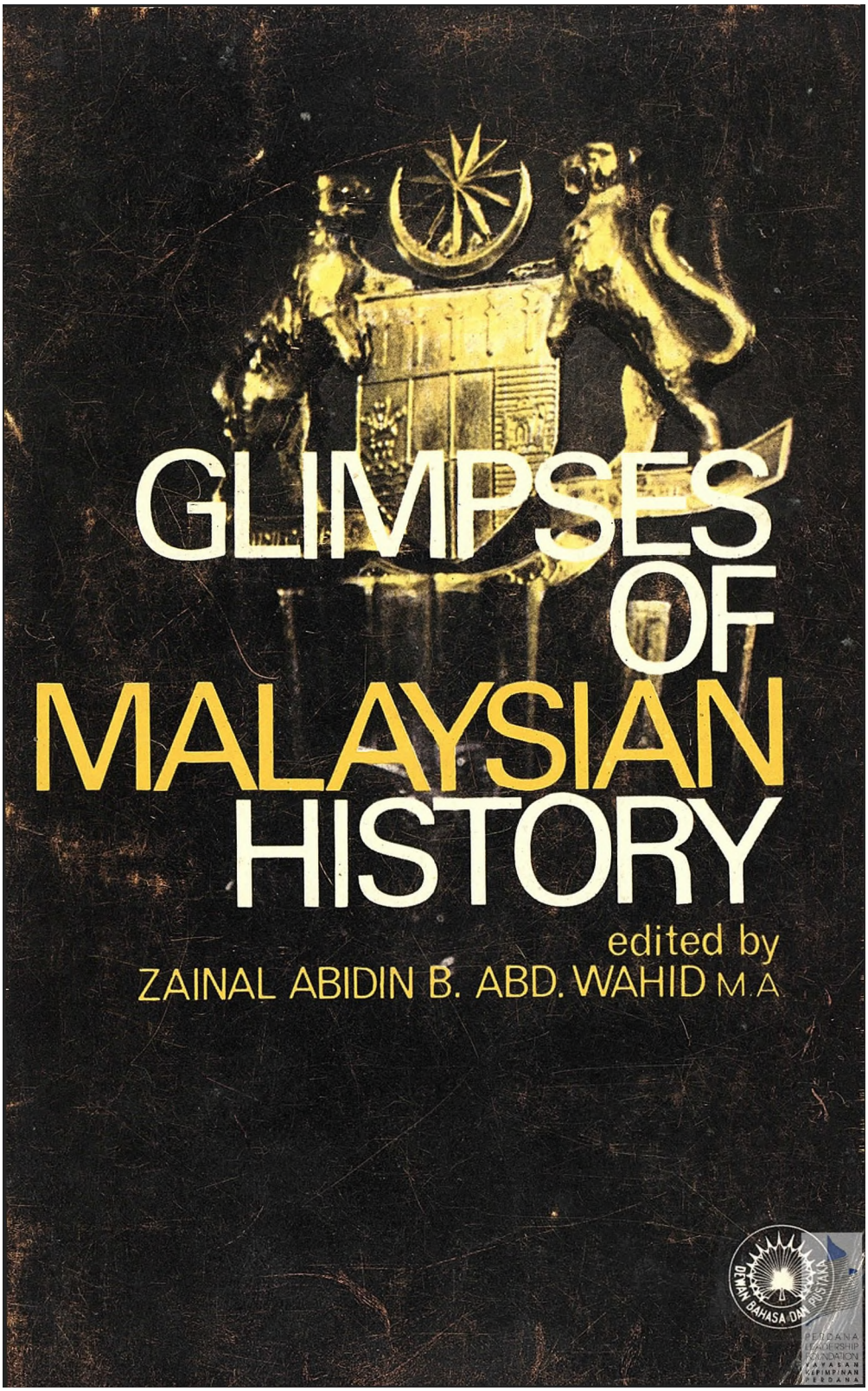

GLIMPSES OF MALAYSIAN HISTORY

edited by
ZAINAL ABIDIN B. ABD. WAHID M.A.


PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
FOUNDATION
YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA

Glimpses of

MALAYSIAN HISTORY

Edited by

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PENGANTAR

Hingga hari ini penulisan sejarah Malaysia masih belum memuaskan. Penulis-penulis Barat, yang sikapnya berorientasikan Barat, menulis sejarah yang berpusat ke sana. Sekarang sarjana-sarjana tempatan sudah mulai muncul dan karya-karya mereka menggambarkan sikap, pandangan dan pemikiran baru terhadap sejarah negeri ini.

