

The Role of Oc Eo Ancient City in the International Maritime Trade Network (From the First to the Seventh Century)

Dang Van Thang¹, Vo Thi Anh Tuyet², Vo Thi Huynh Nhu³, Dao Vinh Hop⁴

Abstract

Oc Eo (Vietnamese: Óc Eo) is an archaeological site in the Mekong Delta, located in southern Vietnam (Óc Eo commune, Thọ An district, An Giang province). Oc Eo is often mentioned in research about ancient Southeast Asia as a part of the Funan kingdom. Some studies have identified Oc Eo's role as a trade, political, and religious center of Funan, but the position of Oc Eo in ancient international maritime trade network has not been clearly stated. Approach this issue from archaeology perspective, the authors surveyed the sites and studied artifacts found at sites in the Oc Eo area, particularly origin of these artifact. Ancient Chinese bibliographies are also cited to supplement the article. The findings state the favorable conditions for the development of Oc Eo as a port city: the location of a traffic hub of inland canals; a stop on the sea route from east to west; and having sources of local products that can be used as goods to exchange with merchants. The article also proves that Oc Eo city was an important port in the maritime trading system in ancient Southeast Asia during the period from the first to the seventh century CE. which was a transit point connecting between China and Southeast Asia, China, and India, maybe even the Mediterranean.

Keywords: *International Maritime Trade, Oc Eo, Phu Nam.*

Introduction

It is more than a century has passed since the first research on the Funan kingdom by P. Pelliot and more than 70 years after Louis Malleret's important discovery of Oc Eo culture. Oc Eo culture is a noun named by Louis Malleret when he conducted archaeological excavations in 1944 at the Ba The mountain relic site - An Giang and was published by him *L'archéologie du delta du Mekong*. He was the first person to believe that Oc Eo was an ancient port of the Funan kingdom. Based on the types of monuments, relics, architectural works... showing the development of a society with a state.

Knowledge about Oc Eo culture, which material products have a relationship with the Funan kingdom - an ancient country located in the Southern region around the beginning of the Common Era and its decline in the seventh century - well known through the research of French scholar G. Cœdès with the work *Ancient History of Indianized Countries in the Far East* published in Paris in 1944. This was the beginning of discovering and researching Oc Eo culture in the Southern Vietnam in general with the main role of the French. The most elaborate and massive research work is a 4-volume book series by L. Malleret called *Archeology of the Mekong Delta (L'Archéologie du Delta du Mékong)*. The work is a collection of all the results of fieldwork, reconnaissance and excavations from 1937 - 1944 in a number of locations such as: Go Cay Thi, Go Oc Eo, Giong Cat... in the Oc Eo relic site, Ba The mountain, at the same time, also synthesized previous findings and research on hundreds of other locations in the western Hau River (Tranbassac), lower Tien River and Southeast Vietnam (Cisbassac). From 1959 - 1963, his previous research was introduced in four volumes: "*L'archéologie du Delta du Mékong*" (*Archaeology of the Mekong Delta*).

After 1975, Vietnamese archaeologists from Institute of Archeology, Institute of Social Sciences, Universities of Social Sciences and Humanities and Historical Museums in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City started fieldwork programs - historical research on Oc Eo culture and the Funan kingdom. In the early years, work mainly focused on collecting documents and editing records of relics discovered by the French.

¹ Faculty of History, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU-HCM, Vietnam, Email: dangvanthang@hcmussh.edu.vn

² Faculty of History, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU-HCM, Vietnam, Email: vothianhtuyet@hcmussh.edu.vn, (Corresponding author)

³ Faculty of History, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU-HCM, Vietnam, Email: huynhnhu@hcmussh.edu.vn.

⁴ Sai Gon University, Vietnam, Email: daovinhhop.dhsg@gmail.com

From 1978 to 1983, surveys began to verify the field. From 1983 to 1992, large-scale excavations were carried out in key areas of An Giang, Kien Giang, Dong Thap and Long An provinces. Based on the results of excavations, a number of publications have been born such as: "Oc Eo culture and ancient cultures in the Mekong Delta". The publication is a collection of many articles outlining the appearance of Oc Eo culture in the Mekong Delta along with basic issues of Oc Eo culture that need to be resolved in the long term such as indigenoussness, origin, featured,...

