

GOLD AND MEGALITHIC ACTIVITY
IN PREHISTORIC AND RECENT WEST BORNEO

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GOLD AND MEGALITHIC ACTIVITY
IN PREHISTORIC AND RECENT WEST BORNEO

by

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"If golde ruste, what shall iren do?"

Chaucer, ca. 1400 A.D.

PREFACE

This is our second study of prehistoric and ethno-historic metals in Borneo and of their complex associations, extended from but based on the Sarawak Museum excavations carried through by one of us while Curator there (1947-1966), supported by a joint intensive field round-up season (1966) and subsequently extensive indoor and library research at Cornell University (1967-1969). In the first study* we examined the story of prehistoric iron in detail against this background, showing the tremendous scale of the industry and its importance in the web of complex trade and outside impact. The present study takes on from there, for a metal not so fundamental for human technological change although it has received much more attention than its base cousin (Part II of this text).

In this case we have followed the golden trail onto stoney ground, and now put forward somewhat unexpected connections between the crafts of gold, iron and the prehistoric megalithic activities which strikingly characterize Sungei Jaong, oldest of the delta sites, as well as two living cultures of Borneo--the remote upland Kelabits and the Dusuns around Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, far to the north. The connecting link here is the riverine or seashore pebble, micro-sibling of much in Southeast Asia megalithic rites. We consider this so important that in the third part of the text (III) a new term is suggested: the micro-megalithic (Chapter III.23 for definition). This also raises questions about the sequential role of megalithic activity and its links with metallurgy in Borneo and surrounding lands (Chapters 24 on).

Gold and iron prove to be more intimately linked together in Borneo than one had supposed; and much of the gold activity, from mining through smithing to jewellery, is comparatively recent upon this ethno-prehistoric time scale. The implications of this could be important for an understanding of developmental sequences and other movements into and through the area--and these are therefore mildly pursued in the present text, too, although this is a data paper and not the place for wide theoretical discussions.

* *Excavations of the Prehistoric Iron Industry in West Borneo*, Cornell University (Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper No. 72), Ithaca, New York, 1969. Hereafter referred to as H.O. (Harrisson and O'Connor), with page reference, thus: H.O.: 72; Vol. I runs to page 222, Vol. II from page 223 through 412.

We cordially thank the present Curator of the Sarawak Museum, Mr. Benedict Sandin, and his staff, especially Mr. Lucas Chin, Mr. Stephen Ingai and Che Junaidi bin Bolhassan, for their cooperation from that end, which has made continuation of these studies pleasurable as well as practicable. Mrs. Maureen Liebl at Cornell, with this as with the previous Data Paper, has rendered much help both in researching the literature and with the manuscript at all stages; and Miss Selene Fung has made some excellent drawings, as she did with all the illustrations in the previous monograph (H.O.). We are beholden, too, to H. H. E. Loofs at the Centre of Oriental Studies, Australian National University, both for his personal interest and for his invaluable annotated bibliography, *Elements of the Megalithic Complex in Southeast Asia* (Canberra, 1967), which pinpoints main sources throughout the area, thus saving hours and days of fruitless library research. Dr. Loofs is not at all responsible for or even hitherto aware of our micro-formulation, however.

Thanks are equally due to Mr. Timothy Green, distinguished English writer, who loaned us a helpful survey of golden history which he did not use in his authoritative recent book, *The World of Gold* (London, New York, 1968), as well as for other help.

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Credits

1. Courtesy Dr. Cheng Te-K'un, Cambridge University.
- 2-6. Drawn by Che Abdul Aziz bin Jahaya, while working with the Sarawak Museum on secondment from Kuala Lumpur in 1962; he is presently a graduate student in Anthropology at Cornell University.
- 7-14. Drawn by Mr. Joseph Ingai of the Sarawak Museum while working with us in 1966.
- 15-19. Drawn by Miss Selene Fung (who also did the illustrations for the previous Data Paper in this series [H.O.]).
- 20-54. Variously by Che Junaidi bin Bolhassan, Barbara Harrisson or T.H., negatives all in the Sarawak Museum.
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