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ARCHAEOLOGY IN HONG KONG AND SOUTH CHINA (1938)

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Of all the ancient and famous seats of early civilisation, China is the one where the smallest amount of scientific investigation has hitherto been done. Years of excavation and research have revealed to us many of the details of the life and history of Ancient Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Palestine, Minoan Crete, the Hittite confederacy, and prehistoric India; but of China all that was known came partly from the chance finds of curio-hunters, about which their finders carefully suppressed all information of scientific value such as provenance, depth of burial, and context of other finds; and partly from the literature of the Chou and Han dynasties, which, valuable as it is, is a distorting medium for historians.

In the last ten years, however, scientific investigation has been started. The Chinese National Research Institute has excavated several important dwelling sites in North China, including that of the capital of the Shang dynasty.† Several distinguished foreign scholars, mostly Swedes, have conducted explorations and excavations in the service of the National Government, and various provincial societies of scholars and archaeologists have worked in their own areas. A few years ago the Research Institute discovered and excavated untouched graves of the great Shang civilisation; the report on their work is eagerly awaited.

All this activity, however, relates to the area of North China traditionally known as the centre of ancient Chinese civilisation. From China south of the Yangtse and especially from its coast provinces, hardly any object had been known to come that was

* Mr. Schofield (1888-1968) was a Cadet Officer in the Hong Kong Civil Service 1911-1938. Previous contributions will be found in the 1968 and 1969 *Journals*, (Vols 8 and 9).

† The first of these, *Ch'eng-tsu-yai* (城子崖), *a Report of Excavations of the Proto-historic Site at Ch'eng-tzu-yai, Li-ch'eng Hsien, Shantung* was published as *Archaeologia Sinica Number One* by Academica Sinica Nanking 1934. A translation into English by K. Starr has been published by the Yale University Press, Yale Publications in Anthropology, No. 52, under the title *Ch'eng-tzu-yai: The Black Pottery Culture Site at Lung-shan-chen.*

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thought to be older than the Han dynasty (210 B.C.). It was known to have been conquered by the First Emperor and added to China, but even history is silent on it prior to that time (220 B.C.). Hence its prehistory lay shrouded in almost darkness, with only a few vague traditions and scanty ethnographic and linguistic data to shed light upon it.

The first beginnings of enquiry into the pre-Chinese culture of South China date back to about 1926 when Dr. Heanley, then investigating the geology of Hong Kong as an amateur, noticed lying here and there on hills of gravelly clay formed from decayed granite, stones which could not have been formed and left there naturally, and which clearly had the shape of stone adzes, as a rule smoothed and polished. Realising the importance of these finds, he devoted much of his leisure to a careful search for more of them, and in so doing discovered a number of sites, which included an axe factory, a workshop for jewellers working in quartz and other stones, and shore settlements, presumably of fishermen, as well as hill settlements. In this work he was associated with Prof. Shellshear, of Hong Kong University, and shortly before leaving Hong Kong in 1930 he interested me in the subject. I had for some time been investigating the geology of the Colony, and started this new line in association with Dr. Heanley and Prof. Shellshear. My contribution consisted mainly in discovering new sites, chiefly in sandbanks on the coasts and islands of the New Territory. Special attention was paid to these for two reasons; first, the beaches were being vigorously dug for sand to be used in building and public works; second, these sandbanks were the only places where a succession of layers containing objects of different ages could be found. As no beds of limestone exist in the Colony, it was vain to look for caves.

