

THE EXCAVATIONS OF J.-Y. CLAEYS AT TRA KIEU, CENTRAL VIETNAM, 1927-28: FROM THE UNPUBLISHED ARCHIVES OF THE EFEO, PARIS AND RECORDS IN THE POSSESSION OF THE CLAEYS FAMILY

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Abstract

Problems in reconciling the material excavated at Tra Kieu between 1990 and 1993 with the findings made by J.-Y. Claeys nearly 70 years earlier led to the 'discovery' of a rich archive of unpublished photographs and records in France. The study of these is helping to correlate results from the various excavation seasons.

Introduction

Jean-Yves Claeys (1896-1978), architect and archaeologist, was employed by the Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient in Indochina from 1923 to 1953 and undertook a series of major excavations at Tra Kieu, Duy Xuyen District, Quang Nam Province (Figure 1) between June 1927 and October 1928 during which he uncovered the foundations of two major, and several minor, Cham temples, large quantities of sculpture and some inscriptions. Most of these are now kept in the Museum of Cham Sculpture in Da Nang with smaller collections in museums in Paris, Saigon, Hue, Hanoi, Bangkok and elsewhere. Despite the large scale of the excavations Claeys published relatively few details of his work; two long but preliminary articles in the *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient* (1928 & 1929), one in the *Revue des Arts Asiatiques* (1931) which to some extent repeats material from the earlier articles, and a summary of the work in his book of 1934.

J.-Y. Claeys was a trained architect, a skilled draftsman, painter and photographer and learned to navigate light aeroplanes in order to take aerial photographs of the work at Tra Kieu (Figs 2 & 6) and later at other sites. It seems that he was

also a keen amateur ciné photographer and in the 1950s, after his retirement in Paris, he compiled a film on the archaeology of Vietnam and Cambodia based on the materials he had shot in the field between 1930-40.

Between 1990 and 1996 Vietnamese archaeologists (from 1993 collaborating with British and Japanese colleagues) have undertaken a series of small scale excavations at various locations within the ancient walled city at Tra Kieu (Figure 3) with the aims of obtaining a dated ceramic sequence and investigating the relationship between the Indianized Cham Civilization and the late prehistoric Iron Age Sa Huynh Culture which preceded it in the central coastal region of Vietnam. This work continued in 1997 and some results have been published elsewhere (Nguyen, Lam et al. 1991; Yamagata and Glover 1994; Glover 1995; Glover and Yamagata 1995; Glover, Yamagata et al. 1996) or are in press. However, in the analysis of the excavated materials, we have found it difficult to relate the stratigraphic and ceramic sequence obtained from these excavations with the structures and sculpture revealed by Claeys' work of the 1920s. In August 1995 the present author started to investigate records held at the EFEO in Paris in the hope that more details of Claeys' excavations were preserved there. The results, thanks to the help

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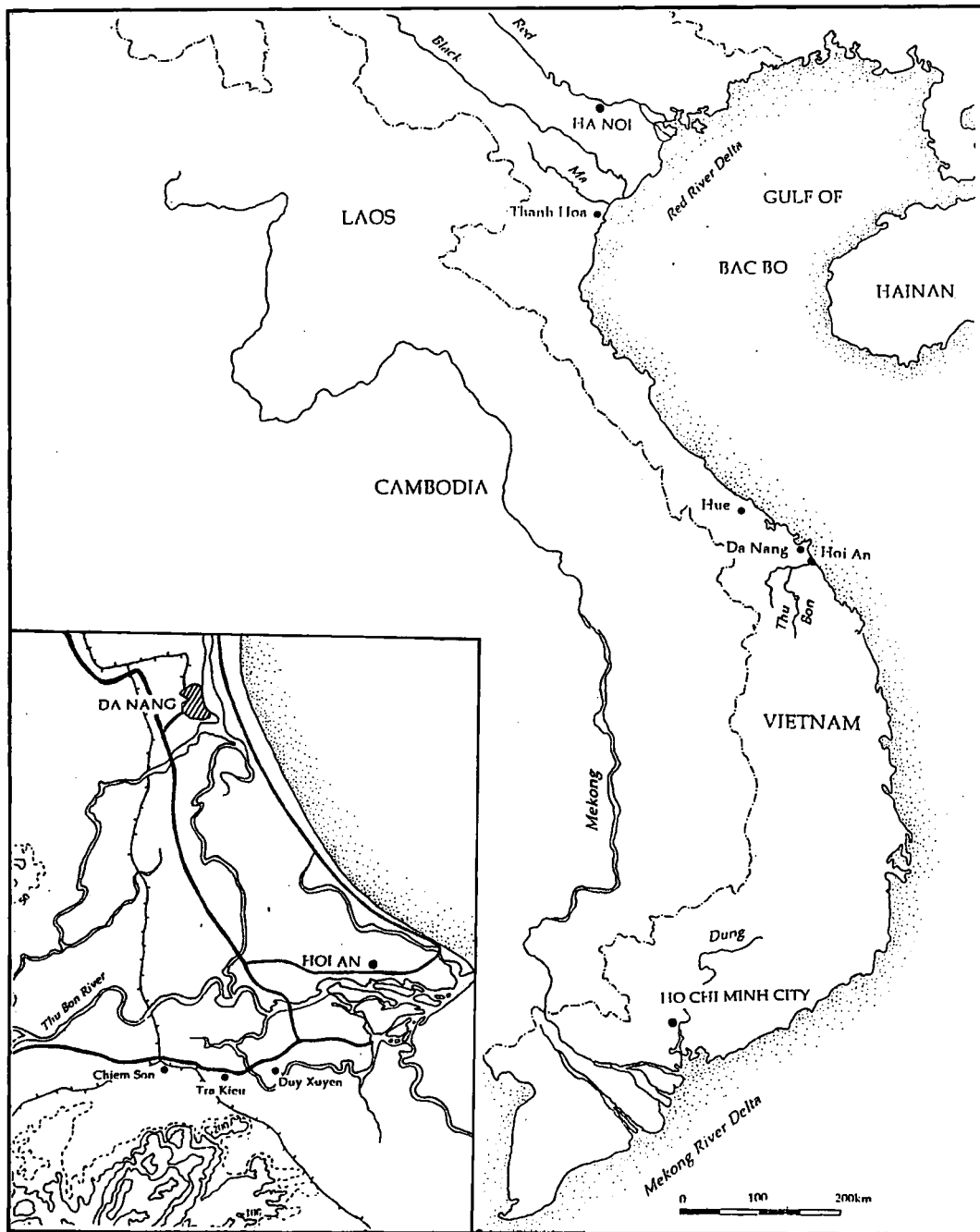