Sebahgian dari karya-karya mereka dikumpulkan dalam buku *Sejarah Malaysia Sepintas Lalu.* Hampir semua karangan yang kita terbitkan dalam buku ini adalah hasil dari pemikiran dan penyelidikan ahli-ahli sejarah tempatan. Saya ingin mengucapkan tahniah kepada semua yang memberikan sumbangan untuk menghasilkan buku ini.

Dan oleh karena memandangkan betapa pentingnya buku ini Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka memutuskan untuk menerbitkan naskhah yang sama dalam bahasa Inggeris, bertajuk, *Glimpses on Malaysian History.*

Harapan kami ialah muga-muga buku ini akan mendapat sambutan, di samping memberikan sumbangannya, yang sewajarnya.

Hassan Ahmad,
Pemangku Pengarah,
Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

DBP
15hb. Ogos, 1970


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EDITORIAL NOTE

This collection of essays was originally prepared for a series of talks organised by the Malaysian Historical Society for broadcast by Radio Malaysia. The public response to the talks has been so encouraging that the Society decides to publish them so that they could reach a greater number of people, particularly Malaysians, in the hope of enhancing amongst them a better understanding of the history of their country.

The essays have been chronologically arranged, from prehistory to Merdeka in 1957. The writers make no claim for definitiveness in these essays, but some results of recent researches have been included. In preparing them, the contributors have been specially requested to direct their contributions essentially to Form V level.

Nine different persons have contributed to this volume and since they have prepared their writings almost independently of each other, a consistent theme is difficult to maintain. However, it is contended that some new aspects of, and approaches to, Malaysian history have been presented.

It is hoped that this little volume would be able to meaningfully fill a little corner of the large empty space in the field of writings on Malaysian history.

Zainal Abidin bin Abdul Wahid.


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THE STONE AGE IN MALAYSIA

by

TOM HARRISSON

A hundred thousand years ago, or roughly a hundred thousand years ago, you could walk from John O'Groats which is in the extreme north of Scotland in Western Europe, to Sandakan in the extreme north of Sabah, in the extreme north-east corner of what is now Malaysia. In fact, Sandakan was the land's end of an enormous continent which covered the whole of Europe and Asia and a lot more. It is only since that time and after the last Ice Age that we had the sort of fragmentation which is characteristic of Malaysia and Indonesia and all our part of the world today. But this great land mass did stop at Sabah and it just joined up at Palawan. It was called Sundaland in these parts. It included Palawan in the southern Philippines but north of Palawan and east of Sabah and the east coast of Borneo, there was a deep shelf and no land continuity — very often that is called Wallace Line from Alfred Russel Wallace, the great scientist of the last century. Now this is awfully relevant when we begin to think of the beginnings of the Stone Age in Malaysia. Because Malaysia was really the end of the line for human movement eastward and, in fact, there is not as yet, and I don't think there probably ever will be any indication of very early man, in early stages of human evolution, east of the Wallace line, for instance, in the Celebes or in Australia where they have not found anything even 50,000 years old. Now, man himself in various forms, is millions of years old, not very many millions but several millions, and in his present form, the sort of people we are — Homo sapiens — about 50,000 years old.

Now coming down to Homo sapiens, we have abundant evidence now that Homo sapiens was right through Malaysia, at a very much earlier stage than was previously thought. It is normally being thought that Homo sapiens lived in the Middle-East and in places like that and did not extend far out across into Asia but recent research, especially in Palawan and in East Malaysia, has proved this is not true. But we still have not ... I will come on to that again in a minute ... we still have not got a clear picture of very early man, earlier than Homo sapiens, the sort of Java man, nut-cracker man, and these very primitive ape-like forms, in Malaysia at all, that is to say, the sort of man who lives a million years ago or several hundred thousand years ago but obviously they were here, they were in the Malay Peninsula and they were in East Malaysia and in Borneo, because we have Java man well established in Java, a very primitive type, earlier than Homo sapiens, if you like to use the word as a sort of ape man, and at Kota Tampan in Malaya proper. In West Malaysia, we have the Tampan stone-chopper industry, which is mainly described by Dr. and Mrs. Sieveking and by Dr. Collings of the National Museum, in Singapore before and though there is a lot of argument about the exact age of the Tampanian, and it depends entirely on geological dating of the layers of the gravels and so on, it does look as if there was a very early form of primitive stone-tool being used by a primitive type of man at and around Kota Tampan and it is very difficult to date this and Mr. Brian Peacock has been doing a lot of work on it in the University of Malaya but we can certainly think and it is generally said in the books that this is the only evidence in Malaysia itself of very early pre-Homo, pre-modern man.

