



Donn Bayard during excavation of Non Nok Tha, 1968 field season.



Donn and Daisy Bayard with Ban Chiang excavation crew and vehicle. Left to right: Bill Schauffler, Don McCauley, Donn Bayard, Daisy Bayard, Chet Gorman, Debbie Kramer.

Donn Bayard (1940–2002): Outstanding Southeast Asian Archaeologist and Much More



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DONN BAYARD DIED ON SEPTEMBER 14, 2002, in Dunedin at the age of 62. With his death, a very important Southeast Asian archaeologist passed away, one who had played a central role in the ferment the field experienced in the 1960s and 1970s. However, no matter how important his contributions were to Southeast Asian archaeology, they constituted only a limited segment of this remarkable man's career and life.

I first met Donn Bayard in the spring of 1969, when I came to the University of Hawai'i for graduate studies. Donn was one of two advanced graduate students of Bill Solheim's who had worked with him in Thailand and were part of the exciting discoveries and claims arising from that work. The other student was Chester Gorman. In many ways, Chet and Donn made an unlikely pair, but they shared a few things in common. One was their excitement about their work in Thailand, another was their dedication to Solheim, and a third was their low opinion of anything that had to do with establishment.

Bayard was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and grew up in a blue-collar neighborhood in Chicago, a background that would underlie his life-long concern for social justice. He won a small scholarship to Columbia University, where he tried out chemistry and geology, but eventually settled on anthropology, receiving his B.A. in 1961. Columbia offered a heady intellectual atmosphere that suited Bayard's critical mind, but the cost of attending this private school was prohibitive. After literally starving through his years at Columbia, Bayard came to the University of Hawai'i in 1963, where he first focused on linguistics, an interest that would reemerge years later. He had not only a true gift for languages but, more importantly, he was deeply interested in the meaning of words and how they were used in social contexts. His study of the "fire rocket song" in North-eastern Thailand, while he was doing archaeological fieldwork there, is an example of this interest, which eventually led him to sociolinguistics. Bayard completed his master's degree in linguistic anthropology in 1966 with a thesis on "The Cultural Relationship among the Polynesian Outliers."

Meanwhile, however, Bill Solheim had begun his archaeological survey program in Thailand, based on the very simple notion that almost nothing was known about the prehistory of that country and that an effort should be made to close that gap. With funding from the National Science Foundation, Solheim

initiated a “salvage archaeology” program in Northeastern Thailand, organized in collaboration between the University of Hawai‘i and the Fine Arts Department of Thailand. Gorman worked with Solheim in this program from the start; Bayard joined in the third season, after test excavations during the second season suggested that bronze artifacts at one of the sites, originally called Nam Phong 7 and later referred to as Non Nok Tha, had considerable antiquity predating the presence of iron. These findings were surprising, since traditional opinion held that metals had been introduced relatively late into Southeast Asia from sources in China and India, in conjunction with the advances of Chinese and Indian civilizations into the eastern and western portions of the subcontinent respectively. More intensive excavations became urgent.

In search of good graduate students to help pursue the expanded program, Solheim attracted Donn Bayard into archaeology and assigned him to take on a major excavation of Non Nok Tha in September 1965. He paired the relatively inexperienced student with the highly experienced and sophisticated field excavator Hamilton Parker from Dunedin, New Zealand. The excavation yielded fascinating materials but, due to the extremely hard sediments and complex stratigraphy, progress was very slow. After seven months, work had to be stopped, even though the team had been unable to penetrate the lower levels of the site in most of the area opened up. Thus, Bayard returned to Non Nok Tha in 1968, this time with a National Science Foundation grant of his own, to continue the excavation as his doctoral dissertation fieldwork.

Bayard’s dissertation, entitled “A Course Toward What? Evolution, Development and Change at Non Nok Tha, NE Thailand,” focused mainly on the analysis and interpretation of the artifacts and other data retrieved during the second season of excavation at Non Nok Tha, while other graduate students at Hawai‘i proceeded very slowly with the analysis of data recovered during the 1965–66 season of work. Even before finishing his dissertation, Bayard moved to Dunedin, New Zealand, in 1970 to take on a post as Lecturer at the University of Otago. He was allowed the unusual concession of defending his dissertation by long-distance phone call in 1971 and shortly afterwards published a summary in a University of Otago monograph. While in Hawai‘i, Bayard met his future wife, Daisy, who joined him in moving to Dunedin.

