

**THE PEOPLES OF THE MENHIRS AND OF THE JARS:**  
 BEING FURTHER NOTES ON Mlle. COLANI'S PREHISTORIC  
 RESEARCHES IN INDOCHINA.

In my appreciation of *Cahiers de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient* as published in the Journal of the Thailand Research Society, Vol. XXXII, Part 1, p. 39-40, I commented on the exemplary prehistoric research work carried out so scholarly and indefatigably by the learned Mlle. Colani in the former principalities of Hua Phan Hã and Mu'ang Phuan, or more correctly Phu-Tun and not Tran-Ninh, which is an Annamite name. Since then I have had the opportunity to read and study in detail Mlle. Colani's monumental work *Mégalithes du Haut Laos*, published by the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient in 1935. For readers of our Journal, who are not proficient in the French language, the following supplementary notes may therefore be of interest.

The plateaux of Hua Phan Hã and Mu'ang Phu-Tun lie at high altitudes, and several mountain tops in the latter country reach a height of over 2,000 metres. Mu'ang Phu-Tun is especially a wild and beautiful country, with many eerie and picturesque landscapes which must have powerfully contributed to the belief of the ancient people in fairies and spirits. While the country of Phu-Tun may be called that of stone jars, Hua Phan Hã is the realm of menhirs, or upright standing stones, as already mentioned in my above appreciation. There is a legend about these menhirs. The original inhabitants were Khã Yeui (1). They had a culture-hero, Ba Hat by name, who used frequently to visit heaven at a time when heaven still lay low over the earth (2). He received as gifts from the Phi Than (the heavenly spirit) a magical drum, a drill wherewith to produce water, and an axe for the working in stone. Next Ba

(1) One wonders whether the so-called *Thai Yeui* living in Amphoe Akat Amnuay, Changvat Nakhon Phanom, have any connection with the Khã Yeui?

(2) See similar ancient Chinese beliefs in *Journal Asiatique*, tome COIV No. 1, p. 96, Henri Maspéro's *Légendes mythologiques dans le Chou King*.

Hat rebelled against the king of Luang Phrabang (was this a Khmer governor or already then a Thai prince?) and defeated him. However, due to misuse of it, Ba Hat had to return the magical drum to heaven, having called wantonly for the assistance of Phi Then; but still he began to build "the free city" of Kong Phan on the ridge of the San Ang hill. By various ruses the king of Luang Phrabang, who had become the son-in-law of Ba Hat, gained the upper hand again; the "free city" was never built but the already quarried stones were, later on, used as menhirs. By and by Luang Phrabang subjugated the Khā Yeui, by burning their "wooden tower", and depriving Ba Hat's tools of their magic powers. The descendants of the Khā Yeui, who are said to have been "tall, bronzed and bearded", are now the poor Khā Phong who only number 500 families, and are dying out. Mlle. Colani asks herself: Were the Khā Phong a race or a people? According to Dr. Verneau, the French anthropologist, it becomes more and more probable that the Indonesians and the Khā descend from a common stock which was domiciled in the north of Indochina. The troglodytes (cave dwellers) of Pho-Binh-Gia were the primitives of this stock. If it is proved that the Khā of Mu'ang Phu-Hun are dolicocephalics, then a new vista opens.

The present inhabitants of Hua Phan Hā are, in the north: Black and Red Thai; and centre and south: Thai Nu'a, all living on the plains. In the hills sit the Indonesian Khamu (also called Phu Th'ung who, by the way, form the nucleus of the Roman Catholics of Ubon). In the hills also live Khā Phong (also called Pai or Ok), furthermore White, Red and flowered Maeo and Yao immigrants from China. The country of Hua Phan is full of caves, ancient chaussées and megaliths, and it presents a mosaic of various peoples. Hua Phan is the country of the menhirs *par excellence*. The largest of these are found at San Kong Phan, with the tombs and their "lids", as described in my appreciation. It may here be mentioned that upright stones, in Thai *hin dang* —หินตั้ง— are found in Changvat Chaiyaphum, Amphoe Chaturat, as well as in Phu Khio Kao, Amphoe Phu Khio; also in Changvat Ubon, Amphoe Muang Samsib (3).

Bronze vessels and bracelets have been found interred with pottery at the menhirs. Mlle. Colani says that the decoration on the schist

---

(3) *Vide my Complément à l'Inventaire descriptif des monuments du Cambodge* B. E. F. O. tome XXII—1922 pp. 88-89-90 and p. 61.

circlets may be compared with that of the painted pottery of Kansu of the last neolithic period of that region (4).

