PREHISTORIC WALLED SETTLEMENTS  
IN THE CHENGDU PLAIN

BY

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Abstract

The Baoduncun Culture, named after prehistoric walled settlements in the Chengdu Plain, was a regional archaeological culture distributed in the western part of the Sichuan Basin along the upper reaches of the Yangzi River and centered in the Chengdu Plain. Dating from the Late Neolithic (or Chalcolithic) and contemporaneous with the Longshan cultures of northern China, its recent discovery constitutes a major achievement in the clarification of the pre-Qin archaeological sequences in southwestern China. The Baoduncun Culture, like the Sanxingdui Culture that followed it, is highly instructive demonstrating the special status that the Sichuan Basin, particularly its western portion, holds as a place of origin and a center of development of ancient civilization in the upper Yangzi River valley.

History of Baoduncun Culture discoveries

Major fieldwork relating to the Neolithic period in the Sichuan Basin began in 1953, when the Bianduishan 邊堆山 site was discovered in Mianyang 绵陽 County (now City), Sichuan Province, and provisionally dated to the Neolithic period (Xi’nan Bowuyuan Choubeichu 1954: 11). In the autumn of 1963, Sichuan University and the Sichuan Provincial Commission of Cultural Relics Management undertook a joint excavation at the Yueliangwan 月亮灣 locus of the Sanxingdui 三星堆 site in Guanghan 廣漢 County (now City) (site locations are

1 The Editors thank Wenbin Peng and Mark Pitter for their draft translation of the paper presented here in revised form. The Editors have provided additional references, including those for a number of field results and preliminary excavation reports that have been published since the submission of the manuscript in Chinese.
shown in Figure 1), yielding features and artifacts that ranged in date from the late Neolithic to the early Bronze Age periods (Ma Jixian 1993). Between 1980 and 1981, a large-scale excavation at Sanxingdui carried out by the Sichuan Provincial Commission of Cultural Relics Management and other archeological institutions identified cultural remains predating the Bronze Age; these late Neolithic remains have since become known as Sanxingdui Phase I remains (Sichuan Sheng Wenwu Guanli Weiyuanhui et al. 1987). From 1989 to 1991, the Sichuan Team of the Institute of Archaeology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences conducted a series of field surveys and excavations along the northern edge of the Sichuan Basin, at Bianduishan in Mianyang, as well as at Zhangjiapo 張家坡, Dengjiaping 鄧家坪, and Zhongzipu 中子鋪 in Guangyuan 廣元 City, adding much to our knowledge of the Neolithic cultural history of the region (Wang Renxiang and Ye Maolin 1993). Since the 1990s, however, all these previous results have been dwarfed in importance by successive discoveries of prehistoric walled settlements in the Chengdu 成都 Plain. Six of these recently identified walled settlements are described in this paper.3

The Baodun site in Xinjin

The Baodun 寶墩 site (30° 26’ N, 103° 45’ E, elevation 472–474 m above sea level) is a walled settlement located in Longma 龍馬 Township, about 5 km northwest of Wujin 五津, the Xinjin 新津 County seat. Four km to the northeast of Baodun is the Xihe 西河 River, and 500 m to the southwest is the Tiexihe 鐵溪河 River, which flows from the northwest towards the southeast. A branch of the Sijiangyan 泗江堰 irrigation system flows from the northeast to the southwest and cuts across the northeastern section of the site, where mounds are still clearly visible on the surface.

The Baodun site first caught the serious attention of archaeologists in the winter of 1984, when Luo Weixian 羅偉先, Wang Yi, and other archaeologists from the Archivalogical Team of the Chengdu Municipal Museum conducted a survey of the area and collected fragments of brown coarse fabric pottery sherds and small stone axes (Wang Yi et al. 1997). In 1995, survey and preliminary excavations were conducted principally by the Chengdu Municipal Cultural Relics and Archaeology Team at Baodun (Chengdu Shi Wenwu Kaogu Gongzuodui et al. 1997).

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2 Unless otherwise stated, all figures are based on line drawings provided courtesy of the Chengdu Municipal Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.

3 In addition to this essay, a summary paper in Chinese on the Baoduncun Culture sites has been recently published. See Jiang Zhanghua et al. 2001.