

### III. MALAYA

## A short description of Malayan Prehistoric Pottery

By B. A. V. PEACOCK

#### I. INTRODUCTION

##### *The Collections*

THE humid, tropical climate of Malaya does not favour the archæological record. Sites in exposed positions soon vanish before the joint onslaught of weather and vegetation. Even where some measure of natural protection is afforded, as for example in the caves and rock shelters which riddle the limestone in the northern half of the Peninsula, only the most durable artifacts survive. Given such extreme conditions, it is not therefore surprising that pottery, one of the most lasting products of primitive technology, should form a major item in any collection of Malayan prehistoric material. What is surprising, in view of its preponderance in the later periods, is that no attempt should have been made so far to describe the Malayan ceramics in detail.

The earliest recorded archæological excavations in Malaya were those of Mr L. Wray, the first Curator of the Perak Museum, Taiping. Between 1880 and 1891 Wray investigated rock shelters in the limestone hill known as Gunong Cheroh near Ipoh in the State of Perak. However, these pioneer efforts were not very enlightening and he found no ceramics. ' . . . except for some fragments of coarse earthenware in the superficial layers of some of the caves . . . undoubtedly of comparatively speaking recent Malayan origin' (Wray 1897: 45).

Mr I. H. N. Evans was more fortunate during his long career in Malaya. In 1917 he excavated caves and rock shelters at Lenggong and Batu Kurau in Perak and at Gunong Sennyum and Kota Tongkat in Pahang. From 1926 to 1927, with the collaboration of Dr P. V. van Stein Callenfels, he continued the excavation of Gua Kerbau, a rock shelter in the limestone massif of Gunong Pondok in Perak, which Mr W. M. Gordon had started in 1921.

All these sites revealed traces of ancient occupation including quantities of pot sherds, but it was not until 1935, after Mr H. D. Noone's discovery of the rock shelter of Gua Cha in Kelantan, that unbroken pottery vessels were found in an archæological context. Gua Cha was destined to prove one of the most important sites in the country.

The later course of pre-war archæology was for the most part in the hands of the Raffles Museum, Singapore, with financial assistance from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Between 1936 and 1939 several excavations were carried out by H. D. Collings, M. W. F. Tweedie, H. D. Noone and P. V. van Stein Callenfels in caves and rock shelters ranging from Perlis, Kedah and Perak on the west coast, to Kelantan and Pahang on the east coast. Most of the sites explored added something useful to our knowledge of Malayan prehistoric ceramics.

After the war intensive field work was hampered by troubled conditions in the country. Meanwhile the depredations of guano-diggers, always a nuisance to archaeologists in Southeast Asia, were proceeding apace. Fortunately, Major P. D. R. Williams-Hunt, while Acting Director of Museums and Adviser on Aborigines in the Federation of Malaya and before his tragic and premature death in 1953, was able to revisit most of the known sites and to discover a number of new ones before the removal of their deposits for fertilizer had destroyed all traces of the cultures contained in them. In this way Williams-Hunt discovered the important site of Bukit Tengku Lembu in Perlis and the strange pottery cones of Kodiang in Kedah. In these and other instances he was able to act before it was too late, but not before much valuable archaeological data had been irrevocably lost. But, sad to say, in the seven years since the death of Williams-Hunt, despite the introduction of legal devices, most if not all the potentially rich cave and shelter sites on the west coast, apart from those to which access has been barred to guano-digger and archaeologist alike by the activities of Communist terrorists and Government security forces, as for example the limestone hills in the Ipoh district of Perak, have been lost to science.

A few sites may remain intact in the remote and undeveloped hinterland of Malaya. But probably these areas were just as difficult to reach in ancient times as they are today and they could hardly have been more attractive then to prospective settlers. The great rock shelter of Gua Cha is on the fringe of just such an area. Its incomparably rich deposits remained unviolated after their discovery by Noone in 1935 until they were excavated by Sieveking in 1954.

Of the few open sites recorded in the annals of Malayan prehistory, the settlement of Nyong on the banks of the River Tembeling in Pahang (Evans 1931 *b*), the stone slab-built graves of Perak and Selangor with their iron implements (Evans 1928 *a* and 1931 *c*; Collings 1937 *a*) and the site of Tanjong Rawa in the mangrove swamps of Kuala Selinsing in Perak (Evans 1932) have been the only significant sources of pottery. The latter site, by virtue of its late date—it has probably to be regarded as proto-historical—is outside the terms of reference of the present paper. The Nyong ceramics, in poor condition when excavated, have not stood up well to the passing of several decades in a tropical museum. Indeed, their state of decay has been exceeded only by some of the pottery from the slab-graves, much of which has mouldered away completely for want of proper preservative treatment. This material can now only really be studied through the relevant reports, a poor substitute for acquaintance with actual specimens, and so, despite its importance, it has not been possible to deal with it in great detail.

Today there are two main collections of Malayan prehistory which are housed in the Raffles Museum, Singapore, and the Museums Department of the Federation of Malaya respectively. For the specialist in ceramics the latter is the more important of the two. At one time the archaeological material in the Federation was shared between the National Museum in Kuala Lumpur and the Perak Museum in Taiping. However, while the writer was Curator of Museums between 1956 and 1959 all the specimens were brought together in Taiping in order to facilitate cataloguing and the formation of a nucleus for a comprehensive reference collection. This amalgamation incidentally created an excellent opportunity for an exhaustive

study of the prehistoric ceramics. Several visits to Singapore during this time and the invaluable co-operation of Dr C. A. Gibson-Hill, Director of the Raffles Museum, enabled the writer to complete a survey of all the available material.

### *Method of Study*

The study and description of the complete vessels presented few problems. The Federation Museums Department collection was photographed and accurate half-section drawings were made of every specimen by Che Abdul Wahab, the staff artist. Unfortunately, there was insufficient time to have drawings made of the complete vessels in the Raffles Museum, but it was possible to photograph the entire collection. This does not represent a real deficiency, since the Raffles Museum collection is made up primarily of a selection of the main types from Gua Cha which could be studied adequately in the Federation. It was possible to classify the few remaining items from other sites by means of photographs and notes.

The extensive sherd material was quite another matter. No attempt had previously been made to study, or even to sort, the sherds from most of the sites. In the case of sherds from one or two of the localities investigated by Williams-Hunt, they were still enshrined unwashed in the boxes in which they had been brought in from the field. After sorting, accurate profiles of a series from each group were drawn, the groups being arranged according to a number of objective criteria of which type of paste, rim form, surface finish and decoration were the most important.

Despite the quantity of the material available for analysis, certain serious limitations to its value were obvious from the outset. Chief among these was the almost complete absence of stratigraphy at most of the sites. Until Sieveking excavated at Gua Cha no real effort had been made to link finds to natural stratigraphy, even on those rare occasions where the latter had been observed. The nearest approach to honest stratigraphical methods was the often employed technique of quoting bare measurements from a datum, sometimes further elaborated by bearings taken by theodolite, or clinometer and compass, with utterly fatal disregard for the natural levels which such an artificial system cuts through unobserved.

Generally speaking the published excavation reports are inadequate and were of little value to this analysis. All too frequently ceramics are dismissed in a few brief sentences, or, where some consideration is given to pottery, descriptive terms are employed so loosely as to nullify their effect.

In the case of Williams-Hunt's collections lack of data must perforce be accepted without too much complaint. They were made, for the most part, in the course of emergency operations in which the sites were threatened with imminent destruction, or otherwise in hurried and necessarily superficial examinations conducted as offshoots of more pressing work connected with the administration of the aborigines.

But, in the face of these sad realities, it is the more tragic, since valid excuses are wanting, that it should not have proved possible to study the large assemblage of sherds from Gua Cha stratigraphically owing to the absence of vital field data.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sieveking, G. de G., 1954-55: 130, 'A copy of the stratigraphical records from the excavation is preserved in Perak Museum File 26/54 vol. iv.' By 1956, when the writer made a search, this file was unfortunately not to be found.

