

Stone Artifacts from Borneo Paralleled in Polynesia (and Elsewhere?)

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IN A RECENT issue of *Asian Perspectives*, Lawrence and Helen Birks (1972) report two stone artifacts from Fiji and Tonga, the former close to a C-14 date of 2060 ± 100 B.P. The authors relate these specimens to one artifact found casually in Sumatra and to others found more regularly in the "Hoabinhian" of the East Asian mainland, again in an early context in Ceylon, later in inland Australia and coastal New Guinea.

Similar tools are very familiar to the present writer. The Tonga example in particular (Birks 1972: Fig. 1) can be matched almost exactly from finds made during decades of excavation in the Sarawak River delta, northwest Borneo (Harrisson and O'Connor 1969: 295). They have not been identified from elsewhere in Borneo: All known examples are in the Sarawak Museum, Kuching.

The Sarawak River delta activities began before ca. A.D. 800 and probably terminated suddenly soon after ca. A.D. 1315 (Harrisson and O'Connor 1972: 90). They form a massive complex of ironworking, linked to a powerful import trade in Chinese ceramics (Cheng 1969), decorated boulders, a Tantric shrine (Harrisson 1973: 129), a local tradition of gold craftsmanship (Harrisson and O'Connor 1970), and glass beads mainly of Indian or Middle Eastern origin (Harrisson 1968). Many of the associated artifacts are clearly forms of hammerstone used in smelting and forging iron, but a smaller number have been provisionally classified as "anvils" or "mortars," the type of usage attributed to the two specimens from Polynesia (Birks 1972: 95). We considered all of these artifacts to be broadly associated, with the striking "waisted stone" hammers, a parallel to which has since been identified on Easter Island (Harrisson 1970), being the most distinctive.

In a sample analysis of 244 artifacts from the latest of the Sarawak delta sites, Bongkisam (13th-14th century), nearly half of the specimens fell into the following categories:

CLASSIFICATION OF ARTIFACT	PROPORTION OF SAMPLE (%)
"Anvils," "mortars," etc.	2
Quartz fire-strikers	4
"Pounders" and "Rubbers"	7
"Waisted stones"	14
Other "hammerstones"	19

In an earlier analysis we particularly compared this material with examples from both a neolithic and early bronze site on Lamma Island, Hong Kong (Weinberger 1948-49; cf. Harrison and O'Connor 1969: 238-243) and a probably early metal site near Allahabad, India (Laufer 1912: 50). Weinberger indicates that the Hong Kong materials have Australian affinities.

It looks, therefore, as if these stone types may belong to a very widespread but erratic pattern that ranges from South Asia out into and across the Pacific. The mortars had domestic value, especially among seagoing parties. The waisted stones were latterly adapted for use as anchors, as on Easter Island. In earlier settings they had some fully stone-age function, but continued to be used until quite recent times, especially where hard stone was in short supply—as on many small islands and in the sedimentary (often very recent) coastal lowlands of larger islands. There is a growing body of evidence to support very long runs of artifact continuity, even for some artifacts once thought to be distinctively Middle Palaeolithic. The chopper types which continue into the Neolithic on Palawan and at the Niah caves (Fox 1970; Harrison, in press) are a pertinent example.

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