

## **II. EXPEDITIONS**

## THE THREE EXPEDITIONS REVISITED

The main purpose of our campaign was to study the Chinese civilization in Indo-China, especially under the Han dynasty, and its possible connections with the West. Three different expeditions were devoted to this work.<sup>307</sup>

The expeditions to Indochina (1934–1940) form a centre of gravity in Olov Janse's life and career, and have been formative for most of his professional legacy. In the history of archaeology Janse is mostly known as a Swedish archaeologist who worked in Indochina; his main scientific oeuvre is the three-volume report *Archaeological Research in Indo-China*; and when he wrote his memoirs for a Swedish audience he formed it around a travel account from the Indochina years. The three expeditions 1934–1940 were at once a crescendo and the end of his earlier cosmopolitan career in Europe, and they defined his later internationalist career in the United States. But what do we in fact know about these important years in his archaeological life? Official accounts – the three report volumes,<sup>308</sup> his memoirs,<sup>309</sup> and articles in journals and newspapers – are all crafted on the same theme: that the aim was to study the westward relations of the southern extension of the Chinese Han empire (206 BC–AD 220), and that the expeditions discovered groundbreaking facts about this

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307. Janse 1947:v.

308. Janse 1947; 1951; 1958.

309. Janse 1959.

and other prehistoric cultures such as Dong Son<sup>310</sup> and Sa Huynh.<sup>311</sup> But a more detailed study of a wider range of archive material, viewed against a backdrop of political circumstances, offers a more complex understanding of the three expeditions.

In world politics, the mid and late 1930s was a time of increasing political tension, decreasing resources, and the eventual outbreak of the Second World War. In their personal lives, Olov and Ronny Janse first experienced a period of great success followed by a deep crisis, which in turn led to a professional and personal reorientation towards a new life in the United States. Published reports and articles from the expeditions have, like almost all archaeological text of that era, omitted such concrete details to create an illusion of a freestanding archaeological enterprise driven merely by prehistoric facts and scientific ideals. But judging from the much richer accounts found in letters and other archive materials,<sup>312</sup> it was circumstances other than prehistory and science – from world politics to the most intimate personal sphere – that were the most decisive in the formation of their three expeditions. Viewed with such an embedded vision, the three expeditions to Indochina stand out as quite different from one another, and each has its own distinctive mood.

The first expedition, which lasted nearly eight months from October 1934 to May 1935, is surrounded by an aura of exhilaration and success. In terms of world politics, this was the swansong of Imperial France. The expedition was conceived in the slipstream of the immensely successful 1931 *Exposition Coloniale* in Vincennes, and Olov and Ronny enjoyed the positive energy of the last push of the French colonial project. The expedition was their first major project together as a married couple, and it turned out to be a great professional success. On a personal level it was not only a magnificent adventure but a professional investment, which they hoped would give Olov a secure position as director of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm and allow them to settle in Sweden for good. Hence the whole expedition and the following seventeen-month interlude in France and Sweden passed in a mood of *euphoria*.

The second expedition, lasting fourteen months from October 1936

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310. In Vietnamese: Đông-sơ'n.

311. In Vietnamese: Sa-huỳnh.

312. Personal material concerning the Indochina years are found mainly in the Smithsonian Institution's National Anthropological Archives, Östasiatiska samlingarna, Riksarkivet, Arbetarrörelsens arkiv, the Marcel Mauss archive, and the archives of the Harvard-Yenching Institute and the Peabody Museum.

to December 1937, was a major turning point in their lives and careers, and the mood here is *crisis*. The first six months passed in much the same fashion as the previous expedition, although their letters home had lost some of the earlier euphoric tone. These were times of anxiety, with the economic depression in Europe, the recent outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, and a political and financial crisis in France. But Olov and Ronny Janse maintained their Indochina work as before, under the auspices of French authorities. The first major blow came in April 1937, when they received a letter from Paris with the news that Janse was not even being considered in the search for a new director of the museum in Stockholm. This coincided with a new crisis in the French economy, which meant that the funding they had been granted to cover the expedition expenses suddenly lost much of its value. Moreover, the economic crisis led to a political decision not to employ any foreign citizens on French state funding. All their plans for the future had failed, they had lost most of the support that had only recently looked so secure, and they were freefalling. But they managed to get an invitation to the United States from the Buffalo Science Museum, and left Saigon on a ship bound for Honolulu and the United States. From the year-long stay in Buffalo they corresponded with a friend from Paris, the Russian-born Japanologist Serge Elisséeff who had recently been appointed director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They persuaded him and the Institute's Board of Trustees to sponsor a third expedition, and to fund the subsequent work of publishing the results from all three expeditions.

So when they departed again from the United States and travelled back to Saigon, it was on a mission from the Harvard-Yenching Institute. The mood of this twenty-month-long third expedition is *refocus*. All their efforts from now on were refocused on creating a new life for themselves, with new professional opportunities, in the United States. The volatile political situation in Asia and Europe forced them to reorientate and refocus their plans several times. After one year of excavations that largely repeated their previous work, the increasing threat from the Sino-Japanese War forced them to leave Indochina. They decided to travel to the Philippines, which had a US-supported Commonwealth Government, and there excavated a number of sites from the Song and Ming periods. The excavated finds were shipped from Manila to the Harvard-Yenching Institute, to be added to the finds that had already been shipped from Hanoi. The Second World War had now broken out in Europe and the political situation in Southeast Asia made it increasingly difficult to

pursue their work. Hence they ended their third and final expedition and returned to Harvard in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where the cases full of finds from Indochina and the Philippines waited to be unpacked.