Last but not least of the difficulties which had to be surmounted during the preparatory work was the chaotic state into which the archaeological collections had fallen during the Japanese occupation and its aftermath. Much time and effort had to be directed to unravelling the tangled confusion resulting from bad labelling—or no labelling at all—and the inadequate storage facilities. Only material which could be identified and localized beyond any doubt was drawn upon for this analysis, a principle which led to the rejection of a large quantity of sherds and a number of complete pieces.

However, despite these drawbacks and the hopelessness of trying to set up a relative chronology in the present state of our knowledge, it was felt that a complete descriptive corpus would at least have the virtue of putting on record the range and distribution of known ceramic types and perhaps form a basis for tentative outside correlations. Of course the absence of a chronological scheme would necessarily impose the utmost caution on any typological comparisons, even between material from the Malayan sites themselves. Finally, certain internal distributional features emerged which are of great interest in indicating cultural links between different sites and, among other things, in suggesting a relationship between the slab-grave culture and that of at least one of the cave sites.

In order to fit in with the aims of the present volume with its emphasis on the ceramics of Sa-huỳnh, this paper presents a summary of certain selected aspects of the main work which it is hoped will be published in complete form at some future date. The intention has been to convey a clear and accurate overall impression of the types of pottery found in Malayan sites, without burdening the text with superfluous detail. To this end greater stress has been laid on the complete vessels. Limitations of space and scope have made it both impossible and undesirable to deal with the sherd material. The sherds have, however, been used to supplement a discussion of decoration and manufacturing techniques. It is also impossible to publish here full sectional drawings of each specimen. Instead we give semi-diagrammatical drawings to a scale of 1/7 covering the different groups from each site. This seems to provide a better perspective for the purposes of comparison. Some drawings and photographs of particularly noteworthy specimens have been included.

## 2. THE COMPLETE VESSELS

Complete vessels or major restorable fragments have been recovered from the following sites:

### State of Kelantan

- A. *Gua Cha*
- B. *Gua Musang*

### State of Perak

- Lenggong* complex of caves and rock shelters

### State of Kedah

- A. *Gua Berhala*, Kodiang
- B. *Pulau Tuba*, Langkawi Islands

### State of Perlis

- A. *Bukit Wang Pisang*
- B. *Bukit Tengku Lembu*

We shall deal separately with the specimens from each of these localities in the above order, giving a résumé of such other relevant archæological data as it has been possible to derive from published reports or independent field observations.

#### STATE OF KELANTAN

##### A. *Gua Cha, (also Gua Menteri, Gua Chos)*

*The Excavation.* The rock shelter Gua Cha is situated in an isolated limestone outcrop on the west bank of the Nenggiri River in Kelantan. It lies about eight miles below the confluence of the Betis with the Nenggiri and a short distance above the mouth of the Perias. Gua Cha stands back about seventy yards from the present-day Nenggiri close to the point where the Sungai Cha, a rivulet, enters the main stream. The rock shelter is about one hundred yards long and some ten yards in height to the point of overhang. The strip of ground protected by the roof is roughly twenty yards wide.

The potentialities of the site were apparent as early as 1935 (Noone 1939). Mr H. D. Noone, who was carrying out field-work among the Temiar of the Perak-Kelantan border region, made two trial trenches in the deposits which brought to light two human burials and no less than eight unbroken pottery vessels. These pots, the first to have been found intact in Malaya, seemed to have been associated with the interments as grave furniture. The war years intervened and although Gua Cha was revisited in 1951 by Williams-Hunt (1952), it was three more years before security conditions permitted a full scale excavation.

In 1954 the Federation Museums Department, collaborating with the Raffles Museum, Singapore, sent an expedition under the direction of the Curator of Museums, Mr G. de G. Sieveking, and his wife (Sieveking 1954-55). Sieveking excavated two cuttings in the main part of the shelter down to archæologically sterile levels and, in the case of part of the first cutting, to bedrock itself. A third cutting was made to secure additional Neolithic cultural material and a fourth, in a terrace outside the shelter, which proved to be quite unproductive.

The stratigraphy of Gua Cha is best illustrated from the sections revealed in the first cutting. The sequence below topsoil was as follows:

- i.* Silt and current bedded sands . . . Modern and Historical (Chinese) hearths.
- ii.* Black and Stony Layer . . . Main Neolithic occupation level.
- iii.* Fine silt . . . Sterile.
- iv.* Neolithic Flake Layer . . . First phase of Neolithic occupation.
- v.* Silt . . . Sterile.
- vi.* Chocolate Brown Earth . . . Hoabinhian level.
- vii.* Yellow Gravel . . . Sterile.
- viii.* Compact Yellow Clay . . . Sterile.
- ix.* Bedrock.

The Hoabinhian culture was represented by contracted burials and other fragmentary human skeletal material all differing markedly in colour and general appearance from burials found in the later levels. These contracted burials and

quantities of characteristic chipped stone implements were confined to the stratum of Chocolate Brown Earth which was sealed off by a sterile band of silt from the rest of the deposits. The Hoabinhian, being a pre-ceramic culture, is not, of course, of direct concern to us here.

In interpreting the important Neolithic remains, it is vital to understand that the earliest evidence of this period at the site, namely the so-called Neolithic Flake Layer, is a purely localized feature found only in part of the first cutting and by no means co-extensive with the floor of the shelter. This level consisted in the main of compacted stone flakes and some roughly chipped but otherwise unfinished quadrangular adzes. Only a few sherds of pottery were found. Sieveking recognized this, beyond doubt correctly, as a working floor.

The Black and Stony Layer, the level of main Neolithic occupation, was thought to have been continually disturbed by human agency during its formation. For this reason no distinct hearths were discovered, but these were inferred from the relatively high carbon content of the stratum. Sherds were in great abundance and some polished stone implements were found.

Burials of the Neolithic period were of two kinds and in view of the apparent difference of funerary custom it is interesting to note that both were oriented in precisely the same way, that is to say parallel to the rear wall of the shelter with the head, where present, pointing upstream. The first group of burials were fragmentary, only the long bones and sometimes the skull being present. These were associated with fewer and poorer grave goods. The second group, on the other hand comprised complete skeletons interred in a prone position and accompanied by a comparatively elaborate grave furniture including fine polished implements, stone bracelets, shell ornaments and several complete pottery vessels disposed round the corpse.

*The Ceramics.* Apart from quantities of sherds in excellent preservation, a large number of fine unbroken pots were recovered. Many of these were excavated in association with Neolithic burials, while others were found in isolated 'nests' or 'alignments' which are referred to in the report as votive deposits.

From the wide range of types present Sieveking distinguished two stages of ceramic development which he referred to as a Primitive and an Advanced Neolithic Tradition. These two stages were correlated with the Early and Main Neolithic levels respectively.

According to Sieveking, pottery in the Primitive Tradition was irregular in shape and roughly built by hand. In some cases too it was very poorly fired. The Advanced Tradition, however, showed a much more sophisticated treatment of design and greater skill in manufacture. Shapes had been elaborated to include carinated and footed vessels and most were turned on the slow wheel.

This is the first time that a serious claim has been made to have observed a definite chronological progression in the ceramics from a Malayan site. If it could be substantiated, it goes without saying that its importance would be very great indeed. Unhappily close investigation reveals little evidence in support of Sieveking's theory and some in direct contradiction.

Turning to Sieveking's own stratigraphical observations and the plans and sections accompanying his report, we find that in the first cutting two extended

burials associated with pottery of the 'primitive' type were found stratified below the Flake Layer. This layer showed no signs of having been disturbed in the vicinity of the burials (Cutting 1, burials Nos. 1 and 2) and we may confidently accept their attribution to an early phase of Neolithic occupation (Sieveking 1954-55: 88).

Difficulties however arise when 'advanced' burials are seen to occur below the Flake Layer in the same cutting. Sieveking explained this by the assumption that in later Neolithic times increasingly over-crowded conditions in the cemetery necessitated deep graves. He went even further and suggested, though seemingly without evidence, that graves were marked in some way on the Neolithic ground surface. It will be recalled that the Flake Layer has but a restricted distribution and Sieveking was obliged to admit that the 'advance' burials in question (Cutting 1, burials Nos. 7 to 9) occur in parts of the cutting where the Flake Layer is either totally absent or 'where it was difficult to ascertain whether this layer had been disturbed' (Sieveking 1954-55: 88).

