

PART IV

SOME IDEAS

Always when I sit confronting the many-hued
rocks and play a tune on my antique lute, my
thoughts are borne away to unearthly regions.

Lin Yu-lin, 1614 A.D.

CHAPTER 27

THE DATING OF GOLD (AND GOLDSMITHING)

This and the following chapters will seek--only briefly-- to draw together a few of the points from the considerable body of data which (we hope) has emerged from the three previous parts of this Data Paper. We aim to offer some broader ideas and conclusions in two follow-up papers for scientific journals: one on gold leaf-foil generally and one on the micro-megalithic concept applied over a wider field. The present chapters will be no more than commentaries of emphasis on what has already been said or shown in the preceding twenty-six.

The importance--perhaps the predominant importance--of Borneo (and particularly southwest Borneo) as a source of gold had been sufficiently indicated in earlier chapters. There does not seem to be any good reason why it has been passed over in favor of other islands like Sumatra or for the Malay peninsula, Burma, etc. In so far as the "Golden Khersonese," El Dorado and other golden lands of fantasy can be suitably located at all, West Borneo has at least as strong a claim to that doubtful distinction as any other place or places. Some of the others have no factual claim at all.

However, the evidence which we have been able to assemble in Part II of this study is surprisingly sketchy, in some sectors even feeble, as regards the antiquity and intensity of past gold working in island Southeast Asia. Although there are, clearly, powerful ancient traditions and skills of making gold ornaments, weapon handles and small figurines in Indonesia, the Philippines and elsewhere, there is little actual proof that the traditions are very venerable though it may well be so. Few pieces of merit can yet be safely dated before 1000 A.D. at this time. There is a marked tendency for the well-made solid gold objects to date after c. 1200 A.D., with an apparent boom in workmanship during the Majapahit period (c. 1300 A.D. on). Gold was in abundant use in West Borneo when the first clear Chinese (thirteenth century) and European (sixteenth century) accounts are available.

Prior to c. 1000 A.D., nearly all excavated gold is in very simple but distinctive form, notably the cut-breach leaf-foil so conspicuous at the Jaong site, with affinities to other pieces found in Gedong and at Limbang further up the coast, as well as in Indonesia, the Philippines, and as far afield as at least one site in southern India. This leaf belongs to the

oldest line of evolution we can so far trace in the area, and deserves fuller attention than its rather mediocre style has earned for it hitherto.

At Jaong, this form of gold leaf is especially associated with beds of extraneous pebbles comprising what we have termed a micro-megalithic activity. Similar very close association between gold and the most intense living megalithic of Southeast Asia is demonstrated as basic for the small island of Nias, west of Sumatra; as also in the past by the dolmen ring from the Limbang Hoard in Brunei Bay. Other special associations with gold and megaliths conform with our interpretation of *all* Borneos extensive megalithic as basically "late," and certainly "iron age." Neither for gold nor megaliths is there any evidence of a neolithic stone-age antiquity.

The earliest *historical* records for specialized gold mining in West Borneo are no earlier than 1760 A.D., with an influx of Chinese shaft mines whose work subsequently influenced the whole island evaluation of gold effort, leading among other things to a widespread sale of gold. This process had begun, however, with the advent of the Europeans and Indians, and in particular the rapacious gold search by the sixteenth century Spaniards, so that by the time British interests took control of most of west Borneo in the nineteenth century old gold jewelry was already rare. Except for the Brunei royal regalia, no antique gold is known in private hands today, apart for casual finds from the ground.

Despite the historical influence of the Chinese, nearly all the uneven evidence points westward rather than northerly in goldsmithing and craft. Many Borneo artifacts, such as the Sambas *buddhas* or the Limbang ring, show Javanese origins; and more remotely the line leads towards India, not China. Tantric influences also play a part, evident in the Bongkizam shrine and the keris handle from Balingian, as well as outside Borneo. Here again there is a link with what Schnitger for Indonesia has called "megalithic tantricism" (see p. 183 above).

In all this the gold story differs very markedly from that of iron, which though developing late "caught on" and became a major skill up into the remote uplands too. Gold barely entered into upland life at all, even as a value import or status symbol -- whereas, all over the interior, very much more difficult, bulky and tasteful outside goods were brought in on human backs over the mountain ranges for centuries: the big Chinese and later Siamese ("Sawankhalok") jars, fine great brass gongs audible for miles, hundreds of thousands of glass and carnelian beads (many close to those found at Jaong).