Figure 1. Map of Vietnam locating the places mentioned in the text. (Drawing by Ruth Prior)



Figure 2. Aerial view Tra Kieu from the southwest taken by J.-Y. Claeys. His excavation at Point A is at the top centre, beyond the chapel on Buu Chau Hill.

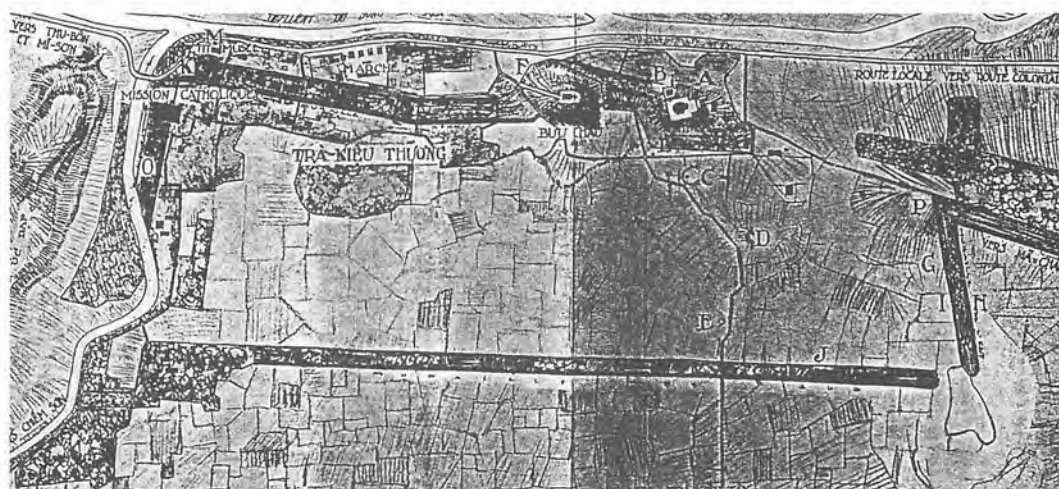


Figure 3. Plan of Tra Kieu – Simhapura showing the ancient city walls and locating the excavations of 1927-28.

Figure 4. Workmen in trench at Point A, in early July 1927.



Figure 5. The mound at Point A in 1927 before excavation. The pagoda, an ancestral shrine to the Mac family, was removed by Claeys and has since been rebuilt.



Figure 6. The temple foundations at Point A after excavation, from a low-level aerial photograph taken by Claeys.



of Pierre-Yves Manguin, the Librarian, and the staff of the EFEO, were most rewarding. In the archives, over 170, largely unpublished, photographs were found covering many aspects of the excavation at Tra Kieu and illustrating objects found there, often *in situ* before their despatch to the museums. The original plates of these stayed in Hanoi and most are believed to have been destroyed¹.