The bronze age culture of San Kong Phan was very little developed, and the people of the menhirs had arrived at the iron age. As a means to fix the age of the tombs it may be mentioned that finds of Song porcelain (XIII century C. E.) have been made. The arrangement of low transversal walls in the tombs are analogous to the small brick walls seen in Korean tombs from the Han period.

What were the exact significance of these stone monuments, the learned lady asks. Should, as is the case with those in Burma and Assam, the standing menhirs be considered as phalli and the lying ones (so-called "lids") as yonis, Buschan's idea, or were the lying ones, the discs or "lids", not used for sacrificial purposes? Monoliths are also raised for commemorative purposes as is still done among the Kuki clans and Nagas of Assam (5). Van der Hoop says that the horizontal stones were used, in the Malay Archipelago to cover the tombs of women, and of men too. According to Baron von Heine-Geldern, the Khasis, a Môn-Khmer people in Assam, place flat discs on the ground between the three places where the ashes of the deceased are successively interred.

The Thai of Upper Thanh-Hoa, who bury their dead within a cromlech (a circle of stones), place their dead with their heads towards the north. It is generally agreed that most primitive people follow this custom, says Mlle. Colani. (Yes! but it may also indicate the direction from which these people penetrated into Indo-China, and the Thai *did* come from the north). Mlle. Colani adds that the cromlechs of the Thai may be a survival of the menhirs of the bronze age.

The cromlech, consisting of four stones, is found in South Sumatra (Van der Hoop). However, stone circles *not* connected with burials are found in England, Brittany, among the Kacharis and in Assam. The Sema Nagas put up a circle of low stones in memory of rich people. The Thangkul Nagas (Manipur) have rings of stones inside which oaths are taken. See also the famous gigantic Uilom stone circle in Thangkul Nagaland where the young men dance and wrestle inside (6). On the ancient Tungus graves in Yēso (Japan), circles of stones, with one large

(4) *Vide* Palmgren: *Kansu Mortuary urns, etc.*

(5) *Vide* T. C. Hodson: *The Naga Tribes of Manipur* p. 11, and Colonel J. Shakespear: *The Luehai-Kuki Clans.*

(6) *Vide* Hodson *op. cit.* p. 112.

piece as centre, are found. M. Pajot found the same arrangement in Thanh-Hoa. Is there a cultural connexion between North and South Asia? There are lexical concordances between the Ainu and the Malayo-Polynesian languages, and Mr. Matsumoto finds the same between Japanese and Malayo-Polynesian. Were the Ainus once spread over all Japan, and did they represent the original and true Oceanians, Mlle. Colani asks. That the Ainus are a people of hoary antiquity is proved by Prof. Weidenreich's saying that a skull of the Ainu type was found in the caves at Chou Kou Tien, where the remains of the Peking man were first encountered.

Concerning the stone jars of Tran-Ninh (Mu'ang Phu-Eun) Mlle. Colani says that if they are not protected by vigorous cutting down of the vegetation, the roots of the bushes will, by and by, destroy these quartz funeral jars. In 1872 the Hô pirates from China occupied Chiang Kwang, the former rich and beautiful capital of the Phu-Euns, which they sacked besides maltreating the population. (Some 6,000 Phu-Eun were later on settled in the eastern parts of the former circle of Udorn). The Hô pirates also destroyed methodically part of the stone jars. The number of these, which so far are in a standing position, and have been studied, is about 250; but if the whole terrain was cleared their number would probably be much increased. The material of which the jars are made is granite (quartz), limestone, schist, sandstone or pudding stone. The transport of heavy jars, 2 metres high, must have presented a problem. Some of them weigh up to 15,000 kilograms or 15 tons! With regard to the transport of such heavy objects, see, however, Hutton's diagram of how the Lhota Nagas transport *their* huge megaliths. The people of the jars were agriculturists and traders, and seem to have been peaceable folk as very few arms have been found.

