



The Sarawak Museum Journal

Vol. L No. 71

December 1996



ISSN: 0375-3050

E-ISSN: 3036-0188

Citation: Bernard Sellato. (1996). Stone Nutcrackers and Other Recent Finds of Lithic Industry in Interior Northeastern Kalimantan. The Sarawak Museum Journal, L (71): 39-68

STONE NUTCRACKERS AND OTHER RECENT FINDS OF LITHIC INDUSTRY IN INTERIOR NORTHEASTERN KALIMANTAN

Bernard Sellato

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on one unusual type of stone artefact- a conical sandstone implement with a flat base displaying a depression- that I call concave pounder. Three such implements were recently found in Long Pujungan District, Bulungan Regency, East Kalimantan. Similar artefacts were collected by Tom Harrisson, first around 1950 and again later, in the Kerayan District, and in the Kelabit highlands and adjacent areas of Sarawak, and identified as sago pounders. A revision of this interpretation is proposed, leading to the suggestion that they were nutcrackers. Their antiquity and ethno-cultural ascription are then discussed in the light of recent historical studies and finds of lithic industry in Long Pujungan District.

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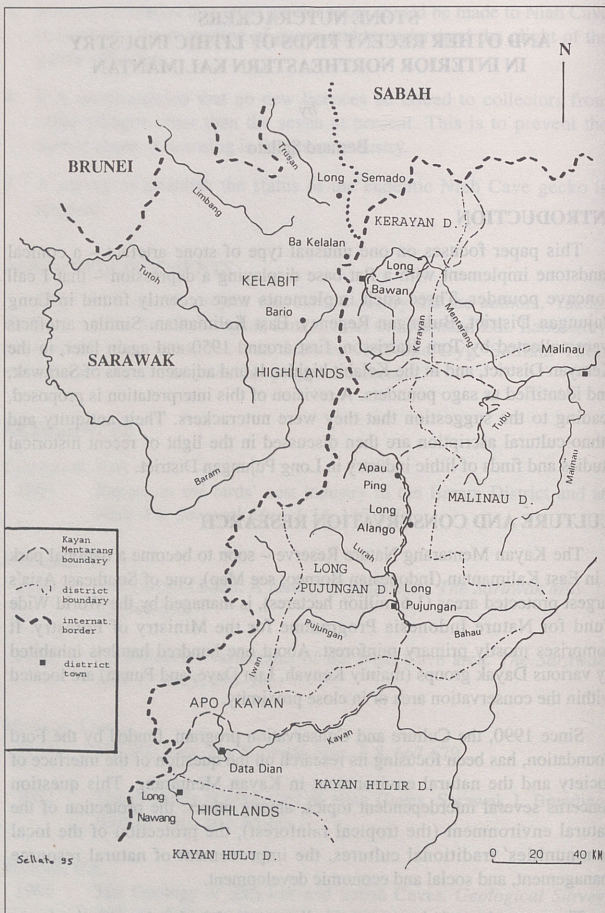
This paper focuses on one unusual type of stone artefact – a conical sandstone implement with a flat base displaying a depression – that I call concave pounder. Three such implements were recently found in Long Pujungan District, Bulungan Regency, East Kalimantan. Similar artefacts were collected by Tom Harrisson, first around 1950 and again later, in the Kerayan District, and in the Kelabit highlands and adjacent areas of Sarawak, and identified as sago pounders. A revision of this interpretation is proposed, leading to the suggestion that they were nutcrackers. Their antiquity and ethno-cultural ascription are then discussed in the light of recent historical studies and finds of lithic industry in Long Pujungan District.

CULTURE AND CONSERVATION RESEARCH

The Kayan Mentarang Nature Reserve – soon to become a national park – in East Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo; see Map), one of Southeast Asia's largest protected areas (1.6 million hectares), is managed by the World Wide Fund for Nature Indonesia Programme for the Ministry of Forestry. It comprises mostly primary rainforest. About one hundred hamlets inhabited by various Dayak groups (mainly Kenyah, Lun Daye, and Punan) are located within the conservation area or in close proximity.

Since 1990, the Culture and Conservation program, funded by the Ford Foundation, has been focusing its research on the question of the interface of society and the natural environment in Kayan Mentarang. This question concerns several interdependent topics, among others: the protection of the natural environment (the tropical rainforest), the protection of the local communities' traditional cultures, the improvement of natural resource management, and social and economic development.