In my explorations I had occasion to examine a beach site discovered by Dr. Heanley on the island of Lamma close to Hong Kong. This had been dug back a considerable distance further, and I saw, littered over the beach, vast quantities of pottery, with more projecting from the sandy cliff behind. One piece of a cup I found was covered with a bottle-green glaze, a ware which was later found to be a feature of the culture at this and several other sites in Hong Kong. Later visits to the site revealed that bronze weapons and tools were to be found in fair number; in addition, rings of

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quartz and jade, and stone beads, adzes and lance heads were discovered. Some of the pottery bore makers' marks, which seemed in some cases to resemble archaic Chinese characters. To deal with the problems raised by these and the ornaments on much of the pottery, the chief of which was a symbol resembling a long *f*. and showing several variations, Prof. Shellshear invited the collaboration of the late Father Finn, S.J., a distinguished scholar in the Regional Seminary at Aberdeen, Hong Kong, and a lecturer at the University of Hong Kong. Father Finn devoted himself thenceforward to a careful study of this site and its culture, and published thirteen papers in the *Hong Kong Naturalist* on the subject, basing his work on a profound study of archaeological literature in neighbouring countries, Japan, China, Indo-China, the Straits and elsewhere.*

This study was greatly aided by the decision of the Hong Kong Government to have the site excavated at its own expense. In five weeks' work about half the undug portion of the sandbank was excavated to a depth of 6 to 7 feet, and some thousands of pottery fragments, a large number of other objects of stone, quartz, jade, bronze and even two or three partly of iron, were unearthed. Father Finn conducted this excavation, and included the description of the results in his articles.

Father Finn also worked at other sites on Lamma and Hong Kong islands, and during visits to St. John's Island (where St. Francis Xavier died), and the Swabue district near Swatow, discovered more sites. The latter district gave very interesting and important results, which have recently been outlined in a paper by Father Maglioni in the *Hong Kong Naturalist*.

In 1932 Professor Shellshear brought the facts then known about Hong Kong's prehistory before the scientific world at the Prehistorians' Congress at Hanoi, whose proceedings were published by the École Francaise d'Extrême Orient as the *Praehistorica Asiae Orientales* (Hanoi, 1932). Father Finn summed up the results of his work at the Lamma Island site at the Manila Congress of the same body in 1935.†

* A list of publications on local pre-history that includes those mentioned at various places in this article can be found at the end.

† Whose proceedings were not published. I have Mr. Schofield's notes and can make them available to anyone who may wish to consider filling a gap in our published records.

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Meanwhile work had been going on under the Geological Survey of China in Kwangsi, where the Tertiary and Recent deposits were examined, and the earth in the caves, known to yield 'dragon bones' in considerable quantities, was searched, with the result that a flaked-tool culture related to the late Hoabinhian culture (Mesolithic) of Tongking was found. It is unrelated to the cultures of the coast. These, however, seem to extend as far north as the neighbourhood of Nanking, for stone artifacts and pottery with geometric decoration have been found near there and around Hangchow, lying on the surface of the earth. No details of these discoveries are yet published. The same is true of investigations carried out round Foochow, where a culture similar to that of Hong Kong is said to have been discovered.

After the Oslo congress of prehistorians in 1936, at which Father Finn was present just before his death, Dr. J.G. Andersson went to China, and turned his attention to the problems of South China's archaeology. In Hong Kong, after visiting several sites, he suggested a trial excavation of a site at Shek Pek on the island of Lant'au, which I had discovered. We accordingly collaborated in this task for some days; after he left I did further excavation there. At this site, for the first time, were found undisturbed burials. Dr. Andersson next visited Foochow, and later went to Szechwan, where he discovered a number of Neolithic sites. After the Japanese began the war he returned to the coast by Canton, and later worked in the islands along the north Tongking coast at the invitation of the École Francaise of Hanoi, where a number of sites were discovered; some were excavated by Mlle. Colani of that institution.

Meanwhile a Chinese scholar of the National Research Institute had pursued researches at Wup'ing, West Fukien, where he found cultures akin to the earlier Hong Kong cultures and to those of Swabue. He communicated his results to the third Prehistorians' Congress at Singapore* and in his address he showed that objects belonging to this group of cultures are to be found in several sites in Fukien and Chekiang provinces, but that all finds made so far are surface finds only.

These investigations, partial and local as they are, have yielded very interesting (and in some respects sensational) results. *First,*

* These proceedings were published by the Government Printing House, Singapore, 1940.

