A000-Asia-China-Sichuan-Sanxingdui-Early W Zhou-Grave Bust-Plain Head-Bronze-3700-2100 BCE

Figs. 1-3. China-Sichuan-Sanxingdui-Grave Bust-Plain Head-Bronze-3700-2100 BCE

**Case No.: 5**

**Accession No.**

**Formal Label:** China-Sichuan-Sanxingdui-Grave Bust-Plain Head-Bronze-3700-2100 BCE

**Display Description:**

This bronze bust was meant to be mounted on a gnomon (or erect pole) in the graveyards of Sanxingdui-三星堆 (three star mound) along the southern bank of the Yazi River 鴨子河 and both sides of the Mamu River 馬牧河. Sanxingdui covers an area of 17 km2. The site is about 10 km west of Guanghan 廣漢 and 40 km northeast of Chengdu 成都, Sichuan province’s capital (Sichuan 1999(9):15). The center has a walled enclosure (3.5 km2 (350 ha) (Chen De’n et al. 1998). The 1986 discovery of locations K1 and K2 which were filled with bronze ware such as these maskettes and busts revealed an early Bronze Age civilization previously unknown. These bronze maskettes and busts have exaggerated almond-shaped or protruding eyes and large, pointed ears. Sometimes traces of black carbon on large protruding eyes may have suggested death or eternity, while red-ochre or cinnabar on the lips, nostrils, and ear holes may have suggested life or enervation suggesting the power to breathe, hear, and speak. This dual color symbolism of life and death probably was used in masked rituals of these objects which were worn or manipulated by an impersonator of the deceased. The smaller heads with pointed bases may have been used in puppet-like scenarios while the larger masks may have been used in play-like scenarios. In both situations the objective was designed to emphasize the beneficent aspects of the deceased’s rôle in the community so that the deceased’s effect on the communal good could be put forth to the community. Many other world-wide communities follow this example from Africa, the Middle East to Asia.

**Accession Number:**

**LC Classification:**

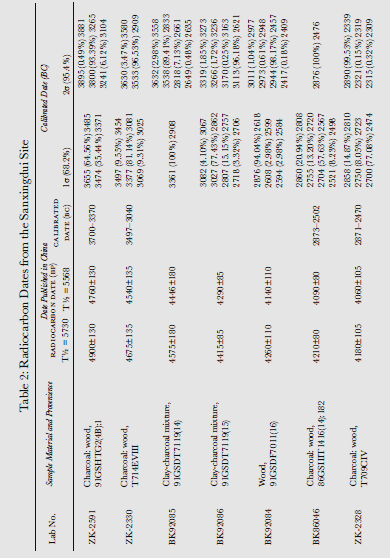
**Date or Time Horizon:**

For the absolute dating of the Sanxingdui site, the report of the 1980–81 excavations (including remarks about the 1982 excavations) relied on the following evidence (Sichuan 1987a: 249). A calibrated radiocarbon date was obtained from a sample of charcoal from Phase I remains, which gives the uncalibrated radiocarbon date of 4075 +/- 100 BP (with 5730 half-life) and the calibrated date of 4500+/- 100 BP. The fine spiral pattern decorating some of the pottery vessels of Phase III are similar to the Leiwen 雷紋 (rectilinear spirals) on Shang bronzes. The upper stratum of the 1982 excavations yielded pottery vessels with pointed bottoms, the likes of which had appeared in abundance at the Shuiguanyin 水觀音 site in Xindu 新都 County, a site that can be dated to the end of the Shang period or the beginning of the Western Zhou period through associations in bronze.

3700–3370 calBCE (ZK-2591, Charcoal: wood)

3497–3040 calBCE (ZK-2330, Charcoal: wood)

2873–2502 calBCE (BK86046, Charcoal: wood)



**Geographical Area:** Sanxingdui, 10 km west of Guanghan 廣漢 and 40 km northeast of Chengdu 成都,

**Map:**



Figs. 3-4. Sanxingdui site (30° 59′ 34.8″ N, 104° 12′ 0″ E). Left, Location in Sichuan Province; right map of city wall enclosing ca 2.6 sq. km. and 4 major cultural areas.

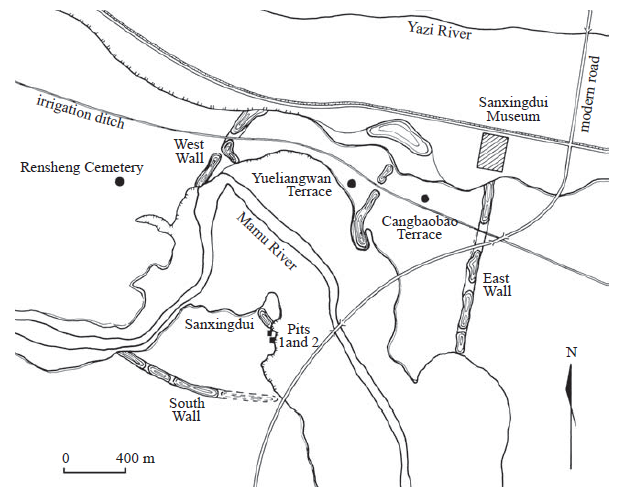


Figure 5. Map of the Sanxingdui site. After Bagley 2001: 24, fig. 1.

**GPS coordinates:** 30° 59′ 34.8″ N, 104° 12′ 0″ E

**Cultural Affiliation:** Sanxingdu

**Medium:** bronze

**Dimensions:**

**Weight:**

**Condition:**

**Provenance:**

**Discussion:**

**References:**

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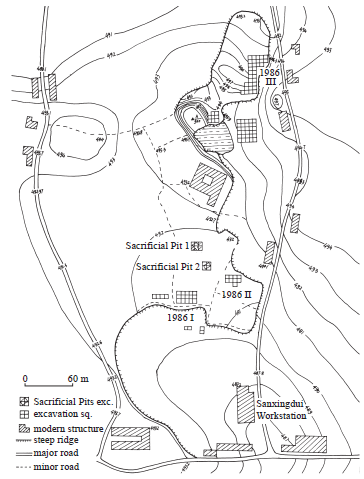


Figure 2. Excavation loci at Sanxingdui in 1986. Adapted from Sichuan 1999: 13, fig. 4.