In the 1990s, a number of programs on Oc Eo culture and the Funan kingdom were implemented in Vietnam and Cambodia. In Vietnam, there was a 5-year cooperative research program on Oc Eo culture from 1997 - 2001 between the École française d'Extrême-Orient, EFEO (France) and the Institute of Social Sciences of the Southern Region. The program has excavated a number of relics such as Go Cay Thi, Linh Son Nam, Go Tu Tram, Go Me, Go Ut Nhanh,... in the Oc Eo - Ba The relic site and the excavation results were announced as a preliminary announcement.

Since then, there have continued to be new publications such as: "Culture and population of the Mekong Delta" (1990) "Oc Eo culture New discoveries" (1995); "Some issues of archeology in Southern Vietnam" (1997, 2004, 2008, 2011); "Vietnamese Historical Archeology" volume II (2002); "Southern Delta culture - ancient architectural relics" (2002), "Funan Kingdom, history and culture" (2005), Buddhist and Hindu art in the Mekong Delta before the 10th century (2006), Funan country (2006), Eo culture and the Kingdom of Funan (2008), "The states of the Kingdom of Funan in the Southern Vietnam" (2017), "The religious centers of Eo culture in Southern Vietnam" (2017), "Southern archeology in early history" (2019),... These publications are largely a continuation of sketching a general view of the Oc Eo culture and the Funan kingdom on the basis of excavation results and Chinese bibliographies or the publication of excavation documents in raw form. In addition to synthetic works, there are also many works that try to delve into aspects of ancient Funan society.

Talking about the Funan trade, there are works by Nguyen Van Kim such as "Oc Eo - Phu Nam Culture, historical position and regional relationships", Cao Xuan Pho considered "Oc Eo to be a cultural and commercial center in southern Indochina in the first 6 centuries CE" and others works by Japanese researchers such as Noboru Karashima, Sakurai Yumio, Shigeru Ikuta. In which, Phu Nam is mentioned with Oc Eo trading port, which is considered the commercial center of the region and the region. From there, it shows Funan's position on the East-West trade route in ancient times.

The research about Funan, approaches by placing Funan in relationship with ancient kingdoms in the region such as Zhenla, Srivijaya, and Angkor to reposition Funan. Works: "From Funan to Srivijaya: Cultural Continuities and discontinuities", Manguin (2002); "From Funan to Angkor: Collapse and Regeneration on Ancient Cambodia", Stark (2006), and "Funan, Zhenla: The reality concealed by Chinese views of Indochina", Jacques (1979). Accordingly, Funan was identified in today's Southern Vietnam and Southern Cambodia. This group of authors relied on archaeological evidence, inscriptions and inscriptions in Sanskrit and indigenous scripts to come to the above conclusion.

The group of research works on Funan in the direction of regional approach and trade exchange, diplomatic relations, and cultural exchange with India includes the works Funan: "A major early Southeast Asia State", Jacques (2007), "Indianization of Funan: an economic history of Southeast's first state", Hall (2011), "Kalinga and Funan: A Study in Ancient Relations", Patra (2011); "Transmission of Indian Buddhist Cultures and Arts towards Funan periods first – 6th century the evidence in Vietnam", Thepa (2011), and "Funan Reviewed", Vickery (2003-2004). Most researchers agree that Funan was an ancient kingdom, the earliest in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia is a region with maritime routes across the Kra Strait and the Malay Peninsula. Oc Eo is one of the earliest ports of Funan, appearing around the first century CE. Most recently, Bérénice Bellina et al studied the connection between Oc Eo and the Thai-Malay peninsula through glass, ceramic and semi-precious stone artifacts (Bellina et al 2023: 18). Bui Minh Tri in 2023 also announced the latest excavation results at Oc Eo and Nen Chua, stating that Oc Eo was a population center, urban center, economic center, political and religious center, Oc Eo was an "urban" or "coastal" city (Bùi 2023: 64).