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they have revealed a new province of culture, which from its leading characteristics as well as its geography can be seen to link the Chinese classical culture with that of the Archipelago and the Pacific Islands, generally referred to as 'Indonesian'. The reciprocal influence of these two cultures has never been adequately studied, for only in a region on their respective boundaries, such as the China Coast, can this be done.

These characteristics may be summed up as: 1. use of stone adzes, chiefly rectangular and stepped; 2. working stones with circular borer to make rings, and with stone saws to cut stone implements; 3. pottery made on the turn-table, in both coarse and fine qualities built up by the ribbon technique and decorated with cord, mat and geometrical patterns; 4. lance heads of shale or slate; 5. cylindrical stone beads; 6. rings of hard stone used as ornaments; 7. cultivation, probably by growing grain in cleared patches of jungle; 8. fishing and boatbuilding; 9. cloth-making. The later form of this culture has in addition these features: 10. casting of bronze weapons and tools; 11. use of ceremonial objects of jade, especially in burials; 12. hard, high-fired pottery stamped with the f pattern; 13. leadless glaze, green and brown, applied to pottery.

Second, they demonstrate the flow of Chinese culture to the south and its replacement of the native culture, in which can be seen traces of the ancient Chinese culture of the Shangs.

Third, they show that this native culture formed part of a culture-province which included not only the Chinese coast provinces but Japan, Manchuria, Formosa and Annam, and whose remoter connexions extend landwards into E. India and N. Asia, and seaward — as shown by the adze forms — into the Archipelago, the Philippines, and the furthest Polynesian islands. For instance, a highly polished adze with a large tang, of very distinctive form, is found in Hong Kong, the Philippines, Hawaii, Tahiti, New Zealand and Hervey Islands.

Fourth, light is thrown upon the ancient trade routes of S.E. Asia. Painted pottery, which was not, it seems, made on the China Coast, was imported from Tongking, probably along the West River. Bronze and jade of Chinese workmanship was imported from the Yangtse valley, by which of the three possible routes is uncertain. The Swabue people produced quantities of shale lance-heads, harpoons, arrow heads and rings, sometimes very delicately worked,

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and exported them to Hong Kong. Even a scrap of tin, perhaps smelted from ore obtained on the Kwangtung coast, was found during excavation at one site where bronze axes were cast. At the some time, the bead trade, so active in Malaya and the great islands, and even in the Philippines, appears to have passed South China by, for the only beads found are either of jade or of soft greenish local stone used as a substitute. This bead trade is in fact coextensive with Indian influence in the Archipelago.

Fifth, these finds raise the vast question of the immigrations of the Polynesians and Indonesians from Asia into the Pacific, and the routes they followed. Having regard to the distribution of anthropological types today, we cannot suppose that any large number of Polynesians ever visited the China coast; but there is the strongest probability that tribes of the types of those inhabiting Hainan, Formosa, the Philippines and Borneo frequented the coast, and perhaps started from it to their present seats. It may be possible eventually to prove that survivors of these peoples still live on the coast; personally, I am disposed to regard the Tan Ka or boatpeople of the Kwangtung coast as such survivors. Certain tribes of the interior, the Yui or Yao, and the Siapo of Foochow, may be similar remnants.

The archaeology of the historic periods has, inevitably, been comparatively neglected in the attractions of unearthing ancient and unknown cultures. Pottery of types familiar to archaeologists in Canton, and attributed to the Han and the Six Dynasties period (100 B.C. to 600 A.D.), has been found at several Hong Kong sites: urns probably of pre-T'ang date (615 A.D. or earlier) have been unearthed at Sheung Shui near the border and elsewhere; and pottery and porcelain of Sung, Yuan and later dynasties can be found everywhere, especially near villages. Forts and watch-posts are to be seen on islands and promontories, and walled towns and villages are frequent inland; such fortifications are, however, post-mediaeval, and the oldest are late Ming, designed for coast defence against Japanese pirates. Of megalithic remains, such as are known as near as the Laos country in Indo-China, no trace exists. No ancient porcelain kilns, such as exist in North and Central China, were ever started within the Colony, though one small establishment for making rice bowls and cooking pots has been found. In one road cutting a mass of broken porcelain of early Ming date, much

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of it with designs in red and green overglaze enamel, and some with underglaze blue, was discovered.