CHAPTER 28

"THE MEGALITHIC MAKERS": WHO, WHEN?

Monumental work in stone has always impressed the western mind--perhaps more, at times, than the eastern. When seen in what is supposed to be a "primitive" context, western minds can find it difficult to visualize such efforts as local. They are commonly regarded as having come upon allegedly simple people from "outside." There is, of course, no doubt that a distinct, fairly orderly diffusion of certain megalithic features--such as the "passage graves" of northern Europe, for instance--did take place, in this case beginning well before 2500 B.C. But this is not quite the same as separating megalithic traits from the rest of the culture in any sense of persons carrying such ideas and techniques, at least in the maze of multidivergent impacts operative in island and economic Southeast Asia. It is not easy to follow up, east of the Straits of Malacca, the thinking so appropriately put for the west by Glyn Daniel:

. . . megalithic tombs were being built and used in western Europe from perhaps 3500 to 1000 B.C. This should not surprise us; our own Christian burial custom of inhumation in a flat grave has lasted for two thousand years. It does suggest however that the role of *the megalithic builders* in areas like western France, Ireland, and northern Scotland, for example, may be more important than we had hitherto thought. (*The Megalithic Builders of Western Europe*, Baltimore, 1963: 145.)

Unless we artificially isolate work in (large) stone as a single criterion of these insular Asian cultures, we can see no people who came into and spread out through the archipelago conceivably identifiable as "megalithic builders." All sorts of people did it in all sorts of ways, upon little islands, on the accessible coastlands and in the interior of some of the wildest terrain in the world. They did it, too--so far as we can judge from what has survived--as the integral substance of rituals, customs, observances, which varied over a huge spectrum of thought and belief (if we may separate these nouns somewhat arbitrarily to make the point here). Sometimes, the megalithic acts as such were quite secondary side-functions of other activities, as in Kadazan Sabah; at other times they were quintessential, to climax the most elaborate socio-economic and spiritual operations, as on Nias. But nowhere can we see any monuments of "megalithic builders" coming and introducing new ways, as some major new innovation in its own right. This is

not to say such movements could not, did not occur; only that there is no proof of them, and that such evidence as exists points rather to a much more subtle, oblique and even random spread of ideas, island to island or valley to valley, over long periods of time and quite eccentrically; from no one direction; and in all cases heavily affected by the existing culture receiving the message (and frequently ignoring it as unfit or modifying out of recognition as inadequate).

It is clear, too, from all that has gone before in this study that there is no *evidence* for any appreciable megalithic in Southeast Asia at anywhere near the early dates for Europe and elsewhere. No megalithic structure in our area is as yet substantiated as earlier than the start of the Christian era. The great part are decidedly later than that. Many of the main and best known activities at least in Borneo belong--in so far as they now appear--to date much later than that, a good deal of it after 800-1000 A.D. Up to a point the Sarawak River delta indirectly lends some support to the general "lateness" of this island megalithic, in so far as these expressions of the approach are relatively "simple," from the *strictly* megalithic point of view: that is, the use of stone is not structurally elaborate, as in the aforesaid "passage graves" for example. Rather the delta stone is taken as part of the living environment, molded out of and back into the human habitat, changing the face (and pace) but not re-landscaping the whole with new, placed, monumental efforts which we reach only with the upland Kelabits *parapun* piles crowned with dolmens, or *nabang* ditches diverting rivers and cutting mountain ridges.

It would be absurd, at this stage, to suppose that there was *no* early megalithic in Borneo. But there is certainly not one strong implication of any pre-metallic megalithic on the great island at this time. This is not a trivial matter. If further study confirms the presently implied time-pattern, it raises further doubts about the widely accepted hypotheses of Heine-Geldern and others, who have pre-supposed that "older" megalithic element occurred in the stone age, and so on.

On the other hand, it would reasonably be argued that it is certainly very odd if no early elements did enter the area early on, in view of megalithic origins in surrounding lands long before.