Therefore, it can be seen that issues related to Oc Eo - Phu Nam such as culture, sculpture, socio-economic life are attractive topics to domestic and foreign researchers. The ancient town Oc Eo is often mentioned in research works on commercial history in Southeast Asia. However, there is no work that takes urban Oc Eo areas as the main research object. On the other hand, there are studies that have identified Oc Eo's role as a trade, political and religious center, but the position of Oc Eo in ancient trade has not been clearly stated.

The Oc Eo Ancient City

Convenient Of Oc Eo's Location

The ancient urban Oc Eo (Oc Eo town, Thoai Son district, An Giang province) has coordinates 10°13'68"N and 105°09'47"E, Nen Chua or Takeo Port (Nen Chua Hamlet, Tan Hoi Commune, Tan Hiep District, Kien Giang Province) has coordinates 10°06'41"N and 105°06'27"E; Nen Chua port is 14.5km from the ancient city Oc Eo and 10km from the current sea (picture 1). Oc Eo has a very favorable location, located in the Mekong Delta, very close to the East Sea, West Sea and South Sea of Vietnam and near the Kra Isthmus (Thailand). Oc Eo is not too far from the sea, avoids storms and tsunamis, had Nen Chua port (Ta Keo - Kien Giang) as a center of transporting exchanged goods. Oc Eo ancient town is a stopover station on an important trade route in Asia. Merchant ships dock at Oc Eo to get fresh water, food, goods and wait for goods from other countries to be delivered as well as to wait for favorable sea current and monsoon: the southwest monsoon from May to October, from the South to the North and Northeast monsoon from November to April, from North to South. Thence, Oc Eo ancient city became a trading center, "an inter-world center".

Canal System from Ancient City Oc Eo

From the Oc Eo ancient city, there were fan-shaped canal systems spreading to many places. In 1929, 1931 and 1941, Pierre Paris announced photos taken from airplanes to demonstrate ancient canals, including the longest canal with 87 kilometers (measured on Google Earth Pro) connecting Oc Eo (An Giang) with Angkor Borrei (Cambodia) (Phan, (ed) 2016: 246).

In 1959, L. Malleret published "The old Irrigation network in the Oc Eo Delta" in volume I of a 4-volume book series: L'Archéologie du delta du Mékong describe this issue in more detail. P. Paris surveyed by plane and recorded five canals, L. Malleret surveyed by plane recorded more 23 other canals, including three canals dug during the Vietnam period (Nguyen dynasty - Mac Can Dung canal, Vinh Te canal and Long Xuyen-Gach Gia canal) and a canal was dug during the French colonial period (Bay Nui canal). This channel system radiated around Oc Eo in different directions, sometimes parallel, sometimes perpendicular to the Gulf of Thailand; In which there are two main canals: canal No.4, the longest with 110 kms, connecting Oc Eo (An Giang) with Angkor Borei (Cambodia) and canal No.16 connecting Oc Eo with Nen Chua (Kien Giang) (Figure 1).