A short description of the leading types of objects discovered in Hong Kong will be of interest. They may be classed according to their probable uses as follows:—

1. Tools: a. agricultural
   b. woodworking
   c. general use.
2. Weapons: a. for hunting or fishing
   b. for war
   c. for ceremonial and burial purposes.
3. Ornaments: a. for dress
   b. for ceremonial, especially burial purposes.
4. Domestic utensils, including pottery.
5. Miscellaneous objects, including playthings and possibly currency.

1. a. A number of roughly-flaked tools have been discovered, many of them at frequented sites. These have various forms: some are large, heavy triangular-pointed things that might almost be called 'rostrocarinates'; others are 'short axes' with a hand-hold on the blunt edge; but a large proportion are triangular, weigh a pound or two, and have one edge flaked sharp, and one of the points adjacent to it bruised. Whether these are the teeth of primitive harrows, hand drills for planting mountain rice, or picks for knocking oysters off rocks, is uncertain, but I class them as agricultural tools. A more probable one is a sharp-edged polished stone blade which can be held hidden in the hand; it is almost certainly a reaping-knife.

1. b. The adze was the chief woodworking tool. It varies almost infinitely: the shouldered, the stepped, the rectangular (with squared sides), the cosmopolitan (with rounded sides), the cylindrical (with pointed butt), the lentoid, the trapezoid, and the boot-shaped forms have all been found, with sub-varieties. All these are in stone, flaked roughly into shape and then partly or wholly polished, but in almost every case a chip or two of the original flaking remains. Undoubtedly, the chief use of these tools was to shape the planking of boats, for their dwelling-sites give clear proof that .....

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Editor's Note The manuscript breaks off abruptly at this point, and since it was passed to me after Mr. Schofield's death in December 1968 and I was hitherto unaware of its existence there is now no means of knowing whether it was completed or finished in part only. It is reproduced here for its interest as a contemporary statement of the progress of the archaeology of Hong Kong and South China by about 1938, when it was written, and for the useful account it provides of the part played by Schofield, Shellshear and Heanley in the early period of Hong Kong archaeological studies.

PRE-WAR WRITINGS ON HONG KONG ARCHAEOLOGY INCLUDE:

(1) J. G. Andersson — "Topography of the Hongkong Sites" in Bulletin No. 11, *Topographical and Archaeological Studies in the Far East*, of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm, 1939.

(2) S. F. Balfour — Section II, "Archaeological Evidence" at pp. 336-341 of his article "Hong Kong Before The British" between pp. 330-352 and 440-464 of *T'ien Hsia Monthly*, Shanghai, 1941. [Since reprinted in Vol. 10 (1970) of this *Journal* —Ed.]

(3) Fr. D. J. Finn — various articles in *The Hong Kong Naturalist* between 1933-36. These are now reprinted in (ed. T. F. Ryan, S.J.) *Archaeological Finds On Lamma Island* (*舶遼洲*) *Near Hong Kong*, Hong Kong, Ricci publications, Ricci Hall, University of Hong Kong, 1958.

(4) C. M. Heanley and J. L. Shellshear — "A Contribution to the Prehistory of Hongkong and the New Territories", *Praehistoria Asia Orientalis*, I, Premier Congrès des Préhistoriens d'Extrême-Orient, Hanoi, 1932.

(5) W. Schofield — "Implements Of Palaeolithic Type In Hong Kong" at pp. 272-275, *The Hong Kong Naturalist*, December, 1935.

(6) W. Schofield — "The Proto-Historic Site of the Hong Kong Culture at Shek Pik, Lantau, Hong Kong" at pp. 235-305 of *Proceedings of the Third Congress of Pre-historians of the Far East*, Singapore, Government Printing House, 1940.

J. W. H., Hong Kong, 1972.