Hindu Iconography in Early History of Southern Vietnam

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Abstract: According to historical documentation, southern Vietnam and the adjacent areas of southern Cambodia were, in the past, considered to be the domain of the Funan Empire, the first state in Southeast Asia. Since the early 20th century, archaeological discoveries have brought to light a large number of artifacts, including important Hindu works of art, in this area. Based on these discoveries, the author offers a brief treatise on the iconic features of several types of Hindu artifacts. Particular attention will be placed on artifacts recently discovered in southern Vietnam. This analysis is based not only on sculptures, but also on smaller artifacts, with special focus on collections of gold plaques discovered during temple digs. Due to the typhological richness, materials used, construction skill and developmental processes demonstrated by the artifacts found during these digs, it is clear that the Hindu pantheon in southern Vietnam was abundant with gods and goddesses, and this reflects the admiration, imitation and absorption of art and religious practices from Indian traditions. At the same time, local traditions were preserved and exploited to create an individual art style. This also had an impact on neighboring countries in Southeast Asia. The history of Hindu art and iconography in this area closely reflects the cultural communications and exchanges between the peoples of India and Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Hindu iconography, gold plaque, temple deposit, sculpture, Óc Eo culture, Funan, cultural exchange

Introduction

From literary records and Chinese chronicles in particular, it is well known that both Buddhism and Hinduism were practiced in the kingdom of Funan, the earliest

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state in Southeast Asia, during the 2nd -7th centuries AD.[1] During the 1940s, discoveries of art-related relics in southern Vietnam and excavations in Óc Eo, an ancient port-city in the area, resulted in the establishment of an impressive archaeological culture of the same name (Óc Eo culture). These discoveries provided important data for the understanding of the society and religion of the people in this area.[2] Since 1975, archaeological efforts undertaken by Vietnamese scholars have uncovered a large number of artifacts and sites, many of which directly relate to religious art and architecture.[3] However, there are still several controversial issues which at this juncture cannot be explained clearly due to the lack of an all encompassing systematic analysis of the available data. This is the case for the study of Buddhism and Hinduism and related art in southern Vietnam. Understanding Buddhists' religious practices in this area is based largely on a number of remaining Buddha and Bodhisattva images, and in rare cases, even based on stūpa remains. It is also becoming more and more obvious that Buddhist religious practices probably ceased in around the 8th century AD. On the other hand, Hindu religious beliefs are recognized as being practiced over a longer time period and over a larger percentage of the population. The collapse of the Funan Empire in about the 7th century AD, resulted in vast political changes, but understandably, this was not able to cut off the immediate flow and exchange of culture and religion, Hindu religion in particular. Thus by focusing on the nature and characteristics of Hindu iconography in the early history of southern Vietnam, from its beginnings to the 10th century AD, a more comprehensive understanding of the formation and progress of

1. Paul Pelliot,"Le Funan,"in *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, No. 3 (1903), pp. 285-303. In his work, P. Pelliot also analyses the Chinese chronicle source to define the realm of Funan, which if not be enclosed to the historical Cambodia, then would be included the whole Cuu Long River Delta (Lower Mekong). Martin Lerner also defines"The empire of Funan was centred in the lower Mekong River and Bassac River areas which today consist of the southern parts of both Cambodia and Vietnam,"see Wolfgang Felten and Martin Lerner, *Thai and Cambodian Sculpture from the 6th to the 14th Centuries* (London: P. Wilson Publishers, 1988), p. 35.
2. Louis Malleret, *L'archeologie Du Delta Du Mekong* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, T. I : 1959 ; T. II : 1960 ; T. III : 1962 ; T. IV : 1963).
3. Information can be found from Le Xuan Diem, Dao Linh Con, Vo Si Khai, *Óc Eo Culture – Recent Discoveries* (Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House, 1995); Nguyen Tien Dong, "Di tich Cat Tien o Lam Dong (The Site Cat Tien in Lam Dong Province),"Ph.D Thesis, Hanoi, 2001; Bui Chi Hoang, Dao Linh Con, *Excavations in Cat Tien – Lam Dong* (*Some Archaeological Achievements in Southern Vietnam*) (Ho Chi Minh City: Social Sciences Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City Branch, 2004), pp. 319-370.

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Hindu art can be realized.[4]

In the early 20th century, French scholars made a substantial effort and were vastly successful in collecting, classifying and identifying the sculptures found in southern Vietnam and its neighboring areas, and vast numbers of works of art were dated as specifically as possible.[5] However, these data and objects ,which were mainly found on the surface (i.e. not excavated), left them unable to define and comprehend the beginnings of the so-called "oldest style" of art in Indochina-the Phnom Da art style. The few excavations undertaken during this period provided much substantial data for identifying the archaeological history of many works of art found in southern Vietnam. Unfortunately, little was discovered that could explain the development of the art process. Recent discoveries in Vietnamese archaeology have dramatically brought to light more important evidence as per understanding the history of Hindu art. Collections of temple digs unearthed from several important sites provide substantial evidence for the study of Hindu iconography. These sources on the one hand help to trace elements of local art styles and the creative nature of Hindu art in the area, while on the other hand they reveal the process of cultural interaction and the development of critical trade networks in southern Vietnam.

