Memory of the World Asia Pacific Regional Register Nomination Form

1 Title of Documentary Heritage Item or Collection (max 10 words)

Bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns in Hue imperial palace

2 Summary (max 200 words)

The bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns in Hue Imperial Palace including 162 motifs and Han-characters embossed on the urns in 1835 and completed in 1837 in Hue under the royal order of the emperor Minh Mang, placed in the yard of The To Temple and have never been moved up to now. This is the original and precious source of document which receives the attention of Vietnamese and foreign researchers because it bears the values regarding history, culture, education, geography, feng-shui, medicine and pharmacy, calligraphy. The most remarkable is the bronze casting technique and the craftsmanship to create the typical and original works. Especially, it is deeply influenced by Oriental culture on the conception of the number "9" 九 and the casting of the nine urns[1] is of the meaning of the unification and the long-lasting existence of the dynasty. The bas-reliefs on the nine urns have preserved the values on the social cultural relations and contacts among Viet Nam and other countries in East-Asian region.

3 Nominator/s Contact details

3.1 Name of nominator/s (person/s or organisation/s)

Hue Monuments Conservation Center – Thua Thien Hue People's Committee

3.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Administrative organization of cultural heritage in the region of Thua Thien Hue Province

3.3 Contact person/s

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4 Declaration of Authority

I certify that I/we have the authority to nominate the documentary heritage described in this document to the Asia Pacific Regional Memory of the World Register. All nominators must sign here.

Name	Position
Hoang Viet Trung	Director – Hue Monuments Conservation Center
Address	Email

[1] Tran Duc Lam – Truc Chi, Chinese culture in numbers, Encyclopedia Publishing House, 2009, p.325

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Signature/s of nominator/s……Hoang Viet Trung……

5 Legal Information

5.1 Owner/s of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different from the nominator/s)

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5.2 Custodian/s of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner/s)

Name: Phan Thanh Hai	Address: Thua Thien Hue Department of Culture and Sports – 8 Ly Thuong Kiet, Hue City, Thua Thien Hue Province
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5.3 Legal status

The nine bronze urns were recognized as National Treasure by the Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam under the Decision N°1426/QĐ-TTg on October 1st, 2012; therefore, they are protected under the law of Viet Nam such as Cultural Heritage Law 2001, the amendments to some articles of the Cultural Heritage law 2009.

5.4 Accessibility

Direct: The nine bronze urns are being placed out-door in the yard of The To Temple and the tourists and researchers are free to get access. Their contents are written in Vietnamese and English placing right under each urn to serve the tourists.

Indirect: The whole content of the bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns were rubbed and printed into book which was translated into Vietnamese and English and built database for looking up. They are now kept as archives at Hue Royal Antiquities Museum, Institute of Sino-Nom, and National Library of Viet Nam. The bas-reliefs were digitalized and built database for searching on the Website:

http://tangthulau.vn/

https://www.hueworldheritage.org.vn/Thu-vien/Video?mlid=29e2c0ab-9dbc-ec11-bd81-95680dc377be

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGvt07TfRf4

https://artsandculture.google.com/story/kgIi_i4YibICLw?hl=vi

https://www.baotangcungdinh.vn/baotang.aspx?l=vn&LoaiTieuDe=1&TieuDeID=138

5.5 Copyright status

Using, copying, printing or photographing the database and the original documents must be allowed by Hue Monuments Conservation Center as management agency, and Vietnamese Government's regulations on the use of the archives as well as the access to cultural heritages must be obeyed.

6 Details of the Nominated Documentary Heritage

6.1 Exact title of the documentary heritage

Bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns in Hue Imperial Palace

6.2 Type of documentary heritage

The bas-reliefs and Han-characters on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty in Hue Imperial Palace.

6.3 Catalogue or registration details (annex attached)

All the nine urns have the same casting year in 1835 and the same completing year in 1837, however, their weights, sizes and shapes are different. 162 motifs and Han-characters embossed on the nine bronze urns are categorized as follows:

a. **The nine bronze urns are given names respectively**: (1. Urn Cao 高鼎; 2. Urn Nhan 仁鼎; 3. Urn Chuong 章鼎; 4. Anh Urn英鼎; 5. Urn Nghi 毅鼎; 6. Urn Thuan 纯鼎; 7. Urn Tuyen 宣鼎; 8. Urn Du 裕 鼎; 9. Urn Huyen 玄 鼎)

b. **Nine stars and natural elements in the universe**

c. **Nine great mountains**

d. **Nine major rivers**

e. **Nine canals and other rivers**

f. **Nine sea-gates, border gates, seas, and rainbow**

g. **Nine great four-legged beasts**

h. **Nine sacred animals**

i. **Nine species of birds**

j. **Nine species of feeding crop**

k. **Nine types of vegetables**

l. **Nine types of flowers**

m. **Nine types of fruit trees**

n. **Nine types of precious drugs**

o. **Nine types of woody plants**

p. **Nine types of weapons**

q. **Nine species of fishes, shellfish and insects**

r. **Nine types of boats, carriage, flag**

6.4 Images of the documentary heritage (annex attached)

The Nine Dynastic Urns – Hue Imperial Palace
Source: https://humazur.univ-cotedazur.fr/omeka-s-dev/s/Humazur/item/6139#?cv=&c=&m=&s=&xywh=-138%2C-229%2C3308%2C2851

Urn Cao

Source: Research Department – Hue Monuments Conservation Center

6.5 History/Origin/Background/Provenance

a) History of the bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty placed in Hue imperial palace

Minh Mang (in his reign from 1820-1841) is the second emperor of the Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945), who was seen as a clear-sighted and determined one, mastered in Confucianism, and was one of the talented political and military figures.