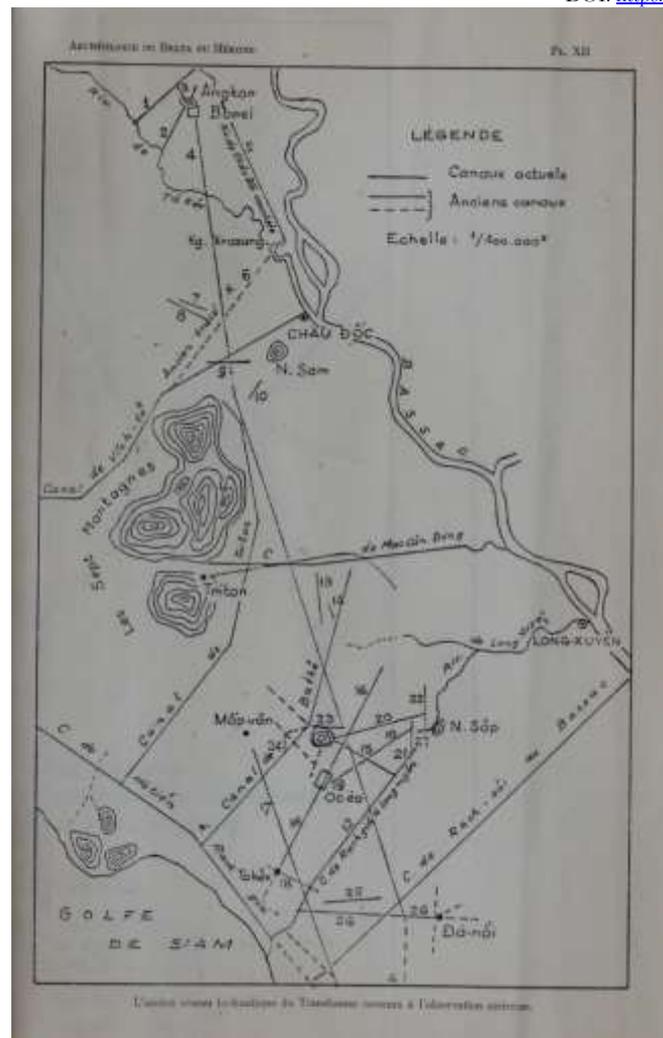


Figure 1. Ancient canal system around Oc Eo and from Oc Eo to Angkor Borei

Source: Louis Malleret 1959

An Electromagnetic survey results have shown that the ancient canal No. 16, other named as Lung Lon, connecting Oc Eo – Nen Chua is about 30-45m wide, with an average depth of about 2m (Bùi et al 2022: 99), therefore, on this canal, only small boats can be used. The digging of this canals system only arose when there was a change in the state governance apparatus, the port- city became a form of "imperial" court, associated with the need to establish a new capital at Angkor Borei in the third century (Phan (ed) 2016: 248-249). This canal system not only a waterway for the circulation of goods for commercial development, is also an irrigation system to bring fresh water to bring alluvium into fields for agricultural development, removes alum acid from the soil and encroaches on salinity.

The Oc Eo Ancient City Is a Center of Agricultural Production and Forestry and Fishery Exploitation

The main agricultural crop here is wet rice. A Chinese history book, "*The New book of Tang*", wrote: "*The field is cultivated for one year, harvested for three years*" (Nguyễn 2008: 286), which proves that the land is always deposited with Mekong River silt every year, therefore land quality was very good. Oc Eo culture did not originate from a port town but from a rice area with the characteristics of a the base of the mountain area locates at estuary and coastal (Phan (ed) 2016: 249), then developed strongly into a port city, a maritime economy, associated with the Silk Road on the sea.

In the cultural layers of Oc Eo sites in the Southern of Viet Nam or in pottery pieces, rice seeds or pieces of rice husks can be found. Japanese researcher Mr. Watabe presented in his book "Rice Road", on the basis of the chaff rices found, long grain rices are Belgan rice, round grain rices are cultivated rice. Cultivated rice is local origin, while long grain rice are from India, also known as "fairy rice". This rice variety was probably brought here by Indian merchants to trade or plant when they settled in Oc Eo (Nguyễn 2015: 47). There was also a type of rice that grows on its own and rises high with the flood water called wild rice or ghost rice (*Oriza nevara*). This rice has long grains with very long pointed tails, grows very well in the rainy season and grows high in the flood season.

In addition wet rice, Funan residents also grow other types of agricultural crops. According to "*The book of Southern Qi*": "*That country has sugarcane, palm jaggery, pomegranate and kumquat trees, especially many areca nuts.*" (Nguyễn 2008: 292-293).