Harder to explain is the fact that four fragmentary burials (Cutting 1, burials Nos. 3 to 6) associated with pottery of 'primitive' type actually occur above the Flake Layer and either in or at the base of the Black and Stony Layer (Sieveking 1954-55: 87). Clearly these cannot date from before the main period of Neolithic occupation. The stratigraphy of the other cuttings is similarly inconclusive.

While it cannot be denied that some of the complete vessels do show a simpler concept of design and technique (*cf.* Fig. 5 *j, k, l*) than the remainder, there seems to be far too little evidence to suggest a chronological distinction. Indeed stratigraphy would appear to be more in favour of contemporaneity. The excavator himself seems to have entertained doubts on this score since he says, 'there does not appear to be a significant variation in the depth of burial between those graves containing primitive and late grave goods' (Sieveking 1954-55: 77).

No argument upholding a relative chronology can be held valid if it has to rely purely on stylistic grounds. So tenuous in fact is his argument, that Sieveking was forced to explain the not infrequent association of both 'primitive' and 'advanced' pottery in the grave furniture of a single burial as a continuation of primitive Neolithic traditions in later times (Sieveking 1954-55: 89). In one noteworthy instance (Sieveking 1954-55: 88) a small bowl of characteristic red slipped ware first recorded from Gua Musang (Tweedie 1940) is referred to as 'primitive' and in another (Sieveking 1954-55: 95) a cylindrical jar and two cylindrical pot-stands of an identical plain red pottery are associated with two 'advanced' burials (Cutting 3, burials Nos. 25 and 27).

If the evidence for a relative chronology of the complete vessels is disappointingly negative, it is still more frustrating to find that no evidence at all can be adduced for the sherds which Sieveking does not take into account at all. In view of the very large quantities recovered from the site it is just possible, though on the whole unlikely, that a statistical approach combined with minute attention to detailed stratigraphy may have yielded useful results. In the event, however, the absence of field records, to which reference has already been made, precludes any possibility of relating the numbered sherds to actual levels.

*Figures 1 to 5.* Under these circumstances it seems safer to regard the collections of complete pots as a unified whole and simply to describe the main types which occur. These types are as follows.

- i. Footed Vessels. Fig. 1 *a-n*
  - 1.1 High footed vessels: *a, b, c*  
*a, b*: undecorated, slipped, red wash.  
*c*: rim and foot burnished, sides of bowl cord-marked. Red-brown in colour.
  - 1.2 Vessels with cylindrical ring foot: *d-l*  
Light red-brown in colour; lower half of body and foot cord-marked; rim burnished; note horizontal grooving on rim and shoulder of *e* and perforations in *j*.
  - 1.3 Vessels with conical or inverted hemispherical foot: *m, n*  
Light red-brown in colour; lower half of body and foot cord-marked; rim burnished; note perforations in *n*.
- ii. Carinated Bowls. Fig. 2 *a-i*.  
Ranging in colour from light red-brown to almost black; body cord-marked as far as carination; rims burnished; note perforations in *b* and *i*.
- iii. Bi-conical Vessels. Fig. 2 *j, k*.  
Dark brown or black with patches of dark red; lower half of body cord-marked, upper half polished.
- iv. Globular Vessels. Fig. 2 *l, m*.  
*l*: light brown in colour; body decorated with irregular pattern produced with cord-wrapped beater.  
*m*: dark red-brown; lower part of body cord-marked, upper part smoothed.
- v. Simple Bowls. Fig. 3 *a-n*.  
Ranging in colour from buff to dark red-brown; bodies cord-marked except for rims in *j, l* and *m*; note incised decoration on the insides of *a* and *b*—these two specimens are unique.
- vi. Rounded Containers. Fig. 4 *a, b, c*.  
Pale red-brown; body cord-marked.
- vii. Bucket-shaped Vessels. Fig. 4 *d-i*.  
*e*: pale red-brown, body cord-marked.  
*d, f, g, h, i*: dark brown or black with patches of black; *d* cord-marked as far as ridge, *g, h, i*, cord-marked on bottoms only; *f* undecorated apart from perforations; all surfaces not cord-marked are burnished.
- viii. Beakers. Fig. 5 *a, b, c*.  
*a*: dark red-brown; surface smoothed; decorated with pattern of spirals and chevrons made up with 'comb-impressions' bounded by incised lines. See Fig. 6.  
*b*: dark red-brown; body cord-marked; rim and neck burnished.  
*c*: light red-brown; surface smoothed; decorated with bands and chevrons of 'comb-impressions' bounded by incised lines. See Fig. 7.
- ix. Pot-stands. Fig. 5 *d, e, f*.  
9.1 Ring stands: *d*.  
Black burnished pottery; note perforations in upper specimen.  
9.2 Waisted stand: *e*.  
Dark brown; smoothed surface.  
9.2 Cylindrical stand: *f*.  
Dark red-brown; burnished.
- x. Perforated Cups. Fig. 5 *g, h, i*.  
Dark red-brown to black with patches of red; undecorated apart from perforation; burnished.
- xi. Jars. Fig. 5 *j, k, l*.  
Red-brown in colour; note perforation in *k*. The bottom of this specimen is cord-marked.
- xii. Miscellaneous. Fig. 5 *m, n, o*.  
*m*: dark brown; rim polished; body decorated with zigzag pattern of 'comb-impressions'.  
*n*: bowl, dark brown in colour; bottom cord-marked; remainder of body burnished; note horizontal grooves on sides.  
*o*: lid? bottom cord-marked; rim burnished; light red-brown in colour.



