EARLY SOUTH EAST ASIA

ESSAYS IN ARCHAEOLOGY, HISTORY AND HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

EDITED BY

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PREFACE

In the past fifteen years the study of the archaeology of South East Asia has made great strides. By comparison with the situation that existed in the 1950s, it is now possible to discern the beginnings of a new framework of chronology and cultural development within which it will eventually be possible to arrive at a complete re-assessment of the early development of the whole region. Many of the papers in the present volume insist that the subject is still in its infancy, that a great deal of research remains to be done. Nevertheless, enough progress has been made by now to justify a new survey of the later prehistory and early history of the region, in terms which will at least remove old misunderstandings and suggest new starting-points. It is not to undervalue the work of such major scholars as Coedes, Heine-Geldern or Van Heekeren, to suggest that there is need to re-examine their pioneer interpretations—many of which were avowedly speculative but which have subsequently become accepted as 'established'. It is a measure of the significance of the new research that practically all the accounts of early South East Asia appearing in the introductory chapters of textbooks on the region are now hopelessly out of date.

It is the object of the present volume to remedy this deficiency by collecting together a series of papers on major aspects of the subject which have been affected by recent research, and to present the conclusions that have so far emerged from the excavations of new sites and the pursuit of new lines of enquiry. It is in the nature of the subject that there should be contributions from a wide range of authors. In the present state of knowledge, no one specialist could claim sufficient direct experience of all the research involved to be able to produce an up-to-date synthesis on his own. The papers are, for the most part, those submitted to a Colloquy on Early South East Asia held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, in September 1973. The object of the Colloquy was to bring together specialists in the field in order to discuss the results of recent research and to try to reconcile some of the differences of opinion to which the interpretation of that research has given rise. It would be going too far to claim that the discussions resulted in a final settlement of the many points of controversy which have been raised during the past decade. But all agreed that a new perspective is required. From the collection of papers as a whole, it is believed that a new perspective does in fact emerge.

South East Asia is a region which has tended in the past to be treated as merely a meeting-point of cultural influences derived from neighbouring parts
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of the world: as a southward extension of East Asia or as an eastward extension of ‘India’. This tendency has been especially marked in relation to periods before about 1000 A.D. for which the principal written source materials are in Chinese, in Sanskrit, or at least in scripts derived from ancient India. It has been reinforced by the fact that such materials are accessible only to scholars proficient in either Chinese or Sanskrit, many of whom have been primarily specialists on the countries to which those languages belong. The importance of Indian cultural influence in the region as a whole, and of Chinese influence in certain areas, is not to be denied. But there is room now for an interpretation which will place rather less emphasis on that influence, and rather more on the continuity of cultural development within South East Asia itself. It would be possible, after all, to insist that Western Europe too, in a comparable period of its early development, experienced profound cultural influences from Egypt and Mesopotamia, as well as from the Greek region: but no one pretends that Western Europe should for that reason be regarded as no more than a field for the reception of cultures derived from elsewhere. Why then should we not treat South East Asia as an equally autonomous region whose archaeological development can be seen in terms of its own prehistory, followed by the growth of its own distinctive civilization? Like Western Europe, South East Asia has its own character (which allows nevertheless for considerably cultural diversity within the region), and the time has come when its prehistory and early history can be presented in such a way as to allow the region a perspective of its own. Within this new perspective it is possible to see South East Asian civilization not as an alien implantation coming from India or from China, but as something which grew out of developed prehistoric cultures whose origins go back at least to the third millennium B.C. Some scholars, though not all, are of the opinion that South East Asia developed bronze metallurgy at an even earlier date than its first known occurrence in either India or China. Certainly the beginnings of ceramics and metallurgy in the lowland areas of the region must be traced back far beyond the period when, in the early centuries A.D. recognizably Indian or Chinese cultural influences began to appear there.

In this respect it might be said that the London Colloquy attempted to create a new balance in the study of early South East Asia, by bringing to bear the results of recent prehistoric research on the problems which have for so long been discussed by historians, historical geographers and epigraphists. The initial intention was to examine the periods of the first millennium B.C. and the first millennium A.D. and to explore the question of cultural continuity between the two. In order to consider the question how far the region—or certain parts of it—had progressed technologically and materially by 1000 B.C. it became necessary also to take into account evidence from certain sites whose early levels may well go back beyond 2000 B.C. For without necessarily reaching
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final decisions on the most controversial aspects of their chronology, the Colloquy established beyond doubt that the results from excavations at those sites have already transformed our ideas about the picture of the region as it was during the first millennium B.C. The recognition of this fact was our principal starting-point. It would be a mistake however, to suppose that the only revisions of old interpretations are to be sought in the prehistoric field. It is evident that new research on the epigraphy, art history and Chinese documentation concerning the first millennium A.D. will require a reassessment of that period too. The need to look at South East Asia in its own terms means that we must abandon old assumptions about the nature of states and other institutions in the earliest period of South East Asian history (or proto-history), and ask new questions about the origins of cities, states and other forms of organization and identity in the region. Whilst some of the papers in the later part of the book are concerned with re-examining the historical evidence, others attempt a more theoretical approach to these questions. Taken as a whole, the collection of papers will, it is hoped, open up new possibilities in the spheres of both research and interpretation.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, the initiative in these different areas of excavation was taken mainly by European and American archaeologists. In the past ten years, however, there has been a great upsurge in the development of archaeological work, including excavation, by South East Asian scholars. It was with great pleasure that the London Colloquy welcomed a number of these scholars, and contributions by them appear in the present volume. They represent a small part of the growing body of work by South East Asian archaeologists, some of whose results will appear from the bibliography, whilst others still await publication. It will be recognized that, as has long been the case with China and Japan, keeping pace with archaeological discovery in South East Asia will in future require that European and American specialists be familiar with the principal languages of the region.

