

6. THAP (SITULA)

North Viet Nam, 5th century B.C.–1st century A.D.

Bronze, H: 41.4 cm × D: 35.7 cm

National Museum of Vietnamese History, Ha Noi, LSB 3140

6

Charles Higham, *Early Cultures of Mainland Southeast Asia* (Bangkok: River Books, 2002), 176.

Large bronze castings indicate the high level of technical production during the Dong Son period. Among the large castings are drums, gongs, urns, and basins, all of which apparently served a ritual function. The decoration of all but the gongs is arranged in a similar fashion, in series of concentric rings, and includes the same motifs: spirals, geometric patterns, dots, figures with feathered headdresses, houses, birds, and boats. Although cast in a single piece, as is common with large-scale Dong Son objects, it is possible on this situla (Viet. *thap*) to see the line where the two parts of the mold were joined. Evidence of chaplets on other pieces indicates the objects were created using the lost-wax technique. The artisan would then correct any imperfections by filling or welding.

Situlae filled with bronze and stone implements have been found in burial contexts in both Viet Nam and South China. Their exact usage and significance

is not known, but one large example from Dao Thinh has copulating figures on the extant lid, leading one scholar to suggest the situlae had a reproductive symbolism.⁶ The decoration around the body of this rather thin-walled urn consists of interlocking geometric motifs alternating with rows of dots and striated lines. Each of the two converted U-shaped handles has four of the appliquéd coiled circles so often seen on Dong Son material. The heavy loops within the handles may have been used to tie on a lid, no longer extant.