However, it took Islam eight centuries to reach West Borneo, Christianity fifteen, Colonialism three. This also raises another question: how much have the megalithics discussed in this Data Paper evolved *entirely* independently? After all, it takes no great genius to place a stone upright as a memorial menhir marker for all to see; or to balance one boulder on several others to get a splendid dolmen which also serves as a

waterproof shelter for human remains. On the face of it, the evidence taken *as it stands* (without allowance for other factors shows so erratic a distribution that it would be easy to believe that the remote Kelabit group, for example, did evolve their intricate system for themselves. For days and days of dreadfully severe walking--and there was no other way before 1945--their is the only concern with living, dying stone in all upland Borneo.

Stretching a point, it may seem plausible for Dr. Loofs-- who has thought as much on this as anyone living--to try and explain mountain Luzon's megaliths by some direct diffusion from Vietnam (see our Notes, III, 82, 84). But whence can we similarly trace mountainous Borneo's, far more inaccessible and isolated? And if, say, we look to South Sumatra (a fiercesome journey), what happened in between? Could not big works be *wholly* lost all along the way? And whence Sumatra's, for that matter?

Certainly no outsiders came up and taught the Kelabits how to megalith. Whenever they got the *idea*, they developed it, rightly and deeply, for themselves, as part of the natural, zestful, explosive upland way of living. No one at all brought gold--or even the news of it, to be retained in folklore--to the same and other remote peoples, whereas their cousin Dayaks of the lowlands, such as the Iban (Sea Dayaks) became highly interested, sometimes (like the Malohs) skilled too.

It is thus no coincidence--in the particular context of this study--that the story of gold runs fairly closely in parallel with the story of megaloid (and miniroid) stone in and around West Borneo. Again, there is no clear evidence of great antiquity. Again, indications rather persistently point to major developments well inside the Christian era, and increasingly well on into the second millennium A.D. Again, the early activity with gold, whether mining it or working it for use, began with a simple respect and only developed what may for lack of a better term be called "sophistication" in any form in or after the *twelfth century*

These are some of the problems and questions that remain for further consideration, and necessarily. Unfortunately, megaliths have widely been lost in the jungle or moved and re-used by man, while gold has attracted looting, reworking and interference to the largest extent. But once more, only orderly and fully controlled excavation can explore the ideas here offered, testing their validity in depth. We may be consoled that even in western Europe the same difficulties exist. To quote Dr. Daniel once more:

The megalithic builders surely formed a most important, as well as a most exciting, element in the early history of western Europe. It is at once the fascination and the frustration of prehistoric archaeology that what we can say about them is so full of doubts and disputeso (Glyn Daniel, 1963: 141)

CHAPTER 29

MICRO-MEGALITHIC SIGNIFICANCE

In putting forward (in Chapters III.23 to 26) a new and somewhat difficult term, "micro-megalithic," we have been impelled by the need to categorize an aspect of specifically "megalithic" activity (within the definitions of Heine Geldern, Loofs, van Heekeren and many others), which has been underestimated. Yet the presence of large numbers of "pebbles" and/or "stones" (as defined in III.23), may add up to a much bigger work in stone than the erection of a menhir. And the impulses, incentives and correlated procedures may be identical in multiplying the small by thousands, as in emphasizing the large one singly. In some Kelabit *parapung* the two procedures are intimately wedded, the micro-many crowned with the mega-few.

The Jaong pebble-beds with their gold leaf foil linked to the petroglyphs and massive iron-working there before 1200 A.D. shade into the fourteenth century climax at Bongkissam, with its more developed gold inside the Tantric Shrine, embedded in another context of massive ironworking. We have suggested that this pebble-and-stone evolution, with or without larger rocks as full megaliths, has affinities with quite separate occurrence in the transition to Hinduism on Bali and Java. It is also implied that once we take big and small as in some ways interchangeable or equivalent, just as wood and stone are interchangeable at Kota Kinabalu, then many other forms have to be treated as part of this outlook--the terraces and platforms of montane Luzon, for instance, over which Dr. Loofs and others have expressed mega-doubts. Moreover, one of us has just spent three months in the islands of the South Pacific, and found the concept valid there too.

The possible uses of pebbles and stones is, of course, numerous. One suspects that at Jaong they made some sort of layer in or relevant to death rites. But many other roles are likely, consistent with the great diversity and elasticity which the megalithic excites in a land like Borneo.