In addition, a microfilm made by the EFEO in Hanoi in 1957 was located and after viewing this in January 1996 a duplicate was made for me. The microfilm, of over 500 pages, contains the monthly reports made by Claeys to the Director to the EFEO in Hanoi, various other reports and letters relating to the work at Tra Kieu. In addition it includes, as separate files, a copy of Henri Parmentier's hand-written reports made on Mi Son and Dong Duong earlier in the century – material which he drew on for the *Inventaire descriptif des monuments chams de l'Annam* (1909 & 1918).

In the course of this archival research I contacted two of the surviving children of J.-Y. Claeys who live in Paris in the hope that they would have more records of their father's work and again this has been most productive. H.-P. Claeys, an interior architect, and his sister Marie-Yvonne have kept quite a number of books and records of their father's work, including ciné film made by him between 1930-40. In July 1996 M. Claeys loaned to me the original hand-written field diary kept by his father at Tra Kieu and the inventory of finds made at the site. These four books contain many details of stratigraphy and the association of material omitted from the publications as well as many revealing details of the conditions under which the work was done, and recording the visits to the site by officials of the French Government of Indochina and well-known scholars from the EFEO.

The background to the excavations by J.-Y. Claeys at Tra Kieu

Claeys' fieldwork arose out of the researches

of earlier French scholars such as Bergaigne (1888), Bergaigne and Barth (1893), Aymonier (1889, 1891), Finot (1904) and Maspero (1928) on Cham inscriptions, and by Pelliot (1903, 1904) and especially Leonard Aurousseau (1914, 1923) on Chinese historical accounts relating to present-day Vietnam and their relations with the 'barbarous tribes' south of the commandery of Jinan (Zhinan); the southernmost border of the Han and later Chinese imperial administrations.

Maspero and some other scholars placed Jinan north of Hai Van pass with its capital near modern-day Hue whereas Aurousseau believed it lay further south, with a territory extending as far as Cape Varella near modern Nha Trang. In the late 2nd century AD a polity known to the Chinese as Lin Yi, probably the earliest Cham principality, emerged on the Chinese southern border but there has been continuing uncertainty regarding its precise location and even whether Li Yi referred to a whole kingdom with its capital at Siang Lin or whether it was simply a city.

The site at Tra Kieu

The remains of an ancient Cham city (Figure 3) with temple foundations and substantial perimeter walls, at Tra Kieu in the Thu Bon River Valley, Duy Xuyen District of Quang Nam - Da Nang Province had been known since the late 19th century (Paris 1891, 1892) and had been recorded by Lajonquière (1901) and Parmentier (1909-1918). Aurousseau was convinced that Tra Kieu was the capital of Lin Yi and was the city sacked by the Chinese in the mid 5th century. Claeys' mission there between 1927-28, under the direction of Aurousseau, was to test this theory and hopefully to demonstrate its validity. This, both Claeys and Aurousseau seemed to have believed to have been demonstrated. But although some sculpture and inscriptions of 5th - 6th century AD have been found at or in the vicinity of Tra Kieu, the overwhelming bulk of the statuary and the building remains can be dated, according to most authorities

Figure 7. Plans of the temple foundations at Points A and B during excavation. The *Tombaux Royaux* in the bottom right were those of the Mac family which Claeys had relocated.

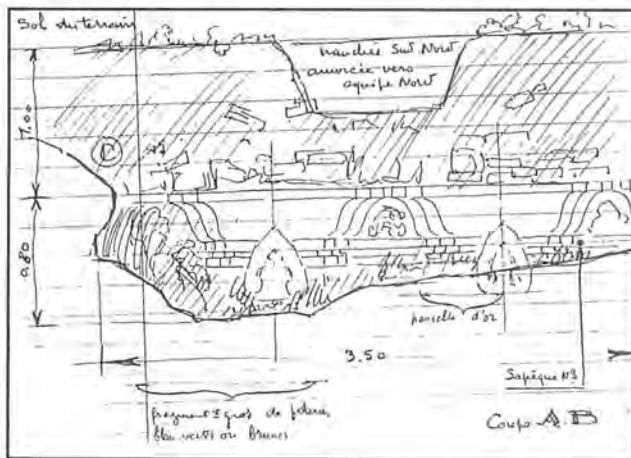
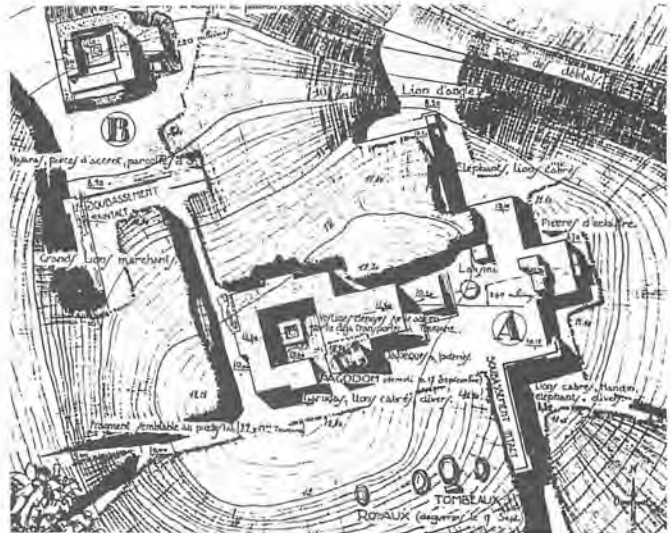


Figure 8. A length of moulded bricks on the facade of a basement at Point A: sketch from Claeys' field notebook.

