



The Sarawak Museum Journal

Vol. XLV No. 66

December 1993



ISSN: 0375-3050

E-ISSN: 3036-0188

Citation: Ipoi Datan. (1993). Archaeological Excavations at Gua Sireh (Serian) and Lubang Angin (Gunung Mulu National Park), Sarawak, Malaysia. The Sarawak Museum Journal, XLV (66): 1-6

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Ipoi Datan

INTRODUCTION

Prior to commencing my fieldwork for this report I intended to excavate only in the cave site of Gua Sireh, which is located about 55 kilometres southeast of Kuching in a limestone hill called Gunung Nambi. The decision to excavate this site was made because of the lack of evidence from western Sarawak for cultural developments prior to the period of importation of Asian mainland ceramics. I wished also to look for material which could possibly be related to the prehistoric sequence known from the Niah Caves, some 480 kilometres to the northeast of Gua Sireh.

The site of Gua Sireh was first excavated under the supervision of Tom Harrisson and Wilhelm G. Solheim II in 1959. Their intention to write a report on this excavation was disrupted by the outbreak of the Confrontation (Solheim 1983:38), but the materials collected were partly analysed and deposited in the Sarawak Museum. Some of the finds, especially the earthenware sherds, were subsequently mentioned by Solheim in comparative contexts in a few articles (Solheim et. al. 1959; 1961; and Solheim 1983). The pottery from Gua Sireh was said to be related to the West Mouth (Niah) pottery and to that from the Bau and Santubong sites in western Sarawak (Solheim 1983:38).

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Prior to commencing my fieldwork for this report I intended to excavate only in the cave site of Gua Sireh, which is located about 55 kilometres southeast of Kuching in a limestone hill called Gunung Nambi. The decision to excavate this site was made because of the lack of evidence from western Sarawak for cultural developments prior to the period of importation of Asian mainland ceramics. I wished also to look for material which could possibly be related to the prehistoric sequence known from the Niah Caves, some 480 kilometres to the northeast of Gua Sireh.

The site of Gua Sireh was first excavated under the supervision of Tom Harrisson and Wilhelm G. Solheim II in 1959. Their intention to write a report on this excavation was disrupted by the outbreak of the Confrontation (Solheim 1983:38), but the materials collected were partly analysed and deposited in the Sarawak Museum. Some of the finds, especially the earthenware sherds, were subsequently mentioned by Solheim in comparative contexts in a few articles (Solheim *et. al.* 1959; 1961; and Solheim 1983). The pottery from Gua Sireh was said to be related to the West Mouth (Niah) pottery and to that from the Bau and Santubong sites in western Sarawak (Solheim 1983:38).

Solheim (1983:52) has more recently recommended that further excavation be done at Gua Sireh so that a report on the site can eventually be published. I also feel that it is high time a report be published since after the 1959 excavation two more test excavations have been conducted in the site. Zuraina, currently lecturing at the University of Science Malaysia in Penang, excavated inside Gua Sireh in 1977 when she was looking for a site for her PhD thesis, although she eventually decided to concentrate her research in the West Mouth at Niah (Zuraina 1982). The other test excavation was done by Edmund, a Sarawak Museum Technical Officer, in 1980. As in 1959 all materials collected by Zuraina and Edmund were deposited in the Sarawak Museum and interim reports were submitted to the Director of the Museum.

Gua Sireh was re-examined by me in July 1989 and the results are presented in this report. In addition, before I left Australia to commence my fieldwork in July 1989 the then Director of the Sarawak Museum informed me of some exciting finds made during a Sarawak Museum test excavation carried out in the upper cave of Lubang Angin, in the Gunung Mulu National Park. He asked if I would consider doing my fieldwork there as well. After consultation with my supervisor, Bellwood, it was decided that both Gua Sireh and Lubang Angin be investigated owing to their obvious importances for the prehistory of Sarawak. Lubang Angin, which lies some 160 kilometres northeast of Niah and inland from Brunei, had produced in the March excavations "three-colour ware" and double-spouted vessels similar to those from the Niah Caves.