Hindu Pantheon As Recognized from Tiny Artifacts

During the early period of Óc Eo culture, large sized stone sculptures were rarely found; the small artifacts seemed to have been more convenient for representing religious beliefs. While images and symbols represented by the ornaments and artifacts of daily life need to be studied further in their archaeological context, the gold plaques found *in situ* inside temple foundations provide evidence of a rich Hindu pantheon. So far, more than 1,000 gold plaques have been unearthed. Many of them provide the most substantive data for the study of religious beliefs and practices, iconography and art history, as well as the usage of Indian script. The main sites of these plaques are Go

4. While southern Vietnam is being geographically selected for collecting and analyzing of archaeological evidences, time bracket from the beginning to about 10th century is being focused to initially identify the formation and changes in art style and iconography in the early history of the area. Further studies from this data will be necessary and useful to answer several questions related to the nature of the Funan and its successive political entities, as well as cultural identities of not only southern Vietnam but also larger area.
5. Pierre Dupont, *La Statuaire Préangkorienne, Artibus Asiae 15 Supplementum* (Swiss, Ascona : Artibus Asiae Publisher, 1955).

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Thap (Dong Thap province), Da Noi (An Giang province) and Cat Tien (Lam Dong province).

The deposits of gold plaques found in the brick foundations in Cemetery mounds at the Go Thap site are typical of the symbols and images that are datable to a period earlier than the 5th century AD. Among the 321 small gold plaques unearthed from this site, 299 are engraved with images or inscriptions. Although not all of the images can be recognized at this point in time, the symbols of Vishnuism and Shivaism are clearly identifiable, and beliefs in the natural world and fertility are also represented. It also is obvious that collections of artifacts found in architectural ruins might focus on one particular god more than the others do and vice versa. The most prominent gods or the gods most often represented are Viṣṇu, Śiva and the goddess of fertility.[6] Symbols are more frequently represented and gods in the human form appear in the collections found from Da Noi.[7]

At the Go Thap site, Viṣṇu is recognized from the presence of his incarnations, such as the tortoise, *Kurm*, the fish, Matsya, the boar, *Varāha* lifting up the Earth goddess…**(Figs. 1-3)**. These incarnations are represented in a very simple and sketchy manner, such as fish without fins, scales or tail; tortoises with no shells, etc.. Images of Viṣṇu's symbols and his vehicles are also richly represented: such as the wheel, Chakra, the conch, *Śaṅkha*, the mythical snake, *Śesa*, and the semi-god bird, Garuḍa. In many cases these are combined with other symbols, such as the sun, the moon, the lotus, and the water vase…**(Figs. 4-6)**. Two images of Viṣṇu in human form are identified in this collection. The iconographical features, such as two raised hands holding a wheel and a conch, two lowered hands holding a small round ball and resting on the *gadā*, staff, are similar to that seen on stone sculptures. However, the standing posture in the *tribhaṅga* and the details of the drapery are distinctive **(Fig. 7)**. These are most probably the earliest examples found so far that preserve elements of Indian art, and they may also have served as prototypes for the stone images of Viṣṇu found in southern Vietnam.

Advanced images of Viṣṇu in human form can be observed in the collections of gold plaques found during the architectural digs at the Cat Tien sites, which can be dated to the late 7th- late 8th centuries AD. Images of a four-handed Viṣṇu riding on

6. Le Thi Lien,"Chu de cua cac hien vat vang o Go Thap, Dong Thap (Subjects on the Gold Plaques Found from Go Thap, Dong Thap),"*Nhung Phat hien moi ve Khao co hoc nam 2000* (*New Discoveries in Archaeology in 2000*) (Hanoi: Social Publishing House, 2000), p.778.
7. Le Xuan Diem et al., *Óc Eo Culture – Recent Discoveries* (Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House,1995), pp. 346-47, 350-53.

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Garuḍa are observed several times. Garuḍa is represented in human form having wide-stretched wings and bird-like legs **(Fig. 8)**.

During the early period, belief in Shivaism is identified by the discovery of the simple forms of the *Liṅga* (a symbol of Śiva) and the *Vajra*, trident (a weapon of Śiva). Several engraved images represent a *Liṅga* that has a pointed upper portion and an enlarged lower half. A rectangular *Vedika*, fence-like proportion is observed in one case **(Fig. 9)**. The simplest form of the *Vajra* is found in a gold plaque from the architectural remain 93GT.M1 at the Go Thap site **(Fig. 10)**. Similar images can also be observed on the tortoise shells found from the test-excavated pit TS1 (Go Thap site) and Point R (Óc Eo site) respectively,[8] Images of Nandin, who was the vehicle of Śiva, were engraved on many gold plaques that were unearthed from the sites of Da Noi and Cat Tien.

In the sites of the lower Cuu Long River Delta[9] representations of Śrī or Lakṣmī – the goddess of beauty, prosperity and fertility – are sometimes recognizable in images of the lotus, the water vase, and the vase with fully bloomed lotuses. The human form of this goddess and probably other goddesses as well appears in great number among the architectural remains of the Cat Tien temples **(Fig. 11)**. In one rare case, the image of the River Goddess, most probably the Gangā, is also depicted.[10] Some examples unearthed from the Da Noi site include images of other gods in human form, but these images have not yet been clearly identified (from the sites in the lower Cuu Long River Delta). Important finds from the Cat Tien site have produced several images which are identifiable. The examples presented in this treatise are those found from the temple deposits of architectural remains at the mounds Go 1A, Go 2A and Go 6. Although very few images of Brahmā can be recognized clearly, two pieces from the site Go 1A are noteworthy. One piece represents Brahmā seating on a lotus base, holding a lotus bud in his left hand, and a rosary of beads (*akshamala*) in his right hand. He wears a high *mukuṭa*, and his three faces are visible **(Fig. 12)**. In another piece the same god is

8. Tran Van Nam et al.,"Noteworthy Artefacts Found from the Excavations in Go Thap (Nhung hien vat dang chu y qua khai quat di chi Go Thap),"*New Archaeological Discoveries in 2001* (Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House, 2002), pp. 855-858; Louis Malleret, *L'archeologie Du Delta Du Mekong,* T. III , Pl. LXXXV, LXXXVII.
9. Cuu Long means nine-dragon, the name of the lower section of Mekong which flows to the sea by nine mouths.
10. Le Thi Lien,"Hindu Deities in Southern Vietnam- Images Seen on the Tiny Archaeological Artifacts,"paper presented to the International Conference, *Early Indian Influences in Southeast Asia: Reflection on Cross-Cultural Movements,* Singapore, 21-23 November 2007, Ill. 24.