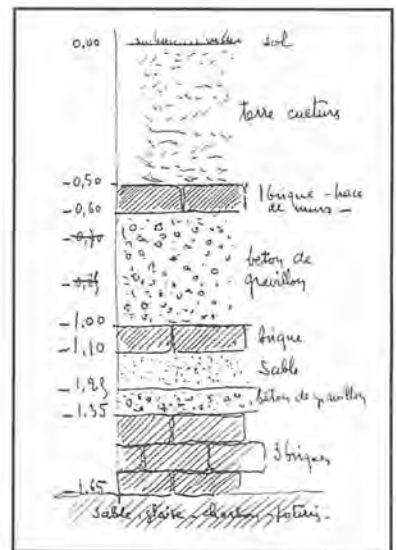


Figure 9. Drawn section from the notebooks showing the structure of the temple foundations.

Figure 10. Cross-section through the temple base at Point A showing how Claeys envisaged the superstructure.

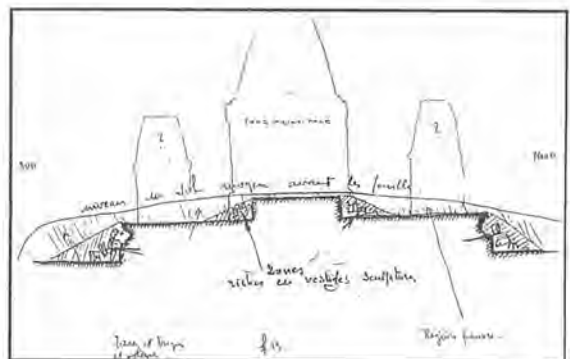




Figure 11. Henri Parmentier (left) with his daughter and dog together with Claeys at Tra Kieu, Point A in September 1927.

Figure 12. Rubbings of two Chinese coins found during the excavations at Tra Kieu. Most of the coins belong to the 11th-12th centuries. (Identifications by Helen Wang of the British Museum)

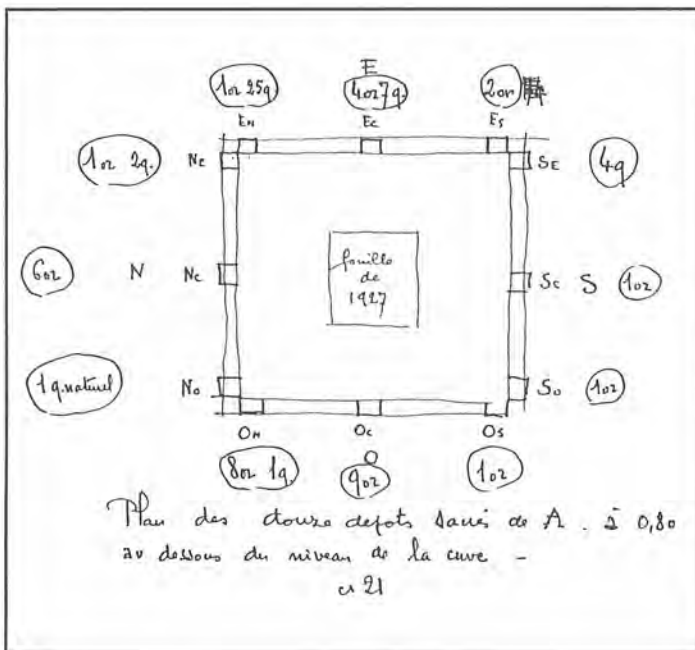


Figure 13. Location of reliquary deposits on Point A.

Figure 14. Claeys' suggested reconstruction of the lingam base from the 'Ramayana' altar now in the Cham Museum, Da Nang, including the central section found at Point A in 1927.