Under the reign of the emperor Minh Mang, Viet Nam was a powerful country and was of high prestige with neighboring countries. Right after the construction of the Citadel was finished, to affirm the power of the dynasty, the emperor had the nine bronze urns cast in October, in the 16th year of his reign (1835) with the meaning to prove the thrones of the emperors and to hand down to the later generations. Concerning the meaning of the casting of the nine dynastic urns, the *Veritable Records of the Great South* written by the History Department of the Nguyen Dynasty recorded that: "*I examined from the old times that the urn casting had been recorded wrong, all were mentioned as cooking cauldrons; the high huge and heavy urns had not been mentioned, even in the three dynasties of Xia, Shang, Zhou. Now I imitated the forefathers to cast the nine urns which were huge, high and majestic without any cracks at all. They were worth to be treasures handed down to the offspring. Hence, formal inform to 31 provinces and Trần Tây city to know*"[2]

In May, the 17th year of Minh Mang's reign (1836), the raw parts of the nine urns were completed, the emperor gave a command to select talented craftsmen to carve 18 patches of motifs and Han-characters on each urn in bas-relief. 162 motifs and Han-characters were arranged by the themes as: nine stars and natural elements in the universe; nine great

[2] The History Department of the Nguyen dynasty (2022), *Veritable Records of the Great South*, Volume 5 (trans. Institute of History, 2nd reissue), Ha Noi Publishing House, p.22

mountains; nine natural major rivers; nine canals and other rivers; nine sea-gates, border gates, seas, and rainbow; nine great four-legged beasts; nine sacred animals; nine species of birds; nine types of food crops; nine types of vegetables; nine types of weapons; nine types of fishes, shellfish and insects; nine types of boats, carriages and flag. By the way, the emperor awarded *Đốc biện* 督辦 (who was responsible for speeding up the task) and the guardians one-month salary, the craftsmen and workers 300 guàn. Simultaneously, the emperor had the Ministry of Rites prepare the thanksgiving offerings to the gods who helped make the casting of the nine bronze urns a success. In the viewpoint of the emperor Minh Mang, the nine bronze urns were of the meaning that they were precious things, so their successful casting was attributed to the help of the gods: *"the casting, of course, depends on craftsmen, but it was with gods' help that precious things can be made successfully. Hence, I order the Ministry of Rites to prepare the thanksgiving ceremony*". However, as the embossment work took so much time, the nine bronze urns were not officially completed until nearly 8 months later. On the day of Quy Mao, January, 1837, the 18th year of his reign, the emperor Minh Mang presided over the grand opening ceremony and the nine bronze urns were placed in the yard of The To Temple. The creation process and the embossment work of 162 motifs on the nine bronze urns lasted 2 years from 1835 to 1837; this stage marked the birth of stories as the themes which were chosen to cast on the nine bronze urns in bas-relief by the emperor Minh Mang. Those contents were composed into poems by the emperor Minh Mang and kept in *Minh Mang Ngu che thi (the emperor Minh Mang's royal poems)*.

On the nine bronze urns, there are also images of products related to the difficult times of the Nguyen dynasty such as the image of langsat tree on the urn Nhan. The langsat is very sweet and the trees grow a lot in Quang Nam's forests and are now sold in such markets as Quang Nam, Da Nang, Hue…Legend goes that in late 18th century, the troops of Nguyen Vuong (Nguyen Phuc Anh) hid in the source of Vu Gia River, Quang Nam Forest when being chased by Tay Son troops and survived by eating this fruit. When Nguyen Vuong was enthroned as the Emperor Gia Long, he named this fruit Phung Quan Moc (the tree that encountered the emperor). Therefore, the emperor Minh Mang had the image of langsat tree cast on urn Nhan to record this mark. The emperor Minh Mang also had the image of crocodile cast on the urn Chuong because the history recorded that Nguyen Phuc Anh crossed the river thanks to the crocodile's assistance without falling into the hands of the enemy. When crossing the sea to Tho Chu Island, Anh's boat was not overturned thanks to the snake god's help to keep its balance; hence, the image of snake was embossed on urn Huyen.