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represented holding unidentified objects and riding on a swan (*haṃsa*).

Images of Sūrya have been identified from the architectural remains of Go 1A and Go 6A of the Cat Tien site. Two pieces from Go 1A represent the same type of god Sūrya riding on his chariot and holding lotus buds in his hands. He wears a type of two-tiered *mukuṭa* and round earrings. The god is sitting on a two-wheeled chariot pulled by one horse. Only the front legs and head of the horse are visible **(Fig. 13)**. The images found from Go 6A represent the same iconic features, but they are instead represented by a simple line-engraving technique.

Images of Kubera may also have been constructed; however, it is difficult to identify him due to a lack of iconographical indications. One piece from Go 2A represents a god seated in ease, his right hand resting on his right knee, his left hand resting on the ground. He is wearing a round-top hat. A node of the lower garment is visible. Although typical symbols are absent, the pot-belly depicted in the image seems to indicate the god as Kubera.

From the site Go 2A, an image of *Kārttikēya*/Subrahmaṇya may have been crafted using the third mode of sculpture representing Kārttikēya-the *katyavalambita* pose-referred to by Rao.[11] The appearance of a young man is emphasized, as demonstrated by the face and body depicted on the plaque.

The concept of *Maṇḍala* was well developed in the Cat Tien area, as is evinced by the presence of the *Dikpālakas*-The gods of Eight Directions and other elements found in the standardized construction of a Hindu temple. The presence of the *Dikpālakas* can be identified by their names in the late South Indian Brahmi and on gold plaques found in the temple digs of mound Go 6B.[12] In other temple digs of mounds Go 1A, Go 2A and Go 6A, they are represented in human form. Iconographical features were executed with great complexity.[13]

11. T.A.G. Rao, *Element of Hindu Iconography*,vol. II, P. I (Motilal Banarsidass: Indological Publisher, 1916), p. 425.
12. Michael Witzel and Le Thi Lien,"Gop them thong tin tu cac manh vang cua Go 6B (Cat Tien, Lam Dong) (More Information from the Gold Plaques of Go 6B (Cat Tien Site, Lam Dong Province)),"*New Discoveries in Archaeology of 2007* (Hanoi: Institute of Archaeology, 2008), pp. 685-687.
13. Le Thi Lien,"Hindu Deities in Southern Vietnam - Images Seen on the Tiny Archaeological Artifacts."

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Hindu Sculpture

As a result of classification and study several main types of Hindu sculpture have been identified in southern Vietnam. These sculpture are mainly made of stone and in only one case made of bronze. A large number of the sculpture are images of Viṣṇu and Śivaliṅga. Ganeśa, Sūrya, Brahmā and Harihara are among the other deities depicted. Many sculptures of gods are fragmented, which makes it difficult to identify their names with total assurance. The image of Śiva is rarely seen and most probably appeared from the 7th century AD, onward. Among more than a dozen images of goddesses, 6 are identified as Durgā Mahisāmardinī. In one case, the goddess Lakṣmī can be recognized.

The appearance of these sculptures, although not found *in situ*, generally indicates the existence of important religious architecture in adjacent areas, as proven by the brick remains. Statues dating from the early period (about the 5th-6th centuries AD) are generally small (less than 50cm in height), but by the 7th century AD the height of several depictions of Viṣṇu had already gradually increased to a lifelike size of 1.4-1.6m. Large-sized Śivaliṅga were mostly crafted in the same period. However, this tendency declined from the 1st century AD, onward.

Elements of Indian art, Kushan art and Gupta art in particular, are recognizable in the sculptures of the 5th - early 6th centuries AD. Images of Viṣṇu and Mukhaliṅga during this period are characterized by baby-faced features, and there was an effort to craft a realistic body, which in some cases was very clumsy.[14] During the late 6th - 7th centuries AD, there was a tendency towards localization of the plastic arts. This localization had started from an earlier period, but was standardized and resulted in the production of a typical art style during this time. Vigorous, youthful, lovable, voluptuous and realistic expressions are the main characteristics of this type of sculpture.[15] Local identities and the continual development of several important sites, such as Óc Eo and Go Thap indicate that plastic art in southern Vietnam was preceded by and/or differentiated from those originating in Phnom Da. Sculptures in southern Vietnam are available to provide evidence for the continuing study of developmental

14. Le Thi Lien, *Nghe thuat Phat giao va Hindu giao o Dong bang Song Cuu long truoc The ky X* (*Buddhist and Hindu Art in the Cuu Long River Delta Prior to 10th Century AD*) (Hanoi: The Gioi Publishing House, 2006), H. 43, 48, 49, 51, 90, 103, 104, 107.
15. Le Thi Lien, *Nghe thuat Phat giao va Hindu giao o Dong bang Song Cuu long truoc The ky X*, H. 60, 63, 74, 77, 167-169, 172, 173.

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processes in larger plastic art and to provide an answer for the sudden appearance of the Phnom Da style. The dry and stiff characteristics of the works are observed from sculptures that can be dated to the late 7th- early 9th centuries AD.