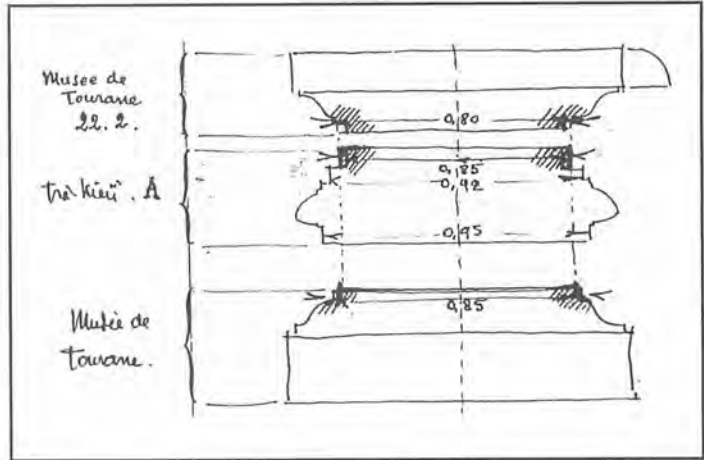


Figure 15. Claeys with M. Jabouillé, his cousin, the French Résident Supérieur in Annam, looking at the looted main reliquary in the foundations of Point A.



Figure 16. Pottery and tile fragments on an excavation baulk in 1927; no pottery seems to have been retained or studied.

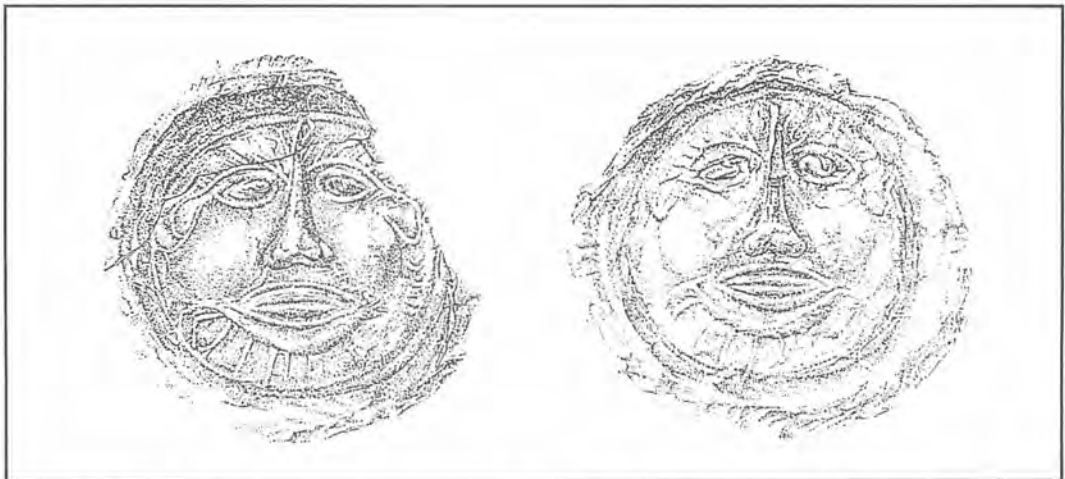


Figure 17. End tiles with stamped faces excavated at Tra Kieu in 1993. (Drawing by W. Southworth)

