THE KETTLEDRUMS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

MODERN QUATERNARY RESEARCH IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Author's preface and acknowledgements

Most books whose preparation in their successive stages has taken a considerable time to accomplish have gone through a kind of process which sooner or later develops into a 'personal narrative' in its own right and should be accounted for specifically. It cannot be dispatched by simply referring to the visible results of the author's efforts to achieve a straightforward and lonesome task. The more time it has taken the author to find his way through an ever growing maze of facts and queries, the more important may have become the successive changes in the situations that he and his forthcoming book had to face. On the other hand, whereas the lengthy bibliographies and notes amply reveal the written sources from which the author derived most of his information, far less is to be found of the names and faces of those who guided him in his rambles, either by means of substantial help or of some casual remark or stimulating word which in due course proved to be a turning-point in what had ended up in being a deadlock of sorts. This was exactly what happened to the present author of the 'kettledrum book' and the book itself on their way to their shared 'personal narrative' to be briefly sketched as an essential element in the genesis of the present volume. It may also present the explanation for the author's preference for certain specific subjects and their arrangement. There is, for instance, the recurrent emphasis on the Indonesian archipelago as a starting-point of the author's studies as a result of his being a Dutchman, which easily accounts for Indonesian and colonial focalization. There is also his being attracted by matters of the drums' decoration, which ask for analyses. There is also - most essential wherever it turns up - a tendency towards a holistic approach, stressing certain all-in-underlying principles of the Southeast Asian metalworkers, like their natural pursuit of 'solidity' with regard to their all-in-one made creations, which seem closely related to their ideas of Oneness and 'Totality'. Stressing such features, the interest for which the author's approach is consonant with that of some of his writings on Indonesian 'classic' archaeology (formerly usually styled 'Indo-Javanese' or in similar terms) or taken from Indonesian ethnology, has doubtless resulted in a loss of ground in other aspects - which should be regretted, but with the data available for the present cannot easily be changed. I am thinking, for instance, of matters like chronology, which had to be dealt with in a superficial way. Far from being an all-round handbook on Bronze Age metalwork or simply on kettledrum
problems, my book avowedly bears the characteristics of a personal approach as it was developed through the years.

To trace my personal narrative – and consequently also that of the present volume – back to its first beginnings let us revert to the early years of the 1930s. In Chapter 2 there will be a survey of the earlier history of kettledrum studies, leading up to the pioneer works by Heger, Parmentier, Goloubew and a few others, which contained references to metal drums from mainland Southeast Asia side by side with similar specimens known from its insular counterpart, the Indonesian archipelago. There were certain Dutch students of the subject: the painter W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp, who was the first to describe and illustrate in detail the so far rather mysterious Pejeng ‘Moon’ (3.01+ in the terminology of the present volume), and – a very different type of man, a judge by profession – J.G. Huysen, who made Indonesian metalwork his special interest. I knew Huysen rather well and some time later he asked me to describe his collection of old Javanese bronzes. Nieuwenkamp I met only twice, once in 1928 in Germany and once during one of his last visits to Indonesia in the late 1930s. At that time I was most interested in his earlier discoveries in Bali; his name, however, will frequently appear in the present volume, with regard to the Pejeng ‘Moon’ as well as the Alor mokos (Chapters 19 and 21). The third man who clearly showed interest in the ‘Dongsonian’ kettledrums was A.N.J. Th. a Th. van der Hoop, who as a former flight-lieutenant and KLM pilot had won fame by having conducted the audacious first flight from Holland to the Netherlands Indies in 1925. After that he turned to the study of geography, ethnology and prehistory, to be concluded by a private expedition to South Sumatra, in order to investigate the intriguing megalithic sculptures in the Pasemah plateau (Chapters 2.1.3: 1931 and 13.5.1a). One of his most spectacular revelations was his discovery that there was a close connection between the sculptures and the – as Heine-Geldern at the same time started calling them ‘Dongsonian’ – Bronze Age. His most striking argument in the case were the two warriors depicted on the previously never correctly interpreted ‘Elephant Stone’ (Batugajah; 1.04+), each of them carrying a kettledrum on a strap over his shoulder. Van der Hoop amply discussed the subject in his important doctoral thesis on ‘Megalithic remains in South-Sumatra’ (1932). Reading and reviewing this book and hearing the author reporting on his findings in the former Colonial Institute at Amsterdam shortly after his getting his doctorate must have been my first connection with the kettledrums from Indonesia, for the time being through Van der Hoop’s illustrations and slides. My own doctoral thesis dealt with a different type of Southeast Asian bronzes: ‘The bronzes of Nalanda and Hindu-Javanese art’ (1933). At that time the Indies were still in the middle of the economic crisis of the early 1930s and archaeologists were as badly hit as all other people looking for jobs out in the East (see Mod. Quaternary Res. SE Asia 7: 1-23). Those who were able to find their way to the Indies off their own bat sooner or later booked success. Thus, Van der Hoop, who went to Batavia in 1934 after some time got himself appointed keeper of three sections of the Batavia Museum, one of which was the prehistoric collection, shortly beforehand founded and organized by P.V. van Stein Callenfels, archaeologist.
and prehistorian of international fame, not to mention his other legendary qualities (briefly sketched in Mod. Quaternary Res. SE Asia 7, see above). In the course of the last years of his life – he died in 1938, some time after a congress in Singapore where he reported on the kettledrums of the archipelago – Callenfels occasionally visited the Batavia Museum, where I had the opportunity to make his acquaintance. At that time there was no reason to discuss kettledrums in my presence, although the collection had been growing immensely in the last few years. The appearance of some of Callenfels' photographs of metal drums in my documentary collection I owe to the kindness of Professor von Koenigswald, who lent me the negatives he had received from his friend Callenfels some long time ago.

