

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.20087746

# TRACING THE DIVINE: ÓC EO MATERIALITY AND THE BRAHMANICAL LEGACY OF ĐỒNG THÁP PROVINCE. THE VALUE OF ÓC EO CULTURAL HERITAGE AT GÒ THÁP RELIC SITE

Dang Van Thang<sup>1</sup>, Le Thi Sinh Hien<sup>2</sup> and Anagha Babu<sup>3\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Head of Faculty of Archeology, HCMC USSH-cum-Standing Vice Chairman of Ho Chi Minh City Historical Science Association. Email: thangkhaoco@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Head of the Department of Indian Studies at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH) affiliated with Vietnam National University (VNU) in Ho Chi Minh City. Email: sinhien.fos@hcmussh.edu.vn

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor at the Department of International Studies, Political Science and History, Christ (Deemed to be) University in Bengaluru, Karnataka, India. Email: toanaghababu@gmail.com

Received: 06/04/2026  
Accepted: 29/04/2026

Corresponding Author: Anagha Babu  
(toanaghababu@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

*This research investigates the Óc Eo culture (2nd century BCE - 12th century CE) as a foundational archaeological complex essential to the emergence of the Funan Kingdom in the Mekong Delta. Since its characterization by Louis Malleret in 1944, the Óc Eo culture has been recognized as a primary catalyst for early state formation in Southeast Asia. This study specifically analyzes the Gò Tháp archaeological site, a dense locus of cultural heritage, to evaluate the socio-religious dynamics of the Funan period. The analysis of recovered artifacts—comprising monolithic Hindu foundations, lithic and auric Brahmanical icons, and wooden Buddhist statuary—elucidates a sophisticated landscape of religious pluralism. The presence of these artifacts corroborates the concurrent integration of Hinduism and Buddhism, facilitated by trans-oceanic exchange via Indian maritime networks. This religious syncretism suggests a highly organized social stratification and a cosmopolitan ethos within the Óc Eo populations. By synthesizing current archaeological data, this paper argues that Gò Tháp serves as a critical diagnostic site for understanding the transculturation and ideological synthesis that defined Southern Vietnam during the first millennium CE.*

---

**KEYWORDS:** Óc Eo culture, Gò Tháp site, Mound Tombs Area, Funan Kingdom, Religious Syncretism, Maritime Silk Road, Material Culture, Transculturation.

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Óc Eo culture is an archaeological culture that flourished from the 2nd century BCE to the 12th century CE. It was first discovered and extensively researched in An Giang Province by French archaeologist Louis Malleret. Malleret's initial discovery was made in 1944, and his findings were widely published in his seminal four-volume work, *L'Archéologie du delta du Mékong* (Malleret 1959; 1960; 1962; 1963). This comprehensive publication brought the significance of the Óc Eo culture to the forefront of archaeological and historical studies, revealing a sophisticated ancient civilization that played a crucial role in the early history of Southeast Asia (Higham 2014).

The Óc Eo culture boasts a wide distribution across the Southern region of Vietnam and extends as far as the Cát Tiên area of Lâm Đồng Province (Ngô Văn Doanh 2002; Hà Văn Tấn 2006). These extensive geographical spread highlights its significant influence and the reach of the ancient Funan kingdom, with which it is closely associated. The Óc Eo culture served as the foundational bedrock for the emergence and development of the Funan Kingdom, one of the earliest and most powerful states in Southeast Asia, which thrived from the 1st to the 7th centuries CE (Coedès 1968; Stark 2006). The Gò Tháp archaeological site in Đồng Tháp Province is one of the most concentrated and significant locations for Óc Eo cultural heritage. Research into the Óc Eo cultural heritage at Gò Tháp is crucial for illuminating several key aspects of the history and culture of the Funan Kingdom in Southern Vietnam, as well as the broader history and culture of Vietnam during the first seven centuries CE (Lê Xuân Diễm, Hà Văn Tấn, và Võ Sĩ Khải 1995; Trần Quốc Vượng 2000).

To date, archaeologists have unearthed a significant number of Hindu temples, gold and stone artifacts related to Hinduism, and wooden Buddhist statues at the *Gò Tháp* Relic Site (Nguyễn Kim Dung 2015). These discoveries vividly illustrate the rich religious landscape and cultural syncretism present within the Óc Eo culture and the Funan Kingdom. The archaeological relics and artifacts unearthed at the *Gò Tháp* Site from the Óc Eo cultural period demonstrate the parallel

existence of two major religions: Hinduism (Brahmanism) and Buddhism. This indicates a significant degree of religious tolerance and syncretism within the Óc Eo society at *Gò Tháp* (Nguyễn Kim Dung 2015; Higham 2014). Hinduism (Brahmanism) and Buddhism arrived in the Southern region of Vietnam and specifically at *Gò Tháp* during

the early centuries CE, brought by Indian merchants and monks (Hall 2011; Ray 2019). These religions quickly gained an extremely important position in the daily lives of the Óc Eo inhabitants at *Gò Tháp* and across the southern region. Their presence profoundly shaped the spiritual, social, and cultural fabric of the Óc Eo civilization.

The Óc Eo culture is an archaeological culture that flourished from the 2nd century BCE to the 12th century CE. It was first discovered and extensively researched in An Giang Province by French archaeologist Louis Malleret. Malleret's initial discovery was made in 1944, and his findings were widely published in his seminal four-volume work, *L'Archéologie du delta du Mékong* (Malleret 1959; 1960; 1962; 1963). This comprehensive publication brought the significance of the Óc Eo culture to the forefront of archaeological and historical studies, revealing a sophisticated ancient civilization that played a crucial role in the early history of Southeast Asia (Higham 2014).

The Óc Eo culture boasts a wide distribution across the Southern region of Vietnam and extends as far as the Cát Tiên area of Lâm Đồng Province (Ngô Văn Doanh 2002; Hà Văn Tấn 2006). These extensive geographical spread highlights its significant influence and the reach of the ancient Funan kingdom, with which it is closely associated. The Óc Eo culture served as the foundational bedrock for the emergence and development of the Funan Kingdom, one of the earliest and most powerful states in Southeast Asia, which thrived from the 1st to the 7th centuries CE (Coedès 1968; Stark 2006). The Gò Tháp archaeological site in Đồng Tháp Province is one of the most concentrated and significant locations for Óc Eo cultural heritage. Research into the Óc Eo cultural heritage at Gò Tháp is crucial for illuminating several key aspects of the history and culture of the Funan Kingdom in Southern Vietnam, as well as the broader history and culture of Vietnam during the first seven centuries CE (Lê Xuân Diễm, Hà Văn Tấn, và Võ Sĩ Khải 1995; Trần Quốc Vượng 2000).

To date, archaeologists have unearthed a significant number of Hindu temples, gold and stone artifacts related to Hinduism, and wooden Buddhist statues at the *Gò Tháp* Relic Site (Nguyễn Kim Dung 2015). These discoveries vividly illustrate the rich religious landscape and cultural syncretism present within the Óc Eo culture and the Funan Kingdom. The archaeological relics and artifacts unearthed at the *Gò Tháp* Site from the Óc Eo cultural period demonstrate the parallel existence of two major religions: Hinduism (Brahmanism) and Buddhism.

This indicates a significant degree of religious tolerance and syncretism within the Óc Eo society at Gò Tháp (Nguyễn Kim Dung 2015; Higham 2014). Hinduism (Brahmanism) and Buddhism arrived in the Southern region of Vietnam and specifically at Gò Tháp during the early centuries CE, brought by Indian merchants and monks (Hall 2011; Ray 2019). These religions quickly gained an extremely important position in the daily lives of the Óc Eo inhabitants at Gò Tháp and across the southern region. Their presence profoundly shaped the spiritual, social, and cultural fabric of the Óc Eo civilization.

The main aim of the investigation is to examine the mechanisms and manifestations of religious syncretism between Hinduism and Buddhism at Gò Tháp, with a view to establishing the coexistence, mutual influences, and interrelationships between two of the major religions of the region, which defined the spirituality of the Óc Eo people between the 2nd century BCE and the 12th century CE. Another major aim of the investigation is to examine the roles of Indian merchants and monks who influenced the spread of religious and cultural traditions to the Óc Eo civilization, with a view to establishing the maritime routes through which Hinduism and Buddhism were disseminated to

Southern Vietnam between the early centuries CE. The investigation also aims to examine the Hindu temples, gold and stone artifacts, and Buddhist statues made of wood, which were unearthed at Gò Tháp, with a view to establishing their chronology, characteristics, and functionality. Furthermore, the investigation aims to examine the geographical spread of the Óc Eo culture, with a view to establishing the spread of the Funan Kingdom from An Giang Province to Lâm Đồng Province. It will also examine the relationship between religion and politics in the Óc Eo civilization, including the role of Hinduism and Buddhism in the formation and development of the Funan Kingdom during the 1st to 7th centuries CE. In addition, the study will examine the cultural and religious characteristics of the Gò Tháp civilization and compare these to other Southeast Asian civilizations of the same period, including the cultural and religious context of the Óc Eo civilization within the larger context of Southeast Asian civilization. Lastly, the study will examine the impact of the cultural and religious practices of the Óc Eo civilization on the later civilizations of Vietnam, including the ways in which these cultural and religious practices were retained, altered, or eliminated in the later periods of Vietnamese civilization.