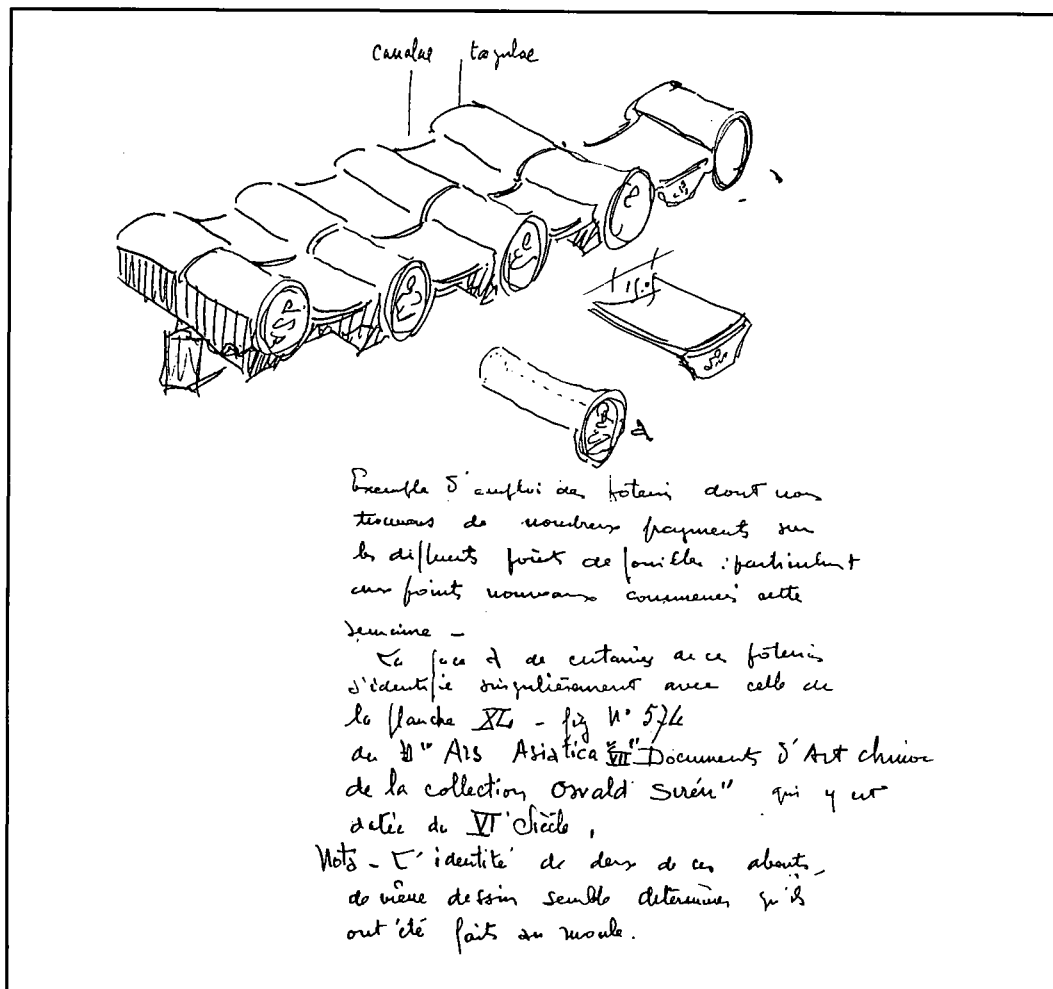


Figure 18. A sketch from Claeys' notebook showing a possible reconstruction of the tiled roofs at Tra Kieu.

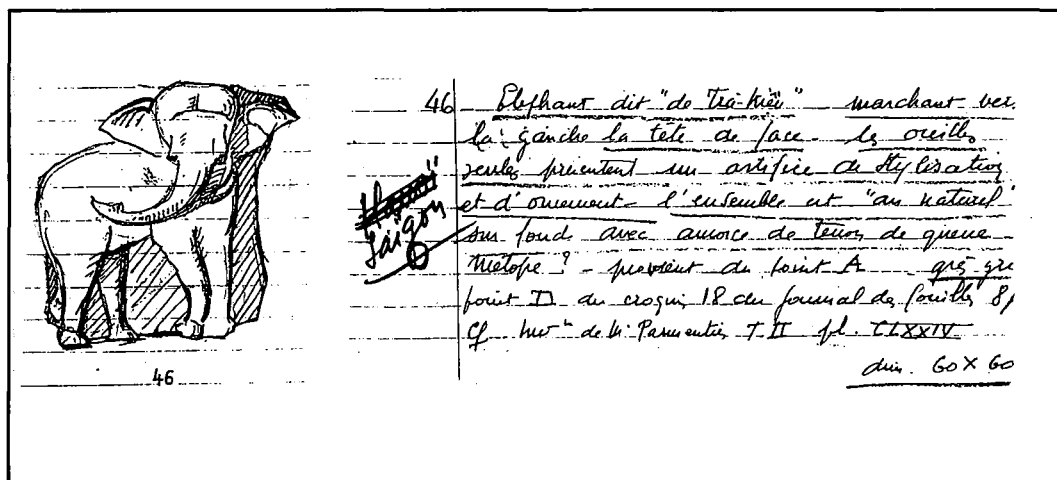


Figure 19. A sketch of a carved stone elephant from Point A, Tra Kieu, from Claeys' field inventory. Sent to Saigon, now the National Museum of History, Ho Chi Minh City.

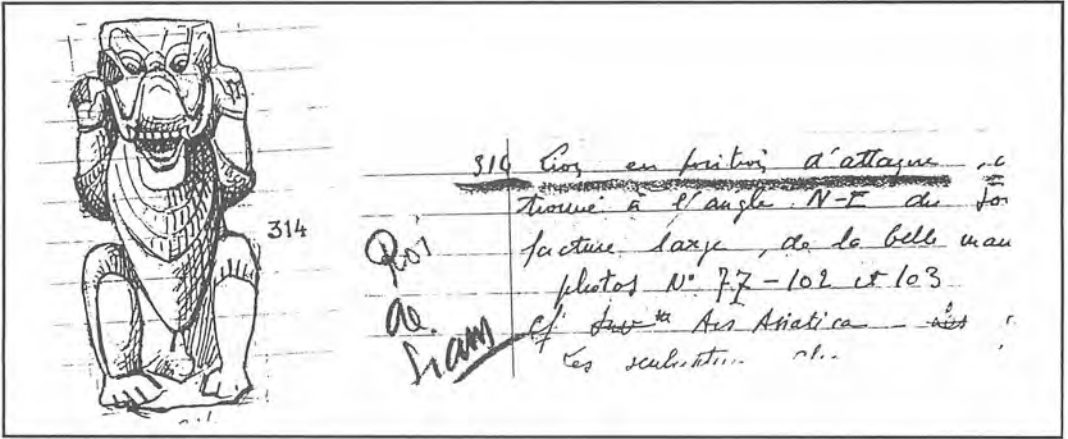


Figure 20. A sketch of a carved stone lion from Point A, Tra Kieu, from Claeys inventory. A gift to the King of Siam; now (?) in the National Museum, Bangkok.