It can be said that each of bas-relief on the nine urns connects with stories relating to many aspects such as: history, culture, society, economy, geography and **the role of Vietnamese women** in feudalism, which the image of Vinh Te canal on urn Cao was a clear proof. Mr. Nguyễn Văn Thoại who was defender of Vĩnh Thanh region (including Long Xuyen and Can Tho), directly commanded the task of digging Vinh Te canal which was more than 87 km long. This work lasted more than 5 years (from 1819 to 1825), which built an important landmark in the history of transportation, commerce, country's border defense as well as the water treatment of the Southern land. During this arduous work, Madam Châu Thị Vĩnh Tế (her hometown was Vĩnh Long, she was Thoại Ngọc Hầu's wife) was diligent helping her husband to take care of great work. When her husband was busy with official works, she took on the task of supervising and speeding up the digging. Her humane fame was praised by the people. At that time, there was a saying: *Viet Nam has handsome boys and talented girls/ Example of madam Chau lives for thousand years*. Admiring her merit, the emperor Minh Mang named Vinh Te canal after her name when this work was completed.

Presently, the nine bronze urns still exist intact, the bas-reliefs are still beautiful. The

explanations in Vietnamese, English and Chinese are attached so that the tourists are able to visit and study.

b) Bronze casting village at Phuong Duc Ward in Thua Thien Hue Province

The bronze casting profession is one of the long-standing and famous handicraft in Viet Nam. Phuong Duc in Hue originated from the organization of the workers of the same casting profession under the Nguyen Lords' reign. (匠局) *Tượng cục* of bronze casting profession was established to gather all the workmen to work in *Tượng cục* of the Lord in Trường Đồng. The nine bronze urns which are typical art works of plastic arts, calligraphy and contents; therefore, the craftsmen must have been competent and knowledgeable in Han-characters.

6.6 Bibliography (annex attached)

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6.7 Names, qualifications and contact details of experts

Name [redacted]	Qualifications Prof. Doctor of Science	[redacted]
Name [redacted]	Qualifications Assoc. Prof. PhD	Institute of Sino-Nom Studies, [redacted]
Name [redacted]	Qualifications M.A	[redacted]

I certify that the above named experts have given their written permission for their names and contact details to be used in connection with this nomination to the Memory of the World Asia Pacific Regional Register.

Signature [redacted] Hoang Viet Trung

Date: September, 10th, 2023

7 Authenticity and Integrity

7.1 Authenticity and Integrity

The bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty are the only positive version presently placed in the yard of The To Temple in Hue Imperial Palace. They were completed in 1837 and up to now, nearly 200 years have gone, the nine bronze urns with their 162 motifs in bas-relief (including images and Han-characters) have never gone under any repair, adjustment or renewal both in their appearances and contents. Therefore, the bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns ensure the intactness and are the historical "witness" to the ups and downs of the dynasty. The most important point is that this documentary heritage is expressed under the form of images and Han-characters, which is still kept intact and even the positions of the nine urns have never been moved.

The authenticity is also expressed in the fact that the nine bronze urns were cast in bas-relief originates from the emperor Minh Mang's thought of getting the ancients' ideas, then had the urns designed and it was the emperor himself who chose the images and named the nine urns. This proves that the bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty ensure the integrity of the document, the material (bronze in block and was created delicately by the royal craftsmen), the integrity of decorative fine-arts with 162 motifs and Han-characters which were arranged elegantly on the nine bronze urns. Each image and Han-character, cast in bas-relief, have their own meaning and story carefully recorded in *Veritable Records of the Great South, Unified Gazetteer of Great South, Imperial Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty*…together with research works of the French and other scientific works. Undergoing lots of ups and downs of the history and harsh weather, these bas-reliefs still ensure the integrity both in objects and in informative value on bas-reliefs.

8 Primary criteria: Regional Significance

8.1 Historical Significance

The bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns include 162 images and Han-characters. After the casting was completed, the emperor Minh Mang had the nine urns placed in front of The To Temple to affirm that this place was to worship the deceased emperors of dynasty founded by the emperor Gia Long. On the other hand, on each urn cast 18 images in bas-relief which were carefully arranged. The Han-characters gave name to the urns, symbolizing the character of each emperor. The rest images include the stars, important geographical entities of the country, important animal species, useful plants or images of carriage and weapons. Each has their own name in Han-character on the whole nine bronze urns creating a document expressing the encyclopedic knowledge of Hue court's scholars in 1836, a document has been preserved intact up to now.

This is precious historical source providing special information as follows:

The cultural, economic and political relation and contact among Viet Nam and such East Asian countries as China, Japan from 19th century.

