

26

Myanmar and Malaysia

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26.1 Introduction

A recent overview of museum collections in the UK (Glover 2002) noted that only a handful of institutions in Great Britain, around 14 in total, hold archaeological material from south-east Asia. In this context the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) was acknowledged to be amongst only three institutions that held 'significant archaeological materials' (Glover 2002: 417): along with the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and the British Museum.

The PRM holds *c.* 355 'archaeological' artefacts from Malaysia and *c.* 248 'archaeological' objects from Myanmar (Burma) (*Table 26.1*). Most of these are Holocene stone tools. As with the collections from the Indian subcontinent (Chapter 23 above), the collections from Myanmar and Malaysia were formed between the 1880s and the 1940s. The majority of the collection consists of polished stone tools including axes, adzes (of three main forms), including sharpening stones, touchstones, charm stones, sumatraliths, and two nut crackers. The bias in the collection towards polished stone artefacts is typical of the attention paid by amateurs and professionals during the 19th and early 20th centuries towards formal tools. As a result such collections are generally haphazard, rarely contain detailed information on the context of discovery and usually represent the finest examples rather than the range of implements originally produced. That being said, this collection represents a significant assemblage of polished stone tools containing the main range of forms typical of both regions as summarized by Tweedie (1953) and Noone (1941).

26.2 Overview

The PRM founding collection contains *c.* 15 'archaeological' objects from Myanmar: 14 ground stone implements from the banks of the River Irrawady (1884.126.82–95), and an undated ceramic plaque depicting Buddha (1884.59.5). Pitt-Rivers exhibited at least some of these stone tools at the Ethnological Society of London in 1869 (Huxley 1869: 89), and this represents one of the first attempts to scientifically engage with Burmese prehistory.

In comparison, the PRM founding collection only contains a single artefact from Malaysia: a stone axe from the River Siniawan, Sarawak collected by Alfred Hart Everett in 1878 (1884.126.66). A.C. Haddon noted that this object represented, until 1898, 'the only authentic example in this country of a stone artefact from Sarawak' (Haddon 1900: 71).¹ The Malaysian collections were, however, expanded considerably

¹ I am grateful to Dan Hicks for this reference to the paper by Haddon.

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Region	Axes	Adzes			Touchstones	Charms	Sharpening stones	Sumatraliths	Nut crackers
		Simple	Gouge	Shouldered					
Malaysia	81	118	20	1	6	21	36	6	2
Myanmar	8	10	0	16	0	4	1	0	0
Totals	89	128	20	17	6	25	37	6	2

in 1892 with Robert Sandilands Frowd Walker's donation of *c.* 156 implements from Perak (1892.22), which was the subject of a paper by Henry Balfour (Balfour 1895[1892]). To this collection Robert Sandilands Frowd Walker added a further 41 stone axes, from Pahang State ('East of Perak') in 1896 (1896.10.1–41). Walker (1850–1917) was a notable British Resident of Selangor and Perak, and a statue of him today stands in the grounds of the Perak Museum.

The remainder of the Malaysian collection is largely the result of donations from two further individuals: Cecil Wray and I.H.N. Evans. Cecil Wray (1865–1946) was resident in Pahang from 1903 to 1908, and elsewhere in Malay from 1878 to 1908. He was an amateur naturalist and collector of Neolithic stone axes, some 85 of which were donated by his wife to the PRM just after the Second World War (1946.4.1–85). Cecil's brother, Leonard Wray Jr. (1852–1942), is recognized as the first cave archaeologist in Peninsula Malaya (Price 2002). He was appointed as the first Curator of the Perak Museum, Taiping, which had been established by Hugh Low and Frank Athelstan Swettenham. Wray Jr. pioneered cave explorations and excavations in Perak whilst collecting for the museum. Although a large number of ethnographic artefacts were donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum from Leonard, nothing archaeological can be attributed to him directly although it is very possible that the material from Cecil Wray was received through Leonard.