Figure 1. Funan kingdom

*The Historical Atlas of South East Asia* by J. Pluier

Source: Phan Huy Lê (2012)

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Oc Eo - Ba The relic complex in A Giang province, South Vietnam, represents one of the most significant archaeological assemblages for understanding cultural history and exchange networks in the Mekong Delta, and its study has

evolved over more than a century of scholarly engagement. Early records of the site date back to 1879, when Correled Anymonier first described the relics in *Journal Excursions et Reconnaissance*, laying the foundation for subsequent systematic surveys (Malleret, 1959). The most influential early work was carried out by Louis Malleret beginning in 1942, who,

with the guidance of residents, documented mounds, rice fields, and topographical features at the foot of Ba The mountain. His excavations revealed a complex archaeological landscape that included gold jewelry, Roman-influenced carvings, Indian beads, and an intricate canal system linking settlements, thereby establishing Oc Eo as a major cultural and commercial hub (Malleret, 1962, 1963).

Following the reunification of Vietnam, post-1975 research by Vietnamese scholars expanded the scope of investigation, uncovering additional sites and clarifying the central role of Oc Eo - Ba The in regional settlement, belief systems, and economic networks (Cao, 1984; Dao, 1986, 2000, 2002; Dao & Vo, 2004; Ha, 1984; Le, 1984; Le, Dao, & Vo, 1995). This body of work positioned Oc Eo - Ba The not only as a large settlement but also as a cultural and political center within the Funan network, suggesting that it functioned as an organized urban area and possibly a political nucleus (Bui, 2002, 2011; Dang, 2009; Dao, 2009; Dao & Le, 2009; Nguyen, 2011, 2019b). The interpretation of Oc Eo's function has been the subject of considerable debate. While Malleret initially emphasized its role as a commercial center, Pierre-Yves Manguin later refined this perspective with the "port-polity" model, which conceptualized Oc Eo as a network of ports and riverine settlements connected by canals, rather than a centralized territorial state (Manguin, 1993). This model aligns with broader theories of complex polity formation through maritime trade and highlights the significance of waterways in structuring economic and administrative systems (Stark, 2006).

Artifact analysis has further illuminated the mechanisms of Funan's integration into the Indo-Pacific exchange system. Bellina and Glover (2004) demonstrated that beads found at Oc Eo were part of a larger transmarine exchange network, while Borell, Bellina, and Chaisuwan (2014) traced agate beads to Indian workshops, confirming direct links between local artifact assemblages and transcontinental trade. Simultaneously, evidence of gold production, jewelry making, and ceramic traditions underscores the blending of imported techniques with indigenous practices, a hallmark of acculturated port-network societies (Stark, 2006). Complementing the archaeological record, historical sources have played a pivotal role in reconstructing Funan's political and economic context. Paul Pelliot's early twentieth-century synthesis of ancient Chinese sources provided a critical framework for interpreting the relationship between textual evidence and archaeological data, thereby explaining the presence of foreign materials at sites such as Oc

Eo (Pelliot, 1903).

Beyond Oc Eo - Ba The, the Go Thap site in Dong Thap province exemplifies the diversity and spread of Oc Eo culture. Initial reports by Captain Silvestre in 1881 noted stone wheels and temple foundations, while subsequent surveys by Parmentier and Claeys in 1931 and Malleret in 1959 documented architectural structures and construction traces (Silvestre, 1881; Parmentier & Claeys, 1931; Malleret, 1959). Post-1975 investigations by Vietnamese institutions systematized excavation data and clarified Go Thap's scale, chronology, and function within the Phu Nam network. Excavations from the 1980s to 2021 revealed 14 Hindu temple structures, terraced ponds, step wells, and an ancient road, alongside residential and workshop remains. The discovery of more than 400 gold objects, Brahman statues, wooden Buddha statues, and a wide range of ceramic, stone, and glass artifacts highlighted the sophistication of religious life and craftsmanship at the site (Institute of Archaeology & collaborators, 1984 - 2021). Stratigraphic evidence demonstrated cultural continuity from the pre-Oc Eo period through the Oc Eo and Post-Oc Eo phases, spanning from the 2nd century BCE to the 12th century CE, thereby illustrating long-term processes of social transformation and economic adaptation.

The convergence of evidence from Oc Eo - Ba The and Go Thap underscores the Mekong Delta's role not merely as a commercial frontier but as an organized urban-religious system integral to the Funan network. Large-scale religious architecture, sophisticated craft production, and the presence of exotic artifacts collectively support the interpretation of Funan as a multidimensional polity shaped by both maritime trade and localized cultural development (Manguin, 1993; Stark, 2006). Recent excavation programs conducted between 2017 and 2021 by the Institute of Archaeology further enriched this picture, yielding artifacts such as gold jewelry recognized as national treasures and refining the dating of architectural complexes (Institute of Archaeology, 2021). Subsequent publications and research reports from 2023 to 2025 synthesized these findings, incorporating new dating analyses and clarifying demographic relationships and religious practices across centers within the Phu Nam area (Go Thap Relic Site Management Board, 2024; Tuoi Tre, 2022, 2025).

In 1881, at the *Gò Tháp* Site, Captain Silvestre, a French inspector based in *Sa Déc*, reported his discovery of a stone wheel and the foundational remnants of an ancient temple in the *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Rochefort* (Journal of the

Rodnefort Geographical Society). This marks one of the earliest documented archaeological findings at the site. Over more than a century of discovery and research since then, a vast treasury of ancient cultural heritage, dating back approximately 1,500 years, has gradually been uncovered at the Gò Tháp Site. This invaluable heritage is none other than the Óc Eo culture. Following Captain Silvestre's publication, French archaeologists began to turn their attention to the history of this region by studying the inscriptions on steles discovered at the Gò Tháp site. In 1931, H. Parmentier and J.Y. Claeys undertook field research and descriptions at Gò Tháp. They initiated several exploratory pits in the area now known as Bà Chúa Xứ (Land Goddess) Mound, documenting traces of bricks, tiles, and architectural foundations. They also noted the presence of a brick construction layer on the western slope of the mound. Later, in 1943, L.

Malleret conducted a broader survey of the relic site. (Louis Malleret, 1959) (Figure 2).

In sum, the research trajectory on Oc Eo – Ba the and Go Thap reflects the evolution of archaeological methodology and the progressive reconstruction of southern Vietnam’s history. From the exploratory records of the late nineteenth century to systematic excavations and advanced analytical techniques, each phase of research has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of Funan’s role in the Indian Ocean – Southeast Asia economic and political networks. The integration of archaeological data with ancient textual sources has provided a robust foundation for comprehending the Oc Eo civilization, situating it as a central actor in the cultural and historical development of the region (Pelliot, 1903; Bellina & Glover, 2004; Borell, Bellina, & Chaisuwan, 2014).

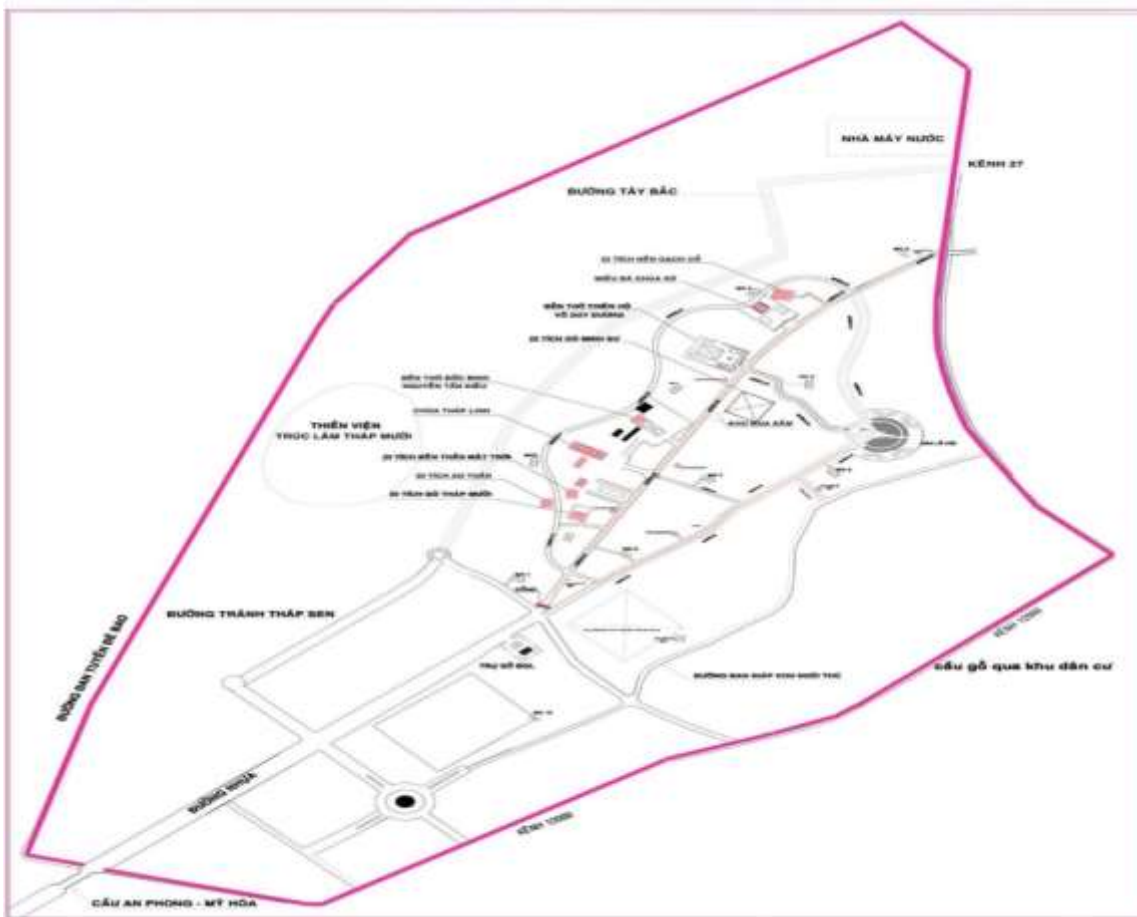


Figure 2. Go Tháp Site Map

Source The Site’s Management Committee

Following 1975, Vietnamese archaeologists have conducted numerous explorations and excavations at the Gò Tháp Relic Site. From 1984 to the present, the Gò Tháp site in Đồng Tháp Province has undergone repeated archaeological surveys and excavations.