According to Asian cultural tradition, the letter "cửu" (九) has its special and interesting meaning and content. *Cửu* (九) is the number nine, but it is the homonym of "*cửu*" (久) which means the long-lasting existence. *Cửu* (九) symbolizes the supreme position which means the emperor's throne. Therefore, whatever closely connects with *Cửu* (九) in Oriental culture has its auspicious and stable meaning and is the emperors' idea. In China, the emperors of different times chose "*cửu đỉnh*" (九鼎) as national treasures, affirming the steadiness of the dynasty and the long-lasting existence of the nation. The emperor Wu of Xia dynasty was famous for water

treatment; he dispatched people to the mountain areas and river areas of the Central Highland where the Chinese civilization originated to divide the Central Highland into 9 administrative divisions. According to the book *Kinh Thư* (書經 Shū Jīng), the emperor Wu divided the country into 9 administrative divisions (cửu châu 九州) as follows: Ký Châu 冀洲, Duyện Châu兗州, Thanh Châu青州, Từ Châu徐州, Dương Châu扬州, Kinh Châu荆州, Dự Châu豫州, Nhiễm Châu梁州, Ung Châu雍州. They are initial territories of the Central Highland. On each bronze urn there carved one name of the administrative division. Xia dynasty was considered as the first feudal dynasty of China by historians. The nine dynastic urns express the ambition of unification and the supreme power of Huá Xià civilization.

In Viet Nam, in the Asian cultural relations as in China, the emperor Minh Mang had also the nine urns cast: ""*to prove that the throne has found the right person, the destiny's fame has gathered. They were truthly precious objects at Ton Mieu house. In the old days, perspicacious kings of the Tam Dai dynasty had 9 urns cast from the metal offered astribute by mục bá mandarins of 9 administrative divisions to hand down as treasure to the later generations. Such regulations are so great! I respectfully succeeded my predecessors' careers, abode by the clear policy. Now I desired to imitate the old generations to have 9 urns cast and placed in the yard of The Mieu: In the middle: urn Cao; the first left position: urn Nhan; first right position: urn Chuong; second left position: urn Anh; second right position: urn Nghi; third left position: urn Thuan; third right position: urn Tuyen; fourth left position: urn Du; fourth right position: urn Huyen. That was to express the desire of a sustained dynasty handed down to the later generations. I authorize the person in charge to cast according to the model*".[3]

As for the bas-reliefs, apart from the images, the Han-characters embossed the name for each urn. This is the common and popular language of many countries in the region, proving the cultural contact and interference among Viet Nam and other East Asian and Southeast Asian countries such as China, Republic of Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore …

Political ideology of Confucianism of the Nguyen dynasty as well as Vietnamese traditional values like the tradition of patriotism, fondness of learning and morality respect.

The history of formation and development of the bronze casting village in Phuong Duc Ward, traditional technique of embossment of images and characters in bas-relief.

The system of rivers and sea-ports for trading with countries in East-Asian region. Images of such rivers as Nhi Ha, Lo which were cast on urns in bas-relief originated from China and flew into Viet Nam. Geographical factors create favorable condition for cultural interference by waterway. Nguu Chu river (also called Ben Nghe river) is where international and domestic ships went in and out in great number so that here became a crowded and busy hub of commerce from the early of 19th century.

Some bas-relief images of bird species on the nine dynastic urns not only appear in Viet Nam but also are reflected in Chinese history like the rare white pheasant which used to be offered to the emperor. The book *An Nam Chí* noted that under the times of king Thanh Vương of Zhou dynasty, people from Viet Thuong region often offered the white pheasant to the king; under the times of the king Quang Vu of Han dynasty, such districts as Nhat Nam and Cuu Chau also offered this kind of bird. It can be said that this precious species of bird appears not only in Viet Nam but also in the region and they are products to offered to the emperors in the old times.

The image of rice plant which was embossed in bas-relief on the bronze urn of the Nguyen dynasty expressed the interference of agricultural culture because this plant was the main food

[3] The History Department of the Nguyen dynasty, *Veritable Records of Great South*, Volume 4, trans. Institution of History, Education Publishing House, Ha Noi, 2007, p.800.

crop of the people in the East-Asian region.

Some images of precious medicine plants which were embossed in bas-relief on the nine urns also showed the interference in medical and pharmaceutical industry of East-Asian countries where used these plants to make up Chinese traditional medicine and cure, that China was famous for Oriental Medicine.

On the nine bronze urns there appeared the bas-relief images of typical animals of Viet Nam. In old texts, these species of animals appeared in East-Asian countries. These animals are presently reserved in such national parks as Bach Ma and Cuc Phuong. They are rare animals now live in Vietnamese primeval forest.

The bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty not only speak for the long-lasting excellent bronze casting tradition of Viet Nam but also express the production custom, landscape identification and product preservation through the images embossed in bas-relief on the nine bronze urns. They are typical images which have geographical influence and interference to regional countries and in the world.

The European used to research and interpreted on the content and art value as well as the hidden meanings of the bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty during their lives and contacts with Vietnamese culture and history by the late 19th century and early 20th century. After the unification of the country (1975), the nine bronze urns have been approached and studied by domestic and international scholars and researchers and these bronze urns in the yard of The To Temple really become art-historical relic for everyone to visit and research.