We can see a continuing range of pebble, stone and rock in the Bali temples so striking in the holy stone-seats and terraces, but extended out into the same structures as secular seats in daily use on pebble-and-stone platforms and walls set among similar house platforms and stairways of stones so abundant around Gelgel in southeast Bali. At the other end of Southeast Asia, the same atmosphere is noticeable in Assam, where Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf describes "Pre-Buddhist

elements in Sherpa belief and ritual,' and how these are carried over into later observance--for instance, to gain merit in the Buddhist sense:

While it is thought that even the poorest man can obtain merit . . . by the circumambulation of *gumba* and *mani* walls. . . . Among such meritorious acts is the construction of the so-called *mani* walls, rough stone structures built along a path and containing upright stone slabs, which bear incised inscriptions of . . . sacred formulae . . . they [the walls] are often combined with stone platforms, built for the comfort of travellers carrying loads . . . *mani* walls are usually set up in memory of a deceased kinsman . . . new sections are added to commemorate other members of the family. (*Manq* 55, 1955: 51)

If we had to pick out one point which stays in the mind as "characteristic" of the micro-megalithic as such, it would be built into this size factor. At this level every individual, strong or weak, rich or poor, as part of a community yet as an individual can contribute--from little child to blind great-grandfather--recapitulating the wholeness and integrity of the community as well as the vitality of the individual. The pebble identifies a very personal, simple participation physically impossible with the rock. For the rest, we ask the reader to take the text on its merits, whatever these may be judged to be; and certainly with no personal claim for anything above the level of the tentative, the micro-theoretical. . . .

CHAPTER 30

THE FEAR OF STONE

One important aspect of Borneo thinking--linked to both stone and gold--has hardly been touched on in the preceding pages: petrification. This and the fear of it are widespread and fundamental over large parts of the island, both in the folk lore past and in the intellectual present.

Put at its simplest, the idea is that man can be turned into stone, petrified, for some transgression and in a matter of minutes. Out of a clear sky swoops a great storm, probably with floods and/or hail ("stone rain"), to strike flesh to rock with the aid of lightning--and stone tools, when found, are everywhere reported as "lightning teeth" or "the teeth of thunder." Moreover, the wrong done by one person may lead to the whole community being thus punished geologically.

The commonest causes of petrification are ridiculing or humiliating animals (especially dressing them up as humans or making them do human work); being socially unkind to widows with little children; and incest. More subtly, petrification is part of a broader concept by which the whole community in its total ecosystem can be endangered by "becoming cold"--or at the other extreme "too hot"--owing to the neglect of proper behavior codes, especially due observances of respect to the spirits and the gods. This concept is particularly developed among the Kadazans (= Dusuns) in Sabah and the Kelabits in Sarawak, both megalithic people.

Many of the striking peaks, hillocks and rocks inside Borneo are explained in local terms as petrified longhouses, people, domestic animals and so on. Caves are commonly thought of in parallel. There are many folk tales of persons imprisoned alive inside petrified houses. The only antidote to this dire threat is by filling the doorway with an ancient stoneware jar; that alone can resist petrification, being broken after the storm passes to let those inside out.

Nor is this idea confined to the pagans inland. Although Islam has reduced or removed the actual fear of being turned into stone, local Moslem lore is full of stories where *animals* became petrified. Thus, for example, one version of the cock-fight contest between Javan and Brunei princes led to a settlement including 40 goldsmiths in the fee (II.15.d, last quotation). In another passage, the defeated Javan cock turned spur and flew, landing on an islet at the mouth of the Brunei River,

where it turned instantly to stone. Impressive in this too, is the saga of the stone dragon, at times golden scaled, which links Brunei to Santubong, where its head now stands guard at the mouth of the latter river as does the cock of the former (cf. III.24.f and Plate 45).

In this way, natural rocks and formations unmoved or untouched by man can be a sort of macro-megalithic extension of the same ideology which covers dolmen and pebble-bed. This thinking assigns a role to stone as a living matter, which can evolve from man and animals, in something of the same fashion as the ancient Chinese belief that gold was the end chain of a long series of changes beginning in stone. Indeed in Borneo there are beliefs that stone itself ages in an animal way. Recently in Brunei a Kadayan headman explained the difficulties the Public Works Department has with finding hard rock-fill for roads in the state, because "our stone is not old enough yet."