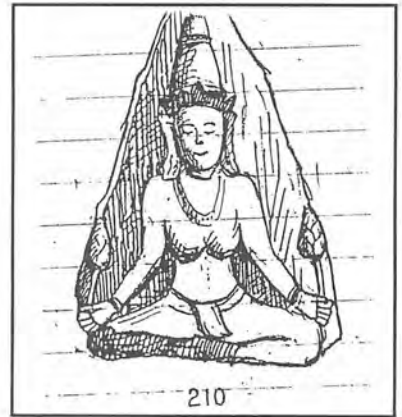


Figure 21. A sketch of a carved stone devotee from Point A, Tra Kieu, from Claeys' inventory.



Figure 22. Reconstruction of ancient Simhapura; a water colour made by Claeys for the Colonial Exhibition at the Château de Vincennes in 1931.

to the 9th - 11th centuries, while most of the coins found there by Claeys have been dated to the 11th century.

In a later reassessment of the Chinese sources Stein (1947) showed, to the conviction of most modern scholars (but see Claeys 1951) that Aurousseau was wrong and that Lin Yi and its capital lay well to the north of Hai Van Pass; but this was long after the excavations at Tra Kieu.

After the excavations Claeys quickly published two quite lengthy but still preliminary reports (Claeys 1928, 1929) and incorporated much of the same material into an article (Claeys 1931) which he wrote as a guide to exhibits at the International Colonial Exhibition at the Château de Vincennes in 1931, where he identified Tra Kieu, in its later stages, with the city of Simhapura known from an inscription of the 9th century. He also went over the same ground more briefly in a general book on the archaeology of Central Vietnam (Claeys 1934) and very much later commented on Stein's re-working of the historical geography as known from Chinese texts (Claeys 1951). He never published a major monograph on the work at Tra Kieu which some nine months of fieldwork surely could have supported, for his duties for the EFEO, particularly supervising building and administration, kept him too busy. However he kept meticulous records of his work at Tra Kieu, as I have discovered.

Jean-Yves Claeys is also said to have been the best field archaeologist in the employ of the old EFEO and he certainly worked effectively. He first arrived at the site on 16th June 1927 and quickly made arrangements for accommodation, engaged four gangs of workmen, called on officials, and after cabling to Hue and Hanoi for his funds to be made available, he started work at 6 am on 1st July. The first excavation was on a low mound surmounted by a small 'pagoda', an ancestral shrine to the Mac family (Figures 4 and 5) which he had removed after complex negotiations with the Annamese court in Hue. The shrine has recently been rebuilt. This mound, the site of the main tower called

Point A in Claeys' reports, had already produced many pieces of sculpture which had earlier been taken to the Cham Museum at Tourane (present day Da Nang) by Parmentier and others.

By the second day of the excavation the four teams of workmen (Figures 6 and 7) were already finding pieces of sculpture, dressed stone and decorated brickwork. On the fourth day he had uncovered a substantial length of carved and moulded bricks forming the facade of a basement (Figure 8). He was able to sketch, over a depth of more than one metre, the structure of the foundations on which the Cham built their great towers; alternating layers of rammed red earth (*betons*), broken bricks, and courses of well laid bricks (Figures 9 and 10).

This was quickly achieved despite regular visits to Faifo (Hoi An) and Mi Son with Dr Sallet from the Cham Museum in Tourane (modern Da Nang). Claeys continued to work at Tra Kieu until 14th November despite periods of heavy rain and visits from various officials and colleagues such as the redoubtable Henri Parmentier who came with his daughter and dog on 24th September (Figure 11).

During the excavation season Claeys lived in the local Community House (*Dinh*) which served as a depository for the sculpture found in the excavations before its despatch to museums in Tourane, Saigon, Hanoi and Hue. He also built a darkroom there where his photographic plates were developed and printed. The building still stands, re-roofed, enlarged and back in use as a *Dinh*.

On 20th September Claeys notes that he received from Aurousseau a report on the various coins (*sapèques*) that had been found in the course of work. Aurousseau dated most of them to the 11th century; the oldest about 1.4 m below the surface of Point A was said to be of the 8th century and the most recent, from the 19th century, was found on the surface of Point B. A re-examination of the coins on the basis of the rubbings made by Claeys (Figure 12) shows that one is marked with a regnal year in the early 7th

century AD, although Aourousseau's attributions were mainly correct².