Sugar cane pressing tools using oxen's power made of marble were found and kept at An Giang Museum and Kien Giang Museum. Many areca carcasses have been found in Stepped ponds in Go Thap (Dong Thap). *The book of Sui* wrote: "*They grow crops regardless of the season. The land is very suitable for growing rice, white beans, and black sesame. In addition to other products, most of them are similar to Giao Chi. They use sugar cane to make wine, add cantaloupe roots, the wine color is bright yellow, and the smell is slightly fragrant. They use coconut water to make wine, and it's also fragrant to drink.*" (Nguyễn 2008: 292-293).

Funan residents also know how to raise cattle. In Funan archaeological sites, buffalo, cow, pig bones can be found... but their farming activities are rarely mentioned.

Funan residents also exploit forestry and fishery products, according to "*The history of Southern*": "*Their products include gold, silver, copper, tin, agarwood, wood incense, elephants, rhinoceroses, feathers, and five-colored parrots.*" Nowadays, fisheries from Tonle Sap follow the water flow down to the Mekong Delta during the flood season, peaking at the end of September and early of October, such as: Siamese mud carp (*Hemicorhynchus siamensis*, only available during the flood season), catfish, basa, perch, snakehead fish,... especially barb fish, which is the largest fish in the Mekong River, weighing up to several hundred kilograms. Flood season is also the season when many types of aquatic vegetation grow very well such as: water lily, sesbania, aglae, etc...

The Oc Eo Ancient City is A Handicraft Production Center

Oc Eo is a large production center with the formation of many handicrafts, such as: metallurgy, (especially goldsmithing), carpentry, pottery making, glass making ...

Gold is one of the first art objects in Oc Eo culture. Gold has met the requirements in creating works to serve the needs of belief and religion as well as being used to make jewelry for people. The gods of Brahmanism in the early stages of Oc Eo culture were just symbols, in the form of non-divine statues represented on gold leaves. Metal jewelry of the Oc Eo culture is also extremely rich in type and quantity. Besides artifacts, many tools used to make them have also been found as: molds, the crucible, the goldsmith's hammer.

Funan residents use mainly three types of wood: *Hopea odoratan* (*sao* in Vietnamese), which can withstand water and mud; Giant Crape-myrtle and Tamanu are types of wood that have a lot of resin which are resistant to termites and insects. Wood was used to make Buddha statues and found most often in the Go Thap area (Dong Thap province), dating from the 3rd century. In Oc Eo, almost only Buddha statues made of *Hopea odoratan* wood can be found (Figure 4). The art of creating Buddha statues in Funan and India has many similarities, the statue styles also include of Gandhara (first to 4th century CE), Mathura (2nd century BC-12th century CE), Amaravati (2nd century BC – 3rd century CE), Gupta (4th – 6th century CE). Following the merchant fleets, Indian artists and craftsmen also came here to live and establish their businesses. Wood was also used a lot in making boats, repairing boats, building houses, making stilt houses,

making wharves... artifacts found in Nen Chua (Kien Giang province) and Go Thap (Dong Thap province) are proof (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Wooden Buddha Statue Found in Go Thap (Dong Thap Province)

Source: Dang Van Thang

The stone artifacts were made to serve belief and religious needs. Stone artworks usually date from the 5th century onwards, the only special case being Buddha reliefs found in Linh Son Bac (Oc Eo, An Giang) dating back to about the 3rd century. The first artifact dating back to the 5th century is a realistic linga at Go Cay Trom (Oc Eo, An Giang), now kept at the History Museum of Ho Chi Minh City. Many lingas and yoni, even quite unique linga - yoni sets can be found in Oc Eo town.

Pottery is the Richest Artifact of Oc Eo Culture

Oc Eo ceramics have two main groups: rough potteries are traditional potteries in the Southern of Viet Nam and fine potteries are potteries learned from India. The first difference between fine potteries and rough potteries is in the quality of the clay, fine potteries have white clay like Cao Lanh. There are two types of fine potteries: fine all-clay and fine clay mixed with small fine-grained sand. There are three types of rough potteries: rough clay mixed with fine-grained sand and vegetable residue, rough clay mixed with fine-grained sand, and rough clay mixed with large-grained sand. According to Ha Van Tan, relics of Indian origin discovered in Oc Eo need to be distinguished into three types: Items brought from India; Indian-style items made in Oc Eo; The items have Indian influences but are mixed with local traditions (Hà 2020: 650) (Figure 3).