Ivor H.N. Evans (1886–1957) was a British ethnographer and archaeologist, who was educated at Charterhouse School in Godalming (Surrey) and at Clare College, University of Cambridge. After a brief spell as a cadet in the British North Borneo Company's Service (1910–1911), he was employed as a curator in Malaya for twenty years (1912–1932), spent mostly at the Perak Museum in Taiping. It was here that he met Henry Balfour in 1914 who was passing through on his return from Australia in September of that year. They stayed in correspondence following this meeting² and he later donated 27 items (1927.38.1–27) from his excavations at Gunong Pondok (see below).

Other small donations from Malaysia comprise 3 casts of a stone axes 'excavated from shell middens at Guak Kepah, Wellesley, 1934', donated by Pieter Vincent van Stein Callenfels (1936.44.1–3); 6 undated tin figures from Perak donated by Alwyn Sidney Haynes (1939.6.01–06); and 4 Chinese ceramic vessels, dated to the 15th century CE, collected from Sabah by Ernest J. Green, a mining engineer before 1925 (1956.11.12–15).

The more limited number of prehistoric objects from Myanmar in comparison to Malaysia in the Museum is perhaps understandable given that research archaeology is less well developed in Burma than elsewhere in Southeast Asia (Glover 2006: 29). It was not until the geologist T.O. Morris's work in the 1930s and Hallam Movius's investigations in the 1940s that the prehistory of Myanmar was more systematically studied and synthesized (Aung-Thwin 2001: 7).

In this context, however, it is notable that the Myanmar collection were significantly expanded in the 1890s, through donations from Henry George Ashworth Leveson (then Assistant Superintendent for Burma's Southern Shan States), and by Richard Carnac Temple. Between 1890 and 1894 Temple donated an unquantified, undated assemblage

Table 26.1 Main stone artefact types in the 'archaeological' collections from Malaysia and Myanmar in the Pitt Rivers Museum.

² e.g. Letter dated 13 September 1921 from Evans to Balfour concerning fire-pistons; PRM Manuscript collections, Balfour Papers, Box 10, Item 5.

of perhaps 100 ceramic sherds (1890.13.31) and a diverse, unstudied collection of *c.* 31 Buddhist artefacts, from sites at Kawgun Cave (Maulmain), 'Jackson's Garden' (Pegu), Dhamatha Cave, Arakan Pagoda (Mandalay), Sagaing, Shwegugyi Pagoda (Pegu), and from an unnamed site to the south of Mergui (Tenasserim Division) (1892.41.86–105, 1892.41.123, 1892.41.481–484, 1894.27.154, 1894.27.158, 1894.27.167–170, 1892.27.174). Then, in 1898–1899 Leveson donated a ceramic clay pipe bowl from 'a ruined walled village, Fort Stedman Lake, Southern Shan State' (1898.18.3); *c.* 40 Neolithic stone implements 'found when working hillside paddy fields on the lower slopes of hills around headwaters of the upper Myitnge steam, Northern Shan State' (1899.42.1–40); *c.* 20 further stone tools from other sites in the Northern Shan State and Southern Stan State (2008.101.1, 2008.102.1, 2010.50–59); and 2 rare bronze socketed axes from Nam Pang Stream (1899.42.41, 1900.36.1).

'Archaeological' items from Myanmar accessioned after 1900 comprise 2 brass figures 'dug out of foundations of a pagoda erected by King Sinyu Mya Shin about 140 years ago', donated by Herbert Lovely Eales (1905.16.1–2); 6 silver discs 'separated from the soil of the Moduk Valley by the washer at the ruby mines, Mogok' (Mandalay), donated by Frank Atlay (1907.4.1–6); a stone blade from the ruby mines at Mogok donated by Donald Gunn (1907.40.1); stone adzes donated collected by William Theobald (1909.12.47–48); 2 stone axes 'dug up in clearing a patch of ground for paddy growing' at Bhamo (Kachin State) (1909.39.40–41); 2 Buddhist ceramic votive tablets excavated at Prayan by Frederick Fawcett (1911.120.25–26); 2 stone tools from Mogok donated by Oscar Charles Raphael (1919.33.7–8); 4 ceramic pipe bowls excavated at Yaunghwe (Southern Shan State) by Thomas Nelson Annandale (1923.19.1–4); 12 bronze bird-shaped weights from the ruby mines at Mogok, purchased from Aubrey Stuart Wheler (1927.74.1–12); a pebble used for burnishing pottery donated by John Hutton (1931.38.15); an undated alabaster figure of Buddha (1941.9.118); 2 clay pipe bowls from Shan State collected by Walter Hildburgh in 1901 (1944.12.25–26); a terracotta votive plaque showing a seated figure of Buddha, possibly from Dhamatha Cave, collected by Duncan MacPherson in 1841 (1945.2.45); 5 clay pipe bowls collected by Walter Hose from a site in the Souther Shan State (1947.12.23–27); a Buddhist ceramic plaque from Tagoung collected by James Henry Green by 1923 and transferred from Hampshire County Museums Service in 1994 (1994.4.7)