**This research can be broadly divided into two main phases:**

- From 1984 to 2005, archaeologists from the Southern Institute of Social Sciences and the Institute of Archaeology carried out five rounds of archaeological surveys and excavations at the Gò Tháp site.
- From 2005 to 2021, a collaborative effort involving archaeologists from the Southern Institute of Social Sciences, and archaeologists and students from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities - Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, along with the Institute of Archaeology, conducted 12 further rounds of exploration and excavation. This intensive period led to the discovery of numerous architectural vestiges and artifacts belonging to the Óc Eo culture at the Gò Tháp Relic Site that had not been found previously.

Across 17 rounds of archaeological surveys and excavations, archaeologists have made significant discoveries at the Gò Tháp Relic Site.

**These findings have substantially enriched our understanding of the Óc Eo culture and its historical context:**

- In terms of site: Archaeologists have successfully uncovered 14 architectural vestiges of Hindu (Brahmanical) temples at the site; 03 Stepped Ponds, a Step Well, one ancient road segment, along with numerous vestiges of residential areas and workshops. These findings offer valuable insights into the daily life, urban planning, and economic activities of the Óc Eo inhabitants at Gò Tháp.
- In terms of artifacts: Archaeological excavations at the Gò Tháp Relic Site have yielded thousands of ancient artifacts belonging to the Óc Eo culture. Among these are numerous unique collections, including Hindu (Brahmanical) deity statues, wooden Buddhist statues, artifacts crafted from diverse materials such as ceramics, stone, and glass, and a collection of over 400 gold artifacts.
- In terms of date: The archaeological vestiges and artifacts discovered at the Gò Tháp Relic Site belong to the Óc Eo culture, encompassing its Pre-Óc Eo, Óc Eo, and Post-Óc Eo phases.

These findings span a remarkable period, dating from approximately the 2nd century BCE to the 12th century CE.

The archaeological vestiges and artifacts recovered from various exploration and excavation campaigns have provided new and re-evaluated understandings of the Óc Eo culture at Gò Tháp more scientifically and accurately. As a result, scientists have been able to demonstrate that the Gò Tháp Relic Site is a remarkably well-preserved repository of the Óc Eo culture and the Funan Kingdom. It stands as one of the two major religious centers in Southern Vietnam during the Funan Kingdom era, alongside Óc Eo - Ba Thê in A Giang Province.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our research employed standard methodologies commonly used in Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies, and related disciplines.

**The specific operational approaches combined in this study include:**

- The archaeological method was applied through explorations, excavations, and the study of both the sites and the artifacts uncovered.
- The historical method was applied through the collection and analysis of historical documents (primary and secondary sources), which were then integrated into the research content.
- We employed an interdisciplinary approach, integrating research findings from other scientific fields such as geology, geography, paleobotany, paleozoology, and anthropology. This holistic method allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the Óc Eo cultural heritage.
- The comparative research method was utilized to analyze the similarities and differences of the Óc Eo cultural heritage at the Gò Tháp Relic Site about Óc Eo culture found in other localities across Southern Vietnam. This method also involved comparisons with Indian and Chinese cultures to clarify the research objectives and gain a more comprehensive understanding. - The analysis-synthesis method was employed to dissect, interpret, and identify the functions of the discovered vestiges at Gò Tháp and their associated artifacts. This method also involved arranging the sites and artifacts chronologically to understand the historical progression. Furthermore, it allowed for the exploration of how cultural exchange and

acculturation shaped the distinctive identity of the Óc Eo culture at Gò Tháp and throughout Southern Vietnam.

- Our research draws upon and builds upon all widely published sources concerning the Óc Eo cultural heritage at the Gò Tháp Site.

In addition, we conducted field surveys in other localities across Southern Vietnam to directly access vestiges and artifacts, allowing for direct research, information gathering, and data processing.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

##### 4.1. Historical Value of Oc Eo Cultural Heritage at Go Thap Site Dating of the Óc Eo Culture and the Funan Kingdom

In 2009, during a visit to the Gò Tháp Relic Site, it was noted that the Óc Eo culture began as early as the 2nd century BCE.

First is Carbon-14 Dating: In the area of the first capital of the Funan Kingdom at Óc Eo - Ba Thê (An Giang Province), a carbon sample taken from the deepest layer (3.30m) of the cultural stratum in the Gò Cây Da exploratory pit (Oc Eo83 - GDTS) yielded a C14 date of 2120 ± 50 BP, which corresponds to 170 ± 50 BCE (Võ Sĩ Khải, 2008). This provides compelling evidence for the early origins of the Óc Eo culture. At the Gò Tháp Relic Site (Đồng Tháp Province), charcoal and wood samples collected from the residential area at the foot of Gò Minh Sư were analyzed using C14 dating at the C14 analysis laboratory of the Institute of Archaeology, Vietnam (Hanoi). The results are as follows: Charcoal sample 02GT.H1 (8)b2 M7: 2030 ± 85 BP, equivalent to 80 ±

85 BCE; Wooden pile sample 02GT.H1 (19)d7: 2050 ± 60 BP, equivalent to 100 ± 60 BCE (Lê Thị Liên, Phạm Lý Hương, Nguyễn Đăng Cường, Nguyễn Quốc Mạnh, 2003).

Second is dating through Archaeological Research: In 2005, during the second excavation of the Gò Tư Trăm site at the foot of Ba Thê Mountain (A Giang Province), Japanese archaeologist Yuko Harino conducted a detailed study of pottery and tiles. Utilizing typological and stratigraphic methods, she presented her findings at the 19th Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association Congress (IPPA 19), held in Hanoi from November 29 to December 5, 2009.

According to Yuko Harino's research, the Gò Tư Trăm site is categorized into three distinct stages as follows:

- Early Stage (the 2nd century BC- the 3rd AD): Predominantly black-painted pottery or redpainted pottery, Red-painted Kendi jars with coloring specifically on the shoulder section, Rectangular bodhi-leaf shaped tiles featuring 7 to 8 drainage grooves. A Carbon-14 (C14) dating for this period yielded 2020 ± 80 BP;
- Developing/ Typical Stage (the 3rd/4th - 6th century): flat tile with a hook on one side, under which there are impressed patterns, and the top surface has 4 to 5 drainage grooves;
- Late Stage (the 7th - 12th century): The round tiles with a hook, eave-tiles have a lotus shape or a seated human (Yuko Harino 2009) (Figure 3).

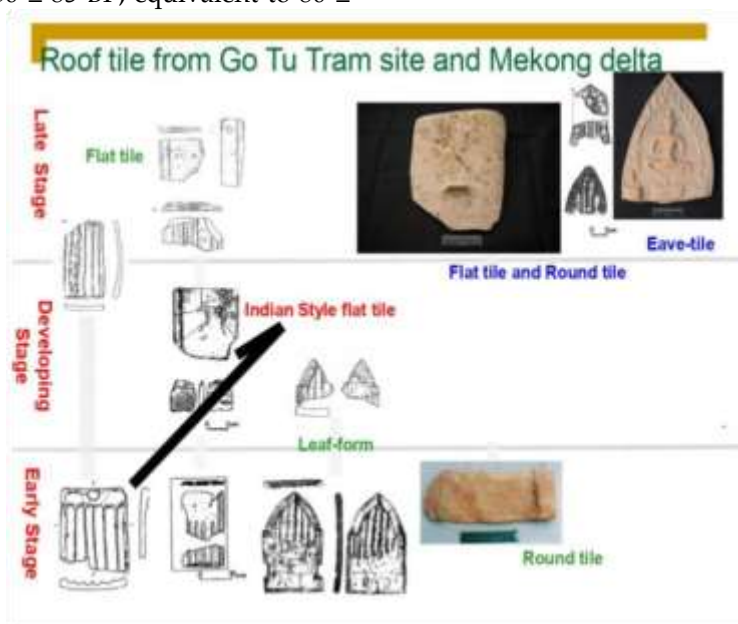


Figure 3: Tile At Go Tu Tram Site and Mekong Delta. Source: Yuko Harino (2009).

