

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY  
OF THE MECHANICS AND CRAFTS OF THE ANNAMITES

AN ESSAY ON MATERIAL CULTURE  
ARTS AND INDUSTRY OF THE ANNAMITE PEOPLE

By

HENRI OGER

New edition and introduction

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Of the French School of Asian Studies (École française d'Extrême-Orient)

Translated from the French by SHEPPARD FERGUSON

TWO VOLUMES

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## PREFACE OF THE HONORARY COMMITTEE

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Composition of the Honorary Committee:

- H.E. Mr. François BILTGEN, Minister for Culture, Higher Education and Research of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg
- H.E. Mr. Hervé BOLOT, French Ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.
- Mr. Jos SCHELLAARS, Consular General for The Netherlands in Hồ Chí Minh City.
- Mr. BÙI Xuân Đức, Director of the General Sciences Library in Hồ Chí Minh City.

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The book by Henri Oger “Technique of the Annamite people” (1909) was published a century ago and is undoubtedly one of those enduring works whose originality is due to its power to evoke things in multiple dimensions.

The reader is first of all drawn in by the aesthetic quality of its drawings and engravings, some 4,200 of them, which make it a true work of art. The simplicity of the line, the rigor of the graphics, the painstaking care taken by the artist to capture the daily gestures and attitudes of the ordinary folk of Hanoi and its surrounding areas: all these elements convey a deep humanity to this work.

One is struck by the power of Henri Oger’s account. Indeed, there are other iconographic sources which evoke this period, but the unique character of this work resides in its thoroughness of data collection. The author invites us to discover a rich material culture, which is the product of a remarkable ingeniousness and of an acute ability to use primary materials and often basic tools. In this respect, this book provides the scientific public with a mine of previously unknown information on the diversity of crafts and popular knowledge (people’s practical abilities) at the beginning of the Twentieth Century in the North of Vietnam.

Finally, the approach developed by the young Henri Oger, who was 24 years old in 1909, hints at the fact that the confrontation between the colonialist and the colonized, as unbalanced as it was, sometimes aroused a real interest and sincere curiosity in one another’s culture. Certain broad-minded people, on both sides, looked for ways to bridge the gap between the two worlds which had been closed off from each other by the very essence of the colonial regime.

It is this spirit of reciprocal curiosity that we need to continue to develop, so that the cultural diversity, so dear to our countries, does not simply end at a juxtaposition of cultures but is reinforced by a mutually fruitful dialogue. The joint support given by the Ministry of Culture, Higher Education and Research of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the French Embassy in Vietnam and the Consulate General of the Netherlands in Hồ Chí Minh City underlines, by its European dimension, the benefit that can result from such exchanges.

For these reasons, and for many others, we were won over by this project to re-edit this work which has been out of print. It was initiated by the Hanoi office of the French School of Oriental Studies in collaboration with the General Sciences Library in Hồ Chí Minh City.