We have also got two rather similar choppers from a bauxite mine at Sematang in Sarawak in recent years. Again, without any supporting information, merely found in the mine, but they certainly do look like very early tools of the Java man type, and on common sense grounds I think must expect to make more important finds in this very early field in Malaysia, and especially I would think in the Malay Peninsula within the next few years but that is in the future. What we have succeeded in doing in the last 20 years particularly, I think, is greatly to clarify the picture for early modern man — Homo sapiens — and we have been very fortunate there in Sarawak because we have in the Niah Caves, in the great caves of Niah, one of the most wonderful caves in the world. It has a floor space of 27 acres and in this cave we have been excavating with the

Sarawak Museum team, I brought help from outside, steadily since 1954, and down in the deeper layers at Niah, we have what appears to be the earliest Homo sapiens skull. It is of a boy of about 15.

This skull is about 12 feet down in a perfectly stratified deposit and we have been able to date the depth from the layer by associated charcoal and animal bone, using the radio-carbon method and getting, we have got three related dates round about, the 40,000 year mark. Now that isolated find caused a great deal of surprise because, as I have said, the rather presumptive attitude was that modern man was really a sort of Westerner, a kind of expatriate as far as we were concerned in these parts, and he could not be right out here. Of course, that is really an intellectual fault in thinking but I was myself responsible partly for this find and I was rather left out on the limb by my colleagues for several years but fortunately now Dr. Robert Fox of the National Museum of the Philippines and a very powerful team he has got, have found a similar skull with a similar date at Palawan in the Southern Philippines, in a very fine cave there. Now, as I said at the beginning, Palawan was directly land-connected as part of Sunda land with Borneo and with the whole Continent that stretched from John O'Groats and Land's End England before the last Ice Age and right up into the Pleistocene era or the late part of the Pleistocene era, so it is not surprising to find Homo sapiens in Palawan as well as in the Niah Caves and if they were in those two places, it is perfectly obvious that they were also in West Malaysia and all over Asia. It is only a matter of finding them. I say it is only a matter of finding them because this cave work is. difficult and one of the difficulties is that of course so many caves, especially in West Malaysia, have been heavily disturbed and stripped, even utterly destroyed, by guano collectors using the guano for fertiliser. We have been fortunate at Niah in being able to control this, in getting the control of the caves immediately after World War II when the Museum took over, and we have stopped the guano collecting in the excavation areas, and been able to carry on now for 13 years with one continuous excavation.

Now, that deep Homo sapiens skull, the young man down at the bottom of, say, 40,000 years ago is not absolute the bottom of the deposit, we have got more stuff below that Stone Age stuff, though I would not like to interpret it quite yet. But what is most interesting and which we will talk firmly about is what is above it and that is above it in the stratification. From deep down there, there is an

unbroken succession of human habitation in this wonderful huge, light cave, over a hundred yards wide, in the mouth, perfectly dry, lovely and cool, in the evening like air-conditioning from the limestone, no mosquitoes, a vast protein supply right there on your door step or rather on your back step with over a million swiftlets making edible birds' nests and another million or so bats living in the cave right behind you which primitive man could eat and, believe me, modern museum man eats when he is hungry, too!

Now, therefore, this was an ideal place for people to live and we find from that early Homo sapiens an unbroken succession, right up into modern times. As we go up inch by inch, we can follow up the gradual evolution of the Stone Age there in Niah. We find that down at the bottom, there are fairly rough deep pebble-tools, chopper-tool types, large stones usually just broken off and roughly flaked at one end. Associated with these and carrying on later, we get an evolution of smaller tools made of struck flakes usually of quartzite and some of them quite fine tools. And then as we get higher up in the deposits say to roughly, 10,000 years ago, we reckon that an inch is about 300 years at Niah in this deposit, we see these tools evolving into more sophisticated types with a wider variety of use, and eventually ending up in polished stone tools, and really fine things, adzes, axes, tools with obviously different functions and purpose, some of which are quite lovely and, of course, are very close to those in West Malaysia. A great deal of work is being done on this tool in Malaya proper, by the museums there and by the university and a very good book written by Michael Tweedie, *The Stone Age in Malaya,* describes all these tools. I am only emphasising the East Malaysia part of it because that is only the work that I have particularly been doing and the great advantage we have at Niah is this unbroken succession. I have not mentioned one particular type of tool — the Hoabinhian, it is called - which is a sort of pebble flaked off at the sides, which is associated with the Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age culture, generally thought to be somewhere between 10,000 to 20,000 years ago, because we have not got that at all at Niah.