In 2010, we excavated the area that previous archaeologists had explored and referred to as the “Western Wall”. During the excavation, a significantly large Stepped Pond was discovered, which served as a water reservoir for the local population. The pond is nearly square, with the West side 122 meters long, the East side 113 meters long, the North side 98 meters long, the South side 88 meters long, and the pond bank 1.50 meters wide. This massive water reservoir, used by the local population, is the largest ever found within an Óc Eo

cultural site.

Significantly, a cluster of artifacts was found close to the surface, adjacent to and just south of the Gò Tháp Stepped Pond. This cluster included celadon-glazed ceramic artifacts shaped like a pumpkin, dated to the 12th century CE (Figure 4). This discovery is particularly important as it helps to define the later period of the Óc Eo cultural presence at the site. This artifactual evidence is the most compelling proof for the final dating of the Óc Eo culture to the 12th century CE.



**Figure 4: Celadon-Glazed Pumpkin-Shaped Ceramic, 12th Century CE, Go Thap Stepped Pond**  
Source: Đặng Văn Thắng.

A notable observation at the Gò Tháp site, made during exploratory pits and excavations of the Óc Eo cultural vestiges, is the presence of mixed artifacts in the uppermost cultural layers. Specifically, in the surface layer, layer 1, and layer 2 (each 20cm thick), which are primarily dated to the 12th century CE, there are also artifacts from the 17th and 18th centuries belonging to Vietnamese and Chinese people found intermingled within these same layers (Lê Xuân Diệm, Hà Văn Tấn, & Võ Sĩ Khải, 1995). This indicates later human activity and settlement at the site. This observation strongly suggests that from the 13th to the 16th centuries, there was no cultural layer,

implying no human habitation in the Southern region; the land was deserted. This aligns remarkably well with the accounts of Zhou Daguan, a Yuan Dynasty envoy to Cambodia. In his book, *The Record of Cambodia: Land and Its People*, he described sailing through the deserted lands of the Southern region on the Hậu River on his way to Chenla (Cambodia) in the late 13th century (Zhou Daguan 2007/2017; Trần Kỳ Phương, 2011).

Based on ancient Chinese historical records, the Funan Kingdom is known to have existed from the 1st century to the 7th century CE (Nguyễn Hữu Tâm, 2008; Coedès, 1968) (Figure 5).

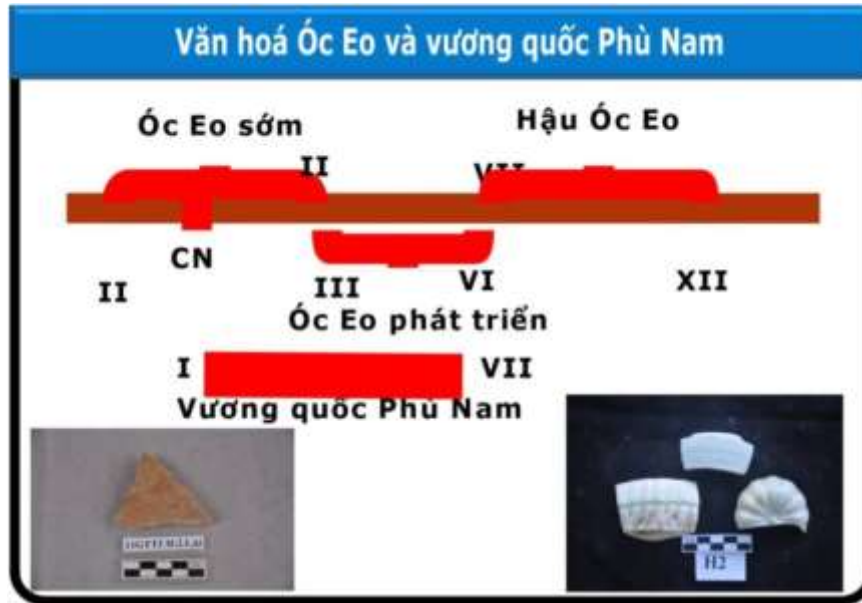


Figure 5: OcEoCultureandFunanKingdom  
Source: Đặng Văn Thắng

### Re-Perception Of Go Thap Site

In 2009, for the first time, we and the archaeology students from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, undertook a field trip to Go Thap. We excavated a small exploratory pit (2 x 3m = 6m<sup>2</sup>) in the Gò Minh Sư area. Through this pit and prior research, it was determined that the vicinity of Gò Minh Sư was a residential area for ancient Funan inhabitants, featuring two types of dwellings: stilt houses and ground-level houses.

In 2010, during our excavation to locate the eastern edge of the Gò Tháp Stepped Pond, the excavation team employed the local farmers' traditional technique of eel-spearfishing (using a sharpened stick to probe the ground) to locate the brick-built edges of the pond. This unconventional yet effective method helped in tracing the hidden structures registered as GT10.H10 and GT10.H11. These sites lie beneath the current ground level, approximately 3040cm below the surface. These sites were constructed quite simply, with only one or two rows of intact bricks on the exterior, and the space between these rows filled with broken brick fragments. The doorways faced east. At the central part of the GT10.H10 site, a *Seima* (boundary pillar) was discovered. It was constructed from four bricks arranged in a Swastika pattern, and the pillar itself had four layers of bricks. This construction is similar to the boundary pillars found at other sites, which some previous archaeologists had identified as tombs. The central niche of the *Seima* (boundary pillar) was empty, containing no artifacts. Therefore,

it's impossible to identify which specific deity the temple was dedicated to; it can only be confirmed as a Hindu (Brahmanical) temple. In contrast, at the GT10.H11 site, the central area revealed stones arranged in a circle, narrowing downwards in a funnel shape, with a layer of white sand at the very bottom. In the layer of white sand, two gold artifacts were discovered: One fragment bearing a circular impression with eight rays, possibly representing a sun wheel with eight spokes from a solar chariot; Another fragment depicting a sun ray. The discovery of circular stone and brick architecture at the upper levels, along with the finding of gold artifacts depicting an eight-rayed sun / eight-spoked wheel and sun rays in the lower levels, determined that the GT10-H11 site is a Surya temple of the Early Oc Eo, dating back to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century (Đặng Văn Thắng & Nguyễn Hữu Lý, 2019).

In the paper *the brick structures of Go Thap – tombs or temple?* Anna Aleksandra Slaczka, a Dutch Archaeologist, at the 19<sup>th</sup> Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association Congress, proposed a hypothesis that the 'brick structures' excavated at Gò Tháp are not tombs, but rather the remains of Hindu temples, and the associated artifacts are not burial goods but objects offered to the deities within these religious shrines. This paper was published in the Bulletin of Indo-Pacific Prehistorical Association and republished in the Journal of Washington University,

issue 31 (2011)<sup>1</sup>. In the following years, we carried out excavations in the area west of Gò Tháp, which was previously considered “Mound Tombs Area” by archaeologists. Here, we also discovered vestiges located approximately 30-40 cm below the current ground surface, featuring Swastika-shaped boundary pillars (Seima), similar to those found in the excavated GT10.H10 site. This led to the conclusion, supporting Anna Aleksandra Slaczka's hypothesis, that this was an early phase Hindu temple complex, dating back to around the 2nd – 3rd centuries CE.

A commonly heard term is “*Gò Tháp Mười Architectural Relic*”. Naming it this way doesn't identify the deity of this large and most important

relic within the Gò Tháp Site. In 1998, during the excavation of the Gò Tháp Mười site, archaeologists unearthed two significant stone statues of Vishnu: Vishnu Gò Tháp 1 (6th century CE) (Figure 6) and Vishnu Gò Tháp 2 (7th century CE) (Figure 7). In 2018, an additional stone statue of Vishnu, dubbed Vishnu Gò Tháp 3 (8th century CE) (Figure 8), was discovered at the Gò Tháp Sacred Pond, which is adjacent to the Gò Tháp Mười site. Based on these and earlier findings (Vishnu Gò Tháp 1 from the 6th century and Vishnu Gò Tháp 2 from the 7th century, both found in 1998), it can be definitively confirmed that the accurate name for this significant archaeological site is the Temple of Vishnu Gò Tháp Mười (Figure 9).



Figure 6. Vishnu Gò Tháp 1 Figure 7. Vishnu Gò Tháp 2 Figure 8. Vishnu Gò Tháp 3 Source: Dang Van Thang Source: Dang Van Thang Source: Dang Van Thang

<sup>1</sup>

(<https://journals.lib.washington.edu/index.php/BIPPA/issue/view/934>)



Figure 9. Vishnu Temple, Gò Tháp Mười

Source: Đặng Văn Thắng.

Another site, called the "Gò Bà Chúa Xứ Architectural Relic", was excavated in 1984. This was the earliest excavation in this area. When excavating, archaeologists discovered that the center of the brick foundation features an eight-petaled rosette design, formed by eight bricks oriented along the four cardinal and four intercardinal directions of a compass (Lê Xuân Diệm, Đào Linh Côn, Võ Sĩ Khải, 1995, p. 182). The description, "an eight-petaled rosette design, formed by eight bricks," is an inaccurate observation for a relic. The eight bricks arranged in a circle, we recognize, represent a sun wheel, with the eight bricks symbolizing eight sun rays. This is a symbol of the sun god, representing the sun itself (Figure 10).

