

Basic Problems of the Prehistoric Archaeology of Vietnam

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DURING the last few years the archaeological investigations in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam have greatly increased in scope. About 30 young Vietnamese archaeologists, connected with the Institute of Archaeology, Academy of Social Science, with the Hanoi University and with the Institute of History, have discovered and partly excavated a great number of new and important Stone-Age sites. Brief characteristics of certain of them are given below.

Mount Dõ Site

The earliest site in the territory of Vietnam was discovered in 1960. It is the early palaeolithic site of Mount Dõ, 170 km south of Hanoi. In November 1963, the writer conducted a statistical survey of a great part of the collection of stone implements from Mount Dõ (825 examined) giving the following results:

Chellean hand-axes	2
Choppers	7
Chopping tool	1
Cores (all archaic, Chellean or Clactonian types)	18
Flakes	782 (95% of entire collection).

Of the flakes, 4.7 per cent were Levalloisian, the remaining 95.3 per cent being non-Levalloisian. Non-Levalloisian flakes with plain, non-faceted striking platforms comprise 64.5 per cent of all flakes; those with dihedral striking platforms, 8 per cent; with faceted striking-platforms, 9 per cent; blades, 2.6 per cent; flakes of secondary chipping, 4 per cent. These data, particularly the lack of Levalloisian and Mousterian cores, and the very small percentage of Levalloisian flakes, flakes with faceted striking platforms and blades, indicate the great primitiveness and antiquity of Mount Dõ, which is impossible to date later than Chellean-early Acheulian. Cleavers were found in such small quantities in the Mount Dõ area, and this writer considered them to be primarily a neolithic admixture. But F. Bordes's recent publication on analogous tools from early palaeolithic sites in Western Europe and Northern Africa permits consideration of the entire basaltic production from Mount Dõ as an entity from the Early Palaeolithic.

Tan Lap Site

In 1963, Tan Lap, the cave with bone bed, was discovered approximately 150 km northwest of Hanoi. Although it dates from the beginning of the Upper Pleistocene, artifacts of prehistoric man were not unearthed. The discovery of this cave sheds light on the synchronization of the pleistocene deposits of Vietnam with the pleistocene deposits of the Irrawaddy River Valley in Burma and the Sohan River Valley in India.

Quinh Van Site

In recent years the excavation of caves in North Vietnam has furnished new material for determining the characteristics of Hoabinhian culture. These new data prove definitively that the Hoabinhian culture cannot be dated from the Upper Palaeolithic. The Hoabinhian has to be considered original Vietnamese Mesolithic. Upper Palaeolithic sites of the territory of Vietnam are as yet unknown. But for the problems of mesolithic and early neolithic periods in Vietnam, there is particularly great significance in the materials discovered and excavated in 1963. The Quinh Van kitchen-midden (shell heap) is situated approximately 230 km south of Hanoi, near the seacoast. Shell layers of a thickness of 5 m furnished many crude tools, made not out of pebbles but pieces of stone, in contrast to the Hoabinhian and Bacsonian caves. In the stone inventory, massive rough side-scrapers predominate. Found also were cutting tools, oval axes, flakes, hammerstones, massive prismatic and conic cores, anvils, saddle-querns and pestles. The 'short axes' (*hache courte*) that are so characteristic of the Hoabinhian culture, as well as the Sumatra-type axes and Bacsonian axes with polished edge, were completely absent; polished tools were also absent. Ceramic fragments with a basket imprint were found. In the shell heap were found 12 seated-crouched burials which were contemporaneous with the cultural layer. The Quinh Van can be dated from the early neolithic, but is sharply distinguished from the well-known Hoabinhian and Bacsonian caves of Vietnam. It is possible that the results of continuing research in the Quinh Van and neighboring locations with analogous shell heaps would validate the establishment of a new early neolithic Vietnamese culture.

Văn Diên and Phùng Nguyễn (Cổ Nhuê) Sites

The civilization of the shouldered axes occurring in the late neolithic and aeneolithic period of Vietnam is well known. But in recent years in the delta of the Sông Hồng River (Red River) north of Hanoi, sites have been discovered of late neolithic and aeneolithic civilizations of quite a different type. In the settlement of Văn Diên, excavated in 1962, 800 m² were discovered, and in the settlement of Phùng Nguyễn (Cổ Nhuê) excavated in 1959-61, more than 3,800 m² were uncovered. All these sites are homogeneous. Cultural layers 0.20 to 1.20 m thick were saturated with great quantities of cultural remains. Among the finds were great numbers of carefully polished axes, rectangular in cross-section; adzes and hoes; abrasives with narrow grooves, formed by grinding long sticks; polished and drilled stone bracelets; stone beads and ceramic fragments. Shouldered axes and adzes are completely absent. Traces of metal are absent, but some stone implements appear to duplicate the metallic prototypes. This is a new late neolithic and aeneolithic culture, apparently contemporaneous with the culture of shouldered axes, but rather different. This culture is represented not by shell heaps and the caves, but by sites in the open air, which were almost unknown before.

Investigations in the field of the Dongson culture of the later bronze age are beyond the

imits of this report. I will mention only the new, highly successful excavations of a celebrated Dongson cemetery conducted in 1961. They revealed 47 burials with rich bronze inventories, including two small bronze drums.

New material for the prehistoric archaeology of Vietnam demonstrates on the one hand, the close genetic connections between the late neolithic Vietnamese and early neolithic Bacsonian cultures; and on the other hand, between the later neolithic Vietnamese and Dongson cultures of the later bronze age. We can say that the historic development of the main prehistoric cultures of Vietnam during the stone age and the bronze age was autochthonous, and in particular assert the local origin of Dongsonian culture.*

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* The basic material for this report was obtained during this writer's prolonged archaeological work in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1960-61 and mainly during his scientific mission there in November 1963.