

2. DAGGER

Dong Son site, Thanh Hoa Province, 5th century B.C.–1st century A.D.

Bronze, L: 30 cm

National Museum of Vietnamese History, Ha Noi, LSB 1200/6

The site of Dong Son, located on the southern bank of the Ma River, gives its name to this period of Vietnamese history (fifth century B.C. to first century A.D.), though it was peripheral to the center of activity. Since its excavation in the 1920s, scholars have identified and excavated numerous Dong Son period sites in the region of the Hong (Red) River delta, the Ma River, and the Ca River. Aside from Chinese references to the “barbarians” to the south, our knowledge of these peoples derives primarily from burial excavations, with only a few excavations of settlements adding to our knowledge, notably that of Co Loa, a third-century city encircled by three ramparts.

The bronze artifacts produced during this period include drums, gongs, ornaments, halberds, axes, and ploughshares. The decoration of daggers sometimes includes a hilt in anthropomorphic form, which gives us a clearer sense of the clothing worn by the peoples of the period than do the abstracted figures with feathered headdresses found on the drums (see Reinecke essay, fig. 14). In this example, the decoration of both sides of the

blade consists of S-shaped designs and zigzags characteristic of the geometric stylization favored by the Dong Son artisans; the hilt culminates in a pierced circle. Examination under magnification reveals that the dagger was wrapped in cloth before burial. Pajot was the first to excavate the site in 1927, and he assigned its name to this first bronze-rich period identified in Southeast Asia.

LITERATURE

Ha Van Tan, ed., *Van Hoa Dong Son o Viet Nam, 1994; Co Vat Viet Nam (Vietnamese Antiquities)*, 2003.