Similarly, this is comparable to the two brick



Figure 10. Eight-Ray Sun Motif in Bricks  
Surya Temple, Gò Bà Chúa Xứ

Source: Lê Xuân Diệm, Đào Linh Côn, Võ Sĩ Khải, 1995, p.457

Another site, referred to as the "Gò Minh Sư Architectural Relic," was excavated by archaeologists in 2009. On the ground plan of the relic, a stone water channel (Somasutra) was discovered. This feature is

similar to the one found at the Shiva Temple in Gò Đồn, Tây Ninh Province. (Lê Xuân Diệm, Đào Linh Côn, Võ Sĩ Khải, 1995, p.108.) or Shiva temple Gò Tháp An Lợi, An Giang province, in the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> circles forming sun rays attached to both sides of the Sun God Temple at Gò Cây Thị (An Giang). With the discovery of a sun symbol at the center of the relic, it can be definitively confirmed that the accurate name for this site is the Temple of the Sun God Gò Bà Chúa Xứ (Figure 11). In the Gò Tháp area, French archaeologists previously discovered a stone statue of the Sun God, dated to the 6th century CE, which is currently preserved at the Ho Chi Minh City History Museum. Given the impressive scale and size of the Temple of the Sun God Gò Bà Chúa Xứ, its history of at least three major renovations, and its long period of use from the 4th to the 12th century CE, it is highly probable that the stone statue of the Sun God currently housed at the Ho Chi Minh City History Museum originally belonged to this very temple.



Figure 11. Surya temple, Bà Chúa Xứ at

Source: Đặng Văn Thắng

similar to the one found at the Shiva Temple in Gò Đồn, Tây Ninh Province. (Lê Xuân Diệm, Đào Linh Côn, Võ Sĩ Khải, 1995, p.108.) or Shiva temple Gò Tháp An Lợi, An Giang province, in the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>

century. The water channel (Somasutra), an indispensable item in rituals involving offerings to the deity Shiva, has become a distinctive marker for identifying Shiva temples. Significantly, at the corner of a tree, just south of the temple, a rather large Yoni head was discovered. The presence of both the water channel and the Yoni provide conclusive evidence, confirming this site as the Shiva Temple of Gò Minh Sư. In 2013, while installing drainage pipes for the roof of the Shiva Temple at Gò Minh Sư, archaeologists discovered a brick-built Stepped Pond at the northeast corner. The Gò Minh Sư Stepped Pond is nearly square, measuring 6.40 meters north-south and 5.80 meters east-west, with a depth of 190 cm. The pond's walls are constructed from bricks in a stepped-terrace fashion. The mortar used is clay mixed with fine sand. Each brick course is set back by 3 to 4 cm, resulting in a total of 20 layers of bricks.

The base of the wall features a square wooden frame, composed of wooden beams on all four sides. These beams are mortise-and-tenon jointed at the corners, and the bricks are then laid on top of this frame. The bottom of the pond was lined with a compacted layer of pottery shards, about 10 cm thick. Above this, a layer of pliable clay, approximately 25 cm thick, was laid down and compacted. This clay layer served to prevent water from seeping through the soil and covered the wooden base frame (Figure 12). The most abundant artifacts found in the Gò Minh Sư Stepped Pond were pottery fragments, including 4 beads and 1 piece of clear glass, small, elongated, round metal ingots, and a 2.7-cm-diameter fragment of gold leaf intricately carved with a lotus flower design. Notably, the pond also contained a significant amount of coconut husks, coconut fibers, and coconut leaf stems.



*Figure 12: Steppedpond, Gò Minh Sư.*

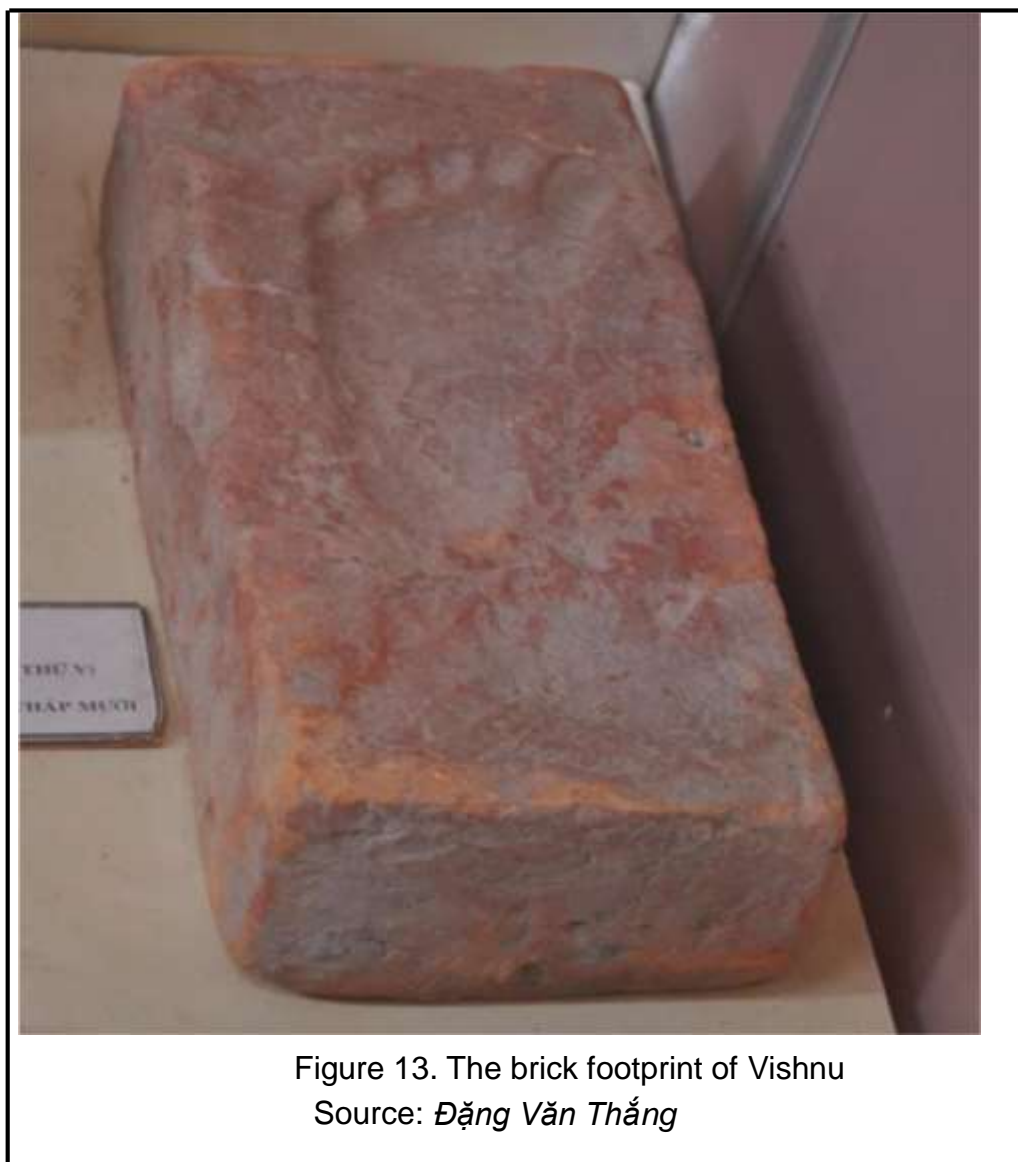
*Source: Đặng Văn Thắng.*

### *New Discovery of Gò Tháp Site*

**During the 15 years of research (2009-2024) at the Gò Tháp Relic Site, archaeologists have made the following discoveries:**

*Discovery of a brick footprint of the god Vishnu:* The light red brick is 30 cm long, 13 cm wide, and 7 cm thick, with the footprint of the left foot of the Hindu god Vishnu imprinted on its surface. Based on the brick's size and color, it is dated to approximately the 4th-5th centuries (Figure 13). In the K5 inscription

(5th century), it is mentioned that Crown Prince Gunavarman, who was appointed by the King of Funan to be the leader governing the "land conquered from the swamps," offered two footprints of the god Vishnu. According to the beliefs of the Vaishnavism sect, the footprint of the god Vishnu is an important sacred object, erected to honor the monarchs who have completed great feats of water control (Phan Anh Tu, 2016, p.259).



*Discovery of Stepped Ponds in Gò Tháp:* Four sacred ponds have been discovered: the Gò Tháp Sacred Pond, the Gò Minh Sư Sacred Pond, and the Gò Tháp Mười 1 Sacred Pond, which was found east of Gò Tháp Mười, straddling D2 road, in front of the temporary warehouse of the Management Board. The pond has a side length of 24m, with terraced brick stairs ranging from 16 to 26 steps, and the Gò Tháp Mười 2 Sacred Pond, where a relatively intact northwest corner of the sacred pond has been clarified, with terraced brick construction of 11 layers.

