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APPENDIX B: THE TRADEWARES FROM THE GUA SIREH EXCAVATION

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SUMMARY

The excavation of Gua Sireh recovered 18 tradeware sherds weighing 178 grammes and representing ten vessels. The top 15 cm of deposits in square 89A yielded 16 of the sherds. They are all of Chinese manufacture and date to the 18th and 19th centuries. A European sherd found on the surface of square 89 would appear to be 19th century in age, while an unstratified sherd also found in square 89 dates to the 16th century. In addition a brownware jar fragment from Niah, labelled "Gua Chi Niah 15.6.1955", was submitted for analysis on the basis of its perceived similarity to the brownware Jar represented in the Gua Sireh excavation. While both jars are brittle wares, details of the decorations indicate that the Niah specimen is late Ming whereas the Gua Sireh specimen is Qing.

After the sherds were matched to their parent vessels, the maximum vertical displacement involved was one spit (five cm), and in only one case did matching sherds derive from different corners of square 89A. Thus the upper levels of square 89A show little evidence of disturbance. From consideration of the precise dates preferred for the sherds, the top five centimetres were apparently deposited during the 19th century, whereas the deposits between five and 15 cm depth pertain to the 18th century, extending at most to the early 19th century. The available tradeware sherds suggest that Gua Sireh was abandoned by the end of the 19th century. Finally, the unstratified Ming sherds presumably derived originally from a level lower than 15 cm.

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METHODOLOGY

The Gua Sireh tradeware sherds were analysed using the methodology established by Karaeng Demmanari (Suaka Peninggalan Sejarah dan Purbakala Sulawesi Selatan, Ujung Pandang) and myself for the tradewares collected from historical sites during the "South Sulawesi Prehistorical and Historical Archaeology Project" (SSPHAP). In this methodology, macroscopic features of the decorations, body, and glaze provide the preliminary identification. The identification is then corrected or confirmed by observing microscopic traits through a 30X hand lens applied to the body (at a location where the sherd wall is snapped to expose a fresh cross-section) and the glaze. Moreover my notebooks describe approximately 2,000 South Sulawesi tradeware specimens with a standardised system of 24 metric and semi-discrete sets of traits. Of these 24, the nine which appear to identify tradewares most reliably will here be reported for the Gua Sireh sherds and compared with the South Sulawesi samples.

To my knowledge this attempt to assemble a database, allowing the formal description of tradeware classes through the variability evinced macroscopically and microscopically by

the assigned specimens, is unique (but see Harrison, 1986). At the very least, the tendency of ceramic experts to eschew such a methodology can, I believe, result in spurious standards. Another of SSPHAP's innovations is the first ever statistically based seriation of the tradeware classes, specifically those which SSPHAP recognised in South Sulawesi (Bulbeck, 1989). Furthermore, recent surveys of eastern Australian historical sites confirm the 19th and 20th century datings which I had assigned to SSPHAP's youngest tradeware classes (Bulbeck and Boot, 1990a, 1990b), and indicate that the chronological system developed for South Sulawesi can certainly be applied to Malaysian Borneo.

BACKGROUND

Hire fired ceramics from the east Asian mainland, especially China, have found their way to island Southeast Asia from at least Tang dynasty times (Guy, 1986; Harrison, 1986). The main period of ceramic exports, and the period which concerns us here, lasted from the 16th century until the present. During this period (and earlier), only a tiny proportion of the wares which reached island Southeast Asia are of "imperial" quality. The great majority were mass-produced with variable attention to quality. They probably comprised merely the exported fraction of the mass-produced wares whose main market would have been ordinary Chinese (and mainland Southeast Asian) householders. "Tradewares" can be usefully employed as a cover-all term for the exotic wares reaching island Southeast Asia, regardless of their origin, or whether or not they were manufactured specifically for international trade (cf. Willetts, 1981:2).

In the grossest terms, Chinese mass-produced wares traded to Southeast Asia from the Ming dynasty onwards can be assigned to three main streams. One stream, which could be called the "porcelain stream", involved the perfection of the technology for producing porcelains in bulk. The general trend towards devolution of the decorations which accompanied mass production of Chinese ceramics (Willetts, 1981) is especially marked with these wares which, in the last century or so, have come to consist mainly of whitewares. The second stream could be called the "Swatow" stream in honour of the famous "Swatow wares" (Harrison, 1979). The production technology maintained the stoneware body, even though the market share was apparently eroded heavily by the mass production of high quality porcelain during the Qing dynasty. The third stream would involve the large stoneware jars discussed in detail by Adhyatman and Abu Ridho (1984) and especially by Harrison (1986).

Willetts' account of a poorly studied class of Qing blue-and-white wares, which he calls "Kitchen Ch'ing" and dates between the terminal 18th and early 20th centuries (Willetts, 1981), inaugurated a tendency for Qing crockery to be identified as "Kitchen Ch'ing" by default (e.g. Kwan and Martin, 1985:79-80; Macknight, 1986:70). The implication, that China largely withdrew from supplying crockery to island Southeast Asia during the early and middle Qing dynasty, would invalidate my interpretation of Gua Sireh, for which reason I should highlight certain deficiencies in the study by Willetts (1981).

Firstly, few of the specimens described by Willetts are dated independently of his intuitive judgement. Willetts' only well dated sample, the sherds from Balambangan (north Borneo), date either ca. 1770 or ca. 1800 (Willetts, 1981:1), and so refer to the 18th century rather than to the 19th century.

Secondly, since many of the wares described by Willetts are devolved copies of Ming and early Qing wares, we would infer that these "Kitchen Ch'ing" wares belong to a copying tradition which also characterised early to middle Qing ceramic production. Unless devolution of the decorations magically occurred at a constant rate right across the ceramic