In this sense, the eminent French scholar Paul Levy may have been right in seeing the rocks of Chapa in Vietnam as part of a megalithic culture, though Dr. Loofs has concluded that "they cannot be considered an element of the megalithic complex" (Loofs, 1967: 176). Loofs himself, in 1961, concluded the Moi of Vietnam had a megalithic, but in 1963 withdrew his earlier description of a "possible megalithic monument" when he learned on subsequent information, that it was "only a natural rock formation" (Loofs: 177-8). Perhaps he withdrew too readily?

In the same spirit, W. van Bekkun in 1944 reported megaliths in the island of Flores which the local people said were petrifications. He did not "believe" them; and Loofs summarizes: "it is still an unsolved riddle" (Loofs: 435). Or again, A. C. Kruyt has reported "beliefs and legends" about human beings changed to stone among the actively megalithic people of Sumba (*Bijdragen*, 78, 1922: 466-608, an important paper).

It might be wise to extend the already capacious term megalithic to include rock formations which to a geologist have got *into* position through "natural causes," whereas to those living with them they are as much a part of *human* experience as any dolmen, terraced temple or piece of mined, worked gold. The megalithic cannot be successfully treated in isolation as a physically restricted set of acts out of context, in Southeast Asia.

CHAPTER 31

OTHER POINTS

i. Stone Birth

As well as many ideas of turning (by dying) into natural stone and the close linkage between megalithic activity and death rites, there are frequent beliefs about birth from stone in Borneo--mostly that a seed or egg contains or becomes a small pebble. Such stones are given the highest value by most Dayak peoples and can seldom be examined by outsiders. Those seen by T.H. over the years have all been tiny, usually black (andesite, etc.) pebbles, several resembling small touchstones (II.20). The finder was usually led to a spot in a dream. The association is usually with rice grains or hen's eggs, from which the pebble developed as a form of seed growth.

Almost everywhere in Borneo these found pebbles are thought to bring great good fortune, especially in improving rice harvests. The concept extends to other lands, of course, and was encountered in this study as far afield as Annam (Vietnam). At Hue there is a powerful cult of stone, boundary stones, shrines of natural stones, mounds of small stones, on the "natural" side of magical stones, incantation stones (*pierres de conjuration*) and talismans, without any of the "normal" megalithic evidences such as menhir, dolmen, cromlech cist. One aristocratic Hue family owns a small black pebble, the shape of half a pigeon's egg, in which resides the good fortune of the family. Onto the concave side chicken blood is poured; then the stone is rubbed with a golden ingot, which loads the pebble with enormous power, which is definitely thought of as alive, from the living pebble (L. M. Cadière, *B.E.F.E.O.*, 19, 1919: 5).

ii. Sex in Stone and Gold

There are strong manifestations of a sexual symbolism near the heart of the Jaong delta petroglyphs and cut rocks as well as in the numerous small shaped cut stones, carnelian faceted beads and other items there as earlier discussed. The emphasis is often feminine, at Jaong--and even the cut-breach leaf-foil in gold could be seen not only as an eye-slit to mask the dead, but also as formalized female pudenda.

At the later Bongkizam stage, the *lingga* in the silver box which is at the core of the Tantric Shrine of the fourteenth

century, is of shining gold. There is no doubt about the penis metaphor here. It is repeated, almost blatantly, in the model golden phallus, *glans* incised, as item noo 0/12 in the Limbang Hoard from Brunei Bay (*B.M.J.e*, 1, 1969: Plate XXXIIa), with similar thirteenth century indications.

Although this aspect has not been emphasized here, we believe it underlies a good deal of the golden and megalithic material here described, and look forward to analysis along those lines when more data is at hand.

iii. Golden Color

The color of gold has always been important, if Borneo folklore is any indicator. And considerable ingenuity has been exercised in strengthening, often reddening, the "natural" color in some parts of the region. The concept of yellowness is widely significant here, in later times especially associated with high social status. This matter deserves fuller study in Southeast Asia. (See also especially Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Cambridge, 1959: 642.)

iv. Feasts of Merit

At several significant points in this study megalithic activity in general and micro-megalithic activity in particular have been seen to be intimately (and inextricably) linked with what anthropologists often call "Feasts of Merit," festivals in which perishables are consumed, objects exchanged and much else, partly or wholly, to establish, advance, or otherwise influence the position of individuals and kin-groups in the community, both in temporal terms of everyday life and in a spiritual metaphor. In at least one case, Nias, golden jewelry is at the apex of the value symbolism implied in the festival, in a sense representing the highest value for which old stoneware jars, ancient glass beads and other previous imperishables serve as equivalents among goldless peoples such as the Kelabits of central Borneo.