Two typical types of artifacts of Oc Eo culture: kendi and Cà ràng. Kendi pots were imported from India during the early of Oc Eo culture, but in the Oc Eo culture sites, kendi pots represented in three types of materials: fine all-clay, fine clay mixed with small fine-grained sand and rough clay mixed with fine-grained sand (Figure 5). Cà ràng is originally from Khmer: *kran*, the name of a unique type of earthen stove appeared in the South during the pre-Oc Eo to Oc Eo periods. Cà ràng was usually made by only one type of material: rough clay mixed with large, very thick sand. During the Pre-Oc Eo period (several hundred years BC), round-shaped Cà ràng were found in An Son, Rach Nui (Long An province) and number-eight-shaped Cà ràng were found as models of burial items in jar tombs at Giong Ca Vo (Ho Chi Minh City) (Figure 4).



Figure 3. Kendi pot found in Nhon Thanh

(Can Tho City)

Source: Dang Van Thang



Figure 4. Cà ràng found in Nhon Thanh

(Can Tho City) Source: : Dang Van Thang

Funan's handicraft industry is very developed, in addition to gold jewelry, there are also agate beads, glass beads, etc. found in many relics in the Mekong Delta. The excavation of the Lung Lon relic at Oc Eo, in 2017-2020, with the excavation area of Lung Lon A 464m² found 200,000 beads and Lung Lon B with the excavation area 577m² found 13,000 beads. These beads are multi-colored including red, orange, yellow, black, white, blue, green, brown, purple, striped black... in which red, yellow, blue, green are the main colors (Lê & Lâm, 2020: 4&8).

The raw materials and goods were thought imported from Southeast Asian traders such as gold, copper, lead, tin, and gems from the Malay peninsula or from highland residents to supply factories. They also imported gemstone materials from India and Thailand and glass materials from India or the Middle and Near East regions (Nguyễn 2005: 46-47).

Research Methodology

This article is the result of a systematic research process including data collection, analysis and induction, combined with field research. The authors surveyed the sites and re-researched artifacts found at sites in the Oc Eo area currently kept at Management Board of Oc Eo Relics, An Giang province Museum and Ho Chi Minh City History Museum. These artifacts are researched and examined by combining notes during the discovery process, using classification methods, in addition to determining the function and age of some unidentified artifacts, the comparative method is also used effectively. Selected artifacts include typical artifacts produced in Oc Eo and the Southern of Vietnam, artifacts have foreign origin, from the Mediterranean, India, Southeast Asia and China. To have a more comprehensive view, the authors also studied artifacts in the Southern region currently kept in Kien Giang province museum, Can Tho city museum and Dong Thap province museum.

Records about Funan from ancient Chinese bibliographies such as *The book of Southern Qi*, *The book of Sui*, *The history of Southern*, *The book of Liang* and *The New book of Tang* translated by Nguyễn Hữu Tâm are also analyzed and used in addition to studying the artifacts. These historical records provide a lot of information about agricultural activities and handicraft production in Funan in general, we can use it as a reference for Oc Eo, a center of Funan.

Based on the results of the above artifact analysis, using an interdisciplinary approach, applying knowledge from the fields of history, geography, anthropology, economics, and international relations to state the maritime urban nature of Oc Eo as well as determine Oc Eo's role in the maritime trade system in the early centuries in this era.

The article reviews the favorable conditions for the development of Oc Eo as a port city: the location of a traffic hub of inland canals, a stop on the sea route from east to west; having sources of local products that can be used as goods to exchange with merchants. The article analyzes the manifestations of Oc Eo as a port city through foreign artifacts discovered in the Oc Eo town area today. In addition, the article also locates Oc Eo's position in the trade system in Southeast Asia during the period from the first to the seventh century CE, which was a transit point, connecting between China and Southeast Asia, China and India, maybe even the Mediterranean.

