

Province before 500 B.C. through a combination of local cultural elements with new influences or immigrated groups, perhaps from Borneo or the western Philippines. The Thu Bon delta and fluvial system, near the famous seventeenth-century port of Faifo/Hoi An, was ideal for intensive irrigation and fishing, providing one of the most fertile areas in central Viet Nam and a tight network of waterways on which boats carried a large part of the inland traffic between the mountains and the coastal markets until recent times.

A larger agricultural yield in the Thu Bon area and closer contacts to the more highly developed metal handicrafts of northern Viet Nam and Northeast Thailand allowed the leap to a more affluent society, with knowledge of new technologies and crafts, and ownership of iron, bronze, glass, and gold. One example is sufficient to illustrate these important contacts: From the whole of southern and central Viet Nam, we know of seven bronze mirrors from the Chinese Han period (fig. 15), of which five have been discovered in Sa Huynh jar burials in the Thu Bon area (An Bang, Go Dua, Binh Yen, and two from Lai Nghi).

The excavations of two cemeteries in Quang Nam Province, with different dates for the main period of burial, Go Ma Voi (500–300 B.C.)³⁰ and Lai Nghi (200 B.C.–A.D. 100),³¹ allow us to conclude that just before the third century B.C. a real “iron boom” began in this region, with iron replacing bronze in tool and weapon production. It is only during the second phase that graves of the rich and poor become clearly differentiated, suggesting the rise of social distinctions in settlements up to 100 B.C. (fig. 16). Thus, during the excavations at Lai Nghi in 2003, more than three thousand beads made of glass, carnelian, agate, and nephrite were found in a single jar burial together with bronze rattles, a bronze bowl, a ring-handled knife, and a hoe, both of iron. In another burial, perhaps containing two inhumations, more than a thousand beads—including one shaped like a lion (fig. 26), fifteen small ceramic vessels, nine bronze rattles, seven split earrings of nephrite, and some additional iron offerings (a spearhead, five knives, and a tweezers) were discovered (fig. 4b).

For a long time, the end of the Sa Huynh culture remained unexplained. A long hiatus of finds occurred between the last jar burials in the

FIG. 15

One of the rare bronze mirrors of the Han period in central Viet Nam was excavated in 1999 in a jar burial at Go Dua in Quang Nam Province.