Viṣṇu Images

While Viṣṇu incarnations and symbols are generously represented on small objects (especially gold plates), this is not the case for the large sized sculptures. More than 45 images of Viṣṇu in human form have been found so far. Except for one small bronze image found from the Óc Eo site (An Giang province), all are made of stone and represent Viṣṇu in a standing position with four hands. They generally depict the *Jarnapada* Viṣṇu with the back right hand raising and holding a wheel, the back left hand holding a conch, the front right hand holding a lotus or, more often, a small round ball, and the front left hand resting on the *gadā*, staff. Some images are thought to be a representation of *Trivikrama* or Śridhara Viṣṇu, as described by Rao.[16]

The Viṣṇu images have been classified into two main groups, according to the mode of dress. Group 1 consists of the sculptures wearing a kind of long dress. In Sub-group 1a, a part of the belt hanging in a U shape becomes a typical feature. The most remarkable images are found from Nhan Nghia (Can Tho province) and Go Mieu (Tay Ninh province). Realistic facial features are represented by a roundish and baby-like face. The images are depicted wearing small mukuṭa, cylindrical hats, which reach just above the ears. Although elements of a supporting frame are rarely seen in sub-group 1a, such a frame does appear in one of the smallest sculptures found at the Nhon Nghia site, Can Tho province **(Fig. 14)**. In some cases, that fact that in smaller images the Viṣṇus are holding a conch in their lower right hand and possess a typical U shape of the twisted cloth-belt make them differ with the larger sized images. Some features appear to be imitated from the original models of the Mathura style of Gupta art during the 5th century AD.[17] In Sub-group 1b, the images of Viṣṇu are wearing long dress type garments with a thick fold falling down between the two legs. This is considered to

16. T.A.G. Rao, *Element of Hindu Iconography,* vol. I, P. I. (Motilal Banarsidass: Indological Publisher, 1914), pp.229-230.
17. See T.K. Biswas and Jha Bhogendra, *Gupta Sculptures: Bharat Kala Bhavan* (Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University, 1985), Pl. VIII, 12a, b, d; Pl. IX, 13 a, b. Also see W. E. Begley, *Visnu's Flaming Wheel* (New York: New York University Press, 1973), figs. 3, 4.

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have been used to maintain the structural stability of the statue **(Fig. 15)**. Characteristics of the sculptures in sub-group 1b represent a long history of development. While some images still preserve realistic features of the face and body, the supporting elements stay much the same. In some cases, these elements are identified by a part of the belt on the sides or the lower hands resting on the *gadā*, staff. The arch or horizontal bar behind the head of the Viṣṇu image is explained as a technical support element to maintain the balance and structural integrity of the sculpture. However, its appearance in both small and large sized images raises the question as to whether or not it could be an element of iconography to represent the halo or the cosmos in which Viṣṇu resided as the supreme god. This so-called technical element seems to be superfluous, as in the case of the Viṣṇu image from Binh Thanh, Tay Ninh province **(Fig. 16)**. It is totally absent from several other Sūrya images of greater or lesser size.[18] This phenomenon reflects the effort to enrich iconographical representations in the sculpture of this area.

Images belonging to Group 2 typically contain a short *sampot*, which, in later periods, gradually developed into a more complicated style. Although elements of several Pre-Angkorien art styles are observed, typical features of art styles in the Mekong Delta preserve their own identity and merit. Viṣṇu The largest and most beautiful of these Viṣṇu images can be dated to around late 7th - early 8th century AD **(Figs. 17-18)**.

Images of Śiva's and Śivaliṅga

Śiva images in human form are rarely found. Except for some Harihara images, very few others appeared in the very late period. Instead, a large number of Śiva's symbolic, Śivaliṅgas have been found. We see no clear evidence as to several holy mountains which had been considered as great Liṅgaparvatas in southern Vietnam. The small natural gravels or stones found in archaeological digs may have been utilized for religious functions as Liṅgas. Most of the examples are *Manushaliṅgas* – the Liṅgas made by human hands. They are made of several materials, but mainly stone in various shapes and sizes. Although many of them cannot be dated accurately due to the lack of complete archaeological background data, a comparative study in typology can help to construct a general time period for them. Most interesting to the study of iconography

18. Le Thi Lien,"Hindu Deities in Southern Vietnam - Images Seen on the Tiny Archaeological Artifacts," H. 63, 159-160.

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and the significance of religious transmission are the *Achalaliṅgas*/immovable Liṅgas, including phallic-type Liṅgas and *Mukhaliṅgas*, and the *chalaliṅgas*/small sized and movable Liṅgas.

Among the 8 phallic-type or realistic Liṅgas, 5 are large sized. The biggest one is 1.73m in height **(Fig. 19)**. These were discovered in the Transbasac area, mainly at the Ba The - Óc Eo, and Bay Nui sites.[19] Stylistically, they possess several features common to pieces from Chennittalai (Travancore) and Gudimallam (South India) as well as Kushan art sculpture from Mathura.[20] The smaller phallic-type Liṅgas were found mainly in settlement sites. They are poorly formed and seem to have originated from a very primitive stage of artistic creation.