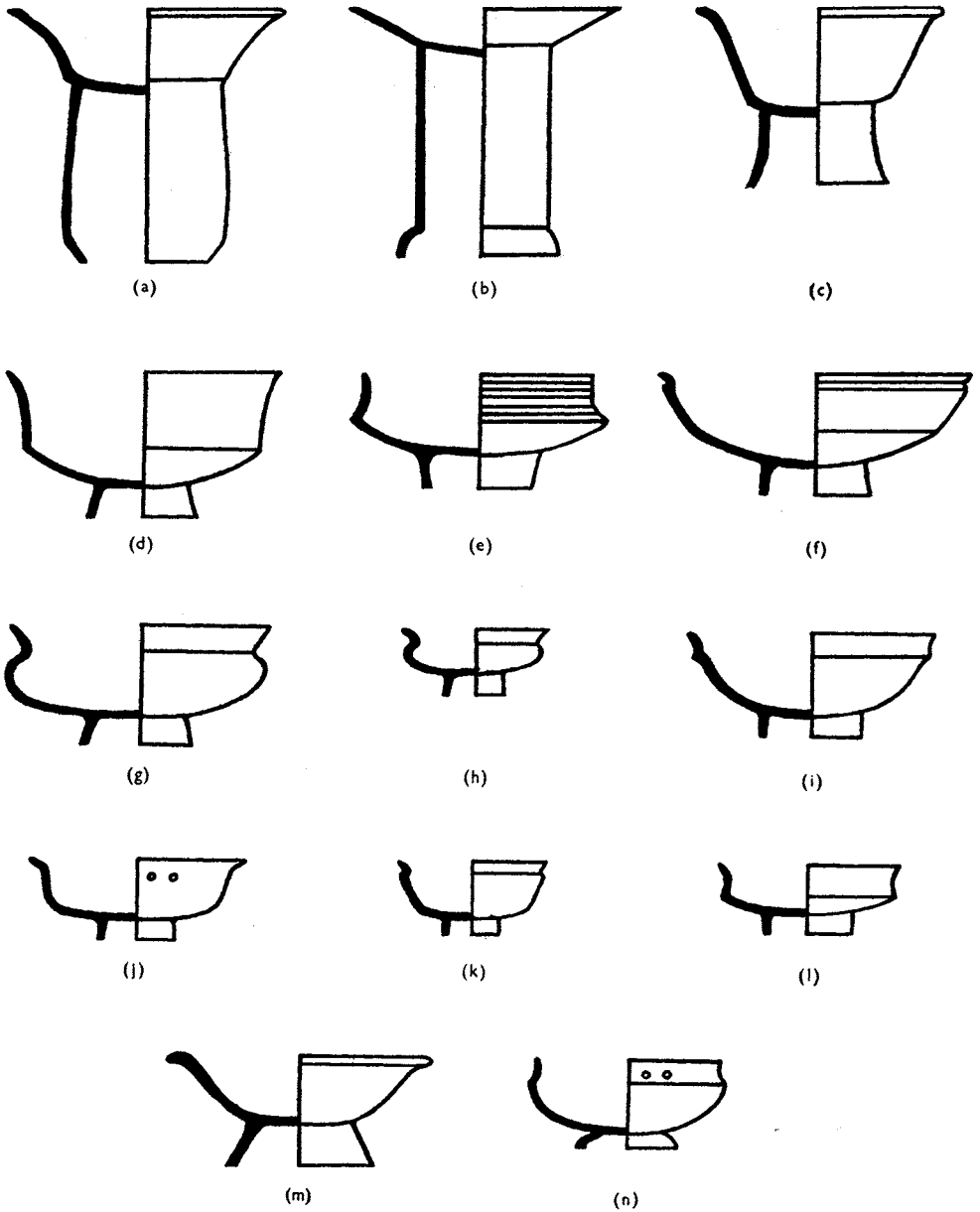


FIG. 1. Gua Cha. See opposite page  
(Scale: 1/7 natural size)

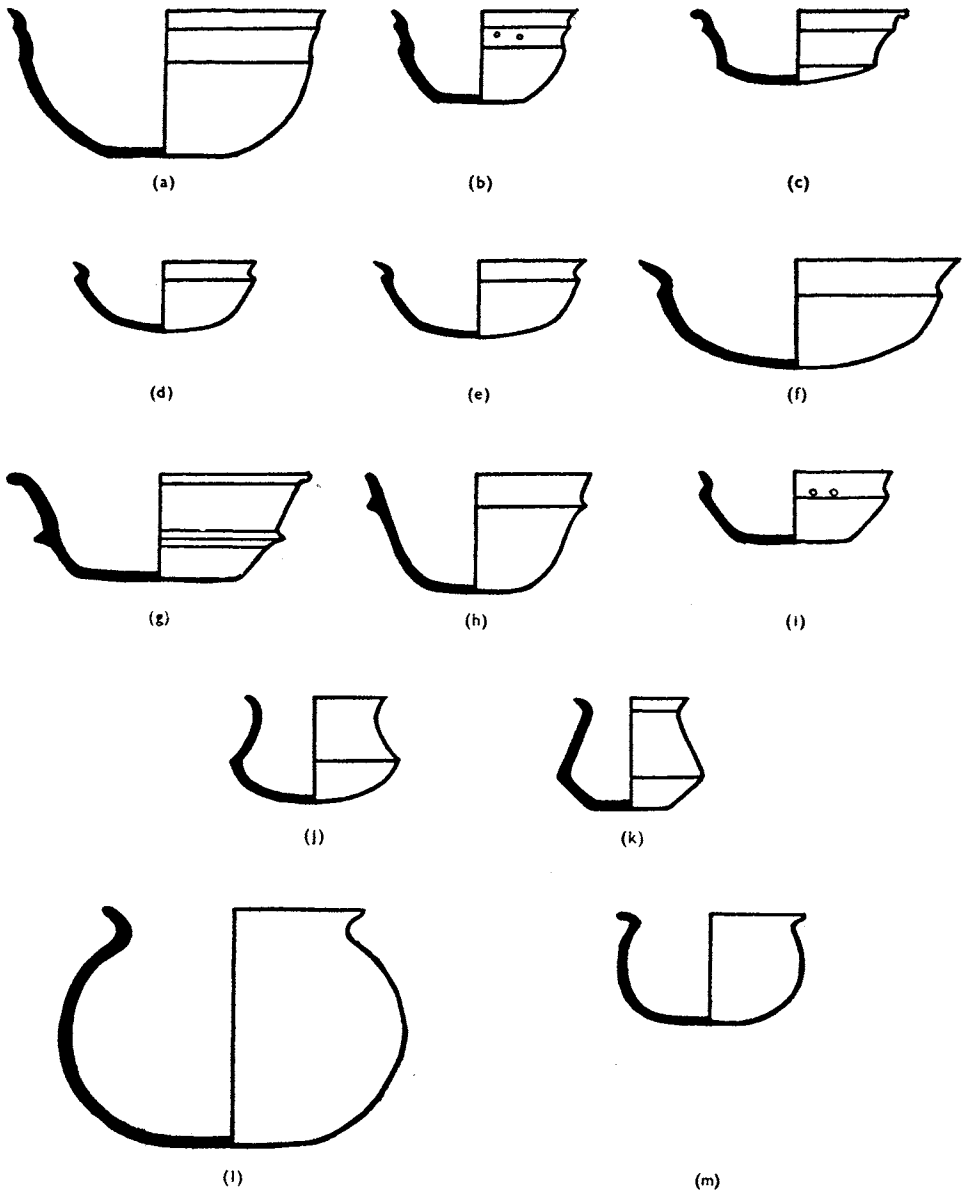


FIG. 2. Gua Cha. See page 128  
(Scale: 1/7 natural size)

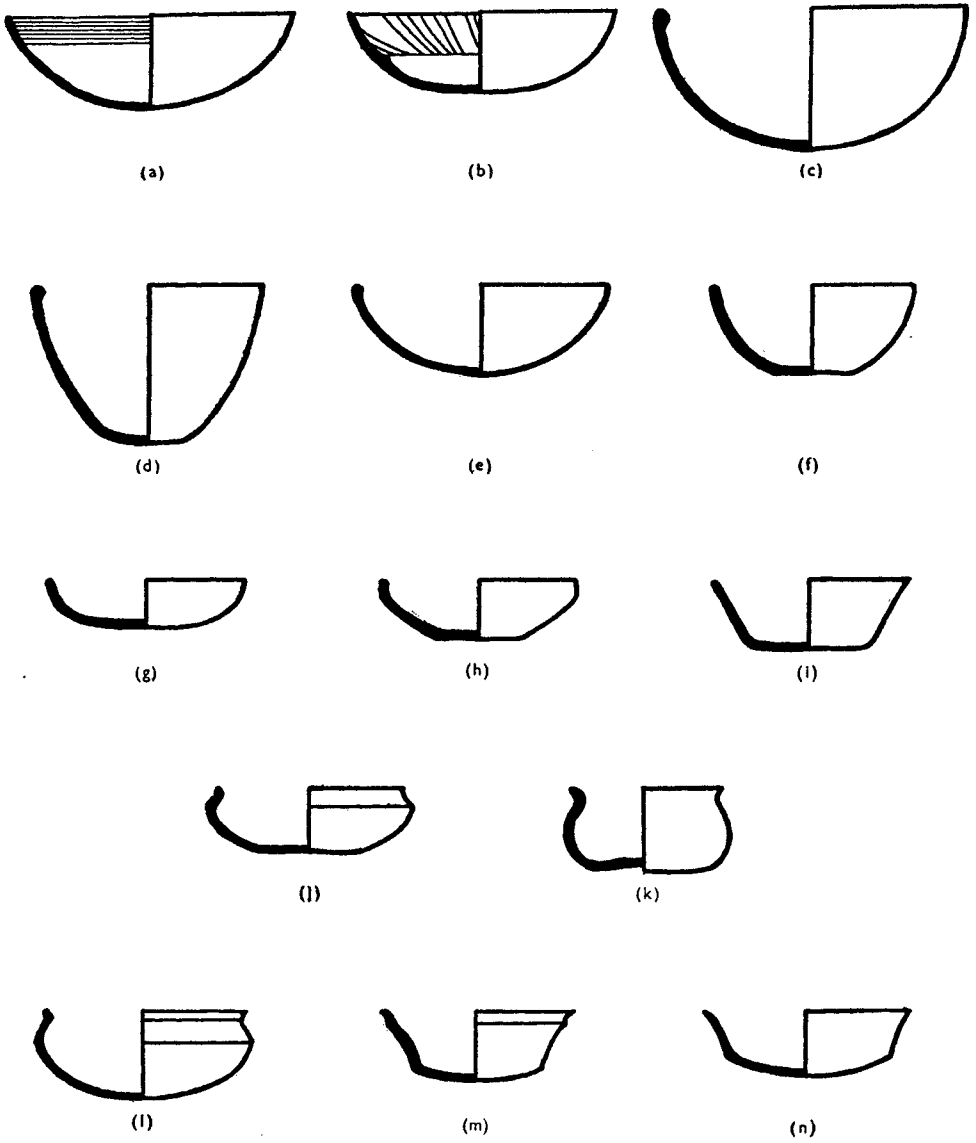


FIG. 3. Gua Cha. See page 128  
(Scale: 1/7 natural size)

