

Charles Higham, *The Bronze Age of South-East Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 130; Peter Bellwood, *Pre-History of the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago*, revised edition (Canberra: Published by ANU E Press, 2007) online at http://epress.anu.edu.au/pima_citation.html. Lost-wax casting was only rarely used in China during this period, indicating the vitality of the local bronze technology.



FIG. 1

Drum, Tan Long commune, Yen Lap district, Vinh Phuc Province, 1st–3rd century A.D.; Bronze, H: 4.6 cm x D: 66.4 cm; National Museum of Vietnamese History, Ha Noi, LSB 22250.

3. DRUM

Hoanh (Mieu Mon) village, My Duc district, Dong Tam commune, Ha Tay Province, 5th–3rd century B.C.

Bronze, H: 48 cm x D: 72 cm

National Museum of Vietnamese History, Ha Noi, LSB5724

Large bronze drums, first noted by Westerners in the seventeenth century, are the characteristic artifact of the Dong Son culture. Hundreds of drums, some weighing up to two hundred kilograms, have been found in Viet Nam, southern China, and throughout mainland and island Southeast Asia. The earliest drums, with rounded shoulders and often of large size, date to the Dong Son period and are referred to as Heger I drums, a typology the Austrian scholar Franz Heger developed in the early twentieth century. He divided the drums into four distinct shapes and showed that the shape of a drum and its decoration are indicators of its period of production. (His classification system has been expanded, but largely retained.) By the second century A.D., the tympanum no longer flowed smoothly into the shoulder of the walls, but instead protruded from the mantle and the decoration; while retaining some of the characteristic Dong Son motifs, in its overall patterning, it differs from earlier drums (fig. 1).

The earliest written documentation of the drums dates to the Han dynasty in the biography of the Chinese general Ma Yuan, who is credited with conquering northern Viet Nam in A.D. 42 and carrying off the drums of the aristocrats of that region. Thus, the drums served both as regalia and as ritual instruments; hundreds have been found, some buried in tombs, suggesting a third function in the afterlife of the wealthy ruling class. The Karens, a Southeast Asian people living in the highlands, continue to use the drums as status symbols. During their festivals, the drums are suspended (with the tympanum horizontal) from a crossbar supported by sticks over a hole, which serves to enhance their resonance.

The decoration of the large drums is organized in bands around the shoulder, body, and face. Some depictions include scenes describing the manner in which the drum was used, either suspended over

an open pit, or carried in procession. The decoration on the curved shoulder of this drum is typical and includes peacocks, pelicans, and boats bearing figures with feathered headdresses. Note the detail with boats flanked by pelicans eating fish (see fig. 1 in Introduction, p. 2). Pairs of striding warriors, also with feathered headdresses and bearing shields, are contained in the sections demarcated by horizontal and vertical rows of triangles and dots around the drum's body. The face has a central star, as is common; many of the drums have sets of three-dimensional frogs on the face, which has led scholars to believe the drums served a ritual function in calling for rain.

The drums were cast in one piece by the lost-wax method, using three molds, one for the face and two for the body.⁵ One scholar has observed that the largest of them, which were used for both ritual and to distinguish rank, might have required as much as seven tons of ore to produce. In this instance, the center of the face was poorly cast and repaired at the time of production, making it difficult to read the peacock-feather decoration around the central fourteen-rayed sun, though the outer concentric circles of decoration, including rows of small dots, circles with dots, and a row of flying pelicans, are clear. It is possible that the tiny holes in the drum indicate the points at which the chaplets would have separated the two sides of the mold for the pour.

LITERATURE

Nhung trong dong Dong Son da phat hien o Viet Nam (Dong Son Bronze drum found in Vietnam). Published by the National Museum of Vietnamese History, 1975; *Trong Don Son (Dong Son Drum)*. Published by the Vietnam Social Science Publishing House, 1987; *Dong Son Drum in Vietnam*. Published by the Vietnam Social Science Publishing House, 1990.