26.3 Strengths of the Collection

26.3.1 Stone Axes and Adzes

The polished stone artefacts from both collections (Malaysia and Myanmar) represent some excellent examples of the types found in both regions. This seems to be the largest collection of such material in the UK (cf. Glover 2002).³ None of the polished artefacts were recovered during archaeological excavations: instead, they were either found haphazardly by locals or handed over to collectors. These artefacts were usually recovered from surface contexts including rivers, frequently during work in rice fields, and occasionally during mineral prospecting. At the time of their collection, there were no ethnic groups recorded as still using stone tools and thus such implements were often seen as having supernatural origins by the locals who recovered them. This belief is common across Malaysia and is described in local terms as thunder bolts, thunder's teeth, *batu lintar*, *batu petir*, *batu perahit*, or dragons' teeth.

³ Note that many of the Malaysian and Burmese objects examined have yet to be physically numbered although the collections all have accession numbers and database records. It has therefore not always been possible to quote the accession numbers of all examples of different axe/adze forms cited. The same is true for the touchstones and charms.

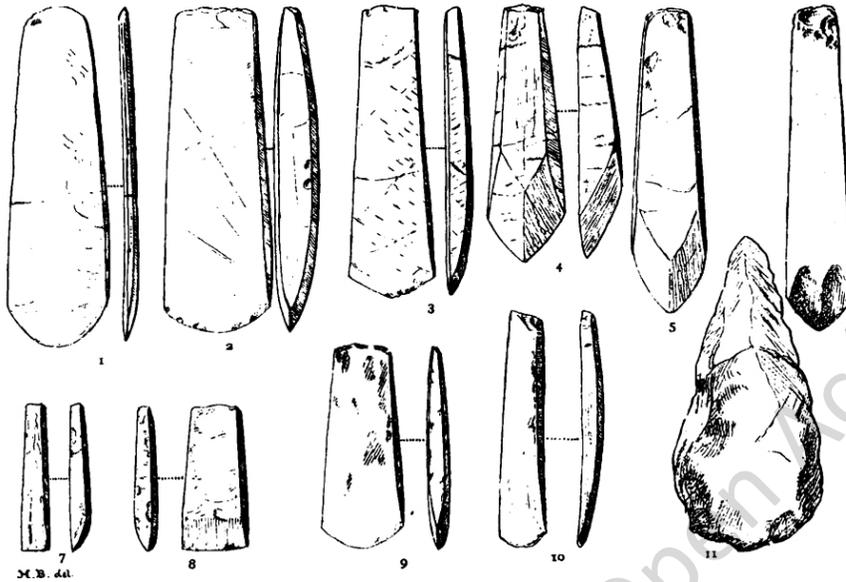


Figure 26.1 Illustrations of examples of axes/adzes from Perak, Malaysia donated to the PRM by Robert Sandilands Frowd Walker (within PRM Accession Number 1892.22) (from Balfour 1895[1892], opposite page 85).

