

On the Extent of the Sa-huynh Culture in Continental Southeast Asia

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THE SA-HUYNH CULTURE, which first came to view in a seaside locality in central Vietnam, appeared very early on as the culture of a population of skillful sailors. And this view has been confirmed by digs carried out in the Philippines and in eastern Indonesia, where traces of a similar culture were found. The aim of this note is not to insist on the nautical mobility of this population, one capable of crossing the China Sea, but rather to investigate the extension of the Sa-huynh Culture on the continent of Asia, particularly in the interior regions.

Few sites have been excavated in a detailed fashion; they are all in Vietnam. Outside of those sites where precise research has taken place, some characteristic objects have accidentally been found in various places: very typical earrings with two animal heads, bulbous, three-pointed earrings, agate or carnelian beads, certain of which are pentagonal in form; their geographic distribution extends as far as Thailand. The material accompanying them has not always been noted. In spite of this, all these objects should draw our attention, especially where they are not in isolation but together in a single site; they can serve to guide us in future investigations. The beads are somewhat less useful as indicators of Sa-huynh Culture than the earrings.

A map (Fig. 1) of the geographic distribution of these objects accompanies this text and it merits a few comments.

At the site of Xuan An (Nghe Tinh), the northernmost site in Vietnam, a double animal-headed earring was recovered in 1974 along with bronze objects of the Dongson Culture (two axes and one knife); previously, a three-pointed earring had been found at the same site. These earrings prove that there existed relations between the neighboring populations of Sa-huynh and Dongson Cultures. At Xuan An, the Dongsonians adopted a

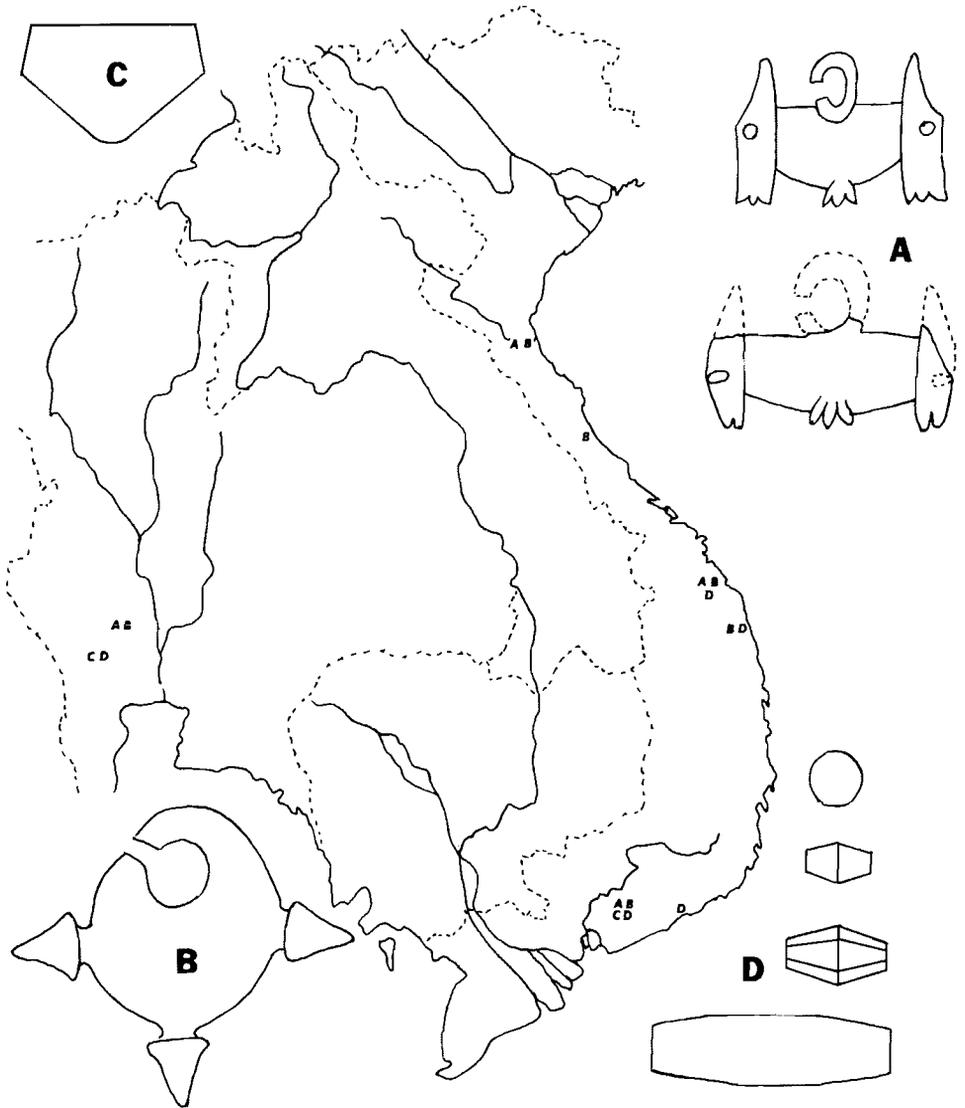


Fig. 1 Geographic distribution of objects associated with the Sa-huynh Culture: *a*, earrings with two animal heads; *b*, three-pointed earring; *c*, pentagonal bead; *d*, various beads in agate or carnelian.

few ornamental objects from their neighbors; here one is a little to the north of the northern limits of the Sa-huynh Culture.

In Vietnam, south of Vinh, important discoveries already made in the regions of Tam Ky, Sa Huynh, and Xuan Loc suffice to demonstrate that the Sa-huynh Culture was broadly distributed along the sea as well as in the interior; nevertheless, no indication has as yet been found in the mountain regions or on the great plateaus of southern Vietnam, that is, the Plateau of Darlac, the Plateau of the Mnongs, and the Plateau of the Mas.

In Cambodia and in southern Laos, no discoveries can be cited. But this void is probably illusory.

In Thailand, the Sa-huynh Culture has not been brought to the fore by digs but only by the fortuitous finding of earrings (two-headed animal earrings and three-pointed earrings) by peasants of U Thong in the province of Suphanburi. Besides these, the site of Ban Don Ta Phet in the province of Kachanaburi has furnished us with a set of personal objects wherein appear the influences of both the Sa-huynh and Dongson Cultures.

To sum up, this short note seeks to limit itself to providing a map and a few remarks on the possible extent of the Sa-huynh Culture in consideration of recent discoveries.

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