

Ancient Sichuan: Treasures from a Lost Civilization

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This extraordinary catalogue accompanies a major traveling exhibition of 128 works of bronze, jade, and clay dating from the thirteenth century B.C. to the second century A.D. The majority of these stunningly sophisticated works of art--among the most unusual and spectacular produced anywhere in the ancient world--all come from a startling archaeological discovery made just fourteen years ago at the previously unknown site of Sanxingdui in Sichuan province. The discovery of this Bronze Age civilization fundamentally changes our understanding of Chinese history.

Representing fifteen hundred years of cultural production, these striking objects are extraordinarily varied, ranging from a monumental standing figure and an almost life-size bronze horse to ritual vessels, masks, and bronze heads of fantastic-looking supernatural beings, finely honed jade knives and ritual blades, and marvelous clay statuettes. Most have never before been seen in the United States. The exhibition and catalogue represent a unique international effort to continue the study of ancient Sichuan.

Under the leadership of Robert Bagley, an international team of scholars contributes eight essays on the archaeological discoveries at Sanxingdui, the art historical importance of these objects, and the new history of ancient China they tell. Contributors are Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, Jessica Rawson, Lothar von Falkenhausen, Alain Thote, Jenny F. So, Michael Nylan, and the Seattle Art Museum's Curator of Chinese Art, Jay Xu. In addition to the essays, there are individual entries for each object, nearly all of which have been newly photographed for this publication.

Ancient Sichuan contributes to a revolutionary change in perceptions of ancient

Chinese civilization, providing an unprecedented opportunity to explore the art, material culture, and spiritual life of ancient China.

EXHIBITION SCHEDULE:

Seattle Art Museum, Seattle
May-August 2001

Kimbell Museum of Art, Fort Worth
September 2001-January 2002

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
March-June 2002

Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto
August-November 2002

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
Ancient Sichuan is the catalog of a spectacular exhibition organized by the Seattle Art Museum. Recent discoveries from Sichuan Province are revolutionizing the history of ancient China, showing that the traditional cradle of Chinese culture, along the Yellow River, had sophisticated competition from distant regions 3,000 years ago. Stately bronze trees and huge bronze heads--some with gold-foil masks, some with strange alien eyes on foot-long stalks--are the centerpieces of the show. Dating from the 12th century B.C., these exotic objects, found with elephant tusks and ritual jade weapons in two vast sacrificial pits, are artifacts of a previously unknown culture whose existence took archaeologists by surprise. These pieces alone would be sufficient for a groundbreaking exhibition, but the show and this beautifully designed catalog take the distinctive nature of local Sichuan culture into Han times, 1,000 years later. Lively ceramic sculptures of entertainers and erotic scenes on wall tiles demonstrate the creativity and exuberance of ancient Sichuan society. Essays by leading scholars in the field compellingly describe the context and significance of the often breathtaking objects. A wealth of comparative material, photographs, and drawings explains how original and different Sichuan culture was from what has long been considered the Yellow River Bronze Age mainstream. With the finds illustrated in *Ancient Sichuan*, the cradle of Chinese civilization begins to look like a large double bed. --*John Stevenson*

From Library Journal
The name China means "the Center Country," and for most of the 20th century, theories concerning the history of China postulated a central culture based on the Yellow River valley and radiating out into the vast territories of what we know as modern China. Recently, brick makers digging a clay pit in a small village in the isolated Sichuan basin discovered a fabulous cache of bronze, jade, and ivory relics from an early civilization unlike any other in Chinese history. As a result, it is now theorized that the interaction of numerous coequal cultural groups may have contributed to the rise of a central Chinese identity. This thesis stands behind a visually stunning exhibition of bronze and stone artifacts from Sichuan organized by the Seattle Art Museum. This book's fine design and gorgeous photography will interest readers who may not be as tempted to plunge into the dense but readable essays delineating the history of Sichuan and the precise archaeological details of the excavations. The artifacts in this exhibition, particularly the gigantic bronze tree, the oddly stylized human masks, and the erotic bricks, are unlike any of the more familiar Chinese art objects illustrated in numerous other books. Essential for academic libraries and recommended for public collections. David McClelland, Philadelphia
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Review

Honorable Mention for the George Wittenborn Memorial Book Award

"This book's fine design and gorgeous photography will interest readers."**--*Library Journal***

"This well-made . . . book . . . documents the principal excavations and offers full-color photographs of some of the most spectacular finds. . . . Students and collectors of Asian art will enjoy browsing through this richly

illustrated catalog."**--Gregory McNamee, *Bloomsbury Review***

Beautifully and profusely illustrated in color with many black-and-white photographs and diagrams, this volume documents a need for the reassessment of China's ancient art history. . . . A splendid book."**--*Choice***

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Loretta Manson:

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Roberta Haile:

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