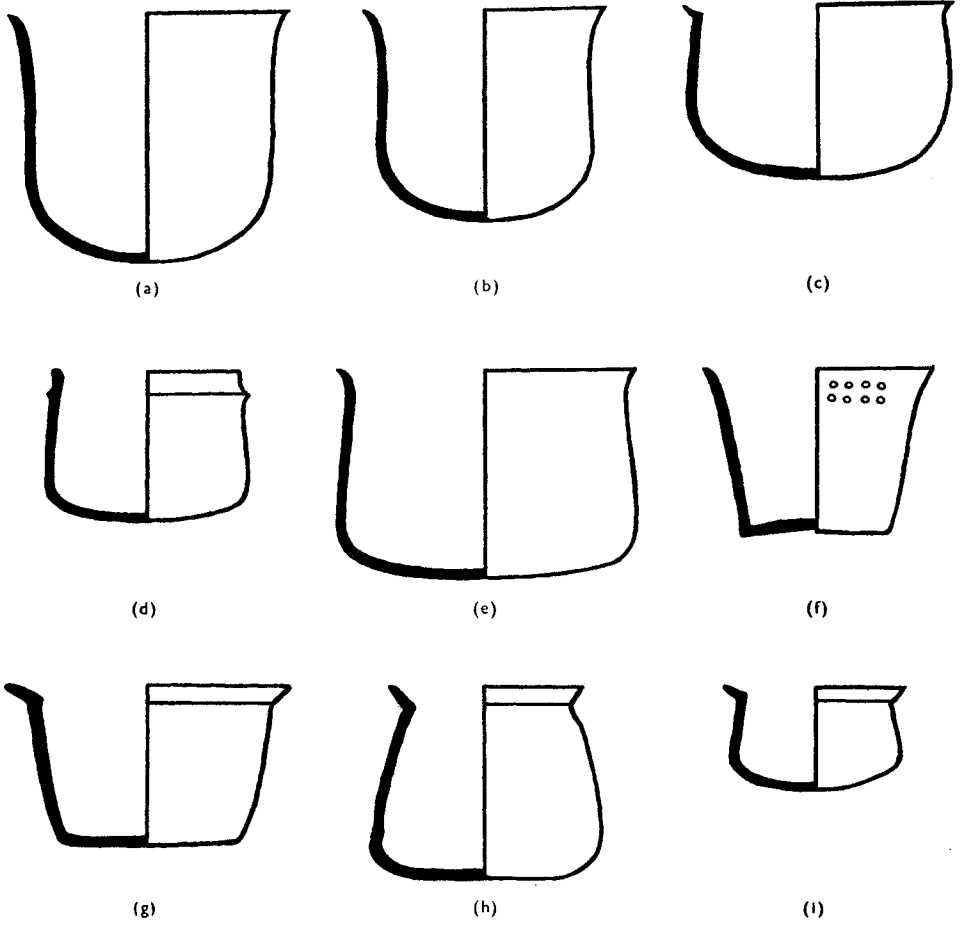


FIG. 4. Gua Cha. See page 128  
(Scale: 1/7 natural size)

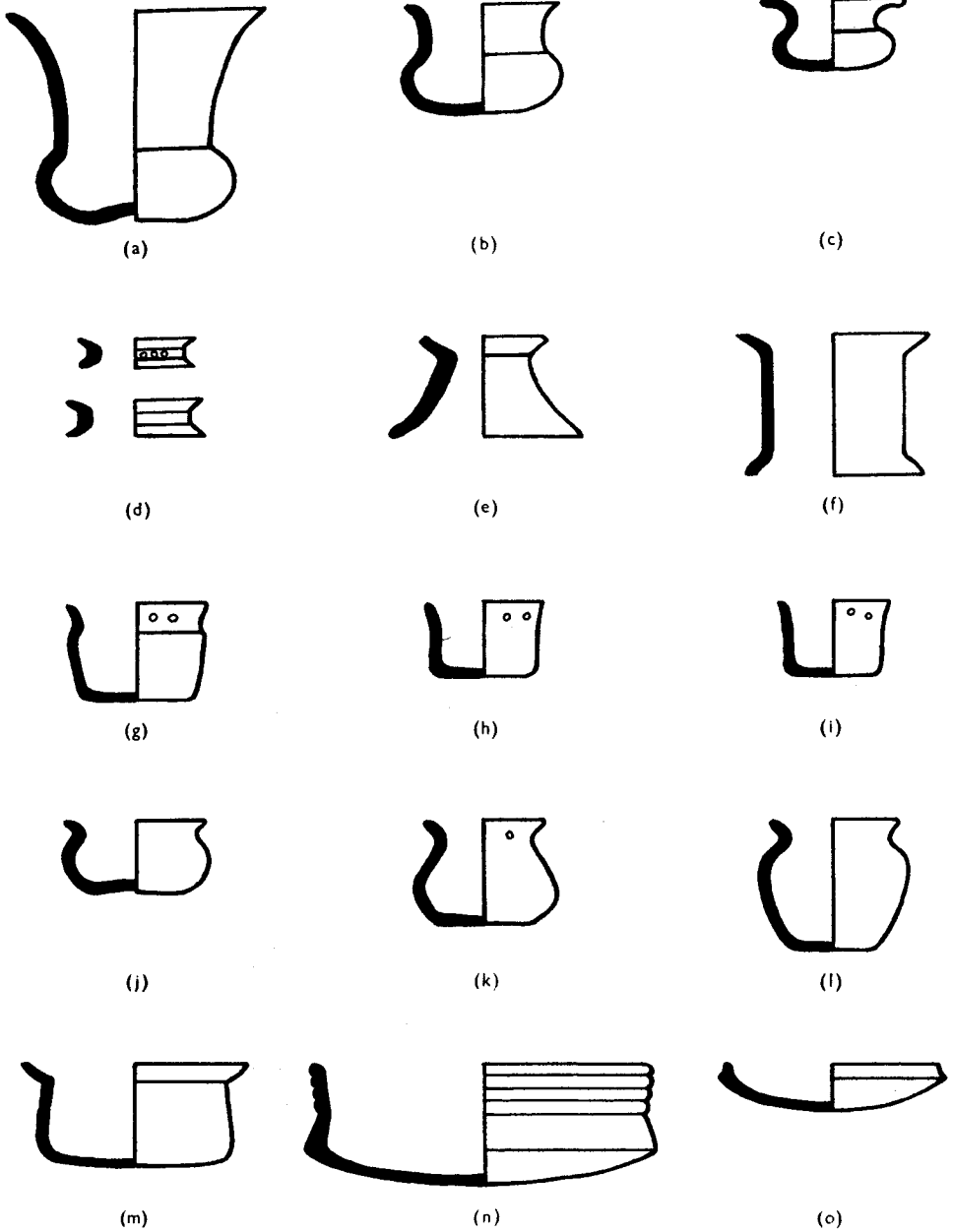


FIG. 5. Gua Cha. See page 128  
(Scale: 1/7 natural size)