The *Ekamukaliṅgas* (*Liṅga* carved with one face of Śiva) have a wider range of distribution in An Giang, Long An, Tay Ninh provinces and Ho Chi Minh City. The earliest one may be from Pok Taho, Chau Doc district, An Giang province.[21] The image has features which are similar to that of early Gupta art from Mathura[22] and the Śiva-Parvati from Kausambi, dated to the 3rd century AD.[23] Most of the other Śiva images carved on the *Ekamukaliṅgas* represent features of Gupta art from the 5th – 6th centuries AD with localized elements. A remarkable image of this type was found at Duc Hoa, Long An province **(Fig. 20)**. The head of Śiva carved on several Mukhaliṅgas in Tay Ninh and Ho Chi Minh City were created in a uniquely different iconographical manner. They can be dated to the 7th - 8th centuries AD, or even later.[24]

Large sized and immovable liṅgas are found mainly at sites that have been connected to the architectural remains of southern Vietnam. In many cases, they are considered to be important indicators of larger and more complex sites. The largest, finest and most well-proportioned sculptures can be dated to the 6th-7th centuries AD or even to the 8th - 9th centuries AD, and hail from the northeastern portion of the Lam Dong province.[25] This is evidence of a flourishing period of Hinduism in southern

19. Louis Malleret, *L'archéologie du delta du Mékong*, T. I, pp. 380-382.
20. Louis Malleret, *L'archéologie du delta du Mékong*, T. I, p. 381, Pl. LXXX b, Fig 51, 2; see also T.A.G. Rao, *Element of Hindu Iconography*,vol.11,P.1(Motilal Banarsidass : Indological Publisher, 1916), pp. 1, 63, 65-68, Pl. II; Gerd Kreisel, *Die Śiva* (Stuttgart : F. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1986), pp.175-176, Abb. 6a-c, 7a-b.
21. Louis Malleret, *L'archéologie du delta du Mékong*,T. IV,Pl. LXXXVIa, b.
22. Gerd Kreisel, *Die Śiva*, Abb. 38, 66.
23. J. C. Harle, *Gupta Art* (London: William Clowes & Sons limited, 1974), Pl. 53.
24. Henri Parmentier, *L'art Khmèr primitif* (Paris: G. Vanoest, 1927), fig. 1, pp. 1-115.
25. Nguyen Tien Dong,"Di tich Cat Tien o Lam Dong," p. 99.

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Vietnam. The most attractive sculpture found so far is from the temple G1A at the Cat Tien site, Lam Dong province **(Fig. 21)**.

A large number of small and movable Liṅgas (*chalaliṅgas*) and worship stones have been uncovered, and these can be dated to various different time periods. Some of them can be dated because of their clear position in the archaeological context or temple deposits. Generally, they are very small in size and made of various materials (terracotta, tortoise shell, stone and semi-precious stone, gold, bronze, and silver). The last three varieties (gold, bronze, and silver) were found during temple digs. Recent excavations of the settlement cum grave site at the Minh Su mound of the Go Thap site brought to light evidence of the use of natural gravels as *chalaliṅga*. Liṅgas made of tortoise shell and terracotta have also been found at various archaeological sites **(Figs. 22-23)**. C14 dating from the earliest cultural layers of the Go Thap site have determined that the materials originated between 2nd -1st BC and 4th centuries AD. This indicates that belief in Hinduism was well established in the daily life of the people in this area beginning in their early history. This fits very well with evidence of gold plaques bearing Hindu symbols which were found in brick structures at the same site.[26] The tradition of depositing small liṅgas, worship stones and precious objects in secret foundations of the temples was also observed at several sites.

Sculpture of Other Gods and Goddesses

Stone images of Hindu gods and goddesses which do not depict Viṣṇu and Śivaliṅga are rarely found in the early period and even into the first half of the 5th century AD are seldom seen. Among 12 images of goddesses found, 6 of them can be identified as Durgā Mahisāmardinī – the goddess killing the Buffalo Demon. One bronze image of this goddess represents a high standard of metal-casting craftsmanship and artistic quality **(Fig. 24)**. A seventh image was unearthed recently from the Cat Tien site, Lam Dong province.[27] Except for the head of one image that can be identified as Lakṣmī, other sculptures are generally in a fragmented condition and have yet to be

26. Le Thi Lien,"Excavations at Minh Su Mound, Go Thap Site, Dong Thap Province, South Vietnam, 2000-2003,"*Uncovering Southeast Asia's Past, Selected Papers from the 10th International Conference of the European Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologist* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2006), pp. 232-244.
27. Bui Chi Hoang,"Tu lieu va nhan thuc moi (New Data and Awareness),"document of the Museum of Lam Dong Province, 2004.

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clearly identified. The finest examples of these sculptures can be dated to the 5th- 7th centuries AD. From the 8th century onward, some types of Hindu gods and goddesses disappeared from depiction in sculpture form.

The study and classification of Hindu sculpture indicates that Viṣṇu images are the most important element of the so-called Funan art style in the Cuu Long River Delta.[28] Typical features of Viṣṇu, such as standing posture and raised hands holding conch and wheel, can also be observed in sculptures of goddess Durgā-Mahisāmardinī and Ganeśa. This phenomenon, together with the scant evidence of sculptures of other gods, demonstrates a tendency towards Vishnuism in the iconography of southern Vietnamese sculpture. However, the presence of a large number of Śivaliṅgas and symbols of mother goddesses precludes the interpretation that Viṣṇu completely dominated in the area. No matter what, the combination of iconographical elements of the goddesses and Viṣṇu, as well as the utilization of common symbols of both Shivaism and Vishnuism should be recognized as a reflection of the dignifying of the power of protection as well as the domination of the gods and goddesses.

Finally, the small number of Brahmā and Sūrya depictions as well as the absence of other gods in sculptures should not be explained as demonstrating a poor knowledge of iconography or the simplification of the Hindu pantheon. Comparative studies of the remains at this site to identify their icons in the context of architectural remains, temple digs, the history of the land and cultural exchange will be useful for further understanding of religious practices and the history of Hindu art.

