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Specialization in salt-making would not be surprising in this region, which is poor in most other resources, including stone and metals. The lack of raw materials led, for instance, to the production of bronze-casting molds of clay, and not of sandstone (Go Cao Su site), and of shouldered axes from tortoise shell (Rach Nui site). Thus, salt was one of the few opportunities for the Khmer ancestors in this area to produce a trade item in great demand in the regions far from the sea, and all that one needed was seawater, clay, and fuel.⁴³

Because no evidence exists for useable salt plants, salt-rich soils, or salt springs in the area of Go O Chua, the assumption remains that the salt makers used seawater or sea salt or brine that was transported from the coast to this site for refining and boiling. Until now, on the basis of the sparse geological data, it is not possible to reconstruct inlets and other variations in the coastline, especially between the Vam Co Tay and Vam Co Dong river. To solve these landscape-related questions, in the surroundings of Go O Chua geo-archaeological surveys are in progress and should clarify the shoreline changes in the last millennium B.C.

In view of the detailed description of traditional salt-making in China in the Chinese record *Aobo Tu* (The illustrated boiling of sea water), compiled during the Yuan period in the fourteenth century, it is clear that Go O Chua could have been situated at some distance from the coast. The Xiasha saline area near modern Shanghai described in the *Aobo Tu* was such a widely ramified complex that special brine boats of up to a thousand-liter capacity were filled by means of bamboo pipes and were then hauled by buffaloes along the channel banks to their destination. There, the brine was ladled out of the boats by dippers and conducted through bamboo pipelines to the boiling area.⁴⁴ The brine boats illustrated in the *Aobo Tu* seem to surpass the imaginations of most people today. However, the presence of waterways, clay, and firewood resources; the crossing of trade routes; and safety from flooding or enemy attack are all sufficient reasons to accept that a salt-boiling center was able to supply a large inland area at some distance from the sea.

CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMERCIAL EXCHANGE

The nature and variety of many important trade goods are archaeologically difficult to prove, since a great number are known to have been foods, spices, or other nonpreserved items, as described in the written Chinese sources since the end of the first millennium B.C. for the trade with northern Viet Nam. Among the excavated finds, however, the far-reaching trade contacts of this period can be reconstructed primarily through artifacts in stone, bronze, glass, or by characteristic ceramics from which the essential evidence will be summarized in what follows.

Although the bronze drums from northern Viet Nam and southern China have been an important research subject over the last century, many problems still remain unsolved. For instance, before 1990 we knew of only seven Heger I bronze drums from the whole of central and southern Viet Nam; since then, their number has risen to more than fifty. One of the numerous newly discovered drum groups, comprising sixteen bronze drums, was found in the foothills of Binh Dinh Province. Some of these drums had a high tin content and some were used as burial containers; the human bones in one drum gave a late radiocarbon date in the second/third century A.D.⁴⁵ A local production of this particular drum group is to be assumed—a center of work far beyond the bronze-casting centers in the north, and possibly made by migrating bronze casters.