

offerings show hardly any distinctive characteristics and could be as rich as those of the adults (fig. 9). In recent years, evidence for inhumations among the Sa Huynh jar burials has grown; this custom was an exception, however (fig. 10). Wooden coffins or boat burials described as typical for the Dong Son culture are not found in the Sa Huynh area.

Moreover, both cultures are differentiated by the fact that, in central Viet Nam, the large bronze objects so typical for the north, such as drums, swords, or spearheads, are seldom excavated in connection with Sa Huynh burials and are certainly import goods; other bronze forms, such as bells, breastplates, or huge containers (*thap*), have not yet been found in any Sa Huynh sites.

In contrast, the potters of the Sa Huynh culture were really accomplished masters in the modeling of huge, thin-walled jars and covers as well as many different types of vessels, including lamps, bowls, and vases, often richly and originally decorated by cord-paddle, shell, or fingernail marks, with incised designs combined with red or black painting (fig. 11). However, as opposed to their neighbors in the north, who left so many pictures from the world around them—particularly human figures in all their detail—the Sa Huynh people were evidently shy with regard to self-portrayal.

In addition, still one more individual characteristic of the Sa Huynh population in central Viet Nam exists: ear ornaments were very popular and common, but some of their members wore strange, double-headed animal earrings of stone or glass (fig. 12). These were probably exclusively worn by men of a special profession, or who held an outstanding position in the society, perhaps a medicine man or healer, hunter, or long-distance trader.

In particular, the double-headed animal earrings (cat. no. 15) were apparently so meaningful that some damaged ones were repaired and continued to be used, rather than being replaced by a new copy. For a long time, it was speculated that the animal depicted on the earring could be a dog, horse, doe, or buffalo. However, only with the sensational discovery in 1992 of some surviving individuals of a previously unknown genus of wild bovid with long straight horns, named "Sao La" by the local people, did it become evident that, very probably, this is the animal depicted on the stone earrings. Until recent times, hunters in Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces near the border of Laos have obtained an especially valuable medicinal draught from it by boiling the horns, as the Vietnamese still do with some other deer species (fig. 13).<sup>29</sup>

Earrings with three protrusions (cat. no. 16) were more common, and were perhaps used by warriors, as the human figure on a dagger hilt suggests (fig. 14). Some examples have also been discovered in neighboring countries and cultures of Southeast Asia, but nowhere is this type so numerous as in Sa Huynh burials.

The origin and beginning of the Sa Huynh culture may have lain in drastic settlement changes during the first half of the first millennium B.C., whereby the crucible area of the culture should have been in central Viet Nam between the provinces of Quang Ngai and Quang Nam. In the area of Sa Huynh in Quang Ngai Province, some covered burial jars from the end of the second millennium B.C. were discovered that are very similar to the later burial ceramics of the classic Sa Huynh culture up to 500 B.C. The gap in burials and artifacts between these two phases is a problem for further research. At present, many reasons exist to assume that the classic Sa Huynh culture developed in the Thu Bon delta of modern Quang Nam