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Go Xoai

Excavated in 1987, the site of Go Xoai included a square brick temple measuring 15.4 meters, which contained a smaller structure in the western section. In this smaller structure, the excavator found a hole filled with white sand and ash and a thin inscribed gold-leaf text; inlaid jewels; gold repoussé tortoise, snake, eight elephants; and a number of lovely lotuses.³⁹ A group of these objects is included here.

Temples from this early period took a variety of forms: square, rectangular, stepped-in at the front or on all sides, or a combined plan. They tended to be built on elevated ground.⁴⁰ The dedication of a temple in Southeast Asia was an important religious and secular event that involved the practice of burying gold and other precious objects in the foundation. The Agni Purana, an Indian text of which the Southeast Asians were aware, states that a tortoise and five objects of cosmological significance are to be buried in the foundation of a temple. In some instances, these objects were buried in stone boxes or pots; foundation burials at later Cham sites in Viet Nam did not necessarily involve a container.⁴¹

Although Puranic texts stipulate what should be included in the foundation burial, those foundation objects that have been excavated in the Fu Nan area do not seem to follow any prescribed list. (Among the gold repoussé finds at various sites in the Oc Eo region were depictions not only of images of conchs, tridents, wheels, and Garuda birds, but also ordinary humans, such as a monk, or an individual with an animal's head.⁴²

Catalogue numbers 47–52 describe a group of works found at the temple foundation at Go Xoai.

47. SNAKE

Go Xoai, Duc Hoa district, Long An Province, 7th–8th century
Gold foil, H: 7.2 cm × W: 1.5 cm × D: .1 cm
Long An Museum, BT87-M1-VIII-1

The technique of repoussé lends itself to the delineation of the snake, whose circular eyes stare back at the viewer. Curved striations arch across the upper part of the body and evolve into a series of shorter lines that are inscribed in the other direction, and which culminate in diagonal straight lines covering the remainder of the body. It appears that the snake would have been buried with his head perpendicular to the body, as there is some flexibility to the gold right at the point where the horizontal and vertical lines meet.

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