

50. THREE ELEPHANTS

Go Xoai, Duc Hoa district, Long An Province, 7th–8th century

Gold sheet, a, H: 3 cm × W: 3 cm; b, H: 2.7 cm × W: 3 cm; c, H: 2 cm × W: 3.1 cm

Long An Museum, BT87-M1-I-3

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The history of the southern Qi, as quoted in the *Art and Archaeology of Fu Nan*, 70.

Elephants were not only an important export from Fu Nan but were also used in a domestic context, as an early Chinese text indicates: “When the King goes out, he rides an elephant. Women also ride elephants.”⁴⁸ Elephants also provided ivory, a commodity that for centuries continued to be a primary export from Viet Nam, and its value is reflected in the artist’s prominently depicting the tusks on this group of lumbering creatures. The elephant is not one of the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism, but is instead one of the seven precious possessions of the *cakravartin* (he who turns the wheel of the law in a secular context). Those possessions also include horse, wife, minister, general, riches, and the *dharma*.

In the context of a temple foundation dedication, the representation of the elephant is more likely to allude to the fact that elephants hold up the four corners of the heavens. In these three of the eight elephants discovered in the foundation of Go Xoai temple, the artist’s familiarity with elephants is particularly

evident in the three-quarter view, with the relatively realistic creased trunk (delineated by dots along its edge) curled up to the mouth. Repoussé dots are also used to define the hairs on that elephant’s head as well as the toes of all three elephants included here.

LITERATURE

James C. M. Khoo, *Art and Archaeology of Fu Nan: Pre-Khmer Kingdom of the Lower Mekong Valley*, 2003; Le Xuan Diem, Dao Linh Con, and Vo Si Khai, *Van Hoa Oc Eo: nhung kham pha moi*, 1995; Bui Phat Diem, Dao Linh Con, and Vuong Thu Hong, *Khao Co Hoc Long An: Nhung The Ky Dau Cong Nguyen (Archaeology in Long An Province: Centuries in Early Christian Era)*, 2001.