The volume is divided into two parts, each with its own Introduction. Part I deals, in principle, with the later prehistory of South East Asia; Part II with the early history of the region, in the first millennium A.D. But inevitably there is some measure of overlap between them. Appendices at the end include a check-list of published Carbon-14 datings from South East Asia, and a list of bronze drums of Heger's Type I.

Some inconsistency in the spelling of place names will be noticed between one paper and another, since in some cases we have not challenged the variants preferred by our authors.

We express our gratitude to the School of Oriental and African Studies for meeting the cost of publication of this volume.

Although complete standardisation has not been possible throughout the book, the editors have made every effort to ensure that papers are printed as
submitted. However, owing to circumstances beyond their control, it is particularly regretted that it has not been possible to reproduce the Vietnamese national script correctly in Mr. Jeremy Davidson's papers.

R. B. Smith
W. Watson
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Introduction

I

The initial intention of the organizers of the London Colloquy was to consider principally the first millennium B.C. and the first millennium A.D., in the belief that a span of two thousand years would be sufficiently great to serve as a context for studying the problem of continuity between the prehistoric and early historic societies of the region. However, it is clear from the results of recent research in Thailand and elsewhere that no such chronological neatness is permissible in the present state of our knowledge. The Colloquy was to some extent successful in reducing the degree of controversy which has surrounded several of the excavations at South East Asian sites, but it cannot be denied that there are some questions which must remain open at the present time.

The question whether rice was first domesticated in South East Asia need not be raised here: there seems little doubt now that rice was being cultivated in both South East Asia and China well before 2000 B.C. Nor is it possible to settle finally the chronology of the first development of bronze metallurgy in the region. It is claimed, on the evidence of an increasing number of radiocarbon tests, that bronze was first cast in the north of Thailand at a hitherto unsuspected early date: possibly before 2000 B.C., with greater probability before 1000 B.C. This conclusion rests chiefly on the intensive study of a single site (that of Non Nok Tha—see the paper by Bayard) and is involved in complex problems of stratigraphy. Many will look to the similar study of comparable sites, the establishment of the evidence in extenso, before giving their assent to this revolutionary conclusion on the course of technological progress in an area once regarded as remote from the main highways of progress in Asia. But whatever conclusion the controversy may reach, and whatever precise dates may be established, the old view that the introduction of advanced bronze-working was in any sense an aspect of the Hinduisation of South East Asia, or took place only shortly before that process began, is now shown to be wholly mistaken. It is very likely that there were prehistoric contacts between India and the western parts of South East Asia, and between China and the eastern parts of the area, before the influence of Indian colonization and religion began to be felt. Even iron would appear to have been first used in the region, perhaps having spread there from India, several hundred years before we find the first evidence of Hinduism or Buddhism.
In the development of research into South East Asian prehistory, as in other parts of the world, it is possible to distinguish between two different approaches or tendencies each producing its own kind of contribution to the overall picture. One approach is centred upon the collection and analysis of individual finds, their types and distribution, whilst the other concentrates upon the sequences of cultures suggested by the excavation of specific sites. Both approaches are necessary, but either of them on its own must suffer from severe limitations. It is important to recognize that during the first half of the twentieth century, the picture of South East Asia which was presented by prehistorians was to a very large extent based upon only the first approach. It is true that there were a number of excavations during the 1920s and 1930s, but the majority of them were unskilled, undertaken by archaeologists more interested in recording finds than in establishing stratigraphy. Moreover a great many of the finds which entered into the work of comparative analysis were studied in museums, and their original provenance was often only very approximately known. With the development of more scientific excavation in South East Asia since the mid-1950s, some of the theories that were based only on the study of finds have come to be challenged.

At least three major ideas in the growth of South East Asian prehistory (down to the 1950s) can be seen to stem almost entirely from typological study of artefacts and their distribution:

(1) Heine-Geldern and others attached great importance to distinctions between three types of stone adze or axe: the ‘round’, the ‘shouldered’, and the ‘quadrangular’, whose distribution on the map must certainly have some significance for the overall pattern of neolithic cultures throughout East and South East Asia. But the time-scale involved would now seem to be much longer than was once thought, and the assumptions of the Kulturkreis philosophy of Heine-Geldern and his contemporaries of the German and Austrian Schools, whereby culture-movement is established from the distribution of a discrete set of important artefacts, are no longer acceptable to the majority of archaeologists and prehistorians. In this case especially, the notion that axe-types may be related to ethno-linguistic groups must be discarded, as a primary proposition. Heine-Geldern sought to use this distinction between axe-types to create a basic framework for the prehistory of the region: it is now clear that such an approach is far too simple, and those of his conclusions which depended upon it must be viewed with great scepticism. Likewise his attempt to distinguish between ‘older’ and ‘younger’ megalithic traditions finds no support in recent interpretations.

(2) The same generation of scholars produced a picture of the South East Asian Bronze Age which stemmed very largely from the study of bronze