

1. AXE

Vinh Quang, Hoai Duc district, Ha Tay Province,
5th century B.C.–1st century A.D.

Bronze, L: 14 cm

Museum of Vietnamese History, Ho Chi Minh City, BTL515857

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Ian Glover and Belinda Syme, "The Bronze Age in Southeast Asia: Its Recognition, Dating and Recent Research," *Man and Environment* 17, no. 2 (1993): 41.0

2

Andreas Reinecke, personal communication, November 2004.

3

Glover and Syme, "The Bronze Age in Southeast Asia," 71.

4

Miriam Lambrecht and Christian Schicklgruber, eds., *Vietnam: Art et cultures de la préhistoire à nos jours* (Brussels: Snoeck and the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 2003), 20.

The Bronze Age in Southeast Asia extends from approximately 2000 B.C. to 500 B.C., when iron first appears in the region.¹ Excavations of two burials were carried out at Vinh Quang village, where this axe was found in 1966, and an additional fifty-three burials in 1967, and five burials in 1968 and 1969. Of the 139 bronzes (and 4 iron items) discovered, about 50 were axes. Besides the burials, a settlement site displayed cultural layers of the Go Mun (1100–700 B.C.) and Dong Son (fifth century B.C.–first century A.D.) cultures.² The earlier Go Mun culture featured quadrangular stone adzes and bronze artifacts that included axes, fish hooks, bracelets, and spear heads.

Large numbers of axes have been recovered in excavations at Dong Son-period sites. These axes have an asymmetrical pediform shape found only in northern Viet Nam, south China, and northeastern Thailand.³ Many are decorated with simplified human and animal forms. On this example, just below the haft, human figures in a row raise their arms; they stand on a curved line that connects two sides of the thick line of geometric pattern that echoes the overall shape of the hatchet. Enclosed in

this form are three deer with enormous horns. The humans' raised arms may suggest that they are hunting the deer. One author construes the shape of the geometric pattern as that of a boat;⁴ the form, however, is not consistent with the boats that are depicted on the Dong Son drums. Vietnamese archaeologists believe that these axes represent a technological advance over earlier tools, as they can be used for a variety of tasks.

LITERATURE

Miriam Lambrecht and Christian Schicklgruber, eds., *Vietnam: Art et cultures de la préhistoire à nos jours*, 2003.