

# MYSTERY MEN: FINDS FROM CHINA'S LOST AGE

*Major exhibition at the Asian Civilisations Museum from 16 January to 15 April 2007 showcases intriguing archaeological discovery of 20<sup>th</sup> century China*



## **Exhibition Factsheet**

**Title:** Mystery Men: Finds From China's Lost Age

**Duration:** 16 January 2007 – 15 April 2007

**Exhibition Gallery:** Special Exhibitions Gallery

## **Backgrounder**

One of China's earliest dynasties, the Shang (1600 BCE – 1027 BCE) was known for the impressive achievements of its bronze culture. The heart of Shang culture lay in the Yellow River valley where archaeological digs of these sites recovered astonishing ritual bronze vessels, jade carvings, ceramics and the important oracle bones which bore the origins of the Chinese written language. The Yellow River basin was thus thought to be the cradle of early Chinese civilisation, while areas such as the Sichuan province, were deemed cultural 'backwaters'.

However, in 1929 a Sichuan farmer's discovery would change this view forever. While digging for a well to irrigate his fields, he found a huge pit of jade pieces which he divided and gave away. News of this soon spread and some years after the find, a formal survey and excavation of the area was ordered.

It would not be until 1986 that archaeologists would get the breakthrough they had been hoping for. The decision had just been made to close down the dig when an exciting message came in - a worker at a brickworks had dug up an exquisitely crafted jade tablet. Archeologists rushed to the site and started digging. They were not disappointed. In addition to the jades and pottery that they had been finding all along, they unearthed intriguing discoveries like none ever seen before.

## The Sanxingdui (三星堆) Finds



### **Zoomorphic human mask with protruding pupils**

12th century BCE

Dimensions: H66; W138cm

Collection of the Sanxingdui Museum

Excavation of the area, known to locals as Sanxingdui ("three star mounds"), unearthed two large pits with over 4,000 items dating to the 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Among these artefacts were spectacular larger than life bronze masks, bronze heads, gold and jade artefacts, turquoise items, elephant tusks and cowrie shells. All the objects were found to have been placed in layers and deliberately broken and burned, suggesting that the sites were sacrificial pits. This discovery indicated the existence of an early socio-political centre beyond the Yellow River basin.

Since then, the Sanxingdui finds have drawn international attention, not only for their significance in history, but for the intriguing and mysterious appearance and origins of the finds.

### **The Exhibition**

*Mystery Men: Finds From China's Lost Age* is a showcase of 103 of these mysterious finds from Sanxingdui. Among these are 20 first grade artefacts including large bronze masks, heads, ritual vessels and jade and gold items. Majority of the pieces come from the Sanxingdui Museum in Sichuan.

Unlike typical Shang dynasty ritual bronzes, Sanxingdui ritual bronzes included masks, heads and life-size human figurines. These unique looking bronze figurines and masks are unconventional in terms of style and size compared to the bronzes discovered in China thus far. The exhibition thus allows visitors to better appreciate one of the greatest and earliest technological achievements – Chinese bronzes, and accentuate the technical superiority of bronze-casting in China.

The Sanxingdui artefacts have since received a great amount of international interest and attention. They have been exhibited in museums such as the British Museum, Taipei's National Palace Museum, National Gallery of Art (Washington), Guggenheim

Museum (New York), Asian Art Museum (San Francisco), Art Gallery of New South Wales (Sydney) and Lausanne Olympic Museum (Switzerland).

This would be the very first time in Southeast Asia that an exhibition of these artefacts from Sanxingdui is held. *Mystery Men: Finds From China's Lost Age* is co-organised by the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) and the Cultural Relics Bureau, Sichuan.

**Highlights (Selection of first grade artefacts)**



**Bronze Human head with gold foil**  
12th century BCE  
Ht: 48.1 cm, W: 22 cm  
Collection of the Sanxingdui Museum



**Bird's head**  
12th century BCE  
Ht: 40.3 cm, W: 38.8 cm  
Collection of the Sanxingdui Museum



**Kneeling woman bearing a zun**  
12th century BCE  
Dimensions: H15.6; Lower Diameter 10cm  
Collection of the Sanxingdui Museum



**Gold Tiger appliqué**  
13th or 12th century BCE  
Ht: 6.7 cm, W: 11.6 cm  
Collection of the Sanxingdui Museum



**Bronze Head**

13th to 12th century BCE

Ht: 29 cm, W: 20.6 cm

Collection of the Sanxingdui Museum



**Zun**

13th - 12th century BCE

Ht: 56.5 cm, diameter: 49 cm

Collection of the Sanxingdui Museum



**Jade ge blade**

12<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE

Collection of the Sanxingdui Museum

**For more information and pictures, please contact:**

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