That is one of the really curious features that we seem to lack — this Hoabinhian culture. But the other thing that is really impressive, not only at Niah but also in all the caves studied, is that when we come to this Neolithic, the late Stone Age with the polished tools — a tremendous flowering of culture, the growth of pottery, of making

boats, and jewellery, the use of jade even, and the tremendous dynamic growth that one feels in this cave when suddenly we have hundreds of burials of people, beautifully laid out 4,000 years ago, just as finely buried as anybody could be today, wrapped up in matting and netting, with shell and stone jewellery, real love of the dead, and associated with little shrines, religious objects, markers, coffins, or the babies buried in beautifully made pottery urns, and in all ways a feeling that in the late Stone Age we began to get a terrific dynaurism in this part of the world so much so that people by then were even populating the smaller islands. There is a little island off Labuan in Sabah where we found a small cave crammed with the same sort of late Stone Age remains and it is quite a difficult island to get to even now, but people carrying their dead lovingly and burying them over there.

So, finally, what we must remember about this late Stone Age, which carried on into the Metal Age probably only about 1,300 years ago here in Borneo (we are not quite sure about this in West Malaysia) is that there was a complete continuity for 50 or 40,000 years, obviously from the excavations. And that the skull of 40,000 years ago is really a Dayak — he is not much different from the modern people living round here today and that this ancient endemic Stone Age culture has continued into the Metal Age and now even into the age of radio, and Radio Malaysia.

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THE LATER PREHISTORY OF MALAYSIA AND THE BEGINNINGS OF CIVILIZATION

by
B.A.V. Peacock

The first lecture in this series of talks on Malaysian History dealt with the earliest human cultures of this region, cultures known to us only by the scantiest of remains. The most ancient of these, the Palaeolithic or Old Stone Age cultures of the Pleistocene, are represented by crudely worked stone implements found in older river gravels such as those exposed at Kota Tampan in Perak and at several other localities in Southeast Asia, for example the Irrawaddy Valley in Burma and the Kali Baksoka river in South Central Java near the town of Patjitan. These simple stone implements were made by knocking off a few large flakes, usually from water rounded pebbles. In general the minimum of effort was employed to produce the desired cutting edge. It is most probable that these chipped pebble tools were the work of men rather different physically from ourselves and at a lower level of evolutionary development.

The later, Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age phase of Malaysian prehistory shows increasing technological sophistication. True, the principal industrial material continues to be stone, but the degree of skill and control in the processes of chipping and flaking show dramatic improvement. The small, precise discoidal or ovate stone axes that are so characteristic of this period of our prehistory are an unmistakeable advance on their Old Stone Age predecessors.

It is particularly significant that careful studies of the skeletons of the people who made and used the Mesolithic stone implements and who were buried in caves and rock shelters in the Peninsula were men just like ourselves, Homo sapiens, although all present indications

suggest that they belonged to the Oceanic Negroid or Melanesian racial type. These Mesolithic cultures, often called Hoabinhian from the site in North Vietnam where they were first identified, are wide spread throughout most of Southeast Asia, although for some reason not yet clear they do not seem to have occupied East Malaysia and the Islands.

In spite of their developing technical abilities — it is probable that at a later stage in their history they came to make and use pottery — the Mesolithic Hoabinhian peoples were nevertheless still culturally limited in one important respect. They depended for their subsistence on hunting and food-gathering. Such an economy imposed on them a wandering nomadic existence and restricted their social organization to small family groups. To this extent the Hoabinhian way of life was comparable to that of the still existing nomadic Negrito tribes of the Peninsula.

There can be little doubt that one of the most significant events in prehistory was the transition from a hunting and food-gathering subsistence economy — as exemplified in Malaysia by the Hoabinhian cultures — to a food producing economy based on knowledge of the arts of agriculture and animal domestication which marks for the archaeologist the beginnings of the Neolithic or New Stone Age phase.