*Discovery of a shipyard:* Two pieces of wood shaped like the side planks of a boat were discovered in pit 16GT.TD15 and have been taken to the Đồng Tháp Museum. The first piece is 3.37m long, made of

starwood, with carved raised patterns that connect to another wooden plank. The two planks were joined together using a mortise and tenon joint technique and tightly wedged. The stylized wavy patterns resembling rolling sea waves indicate that this was a type of large oceangoing vessel. The second piece is 3.39m long. The ornamental motif features a central anchor column with stylized waves on both sides. It is highly possible that merchant ships were built at Gò Tháp and traveled along major river branches to the Cổ Chiên River area and out to sea (Figure 14) (Dang Van Thang, Ha Thi Suong, 2017, p.627). These carved wooden pieces bear a striking resemblance to the side planks of boats used by fishermen on the Indus River (Indus River, formerly in India, now in Pakistan since 1947).



Figure 14. The boat planks found in Đồng Tháp

Source: *Đặng Văn Thắng*

*Discovery of metal casting at Gò Tháp:* Twelve stone casting molds have been discovered in the western area of Gò Tháp, Gò Tháp Mười, at the foot of Gò Minh Sư, and were also collected by residents. Along with these, numerous fragments and original pieces of crucibles, pouring cups, finished jewelry products,

and metal slag have been found. Additionally, there are finished jewelry items such as rings, earrings, and gold threads. This provides complete evidence for a residential site and jewelry workshop belonging to the Óc Eo culture at Gò Tháp (Figure 15).



Figure 15. Casting molds for jewelry

Source: *Đặng Văn Thắng*

*Discovery of pottery production at Gò Tháp:* A source of clay raw material has been discovered in the Gò Tháp Óc Eo cultural relic site that could be used for pottery, along with tools such as pottery burnishers, molds for pressing pottery lids, and even pottery scraps and artifacts: Pottery for daily use includes pots, bowls, cups, and various types of containers; Ceremonial and religious pottery includes kendi ewers, lamps, pedestal bowls, and terracotta statues of gods and Buddha; Production pottery includes

items like metal-smelting crucibles; jewelry pottery includes terracotta earrings and bracelets; and recreational pottery includes toys like marbles, (chipped and ground-round or nearly-round pottery fragments), game pieces, dice, and small animal figurines, etc. (Figure 16). The discovered artifacts are of significant importance in understanding the settlement, religious beliefs, and Óc Eo culture at Gò Tháp.



Figure 16. Terracotta dice

Source: *Đồng Tháp Museum*

#### *The Historical Value of the Gò Tháp Relic Site*

At the Gò Tháp Relic Site, temples of the gods have been found from all three periods: the early Óc Eo period, the developed Óc Eo period, and the post-Óc Eo period, dating from the 2nd century BCE to the

12th century CE. A temple is a house of a deity; it is where the gods reside (Temple is the house of God). The early-stage temples of the gods are located underground: the Temple of the Sun God (Surya) at Linh Nam Tower (10GT.H11) (Figure 17). Notably, a

golden sun wheel was found at this site, along with the temples of Vishnu and Shiva (93GT.M1), the temple of Vishnu (93GT.M2), the temples of Vishnu and Shiva (93GT.M3), the temples of Vishnu and Shiva (93GT.M4), and the temples of Vishnu and Shiva (93GT.M5); The temples of the gods from the developed Óc Eo period and the post-Óc Eo period are located on the ground: the Temple of the Sun God (Surya) at Gò Bà Chúa Xứ (Figure 11), the Temple of Shiva at Tây Tháp Linh, and the Temple of Shiva at Gò Minh Sư. Among these, the most prominent, largest, highest mound, and the main temple of the Gò Tháp Relic Site is the one below: Associated with the Vishnu temples are divine symbols and statues depicted on gold leaf (God Vishnu, the Chakra Wheel - a symbol of God Vishnu, the Boar Varaha - an incarnation of God Vishnu, the Turtle Kurma - an

incarnation of God Vishnu, the Fish Maitreya - an incarnation of God Vishnu, the Chakra Wheel and lotus flower - the Chakra Wheel symbolizing God Vishnu and the lotus flower symbolizing the goddess Lakshmi (God Vishnu and his wife Lakshmi), the Serpent Sesha the mount of God Vishnu, the divine Bird Garuda - the mount of God Vishnu, the Lotus flower a symbol of the goddess

Lakshmi; the Linga - a symbol of God Shiva, the Trident Vajra - a symbol of God Shiva, the divine

Bull Nandin - the mount of God Shiva) and statues of gods depicted on gold leaf and stone (God Vishnu Gò Tháp 1, God Vishnu Gò Tháp 2, God Vishnu Gò Tháp 3 in stone - Vishnu holding the Sankha conch in his left hand and the Chakra wheel in his right hand, and the stone statue of the Sun God Surya).



Figure 17. Surya Temple, Tháp Linh Nam (10GT.H11)

Source *Đặng Văn Thắng*

A large number of wooden statues of the Buddha Sakyamuni have also been found at the Gò Tháp Relic Site. Among these, some Buddha statues are beautifully and meticulously crafted, while others are very crudely made. It is worth noting that at the Gò Tháp Relic Site, only wooden pedestals of wooden Buddha statues have been found, but not like the Buddhist Temple at the Linh Sơn Bắc Relic

Site (at the foot of Ba the Mountain - An Giang) or the Gò Xoài Buddhist Tower (Tay Ninh). Probably, the wooden Buddha statues found at Gò Tháp (Đồng Tháp province) were placed outdoors with wooden pedestals.

At Gò Tháp, residential sites have been found at the foot of Gò Minh Sư, to the west of Gò Tháp, and in the areas of 'gold pond' and 'Buddha Pond'.

The rich and diverse cultural heritage (relics and artifacts) from the Óc Eo culture period found at Gò Tháp are a rare and valuable source of information, significantly contributing to the study of the history of Đồng Tháp province during the Óc Eo culture and the Kingdom of Funan, and also to the research on the history of the Óc Eo culture and the Kingdom of Funan, and ultimately to the study of the history of Vietnam.

**4.2. The Cultural Value of the Óc Eo Cultural Heritage at the Gò Tháp Relic Site Religion and Belief**

The two major religions were first introduced to the Kingdom of Funan by missionaries and merchants who followed the bustling trade ships from India. A significant number of merchants, Brahmin priests, Kshatriya, and royal relatives who followed Brahmanism permanently settled in the

Mekong Delta region (Geetesh Sharma, 2012, p.55). The beliefs and religions of the Óc Eo culture, which developed at the center of the "Substate conquered from the swamps" - with its hub at Gò Tháp, Đồng Tháp province - evolved from simple brick temples located underground. Below these temples, boundary pillars were placed with gold leaf depicting deities, their incarnations, and their mounts, and brick temples built high above the ground, on which are statues of deities made of stone from different periods and with various styles.

**Architectural Arts**

The architecture of the Óc Eo culture at Gò Tháp can be noted by four types of bricks used in construction: type 1 - clay, type 2 - clay mixed with grit, type 3 - clay mixed with finegrained sand, and type 4 - clay mixed with coarse-grained sand (Figure 18).

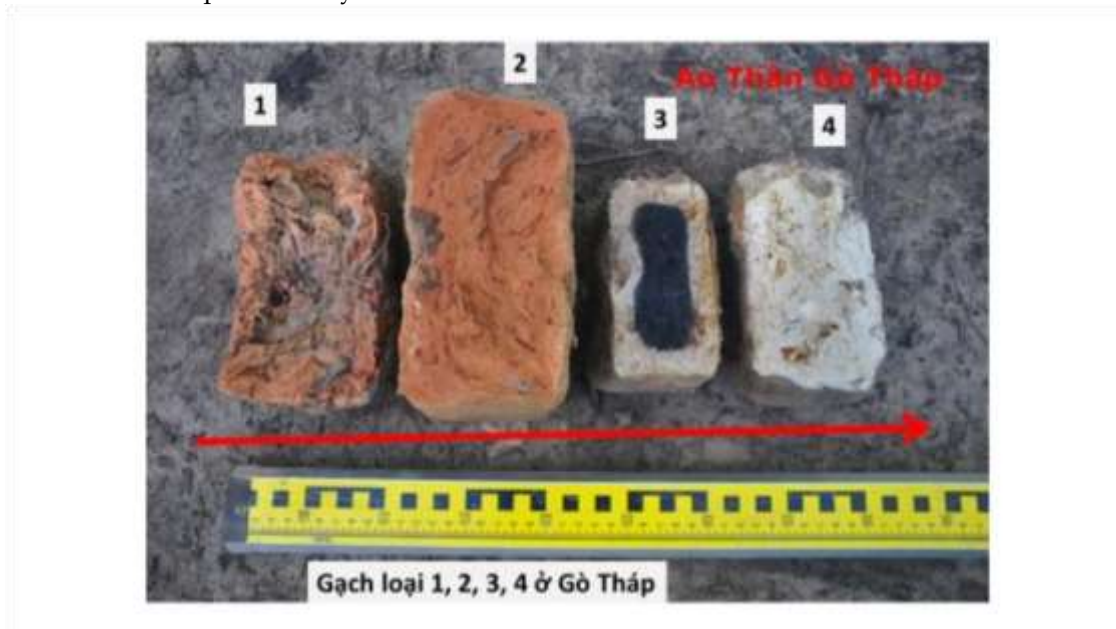


Figure18.4: typesofbrickinGòTháp

Source: Đặng Văn Thắng

Four types of open-air temples (Hypaethral Temples) of the Sun God belief and Brahmanism: (1) A simple temple built underground with a funnel-shaped central structure (Temple with code 10GT.H11), (2) A simple temple built underground with a central boundary pillar in the shape of a swastika (Temple with code 10GT.H10), (3) A higher, more complete temple built of brick on the ground with a sun symbol, and a stone statue of the Sun God on top (The Sun God Temple at Gò Bà Chúa Xứ), (4) A temple with straight brick walls on the outside, a nonstraight interior, and the inside filled with 20 layers of brick fragments and clay, each 10cm thick (The Shiva Temple at Gò Minh Sư). One type of

temple has a roof (Roofed Temple). This is a more complete temple built of brick on the ground, with a stone roof and a stone statue of the god Vishnu on top (The Vishnu Temple at Gò Tháp Mười).