Distribution and Chronology

The distribution of the centers of Hindu art in southern Vietnam can be seen from the map in **Fig. 25**. Chronologically, they can be divided into four main periods:

- The first period: Before the 5th century AD

The early sites were identified mainly in the lower part of the delta of southern Vietnam. The most important sites are Óc Eo, Da Noi, Giong Xoai (Kien Giang province) and Go Thap. Typical artifacts were also found in the sites on several hills

28. Le Thi Lien, *Nghe thuat Phat giao va Hindu giao o Dong bang Song Cuu long truoc The ky X*, pp. 63-78.

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that were scattered throughout the lower plains, such as Ba The, Nui Sam, Bay Nui. The tributaries of the Cuu Long River and the canals connecting them may well have served as important waterways for transportation and commerce within these areas as well as outlying areas. Some of the early sites were also located in old alluvial terrains in the Duc Hoa district (Long An province). This is an important proto-historical settlement area which lies far inland from the coast and might have been reached by the Vam Co River. Glass and semi-precious stone ornaments and pottery found at the coastal sites in Can Gio (Ho Chi Minh City) are important evidences of the early contact and commerce with India and China dating from prehistoric times.[29] The system of ancient canals connecting the tributary systems of the Mekong Delta and the Dong Nai Rivers may have served as the best means for cultural interaction and commerce with inland areas.

The evidence of tiny images on gold plaques found at the Go Thap site as well as phallic-type Śivaliṅgas also suggests that elements of Hindu art might have been transmitted to the early sites during the 2nd-1st centuries BC or 1st century AD.

The early period of Hindu art in southern Vietnam (up to about the 4th century AD) is characterized by the imitation of Indian art as well as the formation of localized styles. During this period, virtually no Hindu gods were found in human form.

- The second period: from the 5th to the first half of the 7th century AD

During this period we witness the flourishing of not only the economy and political power but of culture and art as well. The increased number of archaeological sites with large-scale architectural foundations which were scattered throughout the whole area of southern Vietnam seems to be linked closely with many fine sculptures. Beside Óc Eo and Go Thap, important sites that lay further inland are Da Noi, Nui Sam (An Giang), Canh Den, Nen Chua, Da Noi (Kien Giang), Binh Ta (Long An) and the area of the confluence of the Vam Co Dong and the Sai Gon Rivers (Tay Ninh Province). There were discoveries of numerous stone sculptures and architectural remains in the coastal sand dune areas in or near the mouths of the Cuu Long and Vam Co river systems, which indicate that these areas developed rapidly, owing to the maritime routes established during this period.

29. Le Thi Lien,"Chung cu khao co hoc ve buoi dau tiep xuc voi An Do (Archaeological Evidences of Early Contacts with India)," *Southeast Asian Studies*, 6:51 (2001), pp. 27-38.

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Stylistically, the art objects that can be dated to this time period represent two sub-periods of development. From the 5th to the 6th century AD the earliest types of Viṣṇu sculpture appeared. Although imitating elements from the original Mathurā-Gupta style, a tendency towards localization is demonstrated by a common iconographical standing posture, hand pose and typical features of the face. It is not surprising that the imitated figures occurred in gold plaques for a long period. Elements of arch-shaped supporting frames and styles of drapery appeared for the first time and became more typical in the second sub-period. Iconographically, the Hindu pantheon might have become more crowded as more gods, such as Brahmā, Harihara, Sūrya, Ganeśa and the goddesses, were added. These larger sized images became more and more standardized and neared perfection in the areas of iconography, technique, and artistic skill.

- The third period: from the 2nd half of the 7th to the 8th century AD

Except for several hilly sites in the lower plains of the Mekong River (Ba The, Nui Sam, Bay Nui) and some low mounds of Dong Thap Muoi, Hindu sites are concentrated mainly on the coastal areas of the Tra Vinh, Vinh Long, and Soc Trang provinces, and the high terrains of the Duc Hoa, Duc Hue (Long An province) and Tay Ninh provinces. Typologically, images of Viṣṇu, several goddesses and, more often, large-sized *Manushaliṅgas*/man made liṅgas are found. Characteristics of several pre-Angkorien styles are represented but with localized artistic influences.

- The forth period: from the 9th to the 10th century AD

During this period, art objects are rarely found and are in poor plastic quality. Hindu images are small in size and without character.

Conclusion

Hindu missionary efforts in southern Vietnam quite probably took place in very early history. Brahmanical beliefs may have been practiced by the people beginning in the centuries before the Christian era in association with local beliefs and the worship of fertility goddesses in particular.

The propagation and development of Hinduism resulted in the absorption, imitation, and creation of new elements of religious iconography utilizing various

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materials. The simplest and most suitable forms were selected to represent personal beliefs or the beliefs of the community. Images on gold plaques reflect a rich Hindu pantheon which indicates the development of more and more complicated concepts and religious sects in the early history.

Reproduction of Indian sculptures might have taken place initially by incising the images on gold plaques. These images were then swiftly imitated and modified, most probably on bas-relief and sculpture. It seems that only the major symbolic elements were selected. These elements were then further developed to constitute the typical characteristics of art in southern Vietnam during the 5th – 7th centuries AD, and they shared features and meanings common to other art styles in a larger area. Changes in the styles and iconographical elements of art reflect constant contact and exchange with other cultural traditions, the Indian civilization and cultural tradition in particular. The riches of Hindu art and iconography in southern Vietnam are also evidence of the flourishing political and economic conditions of the area.