This highly important transition from one economic system to another is often difficult to document archaeologically since the beginnings of plant cultivation and the domestication of animals often leave only ambiguous clues in the remains of ancient cultures. It is particularly difficult to define the transition in Malaysia and Southeast Asia where hunting and food-gathering continued to supplement the economy long after agricultural techniques were introduced. What is more, early plant cultivation followed the swidden or shifting agricultural pattern in which a patch of forest is felled, burnt off and planted with crops for two or three seasons before being allowed to revert to forest and the process repeated elsewhere. A system like this leads to a way of life only slightly less nomadic than that of Mesolithic hunters and often hard to distinguish in the sequence of prehistoric occupation of archaeological sites.

Recent archaeological discoveries in Malaysia and Thailand begin to suggest that the idea of plant cultivation and animal domestication was not an indigenous development within Malaysia or even Southeast Asia, but was introduced from outside the region. Detailed comparison of pottery, stone and other artefact types, burial ritual, settlement

patterns and many other cultural characteristics of early Southeast Asian Neolithic settlements, such as Ban Kao in West Central Thailand, Bukit Kaplu in Kedah and Gua Cha in Ulu Kelantan, with materials from Chinese Neolithic sites, particularly those of the so-called Lungshanoid cultures, show striking similarities. Such similarities, however, need not, and indeed probably do not, imply ancient and widespread population movements into Southeast Asia. It must be emphasized that ideas can be spread as successfully through cultural contacts as through actual human migration. In this connexion it is probably significant that many of the correspondences that have been noted between Chinese and Southeast Asian Neolithic artefact types betoken sometimes rather inept copying in Southeast Asia rather than direct borrowing or importation from China. It is most striking also that studies of skeletons that have been found associated with Neolithic cultural remains, for example at Gua Cha, raise the possibility that they belong to the same Oceanic Negroid stock as the people of the Mesolithic. This fact too lends support to the belief that early farming techniques were transmitted to Southeast Asia by cultural contacts and were adapted to local conditions by an indigenous population rather than through the agency of wholesale population movements.

In general then we can say that the introduction of agriculture into Southeast Asia and Malaysia was a gentle transition which did not immediately result in any revolutionary upheaval of social or economic patterns, nor lead to any sudden changes in the physical type of the inhabitants.

Thanks to the wider use of the radiocarbon method of dating archaeological remains, a much clearer idea of the date of the events of which I have spoken is gradually beginning to emerge. Radiocarbon dates from Neolithic contexts at Ban Kao and from two Malaysian sites — one in Perak and the other in Pahang — cluster fairly closely in the range from 2000 B.C. to 1500 B.C.

The next major advance in the social and economic development of our region is marked in the archaeological record by the appearance of metal artefacts and the growth of a knowledge of metallurgy and metal-working.

In order to understand more fully the impact of these innovations, it will be helpful if we examine briefly the social and economic implications of metal-working. Metallurgy is a complex technological process. The making of a metal artefact calls into play a very wide

range of highly specialized skills. Ores do not generally resemble the metals derived from them and so to seek out and exploit ore deposits requires special techniques and knowledge of a high order. Similarly, the smelting of ores, the alloying of metals in the correct proportions to produce the desired hardness and durability, the making of moulds and the casting and finishing of artefacts are all intricate technological processes.

The special talents demanded by these processes need long apprenticeship and much time spent in their application. To a greater extent than anything found at lower levels of cultural and technological development these are full-time specializations. Outside of primary food-production, such a level of technological -specialization is inherently unlikely in a swidden or shifting agricultural economy. The emergence of a full blown metallurgical tradition implies the support of a stronger economic base which in our context could only come from the development of irrigation agriculture. There are other implications too. There would inevitably be a trend towards a more sedentary way of life and the investment of labour in irrigation works and longer-lived settlements would encourage a growing complexity of social and political organization. This phase of prehistory therefore deserves to be regarded in some senses as a formative one and with the appearance of metal-using communities in Southeast Asia and Malaysia one can already discern the dawn of some of those distinctive features that mark the earliest Southeast Asian states to emerge in the full light of history.

The arts of metal-working appear in the archaeological record of our region with dramatic suddenness and at a surprisingly high level of technical sophistication. It is hard to imagine complex alloying and casting techniques being developed without a long history which one would expect to have left some archaeological traces. Such traces have not so far come to light. The facts then as we have them strongly suggest that like agriculture, metal-working in Southeast Asia owes its origins to ideas and stimuli from external sources.