**Artifacts Of the Era**

The artifacts found at Gò Tháp are artifacts of their time. In Đồng Tháp, two stone Buddha statues, 14 wooden Buddha statues, two terracotta Buddha statues, and a metal fragment of a Buddha statue's hand have been discovered. Two Buddha statues were made from greenish-gray sandstone. Both statues are broken at the upper body, with only the parts from the elbows down remaining. There are 14

wooden Buddha statues from Gò Tháp, all depicting the Buddha Sakyamuni: the Đồng Tháp Museum preserves 13 statues made of starwood, and one statue, made of mù u wood, is housed at the Ho Chi Minh City History Museum. The Buddha statue at the Ho Chi Minh City History Museum is the Phong Mỹ Buddha statue (Đồng Tháp), which is in the Gandhara style and dates to approximately the 4th century.

**The 13 Buddha statues at the Đồng Tháp Museum can be divided into four groups as follows:**

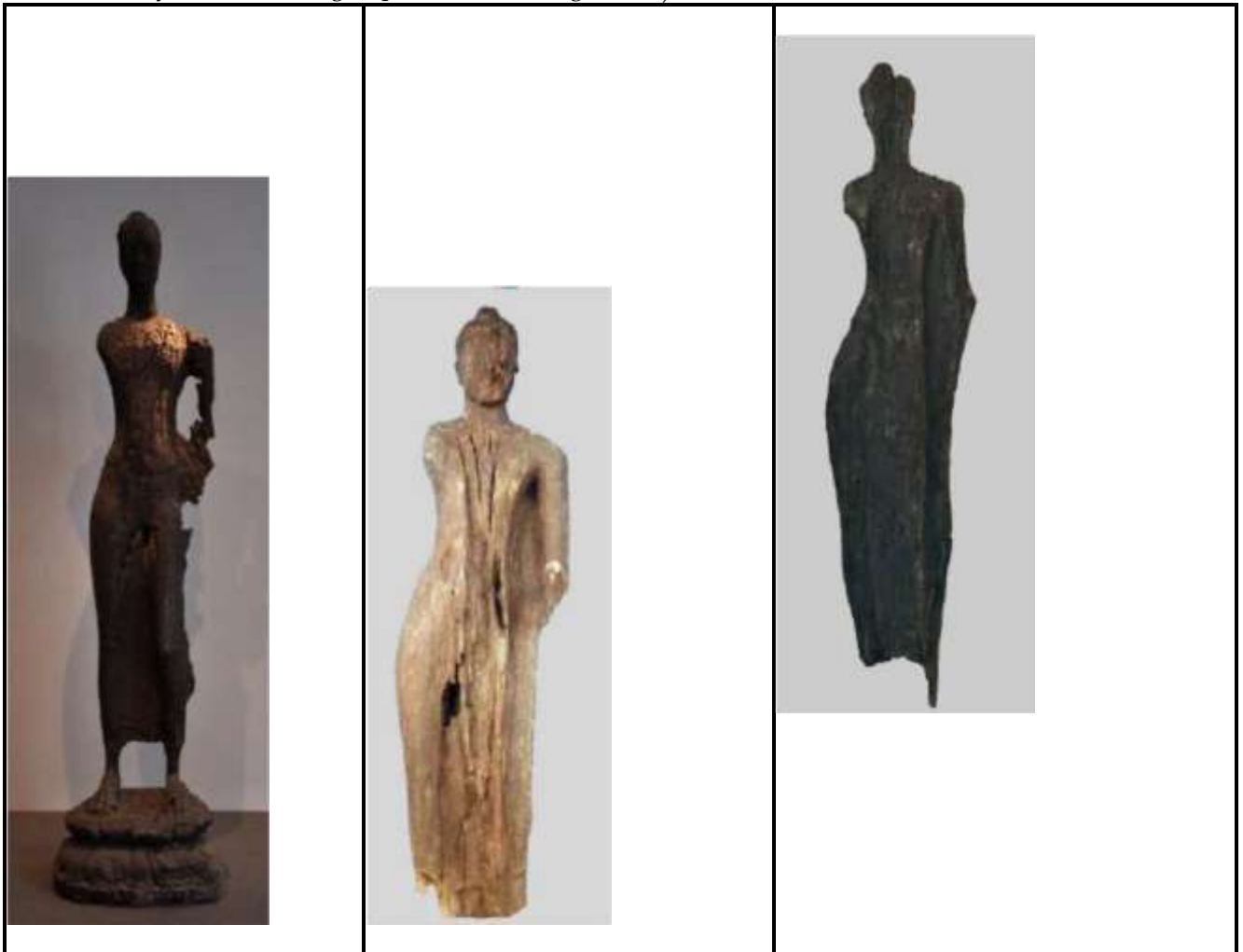
Group 1: There are 5 Buddha statues in the Amaravati style, in a strong hip-flexed standing

posture (tribhanga), dating to around the 4th century;

Group 2: There are 3 statues in the Amaravati style, in a slight hip-flexed standing posture (Abhanga), with the entire body forming two folds and a straight upper body, dating to around the 5th century.

Group 3: There are 4 Buddha statues in the Amaravati style from the Gupta period (320-550 CE) in a straight standing posture (Samabhanga);

Group 4: There is 1 wooden Buddha statue carved in a European-style sitting posture (Figures 18, 19, 20).



<p>Figure 18. Thap Muoi Buddha, BTLS 1615 Source : <i>Phùng Quốc Danh</i></p>	<p>Figure 19. Go Thap Buddha, BTĐT-CV-1251 Source: <i>Phùng Quốc Danh</i></p>	<p>Figure 20. Gò Tháp Buddha, Source: BTĐT-CV-1374 <i>Phùng Quốc Danh</i></p>
---	---	---

In addition to the Vishnu statue depicted on gold leaf, three very valuable stone Vishnu statues were found in the Vishnu Temple at Gò Tháp Mười:

Statue of Vishnu Gò Tháp 1, with a U-shaped pedestal, 0.54m high, dating to the 6th century;

Statue of Vishnu Gò Tháp 2, with a horizontal bar connecting behind the head and arms, the statue is 0.96m tall, including the base, which is 1.48m tall, dating to the 7th century;

Statue of Vishnu Gò Tháp 3, without a pedestal or horizontal bar, with a remaining height of 0.62m, dating to the 8th century.

The Vishnu artifacts at Gò Tháp are objects that represent the different eras of the Óc Eo culture: Vishnu depicted on gold leaf (3rd-5th century) ® Vishnu Gò Tháp 1 in stone (6th century) ® Vishnu Gò Tháp 2 in stone (7th century) ® Vishnu Gò Tháp 3 in stone (8th century) (Figures 6, 7, 8).

At Gò Tháp, one of two stone statues of the Sun God (Surya) from the Óc Eo culture was also found. The statue of the Sun God at Gò Tháp (Đồng Tháp province) is the earliest, dating to the 6th century, while the Sun God statue at Óc Eo (A Giang province) is later, from the 7th century (Figure 21).



Figure 21. Surya, Gò Tháp

Source: Đặng Văn Thắng

### ***Cultural Exchange***

The ancient inhabitants of the Gò Tháp Relic Site, and more broadly, the residents of the "little state conquered from the swamps" of the Kingdom of Funan, had relationships and cultural exchanges with ancient cultures in Southeast Asia (Vishnu statues, ceramics, etc.), with Indian culture (Brahmanism and Buddhism relics and artifacts,

gold, ceramics, glass, etc.), with Chinese culture (Buddha statues, bronze mirrors, ceramics, etc.), and with the Mediterranean world – King Antoninus Pius, who reigned from 138-161, and King Marcus Aurelius, who reigned from 161-180, gifted two gold medallions to Funan (Figures 22, 23). Many cultural heritage artifacts discovered at the Gò Tháp Relic Site have contributed to proving these cultural exchange relationships (Ha Thi Suong, 2022).