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（Revised by Jessica Marinaccio, 王靜靈、王淑津）

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Fig.1 Tortoise as *Kūrma* incarnation of Viṣṇu, gold plaque



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Fig.3 Boar as *Varāha* incarnation of Viṣṇu, gold plaque

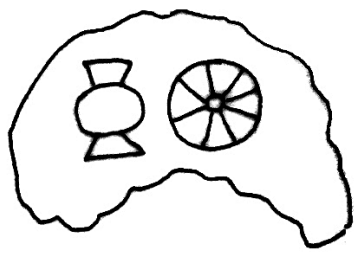


Fig.4 Wheel and water vase images, gold plaque



Fig.5 Conch and lotus images gold plaque



Fig.6 Garuḍa image, gold plaque

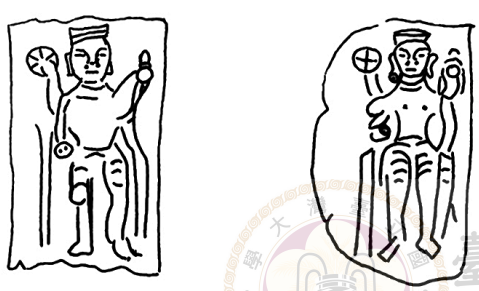


Fig.7 Viṣṇu images, gold plaques

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Fig.8 Viṣṇu riding on Garuḍa, gold plaque

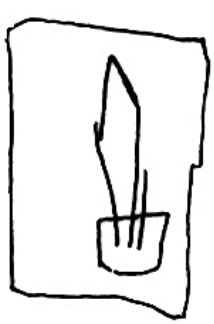


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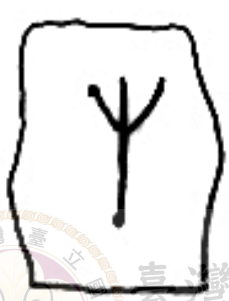


Fig.10 Liṅga image, gold plaque

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Fig. 11 Goddess Laḳsmī, gold plaque



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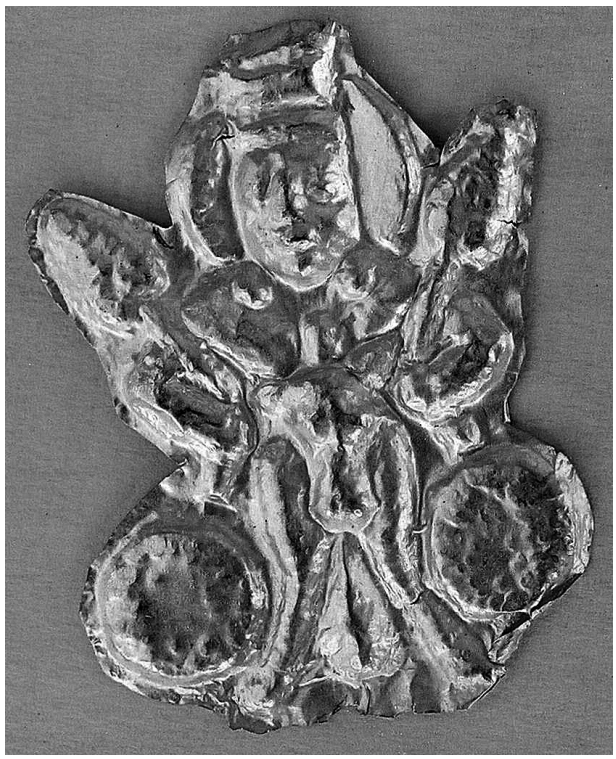


Fig.13 God Sūrya, gold plaque



Fig.14 God Viṣṇu , Stone, Height: 17cm

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Fig.17 God Viṣṇu, Stone, H. 160cm

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Fig.18 God Viṣṇu, Stone, H. (remained head) 22cm

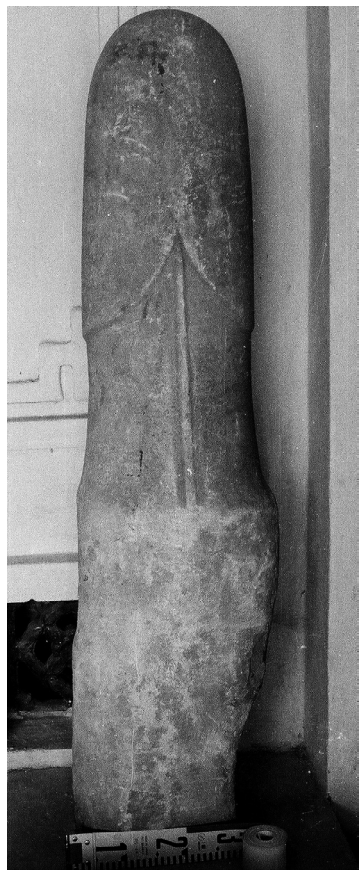


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Fig.20 Ekamukhaliṅga, Stone, H. 52.4cm

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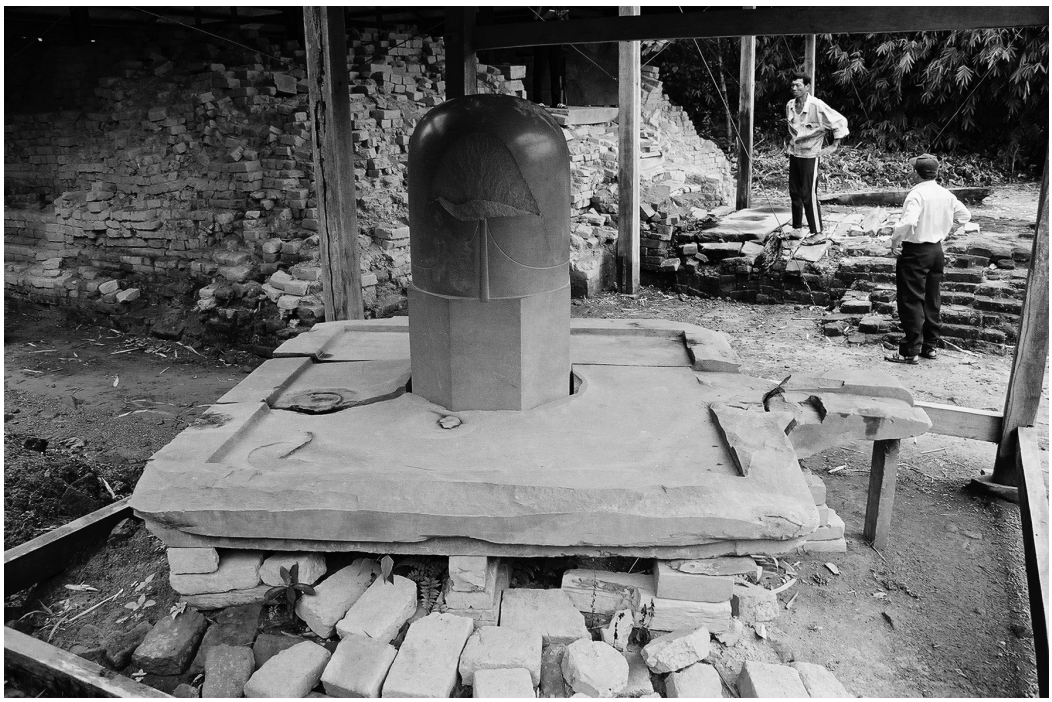