What is impressive about the collection is that it is large enough to include a wide variety of forms and sizes within each of the major types as described by Noone (1941) and Tweedie (1953). The majority of the Malaysia collection consists of simple adzes, of either plano-convex or quadrangular form typical of Malay Peninsula, a smaller number of 20 gouge adzes and one shouldered chisel adze. A large proportion of the simple adze forms have clear evidence of having been heavily utilized before they were lost or discarded. The collection also contains a smaller but significant number of the gouge type, also known as 'beaked adzes' in the literature because of their pointed cutting edge and unusual concave lower surface (e.g. 1892.22.54, *Figure 26.1, numbers 5 and 6*); none have signs of having been worked. Noone (1941: 215) also noted this in his review and wondered if they more likely represented items produced as valuable objects rather than having been produced for any particular physical use. Included amongst the material from Myanmar are *c.* 30 unpolished axes and quadrangular adzes (1899.42.1–42)⁴ recovered from a hillside rice field in the North Shan States (with the noted latitude and longitude of 23° 20' N 98° 20') donated by Leveson. This is a very interesting collection of material consisting of rough-outs and preforms in grey basalt that have not yet been polished. More details on their collection would be illuminating, such as whether they were deposited as a trade cache or whether there was a production site nearby. This material would be instructive for understanding the methods of polished stone production. The shouldered forms are far more common in the material from Burma, a type noted from the region, while rare in Malaysia. Several of these are present amongst the Museum's founding collection from Myanmar (e.g. 1884.126.85 and 1884.126.90) as well as in Leveson's donation.

One very interesting piece is actually the only Malaysian archaeological artefact from the PRM founding collection (1884.12.66): a stone implement found by A.H. Everett embedded at bottom of river gravel bed, on left bank of Siniawan River,

⁴ There were about 40 examples in the original donation, but at least 12 pieces were given in exchange with other museums in the early 20th century.

Sarawak, Borneo in 1878–1879. This drop-shaped artefact is heavily weathered. One side is relatively smooth with some flake scars whilst the opposite side is rough, with flake scars and weathered flake scars. One edge shows definite signs of bifacial flaking and thus has some aspects of a handaxe, but within the collection are several other large, thin, lenticular pieces with rough bifacial flaking around their margins which are not at all of handaxe form and this piece could also be of that tradition/type.

26.3.2 *Charms and Touchstones*

A feature of many polished stone implements recovered by locals in the region is their reuse as magical objects. Typically these artefacts are no longer seen as items made by people, but as objects formed by supernatural powers, often associated with lightning and thunder. This natural phenomenon also has the power to transform animals and humans into stone (Langub 2009; Needham 1964). In Borneo these items are referred to as *batu' perahit* and were used in a variety of ways including re-burial in rice fields to bind the padi spirits and ensure a good harvest, placed with rice bins to increase the quantity of stored padi and ground with metal tools to transfer some of their power and potency. This also included their use in sharpening the spurs of fighting cocks to help ensure victory. Constant grinding and polishing of these tools may significantly re-work their original form. A total of 25 artefacts appear to have been used in this manner, distinguishing them from the more regular polishing of stone sharpening stones. Some of these charms have repetitive deep scratches and/or areas of polish and smoothing. Some pieces appear to have been heavily weathered by stream action first and then further modified by rubbing and grinding. For example, two of these (1909.39.40–41) were noted at the time of their donation in the accession register as having been 'dug up in clearing a patch of ground paddy growing, kept as lucky stones for ensuring success of crop'.

Associated with these types of implements are 6 'touchstones' made from recycled adzes and axes, all black in colour with short gold streaks across their surfaces (1946.4.80). Moore and Oddy (1985) define touchstones as pieces of rock used to determine the purity of gold and sometimes, of silver. They have been in use since at least the 6th century BCE and can, in the right conditions, be accurate to $\pm 2\text{--}3\%$ and Gowland (1896: 59) has claimed that in 19th century Japan an accuracy of $\pm 1\%$ had been achieved. Small quantities of alluvial gold were known on the Peninsula from Kelantan and northwest Pahang (Dobby 1953) and were panned by local Malays and Iban in Borneo and at a much larger, semi-industrial scale by the Chinese in the nineteenth century (Chew 1990). Gold has been recognized as a currency of exchange in Malaysia since the 15th century and appears to have been in wide circulation by the 17th century (Kassim Haji Ali 1988: 89).