Excavation seems to have stopped on 17th September 1927 and by October the weather was deteriorating; the diary entry for 7th October for instance refers to 'heavy rains since midnight with a tornado ... the trenches were flooding, the walls collapsing, and the river was rising'. On 11th October a typhoon threatened to overwhelm them all. He had temporary roofs built to protect the work but could do little outside work. Claeys seems to have concentrated on writing reports, making drawings and plans for the enlargement of the Museum at Tourane to accommodate all the new finds. He left the site for a while to accompany Parmentier who was on tour but returned and on 11th November he was joined by Emile Pajot, well-known (perhaps notorious is better) as the first excavator of Dong Son. He closed down the excavation until 24th February 1928, leaving the site in the care of Pajot.

I have mentioned that Claeys was a meticulous recorder of his excavations (Figure 13) despite the relatively little amount finally published. For example he noted quite a number of stratigraphic details omitted from the publications and these observations, together with photographs in the EFEO archives and some elusive notes in the reports, may allow us to identify at least two, and perhaps three, phases of construction of the main temple complex at Tra Kieu. This may resolve the question as to whether there was a major urban site already there in the 5th-6th century as the great Tra Kieu altar (Figure 14) might suggest; nonetheless, the main surviving building remains and sculpture belong to the 9th - 11th centuries (Figure 15). But of course even the existence of early occupation does not resolve the problematic identification of Tra Kieu as the capital of Lin Yi.

I have mentioned that despite, or perhaps because of his main focus towards architecture and sculpture Claeys paid rather little attention to ceramics and roofing tiles which in our experience are very numerous at Tra Kieu. For example, the small excava-

tions at Buu Chau hill in 1990 and 1993 yielded some 30,000 sherds. But from Claeys' records I can find only one or two rather poor sketches in the Field Diaries and a photograph of a heap of sherds and tile fragments on an excavation baulk (Figure 16).

Claeys did take rather more interest in the roofing tiles he found, especially the face-decorated end tiles (Figure 17). He sketched a possible reconstruction of the roofing arrangement (Figure 18) and published one short article on the value of roof tiles for determining habitation areas (Claeys 1929a). Despite this none of the tiles he excavated seem to have survived. Further searches in the archives may indicate what happened to them at the end of the excavation as I find it difficult to believe that he just dumped them all back in the trenches.

Finally I must briefly mention the inventory of sculpture he made; a summary of this was typed up as a report to the EFEO in Hanoi, and is on the microfilm mentioned earlier. But he did keep a separate handwritten inventory, made at the site - perhaps on those stormy days in October-November - and in this he listed and described 341 pieces of sculpture and illustrated 126 of these by neat ink sketches on pages facing the descriptions (Figs 19-21). On many he also indicated to which museum they were sent.

From these one can see Claeys was quite an artist and for the 1931 Colonial Exhibition at Vincennes he was asked to make some large water colours showing his idea of how ancient Simhapura would have looked at its zenith in the 10th century. One of these he published in his book of 1934 (Figure 22).

In summary

Analysis of all this material will take some time and we have as a medium term plan the intention to put together a book on Tra Kieu which will integrate the results of the earlier researches by Claeys and other French scholars with the recent excavations by the Vietnamese and ourselves as well as

more recent art historical work by William Southworth and the analyses of ceramics by Mariko Yamagata and Ruth Prior.

Acknowledgements

For locating and working on the main archives on Tra Kieu in the EFEO I must thank Dr Pierre-Yves Manguin who told me of them, and Professor Denys Lombard, Late Director of the EFEO and J.-L. Taffarelli, Librarian there for permission to use, copy and publish these records. Work on them with Dr Anna Bennett in August 1995 led me to contact Henri-Pierre. Claeys, architect and son of J.-Y. Claeys, and his sister Mari-Yvonne, who provided me with much additional information about their father and loaned to me the four hand-written notebooks kept by their father at Tra Kieu between July 1927 and 5th August 1928. For information on the historical background to the excavations at Tra Kieu I am much indebted to discussions with, and the unpublished writings of, William Southworth, although any errors in the interpretations offered here are my own responsibility.

Notes

- 1 At the Leiden Conference I was told by Dr Nora Taylor that many of the old photographs of EFEO have been preserved in the library of the National Institute of Social Sciences in Hanoi but I have not yet had the occasion to check whether these include either the plates or prints made by Claeys at Tra Kieu.
- 2 Claeys made rubbings of these coins in his field diary. He also mentioned which boxes he placed them in, but so far I have not been able to find if they have been preserved, and if so where. The Director of the Cham Museum at Da Nang has told me that they are not kept there. They have been identified, as far as it is possible to do so from rubbings, by Helen Wang of the Department of Coins and Medals of the British Museum.

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