The research carried out covered all aspects of the local peoples' cultures – including language, oral literature, music, social organization, religion,



Map 1: Eastern Sarawak and northern East Kalimantan.

legal systems, land and resource tenure, agricultural practices, forest collecting, trade, history, and material culture – and resorting to various disciplines combined in an integrated way. Some 35 scholars and students, 80 percent of them Indonesian (of which most were Kalimantanese), had the opportunity to do field research for periods ranging from 2 to 6 months. As many as 35 individual research reports were published by WWF in early 1995, and a book is currently in preparation.

The Culture and Conservation program is expected to continue its activities in East Kalimantan, with research being more focused on the diachronic dimension of the processes and phenomena studied; that is, on cultural history, environmental history, and the history of interaction between society and the environment.

LITHIC IMPLEMENT FINDS IN THE UPPER BAHAU

Along the upper course of the Bahau River, Long Pujungan District, a small number of easily accessible sites feature megalithic monuments, more precisely funerary stone urns covered by dolmen structures (see Plate XII). They are known locally as liang Ngorek, 'Ngorek Tombs', and were first visited in 1906 by Captain Fischer of the Dutch colonial military (see Fischer and Gramberg 1910; also Van Walchren 1907). Investigations into the local oral historical traditions showed that ethnic groups collectively referred to as Ngorek inhabited the region before the various Kenyah groups settled it. A preliminary synthesis on the history of these Ngorek was circulated in 1992 (Sellato 1995; see also 1992), and an updated document is being prepared.

The question discussed in this paper first arose in the village of Apau Ping when, in 1991, I spotted a long, beautifully polished stone gouge in Pak Darius Irang's outboard motor tool box. Inquiring around, I soon was able to collect over one hundred stone tools, all surface finds, from the hands of local children, who spent hours roaming around under the village houses. I was not the first visitor to pay heed to stone tools: The 1955 French expedition led by Pierre Pfeffer to the upper Bahau area (see Pfeffer 1963, Piazzini 1959) donated a couple of stone adzes to the Musée de l'Homme in Paris (Cat. # 57-77-65 and -67). Martin Baier, who visited the region in 1986 and reported on megalithic monuments, did not seem to mention stone tools (see Baier 1987, 1992), although he did collect some later (personal communication).

Subsequently, Culture and Conservation organized a brief archaeological survey, carried out with French archaeologist P.-Y. Manguin, and had a visiting Indonesian archaeologist from Central Kalimantan, Kiwok D. Rampai, dig one small test pit. In 1993, Karina Arifin, an archaeologist with the University of Indonesia in Jakarta, carried out a survey of a few more sites, and dug a few test pits (Karina 1995). Concomitantly, a team of junior archaeologists, also from the University of Indonesia, mapped four major sites of megalithic graveyards (Dody *et al.* 1995). Later, another team in Jakarta did a study of the first two batches of stone tools (over 200 pieces) and pottery shards collected (Aryandini and Krisprihartini 1995). I also had the opportunity to carry out a very quick survey of Kayan Hulu District and, with Karina Arifin, of Kerayan and Malinau Districts.

By the end of 1993, the total number of reportedly Ngorek (settlement and graveyard) sites recorded in Long Pujungan District had reached over 120 – of which about 30 had been visited – with another 20 related megalithic sites recorded in Apau Kayan and about 50 more in Kerayan, and some 300 stone tools had been collected, mainly from Apau Ping. Over 95 percent of the stone tools collected in Apau Ping are surface finds, and only a few were unearthed in test pits. The main categories of finds are sandstone bark beaters, ascribed to the Kenyah, and basalt implements, mainly adzes and gouges, ascribed to the Ngorek. Other finds include stone pounders, stone rings (forge bellow outlets) and sharpening stones, as well as huge quantities of earthenware and some imported ceramics shards. The first two categories of finds will be briefly described and discussed below, and the stone pounders will be discussed more at length.

KENYAH BARK BEATERS

Eight stone bark beaters were found in the upper Bahau area, East Kalimantan (Sellato 1995: 18, 91; Karina 1995: 106). The local Kenyah groups (Leppo' Ké and Leppo' Ma'ut) acknowledge that these tools belonged to their forebears – in the case of Apau Ping, they would have been the Leppo' Ma'ut's – and may have still been in use until less than a century ago, although some are likely older.

A review of the literature suggests that most Borneo stone bark beaters, "prehistoric" and "ethnographic" alike, are hand tools (with no haft) meant to be held in one's fist and used in a vertical up-down movement, and they display a cross-hatched groove pattern on the working surface. Shapes recorded are: 1) squat cylindrical-conical; e.g., one item from the Kelabit of