

in major sites such as Oc Eo, Nen Chua, and Go Thap. Carbon dating of a variety of sites was now also being performed. Museum collections were consequently enriched, first in Ho Chi Minh City, and later in provincial museums, as these institutions were successively created. Much of this work was published in a variety of short articles and provincial monographs, and summarized in a general monograph published in 1995.⁶ To this day, Vietnamese archaeologists remain very active in the field of the Oc Eo culture's archaeological studies and keep investigating a large number of sites all over the Mekong delta.

Between 1997 and 2002, intensive fieldwork was also carried out at the Oc Eo sites under the auspices of a Franco-Vietnamese cooperation program involving the Southern Institute of Social Sciences in Ho Chi Minh City and the *École française d'Extrême-Orient*.⁷ Results achieved on Vietnamese territory must also be compared with those from Khmer and Western archaeologists working in the southern parts of modern Cambodia, which were also an integral part of Fu Nan.⁸ Recent ongoing archaeological programs have extended research into the fields of geomorphology and paleobotany, and into pre- and post-Fu Nan phases of the history of the Mekong delta, drawing on available scientific techniques to provide a more comprehensive approach to our knowledge of ancient environments and societies. Systematic radiocarbon and other absolute dates now provide a dependable chronology for protohistorical and historical developments. Renewed interpretations in the fields of art and architectural history have also resulted in a much better integration of both past and recent discoveries, and have corrected some profound misrepresentations of the crucial early cultural developments that led to state formation and urbanization. This has brought about an improved (if yet far from perfect) understanding of the major cultural changes that took place in the area during the late centuries B.C. and the first half of the first millennium A.D. This is the time when local political systems attained a significant degree of complexity and interacted with other regional cultures of the upper Mekong valley and the coastal areas of Viet Nam as well as with various overseas civilizations. These sociopolitical processes led to the formation of the polity known as Fu Nan, and, eventually, to its profound transformation through Indianization.⁹

THE ORIGINS OF FU NAN

At this point, nobody can yet describe in precise terms the dawn of the Oc Eo culture and the complex process that led to the formation of Fu Nan. A variety of hypotheses have been offered, none of which, taken separately, can adequately account for all the developments now brought to light by archaeologists. Only three foremost sites have so far been excavated during long-term, intensive archaeological programs: Angkor Borei in Cambodia, and in Viet Nam, Oc Eo; the large settlement and temple site of Go Thap, in what used to be called "La plaine des Joncs" (the reed plain, known today as Dong Thap Muoi), has also been thoroughly excavated by Vietnamese archaeologists.

The earliest known major site, and one of the densest in terms of archaeological features, so far remains Angkor Borei (in southern Cambodia). People appear to have settled there as early as the fifth to fourth centuries B.C., and archaeologists working on this inland site tend to view its growth into an urban settlement in relation to developments farther north in the Mekong valley. During the mid-first millennium A.D., it had attained the status of a major urban settlement, surrounded by a moat and a six-