All magazines, books and monographs of the nine urns are kept as archives not only on Internet but also in many large national libraries. In addition, they are stored in other different libraries, centers of archives all over the world in English and French so that researchers can easily approach such as: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, ISEAS Library (Singapore); Universitätsbibliothek J. C. Senckenberg, Zentralbibliothek (ZB) Rijksmuseum voor (Germany); Research Center for Material Culture [RCMC] - Library Netherland, (Netherlands); University of California Libraries (Internet Archive); Royal Danish Library (Denmark); National Library Board (Singapore); The Bristish Library, St. Pancras (United Kingdom); Pontificia Universita Gregoriana (Italy); Cornell University Library; Muséum National d'histoire Naturell, Paris…

In addition to the written documents, there are the nine urns' images and bas-reliefs photographed and printed on various materials, from the postcards to the albums of different sizes by the French. This type of documents is popularly appeared on Internet and widely introduced by French Offices of Archives.

For postcards, in the website L'objet de collection que vous recherchez est sur Delcampe, many images of Viet Nam country and people during the first decades of the 20th century can be searched. The images of The To Temple – the nine bronze urns were printed on the postcards and sent around the world, which is now becoming a kind of goods with exchange values. Besides, there are also websites of French Overseas Archives Center or La Francophonie. Especially, Flickr, a website shares online community images with a huge storage of documentary images and videos on the nine bronze urns – Hue during many historical periods.

On the nine urns, because the characters which symbolized the images were cast in Han-scripts, therefore, they were of expressive value and high popularity. Contemplating those images, people who are able or unable to read Han-scripts can easily understand (by seeing the images on the nine bronze urns). Under feudalism (1939), there was an American tourist group

came to contemplate the bas-relief images on the nine urns and highly praised the bronze casting profession of Viet Nam at that time. [4]

Especially since 1993 when Hue Monuments Complex was recognized as the World Heritage, amount of tourists who come to Hue to research and visit have increased, especially those from East Asia came to research and contemplate the values and the bronze casting technique of the nine bronze urns.

8.2 Form and Style Significance

The nine bronze urns are of unique form and style. They are of shapes as follows: round body, tight neck, flared mouth, two handles on the mouth, 3 legs under each urn. At the neck of the urns, on the right is the year of casting: "*Minh Mang 16th of At Mui Year*" (1835), and on the left, there casts the weight of each urn. Each urn has its own weight, size and form but the number of images and Han-characters are arranged on urns equally. Each bronze urn has 17 bas-relief motifs and 2 Han-characters indicating the name of the urn which were arranged in 3 transversal lines around their body.

The technique of urn casting is very complex, requiring great expertise and refined skill. When casting, in the mind of the craftsmen as well as the intention of the dynasty, they wanted to cast 9 urns in different heights and weights. In general, the urns still create a unity on the whole, unity but not homogeneity; all are tall, steady but not heavy. In that united and harmonious shape, each part of the urn has innovation, like a sketch of creativity and wisdom. Each urn has 18 patches of images, in which the main patch in the front of the middle row is engraved with the name of the urn with a plain and simple writing style, coherent strokes, square block, tight layout which is considered as a word painting. Embossed images on the nine urns show a strict decorative order on both the surface and each row, throughout the nine bronze urns. The emperor Minh Mang evaluated the nine bronze urns when he celebrated the inauguration: “all of them were huge, high and majestic without any cracks at all", proving that the casting skill at that time developed to a perfect level. This made the emperor Minh Mang realize that the gods had supported the task of completing the nine urns in Hue royal palace apart from manpower.

Since 1914, French scholars have studied it quite carefully, which is a heavy craft with many technical stages; each step must be done by the hands and know-how of the craftsmen. Materials for casting the nine bronze urns include 2 main kinds: bronze and zinc; lead or tin… could be added. The craftsmen must rely on that source of raw materials to mix it with the appropriate ratio to ensure the durability, large blocks without cracks, sharp and precise carvings. This was an equally important technical stage, giving the product the perfectness and artistic value.

8.3 Social Community or Spiritual Significance

The bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty are considered treasures in a solemn place in front of The To Temple, demonstrating the power and strength of a united dynasty. Contemplating the nine bronze urns at present, we are amazed at the technological advancements of bronze workmanship at that time. The land of Duong Xuan on the southern bank of Perfume River (now in the southwest of Hue city), with favorable natural conditions, has attracted many talented craftsmen originating from famous bronze casting wards from the North. According to bibliographic sources, the Nguyen lords had moved to Hue and established casting ward Duong Xuan in the middle of the 17th century. The nine bronze urns - Hue Imperial Palace were cast here, and today Phuong Duc still exists and is a famous bronze casting address of Viet Nam. In Phuong Duc ward – Hue city, there is still an ancestral temple of the bronze casting profession, yearly on the 2nd and 3rd days of the 7th lunar month, the

[4] Imperial archives of the emperor Minh Mang’s times (1838) and emperor Bao Dai’s times (1939). Source: National Archives Center N1

workers celebrate the anniversary of the bronze casting ancestor. The graves and worshiping house of the bronze casting ancestors were honorably recognized as a national monument by the Ministry of Culture and Information (the present Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism) according to Decision No 1460 – VH/BT, June 28th ,1996.