Figure 22. Golden Medal of Antoniu (138-161) Source: [anglichsu.vn/vi/Articles/2001/-ma-va-thuong-cang-quoc-te-o](http://anglichsu.vn/vi/Articles/2001/-ma-va-thuong-cang-quoc-te-o)



Figure 23. Golden Medal of Marcus Aurelius (161-180) Source: Louis Malleret 1962, Appendix XL

#### 4.3. The Scientific Value of the Óc Eo Cultural Heritage at the Gò Tháp Relic Site Archival Documents at the Dong Thap Museum and the Gò Tháp Relic Site Management Board

The artifacts found at the Gò Tháp Relic Site are preserved at the Đồng Tháp Museum (Đồng Tháp province) and the Gò Tháp Relic Site Management Board (Đồng Tháp province), as well as the Ho Chi Minh City History Museum. These are extremely valuable documents for scientific research and domestic and international visitors interested in the Óc Eo culture at Gò Tháp.

##### *Materials For Research Fields*

The cultural heritage artifacts found at the Gò Tháp Relic Site, and more broadly from the inhabitants of the "little state conquered from the swamps," are exceptionally rare and valuable resources for research in various scientific fields, including archaeology, cultural studies, history, architecture, fine arts, economics, and diplomacy.

##### **CONCLUSION**

At the Gò Tháp Relic Site, a wealth of artifacts from the Óc Eo culture and the Funan Kingdom has been discovered, ranging from Brahmanical temples

and shrines dedicated to Vishnu, Shiva, and Surya to wooden Buddhist statues and ritual gold leaf objects. These relics, crafted in stone, gold, ceramics, and wood, span a remarkable chronological range from the 2nd century BCE to the 12th century CE, thus providing one of the longest and most continuous records of cultural development in Southern Vietnam. They not only reflect religious devotion but also represent successive artistic styles and technological achievements characteristic of their respective eras.

The significance of these findings is profound. The Gò Tháp Relic Site is widely recognized as one of the most important archaeological centers for reconstructing the Óc Eo cultural landscape and, by extension, for illuminating the history of the Funan Kingdom, one of the earliest state formations in Southeast Asia. Decades of excavations have revealed a rich and layered cultural heritage that demonstrates the historical depth, cultural vitality, and wideranging exchanges of this ancient civilization. The coexistence of Hinduism and Buddhism at the site reveals a society marked by religious pluralism and tolerance, where spiritual practices were closely intertwined with political legitimacy, social cohesion, and economic activity. Equally remarkable are the architectural vestiges

uncovered at Gò Tháp, including stepped ponds, sacred wells, temples, and residential zones. These structures not only fulfilled ritual and religious functions but also point to sophisticated water management systems and urban planning strategies that enabled communities to adapt to and thrive in the challenging ecological environment of the Mekong Delta. Evidence of craft production, such as metal casting, jewelry making, pottery, and shipbuilding, further confirms Gò Tháp's role as a dynamic hub of economic life and international trade. The discovery of imported artifacts and stylistic influences from India, China, and even the Mediterranean world underscores the Funan Kingdom's participation in the maritime Silk Road and situates Southern Vietnam within broader networks of global exchange.

The research has established a more precise chronology of the different periods of civilization and religion at Gò Tháp by utilizing the latest advances in archaeological technique and technology.

Beyond their historical and economic implications, the relics hold immense symbolic and artistic value. The Vishnu statues carved in stone, the gold-leaf iconography depicting Hindu deities, the solar motifs of Surya temples, and the wooden statues of the Buddha collectively embody a process of cultural synthesis in which local traditions absorbed, adapted, and reinterpreted external

influences. This blending of artistic and religious forms generated a distinctive cultural identity that enriched both the material and spiritual life of the ancient Óc Eo inhabitants. From an academic perspective, the Óc Eo heritage at Gò Tháp provides a rare and irreplaceable archive for interdisciplinary scholarship, offering vital insights for fields such as archaeology, history, anthropology, art history, and religious studies. Simultaneously, the site constitutes an important cultural resource for contemporary society, with great potential for heritage education, cultural identity formation, and sustainable tourism development. Preserving and promoting Gò Tháp not only strengthens academic understanding but also enhances public appreciation of Vietnam's ancient past, linking local heritage to global historical narratives.

In conclusion, the Gò Tháp Relic Site embodies the multifaceted values of the Óc Eo culture, historical, cultural, artistic, scientific, and touristic. Its artifacts and vestiges testify to a flourishing ancient civilization that shaped the early trajectory of Southern Vietnam and contributed to the broader history of Southeast Asia. The continued study, conservation, and integration of Gò Tháp into national and international heritage frameworks are essential, ensuring that this remarkable cultural legacy continues to inform scholarship, inspire communities, and enrich cultural identity for generations to come.

## REFERENCES

- Anonymous. (n.d.). A farmer discovered a Vishnu statue while cutting grass. Retrieved from <https://cand.com.vn/Chuyen-dong-van-hoa/Mot-nong-dan-phathien-Tuong-than-Vishnu-khi-di-cat-co>
- Coedès, G. (1968). *The Indianized states of Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Đặng, V. T., & Hà, T. S. (2017). Discovery of two boat prows at Gò Tháp historical site, Đồng Tháp Province. In *New discoveries of archaeology 2016* (pp. 626–631). Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Đặng, V. T., & Nguyễn, H. L. (2019). Surya temples in Óc Eo culture in South Vietnam. *Journal of Dalat University*, 9(3), 124–137.
- Geetesh, S. (2012). *Traces of Indian culture in Vietnam* (Thích Trí Minh, Trans.). Ho Chi Minh City: Culture and Arts Publishing House.
- Hà, T. S. (2022). *Architecture and archaeological objects at Gò Tháp site (Đồng Tháp Province)*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University–Ho Chi Minh City.
- Hà, V. T. (2006). *Óc Eo culture and ancient Vietnamese culture*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Hall, K. R. (2011). *A history of early Southeast Asia: Maritime trade and societal development, 100–1500*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Higham, C. (2014). *Early mainland Southeast Asia: From first humans to Angkor*. Bangkok: River Books.
- Lê, T. L., Phạm, L. H., Nguyễn, Đ. C., & Nguyễn, Q. M. (2003). *The report on the 2nd excavation of the resident site of Minh Sư mound, Gò Tháp site*. Archives of the Gò Tháp Site Management Committee.
- Lê, X. D., Đào, L. C., & Võ, S. K. (1995). *Óc Eo culture: New discoveries*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Lê, X. D., Hà, V. T., & Võ, S. K. (1995). *Óc Eo culture in Vietnam*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Malleret, L. (1959). *L'archéologie du delta du Mékong. Tome premier: L'exploration archéologique et les fouilles d'Óc Eo*. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.

- Malleret, L. (1960). *L'archéologie du delta du Mékong. Tome second: La civilisation matérielle d'Óc Eo*. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.
- Malleret, L. (1962). *L'archéologie du delta du Mékong. Tome troisième: La culture du Fou-Nam*. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.
- Malleret, L. (1963). *L'archéologie du delta du Mékong. Tome quatrième: Le Cisbassac*. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.
- Ngô, V. D. (2002). *Óc Eo culture and the Funan kingdom*. Hanoi: Culture and Information Publishing House.
- Nguyễn, H. T. (2008). *History of the Funan kingdom [Lịch sử vương quốc Phù Nam]*. Ho Chi Minh City: Saigon Culture Publishing House.
- Nguyễn, H. T. (2008). Overview of Funan and Chenla through ancient Chinese records. In *Proceedings of Óc Eo culture and Funan kingdom on the occasion of 60 years of discovery of Óc Eo (1944–2004)*. Hanoi: The World Press.
- Nguyễn, K. D. (2015). Buddhism and Hinduism at the Óc Eo Gò Tháp relic site. *Journal of Archaeology*, 5, 45–60.
- Paul, P. (1903). Le Fou-nan. *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*.
- Phan, A. T. (2016). The iconography of Vishnu's footprints in the Tháp Mười stele of Óc Eo culture. In *Proceedings of heritage values of Óc Eo culture – An Giang in the process of socio-economic development* (pp. 256–261). Ho Chi Minh City: VNU Press.
- Phan, H. L. (2012). South Vietnam: Active, prosperous, and diverse cultures and historical region. In *Proceedings of the 4th Conference of Vietnam Studies*. Hanoi.
- Ray, H. P. (2019). *The archaeology of knowledge traditions of the Indian Ocean world*. London: Routledge.
- Slaczka, A. A. (2011). The brick structures of Gò Tháp – Tombs or temples? *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association*. Retrieved from <https://journals.lib.washington.edu/index.php/BIPPA/issue/view/934>
- Stark, M. T. (2006). Pre-Angkorian and Angkorian Cambodia. In N. Tarling (Ed.), *The Cambridge history of Southeast Asia* (Vol. 1, pp. 89–119). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Trần, K. P. (2011). Chinese sources and the study of Funan–Chenla. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 1, 15–28.
- Trần, Q. V. (2000). *Vietnam in the founding era*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Võ, S. K. (2008). Pre-Óc Eo age in South Vietnam. In *Issues of archaeology in South Vietnam* (Vol. 3). Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House. Retrieved from <https://journals.lib.washington.edu/index.php/BIPPA/issue/view/934>
- Yuko, H. (2009). The study of the cultural exchange of Óc Eo cultural sites in the Mekong delta: From pottery and roof tiles found from the Gò Tư Trăm site (2005–2006). Paper presented at the 19th Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association Congress (IPPA 19), Hanoi, November 29–December 5, 2009.
- Zhou, D. (2007/2017). *The record of Cambodia: Land and its people* (P. Harris, Trans.). Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.