

during periods of heavy rain, high flooding, changes in the sediment discharge of the rivers, or fluctuations in sea level. Hitherto, the theoretical reconstruction of the coastline in this area from between two to three thousand years ago has been based only too coarsely on a rough comparison of boreholes and sediment analyses.<sup>40</sup> Thus, at present we have just a vague indication of the real landscape that was suitable for settlement and agriculture in the pre-B.C. periods.

From all twelve provinces southwest of Sai Gon, we know only thirty-six sites of the Pre-Christian era, mostly concentrated in the north part of Long An Province near the border with Cambodia or on a small number of raised locations. Finds from some of these sites indicate that, three thousand years ago, the coastline extended much farther inland. For example, at the An Son site, located on the Vam Co Dong River in the north of Long An Province, at a distance of about eighty kilometers from the modern shoreline, sea mollusks were found in a cultural context of about 1500–1000 B.C.<sup>41</sup> Farther to the south, prehistoric artifacts are absent, and this allows us to assume that great parts of the wide plains were still either unsuitable for settlement or submerged beneath the sea, and that this area grew cumulatively through the gradual sedimentation of alluvium from the Mekong River system.

In recent years, an interesting group of a dozen sites with ceramic pedestals was discovered by field surveys south of the border with Cambodia southwest of the Vam Co Tay River. During excavations at Go O Chua (fig. 20) and Lo Gach (fig. 21) in Vinh Hung district, large deposits with more than 100,000 fragments of such pedestals were found and dated in the last millennium B.C. (fig. 22). Hitherto, these strange objects with a three-pointed upper end and a funnel-shaped foot had been undetected in other parts of Southeast Asia, but they are very similar to pedestals known from many late-Bronze Age through early-Iron Age salt-making sites in Europe. French and German ethnographers described the same supports in salt-boiling kilns of the 1970s in the Manga region in Niger (Africa).<sup>42</sup> Such implements were used to support boiling pots or dishes placed on the three-pointed upper end of each pedestal.

Go O Chua, a settlement mound and burial site, is situated about a hundred kilometers to the west-northwest of Sai Gon and at least 140

FIG. 20

Excavation section across the southern hillock of Go O Chua in March of 2005.