Research Results and Discussion

The Oc Eo Ancient City in The International Maritime Trade Network

Funan and Relationship with India

In the context of India's need for trade with eastern countries at the beginning of the Common Era, Funan, with its geographical location, emerged as the first country in Southeast Asia. Sharmin Akhtar & Hanizah Idris divided the process of contact and exchange with India into 4 stages: Stage 1-Trade and tourism exchanges of traders coming from India, mainly from Bengal (northeastern India); Phase 2- The spread of Brahmanism and Buddhism; Phase 3- Penetration of language from the ruling class and missionaries into the local population; Stage 4- Sharing concepts about temple architecture of Bengal. Sharmin Akhtar & Hanizah Idris also present a map of ancient cities in India and Southeast Asia and sea routes. Some of the port towns in Southeast Asia at that time include Oc Eo (Vietnam), Ban Don Ta Phet, Khao Sam Keo (Thailand), Takkola, Kedah (Malaysia), Prambanan and Srivijaya (Indonesia) (Figure 7) (Sharmin & Hanizah 2020: 29 & 52).

Vietnam - India relations date back several hundred years before Christ. Artifacts found in the Central of Viet Nam (glassware, stone beads... in Sa Huynh culture) and the South (Go O Chua black pottery; An Son red pottery; glassware, stone beads, gold beads in bamboo segments shape of Giong Ca Vo) are evidences of this special relationship. By the time Oc Eo culture and Funan kingdom, India's influence on Funan manifested in many aspects. The Funan kingdom learned to organize its state following the Indian Mandala style. The mandala is recorded in Arthashastra by Kautilya. Kautilya (370-283 BC) was the Prime Minister (Chanakya) during the reign of Chandragupta (321-296 BC). Arthashastra is considered one of the greatest political works in the ancient world. In Arthashastra, Kautilya proposed the theory of Mandala with the Circle of States. Madala here is defined as Circle of States, with a states has the king as the center (Vijigisu) (Chu 2016: 129-153). Right from the founding of Funan, Kaundinya, the ruler, married Lieu Diep, had children, then he divided the country into seven parts for his children, following the Mandala style (Nguyễn 2008: 274). According to *Book of Liang*, during the reign of Pham Man (Sri Mara) (220-225), he proclaimed himself "Great King of Funan", built large boats, and sent troops to fight all over the sea, capturing lands such as Do Con and Cuu Tri, Dien Ton, a total of more than ten countries, expanding his land to five or six thousand square miles (Nguyễn 2008: 274). During the reign of Kieu Tran Nhu (Kaundinya II) (late 3rd century, early 4th century), the domestic legal system was changed, according to the regulations of the country of ancient India (Nguyễn 2008: 275). The inhabitants of Funan learned the Indian language (sanskrit) and created many inscriptions; accepted Brahmanism and Buddhism, built many temples, made statues of gods and Buddha. Especially like India, Funan participated in the maritime Silk Road. Products bearing the mark of India such as: gold objects, gold-coated glass, glass objects, beads, black ceramics, smooth ceramics, leaf tiles, stone statues, wooden statues, bronze statues... were made by Funan citizens.

Funam and Relationship with China

According to *The book of Southern Qi*: "In the second year of *Yǒngmíng* (Emperor Wu of Southern Qi) (484),... Previously, I sent an envoy to bring some sundry items to Guangzhou to trade, and a Thien Truc (The name ancient used to tell about India) monk named Thich Na Gia Tien escorted my ship from Guangzhou return to Funan; Unfortunately, in the middle of the sea, the ship caught wind and drifted to Lam Ap" (Nguyễn 2008: 268-269). Artifacts proving the relationship with China found at Oc Eo are Wu Zhu coins (dated to the 2nd - 3rd centuries), hard-printed potteries of the Eastern Han period (2nd - 3rd centuries) found at Lung Lon (a site in current Oc Eo town); Eastern Han bronze mirrors mirror (2nd - 3rd centuries) found at Go Giong Cat; chicken-head-shaped kettle spouts of the Six Dynasties period (4th-5th centuries) (Bùi et al 2022: 296). Bronze Buddha statue (Ho Chi Minh City Museum of History) and bronze statue of Guanyin (An Giang Museum) found at Go Cay Thi (a site in current Oc Eo town), originated from Chinese, had has the characteristics of two art styles Gandhara art (India) and Northern Wei (China) (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Bronze statue of Guanyin found at Oc Eo