9 Regional Significance: Comparative criteria

9.1 Uniqueness or Rarity

Bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty represent a unique and singular collection, distinguished by its absence of repetition and mass production, in contrast to the embossment casting technology of the past. Each of the 162 cast images, featuring both visual depictions and Chinese characters for identifying each urn, is accompanied by individual narratives. These narratives are meticulously recorded in both domestic and international documents, detailing the significance of each image.

Commissioned directly by emperor Minh Mang, bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty involved the naming and depiction of each urn, as well as the affirmation of their size, shape, and weight directly onto the carriers. This act symbolized the enduring strength of the Nguyen dynasty. Each image was meticulously selected and organized into sets of nine, following various themes concerning culture, society, geography, fauna, medicine and pharmacy, and art. This inherent uniqueness and distinctive value of the bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns during the Nguyen dynasty is evident. Furthermore, the original value of the materials and information regarding the nine bronze urns is rigorously maintained to this day. This has contributed significantly to creating a "remarkable highlight" of this proud heritage, particularly for the people of Hue and Viet Nam as a whole.

In the historical book *Sử ký* 史記, in the twelfth volume of *Hiếu Vũ bản kỷ* 孝武本紀 by the historian Tư Mã Thiên 司馬遷, it is recorded: "... [Emperor Hiếu Vũ inquired], "This year, we have not yet received reports of a bountiful harvest. Why should the bronze urns be brought out?" *A mandarin replied: "Your Majesty, in ancient times, the Great Emperor (King Phục Hy) created a sacred urn, a symbol of unifying the heavens and the earth, connecting all living beings. The Heavenly Emperor (King Hiên Viên) then crafted three precious urns, symbolizing the connection between Heaven, Earth, and Humanity. Emperor Hạ Vũ subsequently collected metals from the nine continents and cast nine urns, using them to worship the spirits and offer tribute to the kings. This tradition continued through the Xia (夏朝) and Shang (商朝) dynasties, but during the Zhou (周朝) dynasty, as virtue declined and ceremonial rituals were neglected, the urns were lost and never found again*". Therefore, the nine urns, each adorned with nine images, reflect the dominant ideology of the ancient kings, originating from China. These nine urns were originally intended to symbolize the nine regions of China, but their whereabouts remain unknown today.

10 Gender

On the nine urns, there carved 54 botanical patterns representing various plants including food crops, strawberries, vegetables, spices, medicinal herbs, etc. It is noteworthy that the image of rice plants holds particular significance. Viet Nam, with its agricultural civilization based on rice cultivation and handicrafts, has historically placed great importance on women in society both in ancient times and today. Since the dawn of the Vietnamese Lac Viet ethnic group, Mother Au Co has not only been revered as the mother of the nation but also honored as the ancestral goddess of agriculture. She taught villagers how to cultivate rice, instructing them on clearing land and

preparing fields for rice cultivation. She also taught people how to grow strawberries and use strawberry leaves to feed silkworms for silk production. Additionally, she guided people in sugarcane cultivation, from which Mother Au Co invented a type of cake made from rice flour and sugarcane juice. The depiction of women's roles through images of rice plants, strawberries, etc., highlights their crucial contributions to creating products essential for daily life.

The special thing about the Vinh Te Canal is that it is named after the wife of Mr Thoại Ngọc Hầu, who, together with his wife, dug the Vinh Te Canal to facilitate water flow for trade, production, and the livelihoods of the local people. This demonstrates that the king highly valued the role of women and honored them by naming the canal after a woman to commemorate their contributions.

A long-standing and renowned traditional craft in Viet Nam is bronze casting. Phuong Duc in Hue originated from the concept of being an organization of artisans specializing in bronze casting during the feudal era. Mr Nguyễn Văn Đào and his father opened a class to teach the casting profession to his wife, grandchildren, and people in the region. Over 12 generations, many individuals from the Nguyen family were honored with noble titles and served in Tượng Cục 匠局 (A unit under the Ministry of Construction specializing in workmanship (such as blacksmiths, metalworkers, painters, etc.). This is where skilled artisans gather to serve construction work, restoration, woodblock carving, stone carving, bronze casting, ironwork...). They participated in casting valuable bronze products such as the bell of Linh Mu Pagoda, large cauldrons placed in the Citadel, the Nine Dynastic Urns, the Nine Holy Cannons, and many other bronze items used within the royal court and by the general populace. The subsequent generations of Mr. Cao's descendants continued to uphold the traditional craft, leaving behind numerous renowned products not only in the ancient capital of Hue but also in provinces such as Quang Tri, Quang Nam-Da Nang, Binh Dinh, Nha Trang, Da Lat, Sai Gon, six southern provinces, and even in the northern region. Many products have crossed borders to Laos, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and countries like the United States, Canada, France, etc. After Mr Nguyễn Văn Đào passed away (around 1680), his grave was located in Vĩnh An hamlet (which is now part of the area 5, Phuong Duc today), and the grave of his wife, Ngô Thị Phê, was also placed together with his. To commemorate Mr Nguyễn Văn Đào and his wife, who were instrumental in pioneering and establishing the traditional bronze casting craft in Phuong Duc, generations of relatives and grandchildren have built an ancestral house of worship. This marks a significant period over the past 400 years where the bronze casting profession has resided, thrived, and evolved in this land (This worshipping house is currently located at 171 Bui Thi Xuan Street, Group 24, Area 5, Phuong Duc).

