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NOTES ON "MALAY POTTERY" IN EAST MALAYSIA, AND NEIGHBORING AREAS

Wilhelm G. Solheim II

(University of Hawaii)

The original purpose of this paper was simply to put on record an unusual earthenware "kendi" that is similar to a whole earthenware jar I had seen in the Sarawak Museum in 1959. When I revisited the Sarawak Museum 20 years later I found that several more jars of the same type and provenience had been added to their collections. On the same trip I visited the Brunei Museum and saw there sherds of very similar pottery from an archaeological excavation conducted by the museum. I felt this comparable material would give more and better context to the "kendi" and so decided this should also be included. This new material clearly points to the inclusion of the "kendi" in the general classification of "Malay pottery." As "Malay pottery" has not been the subject of publication for a number of years I finally decided that it would be well to review what I mean by "Malay pottery."

The first report with which I am acquainted in which a specific kind of pottery was identified as "Malay pottery" and equated with the spread of the Malay people was a paper of mine that appeared in this journal in 1959. Hesitating to use the name "Malay" for this pottery at that time, I called it the Bau Pottery Complex (Solheim 1959a:2) after the name of the area in which the first published archaeological site was found where this pottery was the primary pottery recovered. The site is Gua Bungoh, in caves near Bau, about fifteen miles southeast of Kuching. The pottery pictured and described (Harrison and Tweedie 1951: 173—175, Pl. 2) as coming from this site is, except for three sherds, typical of the "Malay pottery."

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Wilhelm G. Solheim II
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Introduction

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The pottery of the Bau Pottery Complex was described as being made by the paddle and anvil technique with one or more of the paddles used having geometric patterns carved into their faces which left a geometric pattern in relief on the finished pot. An infinite variety of patterns was possible with, among the early varieties, a crossed pattern producing a square or triangular lattice. From this crossed pattern and a simple parallel ribbed pattern, the great variety of patterns probably developed. Both of these simple patterns can be seen on the Balau Dayak pots illustrated in the Bau report (Harrisson and Tweedie 1951: Plate 3 middle row left), showing that these patterns continued in use to the very recent past. Later in the development of this pottery specially carved stamps were used to impress designs on the surface. Later still small fillets of clay were applied to the body, usually in a vertical direction. Forms were simple with ovate or globular bodies, narrowing to the top, with simple, slightly flaring rims. Outside influences gradually led to further additions including angles (carinations), flat bottoms or low ring stands, simple lids, and a variety of applied handles (Solheim 1959a: 2-3).

Previous to my calling this pottery "Malay pottery" there had been one other discussion of this pottery in print which presented a number of very good illustrations of the geometric patterns. Gibson-Hill's (1955: 185-193) discus-

sion was concerned with the dating of this pottery and the possibility of it being used in dating the early occupation of the site of Johore Lama, a few kilometers northeast of Singapore. Han Wai Toon had noted the similarity of the stamped geometric designs on the Johore Lama and Kota Tinggi pottery to that on earthenware pottery of China during the Han period and had proposed that this pottery had been imported from China at that time (Gibson-Hill 1955: 186). I feel that Gibson-Hill successfully argued against this and proposed that this was a locally manufactured pottery with the geometric patterns possibly having come indirectly from South China. "The most likely solution is that the patterns were already old when they were introduced to the area" (Gibson-Hill 1955: 187).

A second paper of mine (1967) presented more information on this pottery and a number of plates illustrating some of the carved-paddle and stamped patterns and other kinds of the later decoration and forms. In this paper I proposed the name 'Bau-Malay' Pottery Tradition for the 'Malay pottery,' and gave a very simple definition of "pottery tradition" as "..... a related body of pottery which maintained a distinct and continuing style through a considerable period of time" (Solheim 1967: 16).

There has been very little controversy over my proposed 'Bau-Malay' Pottery Tradition and very little use made of it by other than myself. This has at least in part been because until very recently no one else working on Southeast Asian prehistory or early history has shown any interest in earthenware pottery in a regional comparative sense. One Chinese archaeologist did take exception to my considering this pottery as "Malay pottery," though he did not use that term. Cheng (1969: 16-17), in his interpretation of the group of archaeological sites at Santubong, Sarawak, described this earthenware pottery from the Santubong sites and went on to indicate his belief that this was locally made Chinese pottery and that the Santubong sites had been colonized by Chinese from China. In reviewing this book I strongly disagreed both with Cheng's interpretation of the earthenware pottery and his interpretation of Santubong as a Chinese colony (Solheim 1969: 132-133) but no further argument developed. With this brief review of the meaning and history of the proposed 'Bau-Malay' Pottery Tradition out of the way I can proceed with the presentation of the data.

An Earthenware "Kendi" of Unknown Provenience

The origin and evolution of the Southeast Asian kendi has not yet been satisfactorily demonstrated. The earthenware spouted jar here presented may or may not be an early form of the kendi. It is even questionable whether it can be considered as a kendi but I suspect that when the origin of the kendi is worked out, the vessel presented here will be close to the form from which the kendi evolved.

The jar* (Plate I-II) is globular in form with a narrow neck and flaring rim. It has a broad handle attached to the neck and the body with a short spout

*This jar is part of the collection of kendis made by DiRaja Ungku A. Aziz, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malaya. I thank him for the opportunity of placing this piece on public record. It has been pictured, in colour, on the cover of *Orientations for* December 1979 (Aziz 1979).