Source: Dang Van Thang

Funam and Relationship with Southeast Asia

Gemstones such as carnelian, agate that cannot be found in Southern Vietnam, while quite popular in Southern Thailand. It is likely that jewelry from the Southern region of Thailand was an imported item of Oc Eo residents to continue exchanging with traders from elsewhere (Bùi et al 2022: 295-296). In the Lung Lon site, through excavations in 2017-2020, in addition to the large number of beads, three intact oars were also found at the bottom of the canal. One of them had a 1.6 meter-long shaft, a wide and leaf shape blade, similar to the oars used by Malayo-Polynesian residents (Figure 6). Moreover, results of analysis of starch composition on grinding tools showed that Oc Eo residents crushed roots, wild tubers and taro, especially cloves, a precious spice originating from the Maluku islands (Molucas) in eastern Indonesia (Kien 2022).



Figure 6. The Oar Found in An Ancient Canal at Oc Eo

Source: Tri et al 2022: 170

Funam and Relationship with the Mediterranean

Two Roman gold medals from the time of Antonius Pius (reigned 138-161 CE) and Marcus Aurelius (reigned 161-180 CE) collected by Louis Malleret at the Oc Eo ruins. One (serial number 119) belongs to the time of Antonius Pius, dated 152 CE. The medal was stamped on an embossed mold, 1.9cm in diameter, had a human face in one-side view with beard and wearing a laurel wreath. On the figure of the human head, there is a mark that has been torn off, perhaps is the hanger that disappeared. One (serial number 120) was a gold copy of the Roman Medal, cast on a clay mold, 1.9cm in diameter, had a human face in one-side view with beard and wearing a laurel wreath. On the figure of the human head, there is a mark of a hanger (L. Malleret 1962: 112-116). The medal with the image of Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180 CE) is a replica of the coin and was used as a wearable. The evidence is the weight and thickness vary greatly between real coins and the medals; in addition, the item has a broken stem on the edge used for wearing. However, this is still evidence of the relationship between the Mediterranean and Oc Eo port (Phan 2016: 287-289). In the ancient canal in Oc Eo (Lung Lon site), Roman glass Mosaic beads were also found (Bùi et al 2022: 291).

Conclusion

Oc Eo had a very favorable location next to the East Sea and near the Kra Strait from which to connect with the world. Base on an agricultural rice growing area, Oc Eo developed and had special contact with India, becoming a urban - port town, in contact with the outside world through the maritime Silk Road. Oc Eo had a dense canal system, especially two large canals: canal No.4 connecting Oc Eo with Angkor Borei and canal No.16 connecting Oc Eo with Ta Keo port (Nen Chua) to help Oc Eo approach to the world; these canals are used for both irrigation and transportation In the history of Funan, Oc Eo played the role of an agricultural and forestry and fishery exploitation center, an industrial production center and an international trade center. Oc Eo had special relations with India, China, Southeast Asia and the Mediterranean world. These relationships helped Oc Eo develop dramatically and become the most famous port town in Southeast Asia from the first to the seventh century. By the seventh century, due to changes in climate and trade, Oc Eo gradually lost its role as a commercial city, along with the collapse of the Funan kingdom.

Note: This research is funded by Vietnam National University HoChiMinh City (VNU-HCM) under grant number B2023-18b-02. The authors also expressed their gratitude to the Management Board of Oc Eo relics, Director of Museum of An Giang province, Kien Giang province, Can Tho city, Dong Thap province and Ho Chi Minh city for let us use images of artifacts in this papper.

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