

The Jinsha Site

Compiled by Chengdu Jinsha Site Museum

Translated by Wang Pingxing



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An aerial photograph of the Jinsha Site archaeological ruins, showing a complex network of stone walls, foundations, and structures. The image is in a sepia or brownish tone, giving it an aged appearance. The ruins are densely packed in some areas, with more open spaces and smaller structures in others. The overall layout suggests a well-planned ancient settlement.

Discovery and Excavation of Jinsha Site



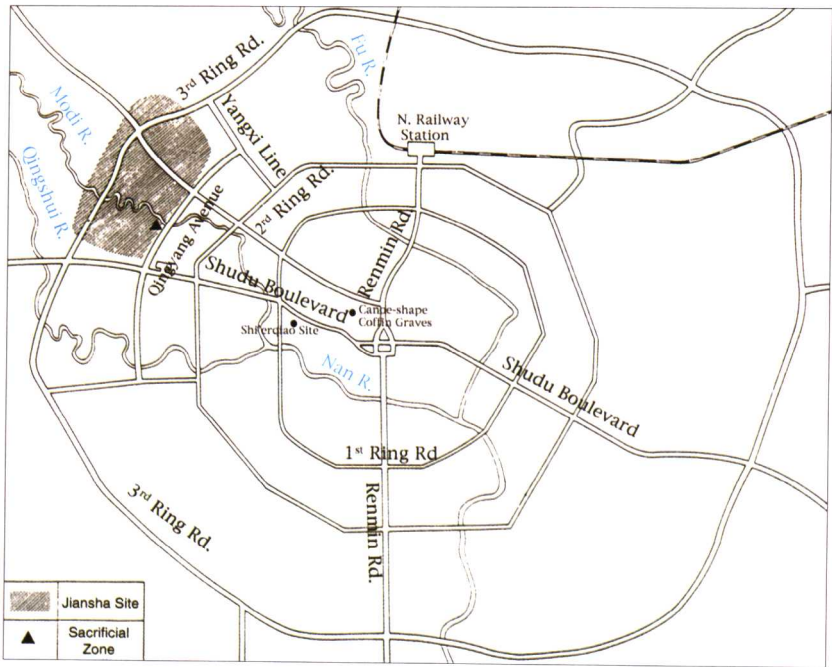
Geographical location of Chengdu City

Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, is an economic, cultural and commercial center as well as a hub of communications in southwest China. With a history of 3,000 years and rich cultural heritage, Chengdu is among the first group of 24 cities named by the central government as "Historic Cities of Cultural Heritage" in China.



Known as a Land of abundance, the Chengdu Plain is located in the western part of the Sichuan Basin in southwest China. Available archaeological records show that ancestors of Shu, an ancient kingdom in today's Sichuan, had lived here for quite a long time. Li Bai (701-762), a most well-known poet of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), wrote in one of his poems that for forty-eight thousand years ancient Shu people had lived in seclusion and had no contact with Qin or the principal part of China. As thus the ancient kingdom had been veiled in numerous legends. For generations, archaeologists have been trying to reveal the history of this ancient kingdom.

In the late 1920s, a peasant named Yan Daocheng at Sanxingdui of Guanghan County, Sichuan Province, accidentally found a number of jade and stone disks and rings in a stream, which was the first unveiling of the ancient Shu civilization. Half a century later, in the mid-1980s people in Sanxingdui made another accidental major discovery of this civilization when they dug clay to make bricks. They uncovered two sacrificial pits in which numerous bronze masks, human figures and trees and jade and stone objects were buried. This discovery made people to reexamine



the ancient Shu civilization in a new light.

In 2001 another astonishing discovery was made in Jinsha Village in the northwest suburbs of Chengdu, capital of Sichuan. This is recognized as the first major archeological discovery in the 21st century in China, and the name of a small village has become known to the world.

Location of the Jinsha Site

The Jinsha site is located in the western suburbs of Chengdu. It is surrounded by Yangxi Line in the north, Tonghe Road and Qingyang Avenue in the east, and Central Qingjiang Road in the south. Westward the site extends beyond the Third Ring Road. The area is within the boundaries of the former villages of Jinsha, Huangzhong, Longzui, Hongse, and Langjia.