The Dong So'n station is probably contemporaneous with the jars of Mu'ang Phu-Eun. Besides the jars there are the curious champignon-formed discs decorated with reliefs of animals, such as tigers or monkeys. The heads of the animals are often cut off. (By the local population, in order to deprive the animals of their magic powers?). Van der Hoop found similar reliefs in South Sumatra. At the San Hin Um jar field are seen sub-spherical calottes with reliefs of human beings. Mlle. Colani asks: Were these "lids", champignons and calottes, not for sacrificial purposes? We think so. There *were* real lids, however, to protect the contents of the jars, bones and ashes, but these were of hard wood, since

rotted away. The stone "lids" do not fit into the openings of the jars. There were also funeral stones: Menhirs, dolmens and lying stones. The stones with reliefs of animals or human beings are numerous. Such carved stones are found in North Borneo (*vide* Ling Roth & Mjöberg). Some of the animal reliefs are real pieces of true art, others are rather crude. The human representations give no clue to the race of the artists. The jars are found in groups, often buried halfway in the ground, evidently without any plan in their arrangement. On p. 264 Mlle. Colani asks: Can the beads or pearls of clay or glass found in the funeral fields be compared with those ancient ones hailing from Mycenae or only from South India?

We wonder whether any such beads have been found in Thailand? A likely spot to search for them would perhaps be at the ancient Mu'ang Kampheng Sen to the N. W. of Nakhon Pathom. Crude statuettes of bronze are sometimes found at the foot of the menhirs together with clay vases containing beads and also such statuettes.

In earthen vessels placed round or beneath the jars, or monolithic urns, are found bits of charred human bones, teeth, crystals, glass beads, stone axes, rings, small discs, weights and charcoal. Sometimes these objects are interred directly in the ground round the jars which may then be surrounded by a circle of upright stones. Débris of bronze bangles and iron swords have also been found. All this indicates a transition period from the polished stone age to that of bronze. It is also curious to notice that the iron tool for striking fire found at these funeral sites are identical with those used to-day by the Khā Phong, and during the Viking period in Sweden!

Mlle. Colani asks whether the stone circlelets were Tehakras (The Sikh weapon). Some ear-shaped discs are decorated with a cross, which all over Eurasia was once the symbol of the sun. All these objects may have constituted offerings to the *manes*, and the culture of the plain of the jars must, like that found at Samrong Sen in Cambodia, have extended over a long period.

A great caravan route led from Sa-Huynh on the coast of northern Annam northwestwards through forests and funeral fields, four principal necropolises, to Luang Phrabang. The last of the necropolises being near to the latter town. Along this route there are, as formerly mentioned, a certain number of menhirs.

The learned lady says that in order to determine the age of the jars of Mu'ang Phu-Eun and of the menhirs of Hua Phan, the stratigraphy of Professor Otley Beyer must be used, *viz* :

1. Microliths, perhaps palaeolithic tools.
2. Non-polished stone tools-Mesolithic-Bacsonian age of Tongking.
3. Partly polished stone tools; crude pottery.
4. Polished stone tools-Neolithic; good pottery, hand made.
5. & 6. Iron knives or swords, axes and harpoon points, various shaped and decorated pottery, glass beads and bangles.
7. Chinese pottery.

The megaliths of Hua Phan are probably not old (but older than the jars), only from the first century C. E. The pearls, pseudo-roman, are younger. Von Heine-Geldern places the migration of the *Uraustronesians* with the *Vierkantbeit* (four cornered axe) between 2,000 and 1,500 before C. E. But from where did this migration start? Golubew says that the oldest metal drums cannot go back to more than the very first centuries of the C. E. The pearls, if really of Greek origin, may be prior to the C. E. The last blossoming of the megalithic culture, says von Heine-Geldern, must just have preceded the Hindu influence in Indonesia.

The makers of the menhirs of Hua Phan do not seem to have known iron.

To be noted is Mlle. Colani's ingenious explanation of how the "basket pattern" of the ancient pottery originated. She says that it was made by applying a wooden spatula enrolled with string, to the still wet exterior of the clay vessel. This explanation is being accepted more and more by all prehistorians.

According to a folk tale, two rich cities lay to the northwest of the plain of jars. It says: The kings of the Chuong called Thao-Ni, or Chuong Hau, were born in Chiang Mai (*sic!*). They came and conquered Mu'ang Ngam Yang (Chiang Kwang's old name) and thereafter Mu'ang Pakan (Annam), and again Tum Wang Yünnan, but were finally beaten by the Hô. This happened *after* the erection of the jars. Were these Chuong Khã or Thai? And who were the Khã Thuong? The myth says that they were giant Khãs. Their kings, after long wars with the invading Thai, retreated to the Annamite cordillera towards the south. Their descendants were the famed so-called Kings of Water, Fire and Air, who are considered by the Khã as real royal personages.