Therefore, researching and promoting the "gender" aspects within the motifs on the nine urns will contribute to dispelling the longstanding belief that women in the past were victims of gender bias and treated unfairly. On the contrary, women played significant roles in rice agriculture and traditional handicrafts such as bronze casting. The wives were regarded as equal partners alongside their husbands in ancestral worship ceremonies dedicated to the bronze casting profession in Hue during the 19th century. This serves as evidence and a way to support, to some extent, the global women's rights movement.

11 Statement of Significance

Bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty, with the number 9 influenced by ancient Chinese culture, signify the unity, reverence, and the unification of territory, ensuring the succession of a centralized state power and delineating political directives for all sectors of a monarchic regime. Viet Nam, situated in the East Asian region, deeply influenced by such ideological influences, and the emperor Minh Mang had the nine urns cast to symbolize the eternal existence of the dynasty. On the urns, various images of rivers and estuaries are depicted, marking historical sites where ships from East Asian countries and Western nations engaged in trade, commerce, and cultural and educational exchanges. Particularly, the nine divine images revered by some East Asian countries as deities and worshipped in celestial ceremonies are represented.

Bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty are depicted with images and annotated using Han script. This writing system has been widely used by East Asian countries such as China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Viet Nam, and etc. for approximately 100 years. Therefore, the presence of both images and Han-characters on the bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty contributes to the cultural connectivity with neighboring East Asian countries, facilitated by the common usage of Chinese characters. In Viet Nam, the subject of Sinology has long been integrated into the school curricula. This aims to provide the younger generations with the opportunity to learn more about the continuous cultural exchanges between Viet Nam and East Asian countries, directly China. Simultaneously, it seeks to decode the source of documents, archives and documentary heritage left by our ancestors to serve the study of Vietnamese history as well as the histories of neighboring countries in the region.

Bas-reliefs on the nine dynastic urns under the reign of the emperor Minh Mang from 1835 to 1837 are one of the remarkable and unique works that vividly show the technical level and artistic talent of the craftsmen in Duong Xuan, Phuong Duc, Hue. They were renowned for their skills in creating bronze artworks since the 17th century. The nine urns of Hue are not only a remarkable piece of artistry, characterized by their distinctive designs and intricately carved decorative motifs (bas-relief) that enhance their inherent beauty, but also contain high-value cultural and historical information about the Vietnamese people. Through the images and stories depicted on the nine urns, it serves as a rich source of historical documents about the nation, the universe, nature and the status of women in society, which has been honored and commemorated in the naming of a canal.

12 Risk Assessment

12.1 Condition

Bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty have remained intact since its completion in 1837 up to the present day. It is noteworthy that this documentary heritage has steadfastly stood in its original location in front of the The To Temple – Hue Imperial Palace, enduring the passage of time, wars, and harsh climates, yet it has remained preserved in its entirety. Over nearly 200 years of historical ups and downs, there has never been a single mention in Nguyen dynasty chronicles or any other source regarding restoration and conservation. This clearly demonstrates that bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty, are an original document, maintaining its authenticity, ensuring its integrity, and having never been influenced by human consciousness or any other material impacts of nature and human intervention.

12.2 Threat/Risk

Bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty, placed outdoors, made of bronze,

and spent more than 2 centuries of "weather-beaten", so the degradation and deterioration are unavoidable. Consequently, the entire surface of the nine dynastic urns is experiencing electrochemical corrosion. Furthermore, there are various stains and dirt adhering to the surface caused by both objective and subjective factors such as birds, insects, human, etc. The interior of the urns holds stagnant water, fostering the growth of moss. Additionally, damage marks on the bronze surface, such as bullet holes, have reduced the thickness of the urns. Facing with the risk from natural elements and potential human-induced threats, the nine dynastic urns urgently require proper protective measures. The construction of shelters is essential to minimize the impact of weather conditions.

13 Preservation and Access Management Plan

Management Plan

+ The Nine Dynastic Urns – Hue Royal Palace need necessary conservation plans:

- For the outer part of the Nine Dynastic Urns: It is necessary to clean the entire surface of the message carrier. Environmentally durable green copper oxide parts should be retained as a protective layer for the object.

- For the inner part of the Nine Dynastic Urns: The green rust caused by the point corrosion should be thoroughly treated to avoid spreading corrosion. After the treatment, the bronze surface at the corrosion point should be covered by a polymer protective layer.

- The inner part of the urn needs to be periodically sucked to clean the moss and dirt inside.

+ The Nine Dynastic Urns – Hue Royal Palace need preventive preservation plans:

- Using measures against electrochemical corrosion for long-term protection of the object. A metal with a lower electrochemistry than bronze can be used (commonly pure zinc metal is used) to contact the bronze surface over a certain area in the suitable position to transfer the corrosion effects into the zinc metal layer, providing long-term protection for the object.