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Fig.22 Liṅga made of terracotta

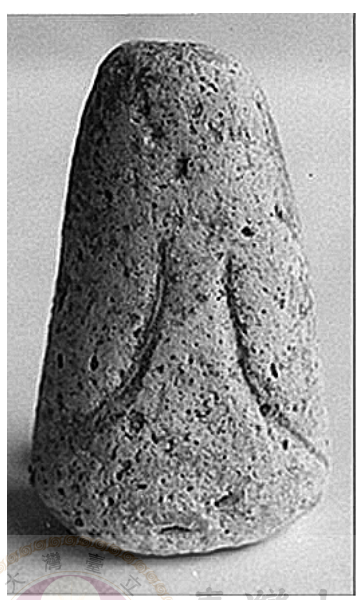


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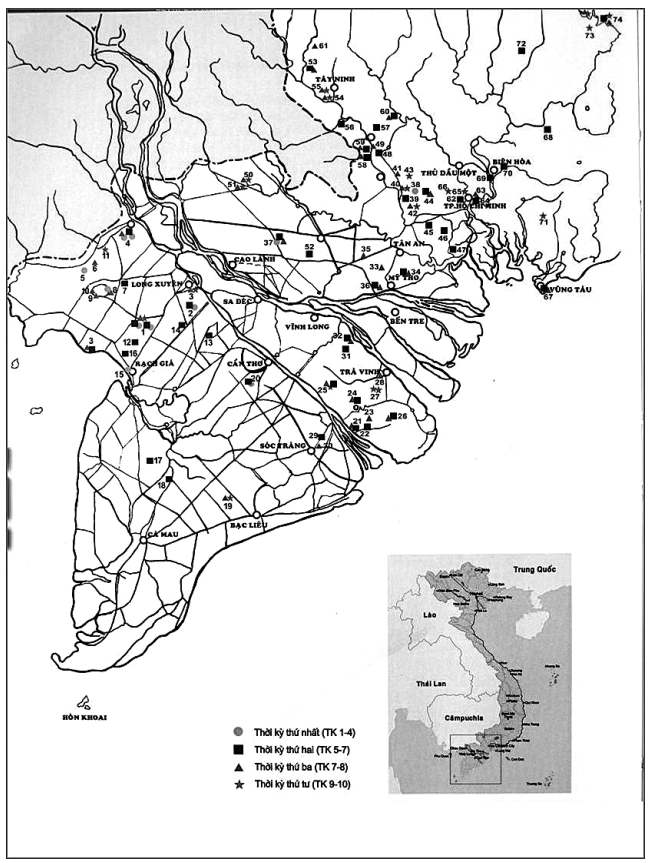


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越南早期歷史的印度教圖像學 (勘誤表)

Hindu Iconography in Early History of Southern Vietnam (Errata Sheets)

Second color page, upper photo:

Wrong: Linga made of tortoise shell, H. 5.6 cm

Recorrect: Linga-Yoni, Stone

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Fig 9 :

Wrong: Vajra image, gold plaque, Go Thap site, Dong Thap province.
Museum of Dong Thap province. Drawing: Nguyen Dang Cuong

Recorrect: Linga image, gold plaque, Go Thap site, Dong Thap province.
Museum of Dong Thap province. Drawing: Nguyen Dang Cuong

Fig 10 :

Wrong: Linga image, gold plaque, Go Thap site, Dong Thap province.
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Recorrect: Vajra image, gold plaque, Go Thap site, Dong Thap province.
Museum of Dong Thap province. Drawing: Nguyen Dang Cuong

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Fig 21 :

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The Museum of Dong Thap province. Photo: Le Thi Lien

Recorrect: Linga-Yoni, Stone, Temple Go1A, Cat Tien site , Lam Dong province.
Photo: Le Thi Lien

Fig 22 :

Wrong: Linga made of terracotta, Oc Eo site, An Giang province
The Museum of An Giang province. Photo: Nguyen Huu Thiet

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The Museum of An Giang province. Photo: Nguyen Huu Thiet

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Fig 9 :
Wrong: Vajra image, gold plaque
Recorrect: Linga image, gold plaque

Fig 10 :
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Fig 21 :
Wrong: Linga made of tortoise shell, H. 5.6 cm
Recorrect: Linga-Yoni, Stone, Temple Go1A

Fig 22 :
Wrong: Linga made of terracotta
Recorrect: Linga made of tortoise shell, H. 5.6 cm

Fig 23 :
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