By the very nature of the material, it is now nearly always difficult and usually impossible to relate megaliths (micro or macro) and/or gold artifacts to the rituals and other activities which were associated with their past preparation and use or exchange. We shall never know exactly what *happened* among the petroglyphs or upon the pebble-beds of Jaong, though the "tantric" tones do provide some more familiar clues at the Bongkisam shrine as on Balio. There is much to suggest that, regardless

of background, such feasts of merit or something of their sort-- especially associated with ensuring status in and a successful after life--were frequently if not always part (not necessarily all) in the complex whole of this pattern. Certainly there is nowhere any sign that either megalithic activity or gold use were considered casual, flippant or purely personal, private experiences--except in the sense (an important one) that, for example, the contribution of your pebble to the Kelabit *parapun* stone heap as upon the roadside stone pile in Indo-China is a highly personal way of fitting the self into a much greater life exercise.

Gold, as General de Gaulle emphatically supposed, is "unchangingi" So, in a way, is stone. Herein lies immortal promise of life-death-life! Cut-breach gold-leaf foil upon the last-closed eyes, a stone above the head, are two of many answers to the mortal dilemma, and to the fear of dying without status, of losing life's gains through death. The micro-megalithic terrace or the solid boulder menhir can be among the strongest assurances that your life cycle will not be soon forgotten. Gold, experience shows, is more often liable to be removed, stolen, re-used--though this can and does happen to destroy megalithic places only too soon.

It remains striking that the Kelabits living in the quite tiny upland zone in Borneo which still has in this century a major megalithic activity always associate this with the most elaborate feasts of merit, called *irau*. *Irau* normally relate to death rites, especially to the secondary treatment of "primary burials (cf. III.17.c), though they can also be held on other special occasions in the life cycle, such as the birth of a son to a leading citizen. In all cases, they involve elaborate economic exchanges centered around the consumption of wealth in the form of buffalos, domestic pigs, salt, rice and much else, at expense to the feast sponsors--and principally to one or more families establishing or maintaining socio-economic status (and ascendancy) in the process. To go into the very complex, rich structure of *irau* would lead us too far afield here. A brief general account is included in *World Within*, 1959 (already cited and much else remains in note form to be published. Suffice it to stress, at this stage, that no sort of megalithic or equivalent can ever have been made, placed or even considered among the Kelabits except as part of parcel of the *irau*--itself essentially, integrally, linked with the journey of life and death, and with the great importance of identifying status (and protecting it) all along the way.

Dr. Loofs has adequately emphasized in other countries the link between megalith and merit feast (1967) as also has H. E. van Heekeren (*The Bronze-Iron Age of Indonesia*, 1959: 62).

v. Irrigation and Iron

Two of the great changes in Borneo life came with the advent of iron technology (H.O.: 318, etc.) and with the development of irrigation and then especially the irrigation of rice. Wet rice cuts down greatly on the effects and shifts involved in slash-and-burn agriculture. Both are found in close association with gold and megalithic interests in Borneo and through Southeast Asia. We have already indicated this for gold at several points and should now add a little more emphasis on the irrigation side.

The frequency with which megaliths go with irrigated rice can hardly be accidental. The two places in Borneo where large-scale megaliths have persisted in use into this century are the richest irrigated rice plains on the west coast of Sabah and the most highly organized irrigated rice anywhere in the interior, on the Plain of Bah. It may well be that there was a similar correlation centuries ago in the Sarawak River delta, where rice irrigation is active a little way upstream from Jaong on the Batu creek now. The correlation is also pronounced in Bali and Java on terrain equivalent to the Sabah Kadazan's, and again inside Luzon's equivalent to the Kelabit uplands (for instance). The association has, of course, been discussed by our predecessors. Here we would emphasize especially the specific treatment of irrigation and other cut ditches as "megalithic activity" among the Kelabits today (II.17.c)a