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A CHECK-LIST OF "HOABINHIAN"
SITES EXCAVATED IN MALAYA
1860 — 1939

by

JOHN MATTHEWS
Curator of Federation Museums, Malaya

Published for the Department of History in the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur
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**KEY**

I.—Name of site  
II.—Site excavated by  
III.—Date of excavation  
IV.—Report published in  
V.—Location of site  
VI.—Nature of site  
VII.—Nature of deposit  
VIII.—Method of excavation  
IX.—Finds  
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   (b) **Palaëoliths**  
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   (f) **Grip-Marked Pounders**  
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XI.—References and Notes
KEY

1. BUKIT CHUPING, PERLIS.
2. GUA DEBU, GUA KELAWAR, GUA PULAI, PERAK.
3. GUA KAJANG, PERAK.
4. GUA KERBAU, PERAK.
5. GUA BAJIT, PERAK.
6. GUNONG CHEROH, IPOH.
7. GUA CHA (GUA MENTERI) KELANTAN.
8. GUA MADU, KELANTAN.
9. KOTA TONGKAT, PAHANG.
10. GUA TO' LONG, PAHANG.
11. BUKIT CHINTAMANI, PAHANG.
12. GUAK KEPAH, PROVINCE WELLESLEY.
13. BUKIT SAGU, BUKIT CHERAS, PAHANG.

SITES DESCRIBED.
INTRODUCTION

This is a check-list. All the facts published about "Hoabinhian" sites which have been excavated in Malaya are presented according to the key on page ix. "Hoabinhian" is an accepted name for cultures of the type described in this list; that it is a term that ignores significant differences rather than emphasises precise similarities will be apparent from the descriptions of the industries and assemblages.

The check-list is purely for reference: no attempt has been made to analyse the published facts; or to comment on them; or to present new hypotheses; or to evaluate existing theories. Where ever possible, the original text has been quoted; when this has not been practicable, then the substance of the published report has been presented so that the manner of the original is preserved.

It is interesting to note that all the cave and rock-shelter sites that have been excavated in Malaya and for which there are published accounts are included—with the exception of three places; Gua Musang and Gua Cha, both in Kelantan; and Keramat Pulai in Perak. M. W. F. Tweedie excavated a cave at Gua Musang, but the artefacts discovered all clearly belong to a neolithic stage. Gua Cha does appear in this list, but H. D. Noone's work in 1935 must now be seen as exploration in the light of G. de Sieveking's recent excavation.1 Unfortunately only the first part of Sieveking's report has been published; the next part is to describe the Hoabinhian assemblage from that site in detail.2 The excavation at Keramat Pulai in 1955 has only been mentioned in a note.a

The shell-midden site in Province Wellesley, Guak Kepah, has been included as P. V. van Stein Callenfels specifically mentioned that "Hoabinhian" artefacts were found there, but it would be interesting if this designation was critically examined.

The sites are arranged in the list chronologically, according to the date when they were excavated or examined. Names of the excavators are given, also the location of the site and the reference to the published report. Next is a description of the nature of the site, whether cave, or rock-shelter, or shell-midden; then the nature of the deposit is described in those cases where this information has been recorded. The method by which the excavation was executed has also been given when these details have been included in the published report.

2. Sieveking, op. cit., p.77.
“HOABINHIAN” SITES IN MALAYA

The artefacts and objects discovered by the excavators are described in order. First, chips, flakes and cores; next palaeoliths. “Palaeolith”, an undesirable term, is used because no other is quite suitable at the present time. “Pebble-tool” is a misnomer, as some of the artefacts are made on flakes; “flaked-tool” would be too easily confused with “flake-tool”; “hand axe” is probably functionally incorrect and has unfortunate associations with other industries. H. D. Collings has suggested a typology for a collection of “Hoabinhian” artefacts discovered near Kuantan in Pahang. But these stone tools were surface finds from a number of places, and Collings’s typology is not sufficiently catholic to be adopted for all Malayan sites in the check-list.

“Sumatra-type palaeoliths” are distinguished by Callenfels’s definition: tools “of elongated shape with one side chipped and the other in its original water-worn condition.” This type predominates in coastal sites which have been excavated in Sumatra.

“Edge-ground tools” are stone tools which have been ground at the edge or end, unlike polished neolithic tools where the polishing is not confined to the cutting edge. These tools have been called “neoliths”.

“Pounding stones” are pebbles, usually quartzite, which have bruises and marks to show that they have been used as hammers or pounders, perhaps as fabricators to chip and flake implements, or to crush haematite to make a red pigment. A pounding stone from a deposit at Bukit Chintamani was discovered to have pieces of bone adhering.

“Grip-marked pounding stones” are pounding stones which have one, or two opposed, depressions in a side or sides. The depressions seem usually to have been made with another stone by percussion. It has been suggested that the depressions have been made so that the stones can be held in the hand with a firm grip; but some of the stones, if gripped according to this suggestion, would be so unwieldy that some other explanation may be more appropriate.