Bayard returned to Northeast Thailand in 1973 and 1975 for two seasons of archaeological survey in the Pa Mong Reservoir area and quickly published a summary account in another University of Otago monograph in 1979.

It was findings at Non Nok Tha upon which the original claims for a very early occurrence of bronze technology in Southeast Asia, as well as suggestions of early rice cultivation, were based. The former involved abundant copper and bronze artifacts, bronze casting implements, and casting spillage. The latter involved the presence of rice chaff used as temper in certain types of buff-colored, cord-impressed pottery, which was discovered during laboratory examination of the ceramics. These claims were further emphasized through excavations by Chester Gorman at the famous and much larger site of Ban Chiang.

While the claims for early dates for bronze in Thailand stimulated a great deal of professional and popular interest, they were also highly controversial, because of contradictory results in the carbon-14 series. Bayard was careful to present all the chronological evidence, but favored the “long series” of dates, discussing his

reasoning in detail. He never fully abandoned his conviction, even as his colleague at Otago, Charles Higham, conducted extensive fieldwork in Thailand and advanced strong and well-publicized arguments for a shortened chronological framework.

For Bayard, as for Solheim, the question of the date of the appearance of bronze was related to the question of the possible independent development of this technology in Southeast Asia which, in turn, was related to the much broader issue of Southeast Asia as a culture area in its own right. It may sound silly forty years later, but in the 1960s there were few historians or archaeologists who viewed Southeast Asian civilization as being more than a hybrid derivative of the great civilizations of India to the west and China to the north. Several of Bayard's polemical publications revolve around this topic.

Besides his contributions to Southeast Asian archaeology, Donn Bayard also had a strong interest in archaeological theory. His own theoretical direction was somewhat idiosyncratic and would be difficult to align with any particular school or movement. His publications concerning theory were primarily polemical and motivated by objections against what he saw as obfuscations caused through empty neologisms by followers of the "New Archaeology," particularly of the brand offered by David Clarke.

While Donn Bayard never abandoned his interest in archaeology and continued to publish on Southeast Asian prehistory until the end of his life, his main interest eventually reverted back to his first love, linguistics. Focusing on sociolinguistics, he conducted extensive research on New Zealand dialects, with special interest in race, ethnicity, class, status, and gender relations. Beginning in 1987, he published a series of highly influential papers on New Zealand dialects and a book entitled *Kiwitalk: Sociolinguistics and New Zealand Society*, which was called a "trailblazing book on sociolinguistics" in an obituary published in the *Otago Daily Telegraph* on September 21, 2002. The stature Bayard achieved as a linguist is reflected in the fact that he served as President of the Linguistic Society of New Zealand from 1995–1997. He also co-founded and helped coordinate an international linguistic survey of attitudes toward English accents.

All of Bayard's intellectual interests were closely tied to his personal social philosophy and ethical convictions. He maintained, throughout his life, a strong commitment to social equality and a genuine interest in the problems and rights of peasants, working people, cultural and racial minorities, and women. In Thailand, he not only learned to speak, read, and write Thai fluently, but he also became proficient in the local Lao dialect spoken on the Khorat Plateau and established close friendships with the peasant workers employed in his excavations. In publishing his primary archaeological reports, he appended summaries in Lao, which he personally composed, and made sure that his workers and their families in the villages back in Thailand got copies of them. He moved to New Zealand to escape what he saw as intolerable American racism, institutionalized both domestically and internationally, with the Viet Nam War being one of its worst expressions. In New Zealand, he frequently spoke up, often in the newspapers, for the rights and interests of disadvantaged segments of the population. He was also an ardent defender of academic freedom. Being gifted in turning a good phrase and blessed with a sharp analytical mind, he delighted in argumentation, but he was a thoroughly warm and caring human being.

Although Bayard turned his main attention to linguistics in his later years, he never abandoned archaeology, and his contributions to Southeast Asian prehistory are of lasting value. He worked with Solheim over a period of nearly 30 years to prepare a major, two-volume, final report on Non Nok Tha and did final editing and revision of the massive manuscript in 1998. It is truly sad that he was not able to see this capstone of his archaeological work in print.

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