

The Sa Huynh Culture: Recent Discoveries

NGO SY HONG

THE FIRST SITES belonging to the Metal Age in central Viet Nam were discovered 75 years ago. These and subsequent discoveries are now classified as the Sa Huynh culture. Information concerning this culture is limited to jar burials; vestiges of habitation are virtually unknown. Concerning its origin, many scholars suggest that its bearers came from Island Southeast Asia. It was originally classified as Neolithic, but later revised as Iron Age.

Since 1975, 38 Sa Huynh culture sites have been identified, in addition to the 12 previously known. Some major sites have since been excavated on a large scale. From new data, we are able to discern an earlier stage of the Sa Huynh culture which belongs to the Bronze Age. Typical of this early stage is the site of Long Thanh in Nghia Binh Province, central Viet Nam, which has two radiocarbon dates, both on charcoal, of 3370 ± 40 b.p. (at 1.6 m.) and 2875 ± 60 b.p. (at 0.6 m) (Bln 1972, 2094).

At Long Thanh the habitation layer is 2 meters thick, and yielded stone pestles, axes, chisels, hoes, grinding stones, earthenware rollers, fishhooks, and thousands of potsherds. Some of these artifacts are similar to those of Neolithic sites such as Bau Tro, and the pottery is similar to that from contemporaneous cultures such as Phung Nguyen and Hoa Loc. However, it is distinguishable from these other cultures in terms of its flower-vase, ring-footed and long-necked vessel shapes. The burial jars of this stage are egg-shaped, whereas those of the later period are cylindrical. Decorative techniques at Long Thanh include incision, shell-edge impression, and painting. Motifs are mostly curvilinear scrolls.

This early stage finishes with the Binh Chau site in Nghia Binh Province, which has produced an elaborate bronze industry which includes axes, knives, molds, and crucibles. Painting becomes more common on the Binh Chau pottery, and in addition to the black previously used there appear new colors: white, red, and yellow.

Eighteen new sites belonging to the later stage of the Sa Huynh culture have been identified since 1975. It is significant to point out that some are situated in mountainous areas, and many were found in the Quang Nam–Da Nang area, just north of Nghia Binh Province. In this stage, iron tools appear in the form of common implements such as

spade blades, hoes, knives, sickles, and chisels. Most ornaments are made of agate and glass, and common items include beads, earrings with three lugs, and earrings with two animal-headed projections. Decorative motifs on pottery tend to be more geometrical than in the preceding stage, and radiocarbon dates indicate that this stage lies between 500 B.C. and the beginning of the Christian era.

CONCLUSION

The discovery of a pre-iron stage of the Sa Huynh culture shows that it had a longer duration than previously envisaged. The artifacts found in this stage are similar to those of Neolithic sites in central Viet Nam, and this circumstance suggests a possible local origin. Concerning the bearers of the Sa Huynh culture it should be noted that skeletal remains from the early stage have been identified as Southern Mongoloid.

Owing to its wide distribution in both coastal and inland mountainous areas, the Sa Huynh culture was not necessarily maritime in its orientation. Its economy was probably based on agriculture.

SITES OF THE SA HUYNH CULTURE

		DATE OF DISCOVERY	LOCALITY	CULTURAL PERIOD
1	Bau Tram	1976	Quang Nam-Da Nang	Early
2	Go Mieu	1983	"	"
3	Doi Vang	1980	"	"
4	Ngu Hanh Son	1977	"	"
5	Dien Hoa	1978	"	"
6	Dien Tien	1978	"	"
7	Dien Ngoc	1978	"	"
8	Cam Ha	1978	"	"
9	Que Loc	1977	"	Late
10	Dai Lanh	1979	"	"
11	My Can	1979	"	"
12	Tam My	1976	"	"
13	Phu Hoa	1976	"	"
14	Ky Xuan	1977	"	"
15	Tien Ha	1977	"	"
16	Go Vang	1979	Nghia Binh	Early
17	Long Thanh	1978	"	"
18	Go Doi	1978	"	"
19	Truong Xe	1978	"	"
20	Nui Sua	1979	"	"
21	Binh Chau	1977	"	"
22	Phu Khuong	1909	"	Late
23	Tan Diem	1909	"	"
24	Nui Cat	1976	"	"
25	Thanh Duc	1909	"	"
26	Dong Phu	1937	"	"
27	Phu Nhuan	1937	"	"
28	Bu Nu	1937	"	"
29	Thuan Dao	1978	"	"
30	Chanh Trach	1978	"	"
31	Hoi Loc	1978	"	"

		DATE OF DISCOVERY	LOCALITY	CULTURAL PERIOD
32	Nui Ngang	1978	Nghia Binh	Late
33	Cu Lao Re	1978	"	"
34	An My (Tra Dom)	1979	Gia Rai-Cong Tum	Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age
35	Bau Can	1956	Gia Rai-Cong Tum	Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age
36	Phuoc Hai	1983	Phu Khanh	Late
37	Xom Con	1980	"	Early
38	My Tuong	1979	Thuan Hai	"
39	Hon Do	1979	"	"
40	Mai Lanh	1978	"	Late
41	Ba Que	1975	"	"
42	Bau Hoe	1975	"	"
43	My Lai	1975	"	"
44	Hang Gon	1968	Dong Nai	"
45	Phu Hoa	1971	"	"
46	Dau Giay	1966	"	"
47	Dong Lang	1978	Thuan Hai	"
48	Suoi Chon	1976	Dong Nai	"
49	Cuong Ha	1935	Binh Tri Thien	"
50	Co Giang	1935	"	"