“Grinding stones” are usually, but not exclusively, granite river-pebbles that have been used for grinding, so that in places they have been worn smooth by abrasion against another stone.

To grind with a grinding stone is impossible with one single stone; “grinding slabs” are flat pebbles, usually granite, which have smooth depressions on one or both sides which demonstrate that something has been ground on their surface.

INTRODUCTION

"Haematite", red iron ore, is common at these “Hoabinhian” sites. powdered haematite is a red pigment. Many of the grinding stones and slabs have been stained with haematite.

“Human remains” are the skeletal remains of humans.

“Food remains” are bones or shells which are present in the habitation deposits because they are the remains of animals which have been eaten.

Objects of shell and bone, implements or ornaments, are listed separately.

Pottery sherds have not been described in detail. It is very important to note that pottery is invariably found in these “Hoabinhian” deposits and is not always confined to the uppermost layers.

It has not been possible to illustrate the check-list. If the objects described have been illustrated, then reference to the plates and figures is given in a foot-note; all such notes refer to the original publication.

Archaeological techniques available to the prehistorian have been developed very considerably during the last twenty years. There would be no purpose served by belittling the efforts of those who have devoted much of their time and interests to the study of Malaya’s prehistory; but it is important to realise the exact nature of their excavations and their discoveries. Chronologies, absolute or relative, do not exist for these “Hoabinhian” sites. Collings has put forward an hypothesis for dating an industry found at Bukit Chuping in Perlis—but it is unsatisfactory and the only attempt that has been made. Typological classifications are rudimentary. The results of the examination of human bones from Malayan archaeological deposits are most severely limited by the inadequacy of the material which, up to the present decade, has been available for study.

Winstedt, quite legitimately, wrote in 1932 that to the “Hoabinhian civilisation have been attributed the institution of mother-right, the two class culture of Australia and the cultivation of yams—an attribution that would ascribe matriarchy (or more precisely mother-right) to the cave women”!

It is often held that the Malay Peninsula has been a land bridge holding a key position in the early southward migration of peoples. Palaeo-Melanesians and Australoides, Veddas and Negritos, some say, have all passed this way, many remaining to mingle with Duto-Malays from South China, where the Malay language was spoken seven thousand years ago. None of these hypotheses is really unpalatable, but it will be profitable to examine the archaeological facts given in this check-list and to consider whether they substantiate these suggestions.

"HOABINGHAN" SITES IN MALAYA

To the prehistorian, the primary interest of an object in a deposit, be it stone tool or pot-shear, bead or bone, shell artefact or domestic rubbish, ash or golden ornament, derives from the consideration of the object's position in the deposit and how it came to be there. A simple principle, but one too easily overlooked. Malaya is a large country, with a multitude of cave sites that have not been explored; many of these deposits, vital to the prehistory of the region, are being quarried for bat guano or agricultural fertilizers. The Malay Archipelago is a vast place; it would be reassuring to be able to think that now and in the near future prehistoric sites here would be carefully and scientifically excavated. Let it be hoped that such a thought is not unduly optimistic.
I.—Name of site: Guak Kepah.

II.—Site examined by G. W. Earl.

III.—Date of examination: 1860.


V.—Location of site: Lat. 5° 4’ 15”; Long. 100° 4’ 10”. On the left bank of the River Muda, four miles from the sea, Province Wellesley.

VI.—Nature of site: A shell midden, standing on the sandy ridge of an old sea beach.

VII.—Nature of deposit: “The mound consists of pure cockle shells, without the slightest admixture of other shells or any foreign matter, and it appears as if the fish had been taken out before the shells were thrown on the heap, where they now form a concrete which has to be broken with a pick-axe, owing to the partial crystalization of the edges causing the shells to adhere to each other.”

XI.—Finds: Haematite; water-worn quartz pebbles; fragmentary human bones and teeth.

The human remains were examined by F. W. Huxley, who wrote:—

“I regret that the state of my health . . . . I have been unable to draw up a detailed report. I regret this the less, however, as the very fragmentary condition of these remains would, under any circumstances, oblige me to speak with very great hesitation in giving an opinion respecting the races of mankind to which they belong.

. . . . bones belong to four distinct individuals at least.

. . . . there is no cranial fragment sufficiently large to enable me to form even an approximate judgment as to the contour or the capacity of the skull to which it belonged. Temporal bones all exhibit large auditory foramina, well developed mastoid, vaginal, and styloid processes and well marked supra-mastoid ridges.

Upper and lower maxillae. The latter prove that the palate was deeply excavated and narrow; that the molars were large and even sized, forming a series whose minor contour is almost straight. . . . so that the face must have been as prognathous as that of an ordinary Australian native in the Hunterian Museum. That these are very slight materials


2. F. W. Huxley, Transactions of the Ethnological Society, New Series II.