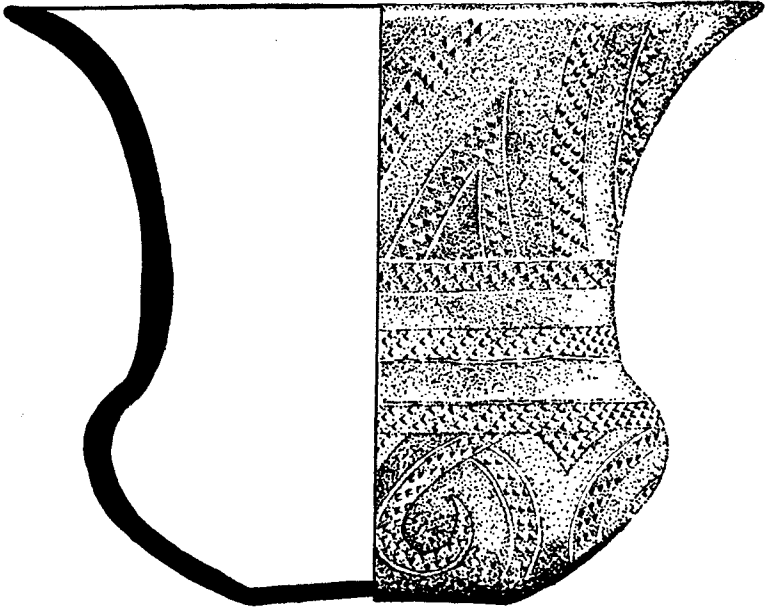


FIG. 6. Gua Cha. Beaker (*cf.* Fig. 5a). See pages 128, 150.  
(Scale:  $3/8$  natural size)

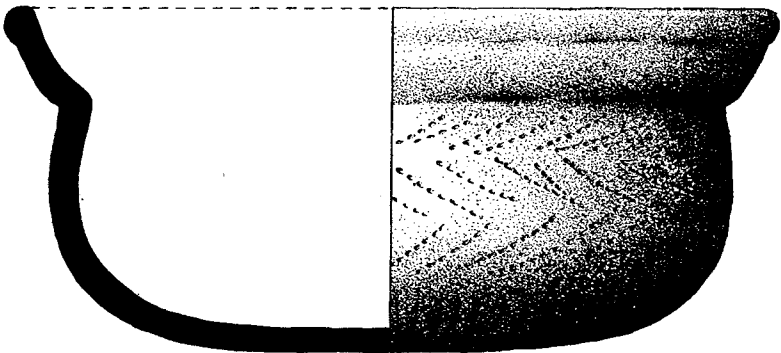


FIG. 7. Gua Cha. Bowl with 'comb impressed' decoration.  
(Scale:  $1/2$  natural size)

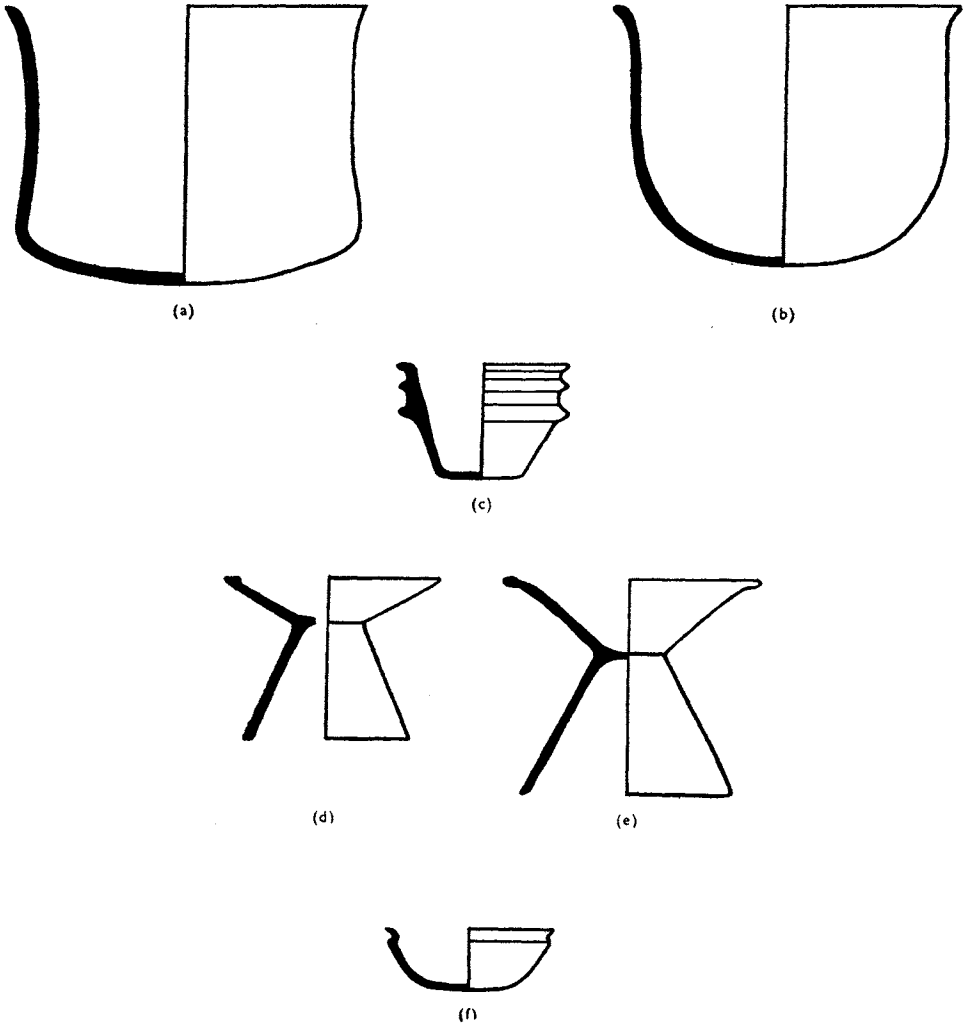


FIG. 8. Gua Musang. See page 136.  
(Scale: 1/8)

### B. *Gua Musang*

In 1939, Mr M. W. F. Tweedie of the Raffles Museum carried out a survey in the region of the Gua Musang railway station on the main Kota Bahru-Kuala Lipis line. This led him to discover a number of caves and rock shelters bearing traces of prehistoric human occupation. He first investigated a large rock shelter known as Gua Madu some three miles south of Gua Musang station. Although the shelter, or rather a small cave leading off from the rear wall, produced quantities of sherds and it is stated that reconstruction of two vessels was possible, these vessels unfortunately have not been illustrated and their present whereabouts is not known (Tweedie 1940).

Tweedie then turned his attention to a group of caves and shelters overlooking Gua Musang station itself. Here in a small cave in the south-west face of the hill he excavated in undisturbed deposits and once again brought to light large quantities of sherds. From this collection several reliable reconstructions were found to be possible.

We learn from Tweedie's report (Tweedie 1940: 11) that the deposits of Gua Musang were excavated in layers or spits of 15 cm. each in depth. By far the majority of the sherds and of the nine associated Neolithic stone implements occurred in a concentration in the first or superficial layer. Within the first 15 cm. there was also found a thin stratum of ash. It will be seen that on the evidence available no attempt can be made even to speculate on a chronological development of the pottery from this site.

The complete and restored vessels from Gua Musang are illustrated in Fig. 8.

- i. Large containers. Fig. 8 *a, b*  
Red-brown in colour; coarsely cord-marked.
- ii. Bowl with triple rim. Fig. 8 *c*  
Dark brown; undecorated; burnished.
- iii. Stands. Fig. 8 *d, e*  
*d*: slipped; red wash; undecorated.  
*e*: dark brown; pedestal smoothed; under side of bowl cord-marked.
- iv. Bowl. Fig. 8 *f*  
Dark brown in colour; body cord-marked; rim burnished.