The late Captain Barthélemy said that he had seen along the ancient caravan route from Luang Phrabang to Chiang Kwang, and the San river, stone circles and stone tombs (dolmens) akin to those met with in South Oran (Algiers). The late Raquez confirms this, but Mlle. Colani has never seen them. These tombs ought to be re-discovered. Similar circles or groups of stones are found in Japan (Isle of Yōso) erected by the Tunguses, and in Mongolia, besides in North Tongking, where they are unique in Indochina and quite unlike those in South China. Would these stone monuments not be of considerable interest for the study of tribal migrations, Mlle. Colani asks. We believe so, very much. There are clear traces of the routes of invasion from Yunnan via Laokay, Sam Nu'a (Hua Phan) and Chiang Kwang to Luang Phrabang and along Nam San southwards. (The Thai of the Menam and Mekhong valleys came that way). Megalithism in Insulinde also came from the north (Celebes). Did the menhir and jar peoples also come from the north? Or did they come from the northwest? We believe the latter was the route.

The study of *the salt routes* is another fascinating subject. Salt became a necessity for man when he shifted from an entire diet of meat to one mixed with vegetables. During the Halstatt period the salt trade was already flourishing in Europe. Here in the extreme east we see the line of salt deposits running from the Yangtze river, north of Tali, south-east to Phongsaly (North Tongking), from there to Luang Phrabang, and south of this town to Wiengchan and further southeast through Udorn to Nakhon Panom and Nam Mūn, and finally the Khorat plain (7).

Is there a cultural line running from Cachar (Assam) in the northwest to Sa-Huynh in the southeast, Mlle. Colani asks. It seems so. Fields with jars were found in 1928 in Assam and Cachar by Messrs. J. P. Mills and J. H. Hutton. Four main fields were encountered with altogether 500 monoliths (jars and bulb shaped stones; the latter perhaps denoting a phallic cult). The jars are closely connected with the forms found at Chiang Kwang. They are ranged in rows or in groups, often destroyed by Vandals. They are "male" and "female" jars. The urns and *tabourets* are decorated with geometrical patterns or pictures of animals, human beings or only heads. (Have the latter something to do with head hunting?). Stone circles are found there too, each stone being

---

(7) See my review of Prof. Credner's book *Siam, das Land der Thai*, on the salt trade in Northeast Thailand.

a seat. It is a mystery as to who erected these monoliths (jars) and stone seats, and made the long two hand iron swords found interred there. It must have been done by a people living there before the Tibeto-Burmese influence penetrated into Assam.

The culture of this unknown people was analogous to that of the Môn-Khmer, according to the traditions of the Nāgas and Mikirs. The Khasi and Syntengs are associated with stone circles too. These people, as well as the Nāgas, are also phallic adorators, the upright stones representing the linga and the lying ones the yoni. (This does not quite agree with what Messrs. T. C. Hodson and J. H. Hutton tell us about Nāga beliefs).

Messrs. Hutton and Mills agree that the jars in Assam and Cachar contained the ashes of the cremated dead (Mikir, Sackehip, Kuki and Hrangkol). They also think that the particular monolithic cult in Assam is a branch of a widely spread ancestral phallic cult in southeast Asia, Oceania and even Madagascar. In Assam are also found stones incised with human figures. By the Khasis, stones were not only raised for the dead but also to commemorate other events than death, and for other purposes such as for oath taking. The stone may be a cenotaph only, and the body of the dead be interred in a schist grave far from the monument. There are "stones of the salt" where an oath is taken by eating salt from the tip of a sword. (Quite a manly idea! Something akin to the Kachin who take the oath on a drawn sword). The Khasis have also cromlechs, cairns, dolmens and stone tables. Food sacrifices (to the ancestors?) are placed on such stone tables by the Mikirs and Nāgas. Perhaps there were human sacrifices before?

Returning to Mu'ang Phu-Eun, Mlle. Colani says that it may be that there were also "male" and "female" jars here, as well as sexed menhirs and discs in Hua Phan, and the pointed stones on the Luang Phrabang road, are they not lingas? And at Sa-Huynh "*même chose*". She says "the idea is natural and sensible, it is nature's own processes". We wonder whether dolmens and schist graves do exist in Thailand. There are such in Malaya, Annam and Java, and their period is between the neolithic and iron age. Stone jars and menhirs in connection with the cult of the dead are found in Sumatra (south), in Java (centre and south) and in Celebes (centre); in the latter island are found true jars, not the "troughs" of Sumatra, as well as dolmens. Another cultural link between

Mu'ang Phu-Eun and Java are the bangles which the Javanese women fix to the seam of their skirts.