The first major centre of Southeast Asian metallurgy to be explored archaeologically was the site of Dong-s'on on the banks of the Song Ma river in North Vietnam. Here archaeologists found the remains of an ancient village settlement, built partly on piles over the water and strategically located to command important trade routes both by land and river. That the inhabitants of ancient Dong-s'on subsisted not only by agriculture but also by trade is

indicated by the presence of several superb bronze objects imported from China. That Dong-s'on flourished is amply attested by the wealth of magnificently decorated metal objects placed as offerings in the graves that were discovered near the settlement.

The influence of the culture that has come to be known after its type site as Dong-s'on was certainly great and was widely felt in Southeast Asia and in Malaysia - perhaps even further afield. But here again, as has so often happened in the reconstruction of prehistory and early history, the spread of metallurgy and all that it implies has all too often been viewed in terms of the wholesale movement of peoples and cultures instead of a more gentle diffusion of ideas through trades and other casual contacts which seem better to fit the facts. One scholar, for example, has conjured up an overly dramatic vision of Southeast Asia over-run by hordes of Dong-s'on people fleeing from the invading armies of the later Han Dynasty.

In Malaysia quite a large number of bronze antiquities with clear affinities to Dong-s'on have come to light. In 1905 three beautiful bronze bells decorated with typical motifs were unearthed near Klang. One of these may be seen in the Muzium Negara in Kuala Lumpur, one was presented to the British Museum and the third was unfortunately lost during World War II. In 1926 the badly corroded remains of a bronze drum in Dong-s'on style were washed out of the banks of the Sungai Tembeling in Pahang by the great flood at the end of that year. This is now in the possession of the National Museum in Singapore. Towards the end of the Japanese occupation fragments of a second drum were discovered in the course of digging foundations for a new building near Klang. These fragments, partially reconstructed, are on display in the Muzium Negara, Kuala Lumpur.

Owing to the circumstances in which these discoveries were made no proper archaeological investigation of any of them was possible. It was therefore fortunate when in 1964 two more bronze drums of Dong-s'on type were found in the course of agricultural operations. The site was preserved and investigated by a team of archaeologists from the Muzium Negara and the University of Malaya. Careful excavation of the site, at Kampong Sungai Lang near Banting in Selangor, showed that the two drums had been intentionally buried in an inverted position on a plank of *chengal* wood — possibly the remains of a wooden boat. Round the drums several groups of pottery had been disposed. This pottery had a curious brown

shiny glaze produced from some resinous organic substance. At one place numerous orange glass beads were found and there were traces of socketed iron implements. After the groups of objects had been put in place, a hemispherical mound of soil had been heaped up to cover them. This mound was about fifteen feet in diameter and four feet high.

Following desertion of the site by its ancient inhabitants a deposit of peat built up to a depth sufficient to cover and conceal the mound. It was shrinkage of this peat layer due to agricultural drainage that led to the mound's discovery. Two other earthen mounds were subsequently located in the same kampong, but unfortunately they were too badly disturbed for proper examination to be possible. Instead of drums, these mounds were found to contain fine undecorated bronze bowls, rock crystal beads and pottery with the same resinous coating.

Samples of the wooden plank have been subjected to radiocarbon analysis and this has yielded a date of about 200 B.C. Again in 1964 the widening of a road just south of Kuala Trengganu brought to light two more fine bronze drums which were unfortunately rather badly damaged in the process. Although the site was disturbed, it seems reasonably certain that as at Kampong Sungai Lang, these drums had been buried as a pair and were associated with small coloured glass beads, pottery and a fine socketed iron spearhead.

Over many years as a result of mining, road building, drainage and other activities, numerous other finds of metal antiquities have been made. Some five cast socketed bronze axeheads are known from various mines scattered through the country. There is also a group of socketed iron implements — some of them of somewhat uncertain use — known generally as *tulang mawas.* These are found mainly on the West Coast of the Peninsula — although a few have been recorded from the Sungai Tembeling and near Raub in Pahang. They occur either in small hoards, as in the case of the discovery at Bukit Jati near Klang - or in association with strange tombs constructed from rough granite slabs which seem to be limited in distribution to the Sungai Slim and Sungai Bernam regions of South Perak and North Selangor.

In East Malaysia so far no bronze drums in the early Dong-s'on style have been reported, but stone moulds for casting bronze axeheads are known and other evidence of Dong-s'on influence exists.

The concentration of discoveries of metal antiquities in the region

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