

few dozen square meters, with little chance of recognizing a complete house plan or any settlement structure.

From all the sites in Viet Nam that can be dated to the first millennium B.C., about 65 percent are attributable to the Dong Son culture and its predecessor, the Go Mun culture (1100–700 B.C.) in the north. The total of all the Sa Huynh culture sites, mostly discovered since 1975, should amount to 20 percent; the other 15 percent lie in the Dong Nai area or in the Vam Co River plain to the west of Sai Gon.

#### DONG SON CULTURE: BRONZE-IRON AGE ROOTS OF THE VIET PEOPLE IN NORTHERN VIET NAM

By the end of the nineteenth century, bronze drums from “Tonkin” (the area of present-day northern Viet Nam) and from south China were already highlights in many European collections and exhibitions, and they made a deep impression on art circles interested in the Far East. In 1902, Franz Heger (1853–1931) published his seminal study “Alte Metalltrommeln aus Südost-Asien,” in which he analyzed 153 drums, classifying them stylistically from types I to IV and dating the earliest drums of type I to over 2000 BP. Many of the oldest bronze drums are as detailed as a picture book, showing scenes and elements of the highly developed societies in Tonkin and southern China. Through Heger’s publication, these fascinating bronze drums were brought to a broader public, and the interest in Southeast Asian archaeology was reinforced. At present, about 250 drums of Heger I type are now known from recognized sites in Viet Nam, and they remain the principal icon for Vietnamese prehistory as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

The Dong Son culture is named after the community of Dong Son, which lies beside the Ma River in Thanh Hoa Province about 150 kilometers south of Ha Noi (figs. 7a–b). Many large sites were discovered there during the last century, and along the Ma riverbank, cultural layers of several meters in depth have been uncovered, belonging mainly to the period from the tenth century B.C. until the third century A.D. Early excavations of some of these sites between 1924–30 by the French Louis Pajot,<sup>10</sup> and in 1935–38 by the Swedish archaeologist Olov R. T. Janse,<sup>11</sup> were continued by Vietnamese archaeologists during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>12</sup>

At present, some thousand burials of the Dong Son culture are known and allow us to draw a detailed picture of the burial customs, the



FIGS. 7a–b

Dong Son community in Thanh Hoa Province. a. Excavation during the war in 1970. b. The bank of the Ma River near the village of Dong Son in Thanh Hoa Province reveals the cultural layers of the Dong Son people through 2,000-year-old settlement refuse.