The Discovery of Jinsha

On the afternoon of February 8, 2001, construction workers were digging a ditch for a sewage system in a new development at Jinsha Village. All of a sudden some workers noticed something strange in the dug-up earth: they saw a large number of white bone-like objects, stone figures, round stone objects and some bronze wares. Someone shouted: "We've found a treasure cache!" On the walls of the ditch were bone-like objects and other things. The workers wondered: Did we dig into an ancient tomb? Those who were aware of cultural heritage dialed an emergency call, and soon archaeologists arrived. When they saw all the jade disks and blades, stone human figures, a large number of bronze wares and numerous broken pieces of ivory, the archaeologists realized this must be a major archeological discovery. They knew that all these are invaluable relics and in the past few decades such relics had only been found in the two sacrificial pits at Sanxingdui. By examining the relics, they found that the broken stone figures were similar to those kneeling stone figures unearthed at Fangchi Street in Chengdu, which belonged to the Shang (1600-1046 BC) and Zhou (1046-256 BC) dynasties, and the jade disks and blades and stone disks were similar to those found at the Sanxingdui Site. As such objects could



never be found in ordinary ancient tombs, the archaeologists believed they had hit on a most valuable discovery. They then cordoned off the site, sorted the earth dug up by engineering machinery, and began large-scale exploration of the area.

The initial excavation was most exciting. Sifting the dug-up earth, they found some relics and collected numerous broken pieces. By putting the pieces together they finally got more than 1,400 relics, including gold, bronze, jade, stone, pottery, ivory and bone objects. Further excavations uncovered many extraordinary deposits, including large deposits of stone objects, boar teeth, antlers, and tortoise shells. These findings spurred archaeologists to extend the exploration to surrounding areas.

A Glimpse of the Ancient Kingdom

From 1995 to 2000, archaeologists from Chengdu Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology had made explorations and excavations at construction sites near Jinsha, such as the Huangzhong Development, Sanhe Garden, and Jindu Garden. They discovered large housing foundations, kilns, ash pits, and burial sites, dating from the late Shang to early Zhou dynasties. As most of the findings were made at Huangzhong



Village, they named it the Huangzhong Village Site.

In 1999 archaeologists unearthed ruins of a large site with five buildings. After more than 3,000 years, the upper structure of the buildings had long disappeared, and what is left are only the ditches of the foundations, in which there are vestiges of small holes densely arranged. Archaeologists presumed that the holes were for wooden poles of the wall, which was built by plastering a mixture of clay and grass to the framework on wood or bamboo poles and then baking it with fire.

Ruins of large buildings at
Sanhe Garden





The layout of the foundations show the buildings must have totaled more than 2,000 sq m, with No. 6 building being the largest: its uncovered length was 54.8 m, its width, about 8 m, and its floor space, more than 430 sq m. The building must have had at least five bays.

The numerous invaluable relics unearthed at Jinsha in early 2001 helped archaeologists realize that Jinsha and Huangzhong sites, which are about 500 m apart, are both parts of a whole site. As the relics from Jinsha are most attractive, the archaeologists named both as the Jinsha Site.

Since 2001 archaeologists have conducted explorations and excavations at more than 30 places for real estate development, including Lanyuan, Jinshayuan, Yansha Tingyuan, Jiangwang Fudi, Furongyuan, Boyatingyun, Chunyuhujian, Qianhe Xincheng, and Yongjinwan. Their work has covered more than 100,000 sq m. Through the explorations and excavations, they have got some knowledge about the distribution of the Jinsha Site, its geographic and geological conditions, the dating of the site, and the nature of this culture, as well as the life, funeral customs and religious activities of ancient people in this area.