At the time of Van der Hoop's discovery of the Butugajah warriors (4.01+; or should we interpret the scene as one single man duplicated on either side of the stone?) the existence of kettledrums in the archipelago was already a well-known fact. The Batavia Museum contained several avowedly prehistoric bronze objects, for the time being spread over separate sections, that early in the 1930s became assembled in the newly created prehistoric collection. In comparison with the later 'battery' of enormous metal drums the earlier assortment of fragmentary kettles and tympan could not rival the show-pieces in the Tonkin Museum that became well advertised around 1930: Ngoc Lu (11.30+ in the terminology and illustrations of the present volume), Laos (12.01+), and in a later stage Hoàng Ha (11.20+), not to speak of other famous specimens like 'Moulié' (11.28+; temporarily reported to have vanished after having been shown at a World Exhibition in 1889, only to return after sixty years and now in the Musée Guimet in Paris) or the Vienna drum (11.47+). The modest assortment of metal drums and fragments in their equally modest accommodation in a far corner of the Batavia Museum (now the same location in the National Museum) formed part of the Prehistory department taken over by Van der Hoop as successor to Van Stein Callenfels, in one of the latter's functions. Similarly this situation conditioned my own impressions of the archipelago's kettledrums when, in 1935, I paid a reconnoitring visit to the then Netherlands Indies and when, in 1936, I came back to take up office as librarian of the same Batavia Museum, where Van der Hoop was starting his manifold tasks. The curatorship of the archaeological (mainly 'Indo-Javanese') section was an additional function of the director of the Archaeological Service in the Netherlands Indies, at that time W.F. Stutterheim. This indeed was a highly workable arrangement, because in this way all of the archaeological discoveries (including the prehistoric ones) that were reported to the Archaeological Service smoothly reached the Batavia Museum via the said director of archaeology. Nowadays the situation is very different since archaeological research and the display of finds has been decentralized and spread over the National Research Centre (Pas Lit Arkenas), the Directorate for the protection of monuments and its branches, the Provinces and Daerahs which prefer to possess local and regional museums of their own instead of the single central museum for all purposes in faraway Jakarta.

In the 1930s it must have been a reason of satisfaction to Van der Hoop that it was under his curatorship of the Prehistoric collection that the major