#### STATE OF PERAK

##### *Lenggong District*

The sherds collected by Wray from caves in Gunong Cheroh near Ipoh between 1880 and 1891 have long since disappeared. A series of rock shelter excavations carried out by Mr I. H. N. Evans at Batu Kurau and Lenggong in 1917 (Evans 1918; 1920 *a*), by Evans and Dr P. V. van Stein Callenfels again at Lenggong and in the Gua Kerbau, Gunong Pondok, between 1926 and 1927 (Evans 1922; Callenfels and Evans 1928; Evans 1928 *f*) and by Callenfels and Mr H. D. Noone at Gol Bait near Sungai Siput between 1934 and 1936 (Callenfels and Noone 1940) failed to produce any complete vessels.



However, some fragments obtained by Evans from Gua Kajang during his first excavation at Lenggong enabled Mr H. D. Collings of the Raffles Museum to publish (Collings 1940: 128, fig. 2[2]) a composite reconstruction on which Fig. 9 *a* is based. Pieces of what were probably similar vessels were also found at the Gol Bait site (Callenfels and Noone 1940) and at Gua Kelawar, Bukit Baling, Kedah (Collings 1936, pl. XII [1]). The specimens from Gua Kajang are reported to have come from within one foot of the surface, but that is all we know of their stratigraphy.

After the war, in 1950, Williams-Hunt visited several sites in the Lenggong district. He collected a few complete vessels or restorable fragments which are shown in Fig. 9. The exact provenance of *c* and *e*, beyond the fact that they came from the Lenggong district, is not known.

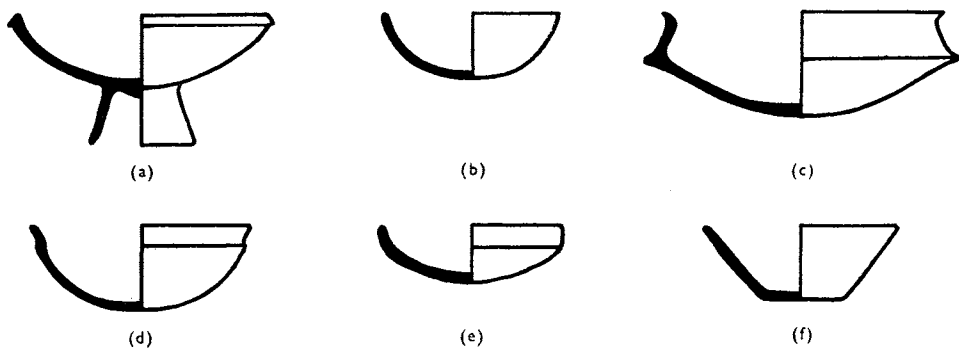


FIG. 9. Lenggong District.

(Scale: 1/7 natural size)

- a.* Footed vessel. Slipped and finished with red wash. Undecorated. Gua Kajang.
- b.* Bowl. Light red-brown. Exterior cord-marked. Gua Gelok.
- c.* Carinated bowl. Rim burnished, base cord-marked. Dark brown to black. Lenggong.
- d.* Bowl. Rim burnished, base cord-marked. Dark brown. Gua Batu Tukang.
- e.* Bowl. Rim smoothed, base cord-marked. Light red-brown. Lenggong.
- f.* Bowl. Surface crudely smoothed. Light red-brown. Gua Badak.

#### STATE OF KEDAH

##### A. *Gua Berhala, Kodiang, District of Kubang Pasu*

From its high position in the north face of a limestone outcrop called Bukit Kaplu near the village of Kodiang on the Kedah-Perlis boundary, the large rock shelter of Gua Berhala overlooks the whole of the State of Perlis. The site was already known to Evans in 1929 under the name of Gua To Pan (Evans 1931 *a*: 44). It is interesting to note that even at the time of Evans' visit the deposits were in the course of being removed for use as fertilizer on the adjacent rice fields. Evans found a few fragments of cord-marked pottery and some pieces of antler, one of them worked.

In 1951, Williams-Hunt (1952) paid a visit to the site and although by this time little remained of the original floor of the shelter, he succeeded in recovering from the debris numerous sherds of pottery and some very curious hollow conical pottery

objects decorated all over with cord impressions and pierced with two diametrically opposed holes, one near the broad end and the other near the point.

The sherds proved on examination to belong to four distinct types of vessels. The first a large deep bowl with very marked carination, the second a shallower bowl with an everted lip, the third a bowl similar to the last but without the lip and finally a very simple vessel without lip or differentiated rim (Fig. 10). All were cord-impressed with the exception of the inner surfaces which were polished. The external surfaces of the rims of the first three types were also polished. All the pottery, including the cones, varied from light red-brown to dark brown in colour.

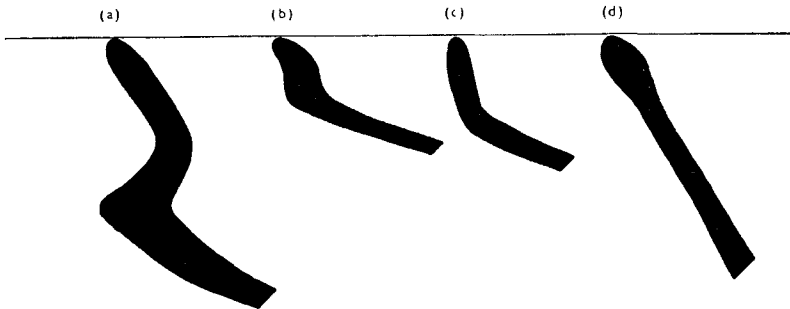


FIG. 10. Gua Berhala. Profiles of Sherds.  
(Scale: 1/2 natural size)

a. Type One    b. Type Two    c. Type Three    d. Type Four

The conical objects continued to be puzzling for some years after their discovery. Some remarks made by local inhabitants lent colour to the theory that they were incense burners. Williams-Hunt, perhaps in despair, had rather lamely suggested that they may have had a ritual significance 'possibly in association with Buddhism'.<sup>2</sup> Sieveking (1956) very properly disposed of the incense burner theory by pointing out that none of the specimens bore traces of the resinous soot which they ought to have acquired in such a role. However, he went on to propose a use hardly more credible than the one he intended to supplant (1956: 193). He believed that the cones were thrust points downward into the ground and used as stands on which pots in the course of manufacture could be balanced either to dry in the sun or to have decoration applied to them. The two mysterious holes with which each cone was provided would, he supposed, accommodate sticks to serve as handles for rotating the vessels under construction.

Sieveking was unconsciously close to the truth, but was led astray by the wholly erroneous observation (1956: 189) that the cones finish in flat horizontal rims marked with heavy striations. The cones are indeed striated—by cord-marking—but they are by no means flat and horizontal. Not a single complete specimen exists, due no doubt to years of disturbance at the site, but the fragments are of sufficient size to show quite clearly that the ends were actually *concave* and that the long axes of the cones were at a distinct angle to the plane formed by the broad ends. Even

<sup>2</sup> Williams-Hunt, 1952. Although officially a Muslim state, there are scattered Buddhist (Samsam) communities in Kedah. There is also a Wat, Wat Padang Sira, not far from the village of Kodiang.

more significantly, the ends are always broken and without a trace of a finished rim. In other words the cones were originally parts of something else. Parts of what?

Sieveking once again came within an ace of the solution when he pointed out how close the cones were to the other sherds from the site in general appearance and composition (1956: 189) only strangely to contradict himself a few paragraphs later by remarking on 'the very crudity of the objects (i.e. the cones) coupled with their relatively massive construction and the fact that they appear always to be inadequately fired. They were found, as we have seen, in association with pottery sherds representing workmanship of a superior quality' (Sieveking 1956: 192).

In fact cones and sherds are identical in every way and this at once suggested to the writer a close connection. The concavity of the broad ends of the cones was found to accommodate the curved bottoms of vessels of the first type, namely the carinated bowls. Further, if cones and bowls were united, the angles of the long axes of the cones would be just sufficient to provide nicely canted and stable legs.