Mlle. Colani mentions the curious fact of finds of skeletal remains of tall people and dwarfs together. Such finds were made in rock shelters in Tongking and in Malaya (Selinsing). To-day of course we have many examples of tall people and pygmies living side by side, such as the Papuans and the inland pygmies of New Guinea; the Malays and Semang in Malaya; the tall Dravidians and the small Weddahs in South India, and in Central Africa the giant Bahima (in Ruanda) and the tiny Batwa dwarfs.

The erection of stones for commemorating the dead or jars for keeping their mortal remains, mummyfying or otherwise protecting such remains or even raising statues of them as in Nāgaland, Nias and Melanesia, all spring from the same desire of perpetuating life. As has aptly been said, "That most vital concept in man's life continuity" (8).

It seems, as already said, that a megalithic culture has travelled from west to east and southeast. Von Heine-Geldern says that megalithic culture travelled from northwest to southeast, to Insulinde and Luzon, between 2,000 and 1,500 before C. M. Professor Gunnar Andersson in his *Sur la voie à travers les steppes* says the same. Even the now extinct animals such as the hipparion and giant ostrich followed such a route, i. e. a northerly route from west to east. The Halstatt iron culture also reached China via the Central Asian steppes.

To go back to our own particular cultural route, Mlle. Colani says that we must find other monuments at present hidden on the forest clad hills between Cachar and Mu'ang Phu-Eun to establish that route.

That gap represents a stretch of 1,100 kilometres; from Mu'ang Phu-Eun to Sa-Huynh is 650 kilometres, as the crow flies.

The route from Bang Ang was an important trade artery running northwestwards. This was also the direction of the souls going to their ancestral land—Gone west!

Von Heide-Geldern says that when the primitive had no stones, he raised monuments of wood. The large gap between the two megalithic centres in Mu'ang Phu-Eun and Assam may be explained by the disappearance of such wooden monuments. However, as Mlle. Colani says,

(8) Vide S. F. Nadel; *Gummu, a Fertility cult of the Nupe in Northern Nigeria*, Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, Vol. LXVII—1937—January-June p. 112.

by patient and continuous search, stone monuments are due to be found approximately along the line she has drawn on the map (9) from Luang Phrabang to Assam. She says furthermore (10), "At Luang Phrabang ends the colonial route No. 7 which connects this town with the sea. Does a path on the other side (now Thai) of the Mekhong, going west, not continue the old trade route and cultural road on the eastern bank?" A search for stone monuments of the kind found in Mu'ang Phu Eun, Hua Phan or Assam, should therefore be started in Changvats Lān Nā Chāng, Nān and Chiangrai in order to take up the thread. Even the discovery of coloured beads, as pictured in Mlle. Colani's monumental work, should be of assistance to find the supposed continuation of the ancient route. During a recent visit to Nakhon Nān, we tried to interest certain people in the search for this route with its accompanying monuments, and it is to be hoped, when peaceful times return, that young Thai scientists will take up such work as soon as possible.

The question may be posed why the megalithic culture should have travelled from west to east and not *vice versa*. To this the reply is that the oldest megalithic monuments in the world are found in the lands of the so-called "fertile crescent," i. e. the lands of Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, where civilization was born. There can therefore, for those of us who believe in the theory of diffusion as the correct one, be no doubt about the megalithic cultures travelling from west to east and not *vice versa*.

Finally, as a piece of good advice to young would-be students and research workers on the pre-history and archaeology of Southeast Asia: Start by reading and *digesting* Mlle. Colani's splendid work *Les mégalithes du Haut Laos* and add to that a close study of the report on *Proceedings of the Third Congress of Pre-historians at Singapore 1938*.

Mlle. Colani's above-mentioned work was published in 1935 in two volumes, running to altogether 629 pages with 409 figures in the text and 102 beautiful plates, besides two water colours depicting the ancient beads. As stated above this work is unique: it is a masterpiece of pre-historic research work, and as such will be of lasting value for all future students and research workers.

ERIK SEIDENFADEN.

Bangkok, 10th March 1942.

(9) See map p. 212, Vol. II.

(10) p. 276 Vol. II.