- Establishing a visit limit to protect the object from the effects of visitors' curiosity.

- In order to preserve the national treasure, it is necessary to have a shelter because of harsh weather in Hue; bronze is easily oxidized and eroded. Therefore, it is necessary to have an appropriate protection project to preserve the informative carriers - the national treasures.

For good conservation, seminars need to be organized to get the experts' opinions and raise people's awareness of the value of the heritage.

- Copying (video recording, photographing, reproducing the images), measuring the Nine Dynastic Urns, perfecting archive fonts.

- Preserving the system of decorative motifs on the Nine Dynastic Urns by the method of "imprinting".

- Continuing to study the traditional techniques of embossed image casting (bas-relief casting techniques) to know the sophisticated bronze casting techniques to obtain this unique product.

- Studying the images on the Nine Dynastic Urns through the contents of the emperor Minh Mang's royal poems to know the significance and value of images towards Viet Nam in the early 19th century.

- Introducing and propagating particular values and images of the Nine Dynastic Urns – Hue Imperial Palace to people inside and outside the country by various forms of mass communication, making the poster in English with a brief introduction by QR Code in many languages for each urn so that visitors can easily access and understand the content and artistic value of the nine urns. Printing the brochure and publishing books for gifts, introducing the value of the Nine Dynastic Urns Documentary Heritage to a large number of Vietnamese and foreigners.

14 Consultation with Stakeholders

a) Thua Thien Hue Department of Culture and Sports:

"*Bas-Reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty are a source of documentary heritage of great value, rare, unique in terms of history, culture, science, art of embossing and shaping and are a proud testament to the traditional craft of bronze casting and the documentary value in Viet Nam*".

b) Scholars researching this heritage:

- Opinions of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nguyen Tuan Cuong - Director of the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies, member of the National Cultural Heritage Council:

Bas-Reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty were cast from 1835 to 1837 by talented craftsmen from Phuong Duc, leaving behind renowned works for the ancient capital of Hue. These include the bronze cauldrons in the Citadel (1659 - 1684), the Great Bell of Thien Mu Pagoda (1710), and the Nine Holy Cannons placed in front of Ngo Mon (1803 - 1804). More noteworthy than these are the bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns, the literary works which possess significant aesthetic value, ranging from literary language to philosophical issues.

- Opinions of Ms. Andrea Teufel, Head of the Representation Office of GEKE (Association for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage, Germany):

Bas-Reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty preserve many historical and cultural heritage documents of the people. Among them, the system of bas-reliefs and Han-Nom characters is an important component of the National Treasures. The system of bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns serves as a bridge for cultural exchange and relations between Viet Nam and nations in the region. Currently, this heritage is being left outdoors, exposed to the weather, making it susceptible to oxidation.

Communities with involvement in the documentary heritage

All visitors to Hue Citadel and those involved in research activities, especially research on bronze casting.

All people in Phuong Duc, the birthplace of the bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns of the Nguyen dynasty – Hue Imperial Palace. Currently, Phuong Duc remains renowned for its bronze casting profession, producing various bronze items used in daily life and serving as souvenirs for tourists visiting Hue.

15 Other Information to Support the Nomination

Please provide any other information that supports the inclusion of this documentary heritage collection on the Memory of the World Asia Pacific Regional Register.

Check List

× MOWCAP website reviewed

×	MOWCAP Register Guidelines read
×	Short title provided (section 1)
×	Summary completed (maximum200 word) (section 2)
×	Name and contact details of nominator/s completed (section 3)
×	Authority to nominate completed (section 4)
×	Authority provided by each National Commission when the nomination is from two or more Member States (section 5)
×	Name and contact details of Owner/s or Custodian/s completed (section 5.1, 5.2)
×	Details of legal status completed (section 5.3)
×	Details of accessibility and any limitations completed (section 5.4)
×	Details of copyright status completed (section 5.5)
×	Identity of documentary heritage recorded (6.1-6.5)
×	Bibliography completed (section 6.6)
×	Names, qualifications and contact details of two to three independent experts recorded (section 6.7)
×	Certification that experts have agreed to be contacted about the nomination (section 6.7)
×	Evidence presented of authenticity (section 7)
×	Evidence presented of regional significance (section 8)
×	Comparative analysis completed (section 9)
×	Information presented on uniqueness or rarity (section 9.1)
×	Gender analysis completed (section 10)
×	Statement of Significance completed (section 11)
×	Risk assessment section completed (section 12)
×	Preservation and access management section completed and relevant documents attached (section 13)
×	Details of consultation with stakeholders provided (section 14)
×	Other relevant information provided - if applicable (section 15)

Files Attached:

- Video of Bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns in Hue Imperial Palace
- File of Photos – Bas-reliefs on the nine bronze urns in Hue Imperial Palace
- Catalogue or Registration details
- Bibliography