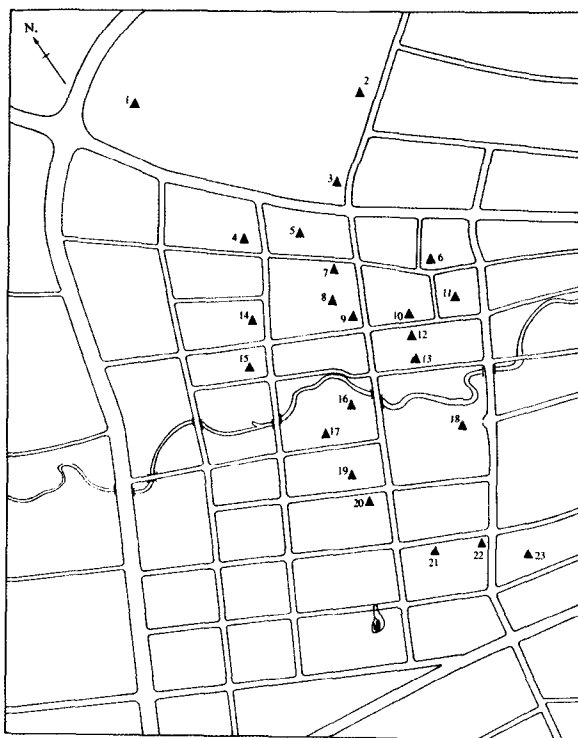
>> Archaeologists presumed that the holes were for wood or bamboo poles of the wall, which was built by plastering a mixture of clay and grass to the framework on the poles and then baking it with fire. The roof of the buildings was supposed to be made of thatch, as such thatched roof was found quite well preserved in the Shi'erqiao Site in Chengdu in the mid-1980s.

1. Distribution

The archaeologists have initially identified the distribution of the Jinsha Site in an area of at least 5 sq km. It is surrounded by Yangxi Line in the north, Tonghe Road and Qingyang Avenue in the east, the Third Ring Road in the west, and Central and West Qingjiang Roads in the south.

Excavations in the Jinsha Site

1. Jiazaihuilang
2. Jingangwan
3. Yangxi Line
Multipurpose Building
4. Yudu Garden
5. Jindu Garden
6. Sanhe Garden
7. Furongyuan (N.)
8. Furongyuan (S.)
9. Jinniu Jiaotong
10. Gangzheng
11. Huangzhong
Development
12. Jinyu
13. Jiangwang Fudi
14. Chunyuhujian
15. Boyatingyun
16. Yansha Tingyuan
17. Renfang
18. Meiyuan
(Northeastern)
19. Lanyuan
20. Hanlong
21. Jinshayuan (2nd phase)
22. Jinshayuan (3rd phase)
23. Qili Garden





2. Geographical and geological conditions

The Jinsha Site is relatively flat, sloping from the northwest to the southeast at altitudes of 508 m to 504 m above sea level, with a difference of less than five meters. The Modi River runs through the site from west to east, cutting the site into two parts. From Jinsha, the Modi flows through the western part of the city and meets the Qingshui River near Qingyang Palace.

A bird's-eye view of the Jinsha Site, now a preserved zone



3. Major ruins and relics

The ruins found in the site fall into four categories: foundations of large buildings, sacrificial zone, residential zone, and burial sites. This shows the site had distinct functional areas of considerable size, which indicates that the then social organization was quite complicated.

By analyzing the ruins and relics, the archaeologists have determined that the cultural deposits of Jinsha were roughly of the late Shang Dynasty to early Spring and Autumn period (c. 1200-650 BC), with most of them dating from the late Shang to Western Zhou dynasties. In that period Jinsha might have served as a political, economic and cultural center of the ancient Shu kingdom after the Sanxingdui civilization, and quite probably as a capital of the ancient kingdom.

A. Palaces

From the ruins at Sanhe Garden archaeologists found foundations of large buildings in a carefully designed layout, the first such discovery in southwest China. Judging by the area of the foundations, their layout and relics unearthed from nearby places, archaeologists presumed that the ruins were probably remnants of palaces of a period corresponding to the late Shang to early Western Zhou dynasties (1046-771 BC).



B. *Sacrificial sites*

At the Meiyuan construction site, archaeologists unearthed large numbers of beautiful artifacts, and they believed this place used to be a special sacrificial site by the river, which had been used for quite a long period of time. Ancient Shu people carried out their sacrificial activities on the bank, and then buried the sacrificial objects in the ground by the water. The activities might have lasted for more than 500 years, and by the early Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BC) the ground by the water was at the same level as the bank. With the political center moving elsewhere, the holy place was gradually abandoned.

An analysis of the more than 60 groups of relics related to sacrificial activities divided the activities in Jinsha into three phases, each with

A part of the sacrificial zone