26.3.3 *Objects from Gunong Pondok*

Some 27 objects (1927.38.1–27) were recovered from excavations in the cave of Gua Kerbau, Gunong Pondok, and were donated by Ivor Evans. The site was first identified by Leonard Wray, who noted deposits of bone and shell in 1880. However, Wray does not appear to have conducted excavations here (Wray 1897). W.M. Gordon dug some exploratory test pits in 1921 but did not produce a report, though a summary based on site visits was published by Evans (1922). Controlled excavations were later undertaken by P. Callenfels of the Netherlands East Indies Archaeological Service and Ivor H. Evans of the Perak Museum in 1926 and 1927 (Callenfels and Evans 1928; Evans 1927, 1928). The objects in the PRM – c. 17 stone implements, 2 casts of artefacts, 3 pieces of haematite and 5 pottery sherds – appear to come from the 1927 excavation. The site is notable as it represents one of the first attempts to

formally describe the unifacially worked pebble tools, now known as ‘sumatraliths’, that are typical of the Hoabinhian Industry (Tweedie 1953: 12). At least two classic examples of these objects are present in the Museum collection made from lenticular pebbles of pale white limestone with a smooth cortex (1927.38.1, 1927.38.3) and four further pieces that can be described broadly as once having been sumatraliths (1927.38.2, 4–6).⁵ While the site has never been dated by radiocarbon or other absolute methods, based on the assemblage recovered David Bulbeck (2003) suggests that the site dates from the early to late Holocene. The PRM assemblage also includes 2 small worked pebbles of a schist-like raw material from the site (1927.38.7–8). Each has two small depressions, originally identified as ‘grip marks’ by Evans (1927), but these almost certainly are the working surfaces of these pounders. The function of these pounders remains unknown, but based on their size and overall morphology I would suggest their use was as nut-crackers. These items would be suitable for more detailed functional analyses including use-wear and especially, residue analysis.

26.3.4 Metal Artefacts

The question of whether a distinct Bronze or Chalcolithic Age is discernable in the Burmese archaeological record is still debated (Aung-Thwin 2001: 27–9). T.O. Morris, a pioneer of Burmese prehistory, knew of only 14 copper or bronze objects (Morris 1938), 2 of which are in the PRM (1899.42.41 and 1900.36.1). The former is described as a socketed spear, whilst the latter is noted to be a socketed axe, ornamented with zigzag lines in relief on one side and an inner border line in relief on the other. These were found sometime in the late 1860s or early 1870s in a bed of Nam Lwi stream, a tributary of the Mekong River (noted with the latitude and longitude of 100°E, 21°20' N) and presented to the museum in 1899 by Leveson, along with the collection of stone axe performs and roughouts described above. They were shortly thereafter a subject of one of Henry Balfour’s early papers (Balfour 1901). Their date remains unknown, and the objects in question have never been scientifically examined, despite the Museum’s involvement with metallurgical studies in the mid 20th century. There are several reasons for the rarity of these items in museums, one being that these were often considered thunderbolts (*mjojo*) of Indra (Thagya in Burma), and were thus treasured for their supernatural powers. Moreover, many examples were melted down to make plates, which were then deposited in temples with the names of their donors inscribed upon them (Aung-Thwin 2001: 27).

26.3.5 Buddhist Items from Myanmar

Among Robert Carnac Temple’s donation (outlined in 26.2 above), the Buddhist items are of particular interest, and warrant further investigation: especially the 6 metal votive figures (four of Buddha) excavated at various sites (1894.27.154, 1894.27.167–170, 1894.27.174), and the 4 15th-century tiles with glazed reliefs (1892.41.481–484), originally from procession paths of an old Pagoda, which Temple published in 1893 (Temple 1893).

26.4 Conclusions

PRM holds a unique collection of Holocene polished stone tools from Peninsula Malaysia. The range and size of the collection from Myanmar is more limited, but still relatively large in comparison to other known UK collections. The material from Myanmar does contain a rare collection of stone adze preforms, with provenance,

⁵ One is a clear example, another appears exhausted and has been bifacially flaked on one end and one other now resembles a small discoidal core seemingly coated in red sediment or possibly haematite.

and this assemblage deserves further study. The Malaysian collection represents the beginnings of formal archaeology in the region and several pieces are illustrated in early publications by I.H.N. Evans. The nut cracking stones hold great potential for use-wear and residue analysis. With the growing interest in the cognitive lives of material objects, the touchstones and charms represent a small, but valuable collection from this region.

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