Final proof came when the writer was lucky enough to find at Gua Berhala a fragment combining part of the base of a cone, including the upper half of one of the holes, with the carinated shoulder of a bowl (Fig. 11). An exactly similar junction piece was later found at the nearby site of Gua Bintong, Perlis, together

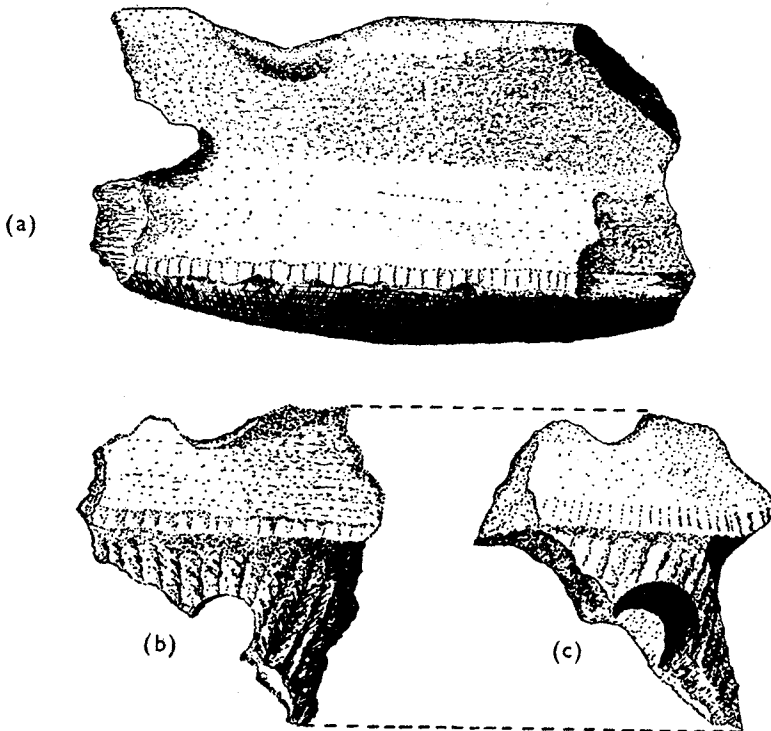


FIG. 11. Gua Berhala.  
(Scale:  $3/4$  natural size)

*a.* Sherd of Type One.

*b/c.* Two views of fragment showing junction of cone base with shoulder of carinated sherd.

with a sherd of a carinated bowl like those from Gua Berhala. It was felt safe to postulate at this stage the existence of a type of tripod vessel. The reconstruction shown in Fig. 12 *a* is based on average measurements, although the possibility that the original vessels had more than three legs, though remote, has to be conceded.

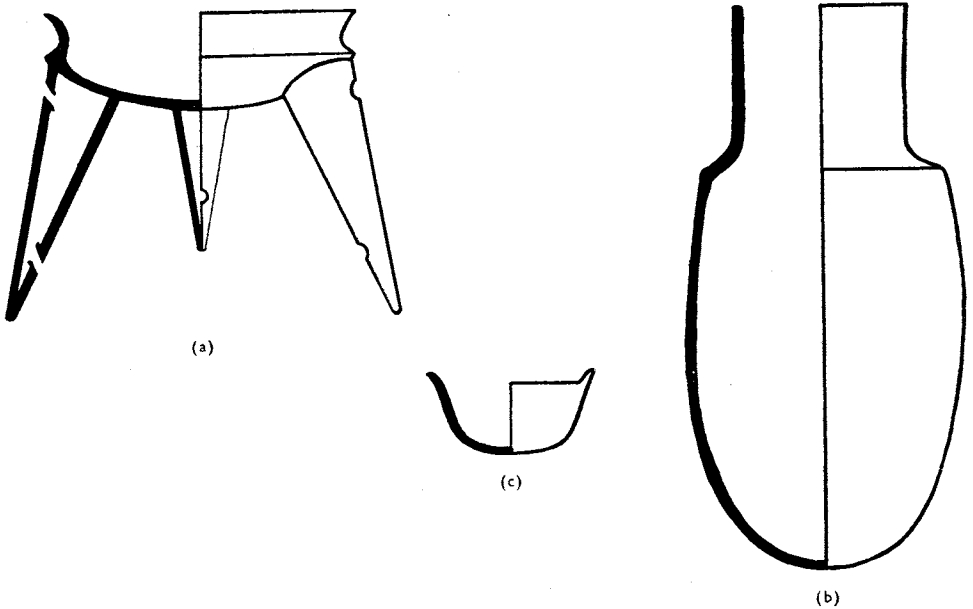


FIG. 12. Kedah and Perlis.  
(Scale: 1/7 natural size)

- a.* Gua Berhala, Bukit Kaplu, Kedah.      *b.* Pulau Tuba, Langkawi Islands.  
*c.* Bukit Wang Pisang, Perlis

The striations on the ends of the cones were clearly intended to aid the process of luting the bowls and their legs together by mating with matching striations on the bowls which were afterwards finished by covering with a superficial layer of clay. This double-layering of sherds from Gua Berhala was observed and commented on by Williams-Hunt (1952).

The perforations in the legs may at first sight seem inexplicable and out of place. However, similar perforations in the legs of tripod vessels from South America are known. They may have been intended originally to permit the escape of air from the hollow interior during firing. In this connexion it is important to call attention to the fact that the hollow spaces in the legs of Chinese *Li* 罍 tripods are connected directly with the bowl and are not sealed off as in the Malayan and most South American examples. It was unnecessary therefore to provide vents in the legs of the Chinese hollow-legged tripods.

It should be noted that identical cones and sherds from a cave near Buang Bep in the Ta Kanawn district of the Thai province of Surat were described by I. H. N. Evans in 1931 (Evans 1931 *d*). Evans remarked on the concavity of the broad ends in these examples, but their true nature eluded him. In this paper Evans mentioned

that a cone of the same type had been found by Dr W. Linehan at a site on the Tembeling River in Pahang (Linehan 1928), but unfortunately it cannot be distinguished from the Thai cones in the illustration accompanying the article owing to the lack of a key and it has now disappeared. Finally, a hollow conical piece of pottery was reported from the Gol Bait site (Callenfels and Noone 1940), but we shall never know whether this was in fact the leg of a tripod as no illustration was published and it has likewise vanished.

### B. *Pulau Tuba*

In 1924, a very large and otherwise unique vessel was discovered in a small cave on Pulau Tuba, one of the Langkawi group of islands. The cave had a low narrow entrance through which it was necessary to crawl to gain access to a chamber about twenty or thirty feet wide. Once inside, it was possible to stand up comfortably. The jar was apparently found on the floor of the cave with fragments of another which has since disappeared (Evans 1924).

The vessel is decorated over the entire body as far as the shoulder with an irregular pattern produced with a cord-wrapped beater. The paste, though unusually thin considering the large size of the jar, is very coarse and frequent small pebbles occur in the temper. The colour is a uniform buff-brown. This specimen is illustrated in Fig. 12 *b*.

### STATE OF PERLIS

#### A. *Bukit Wang Pisang*

The State of Perlis is particularly well supplied with imposing limestone outcrops filled with caves and rock shelters. In one such shelter in the hill known as Bukit Wang Pisang, Mr C. R. Jones, then Government Geologist in Perlis, discovered the greater part of a small hemispherical bowl decorated with impressions from a cord-wrapped beater. Although a simple and common enough shape, this specimen is rendered unique by raised lugs moulded onto the rim. The circumference of the pot is incomplete, but the position of one lug in relation to the remains of another, indicate that there were probably three such lugs on the original vessel (Fig. 12 *c*). It is brownish red in colour.

#### B. *Bukit Tengku Lembu*

The rock shelter of Bukit Tengku Lembu, in which a rich collection of Neolithic material came to light in 1951 (Williams-Hunt 1952), was the second Malayan site after Noone's discoveries at Gua Cha in 1935 to produce a large series of complete or at least easily restorable pottery. In beauty of form the Tengku Lembu pots (see Fig. 13) have so far been equalled in Malaya only by some of the vessels resulting from Sieveking's subsequent work at Gua Cha. Unhappily most of the site was cleared, not by proper archæological excavation, but by the cruder methods of the guano-diggers and it must surely provide the most harrowing example of the loss of valuable information through this all too common cause.

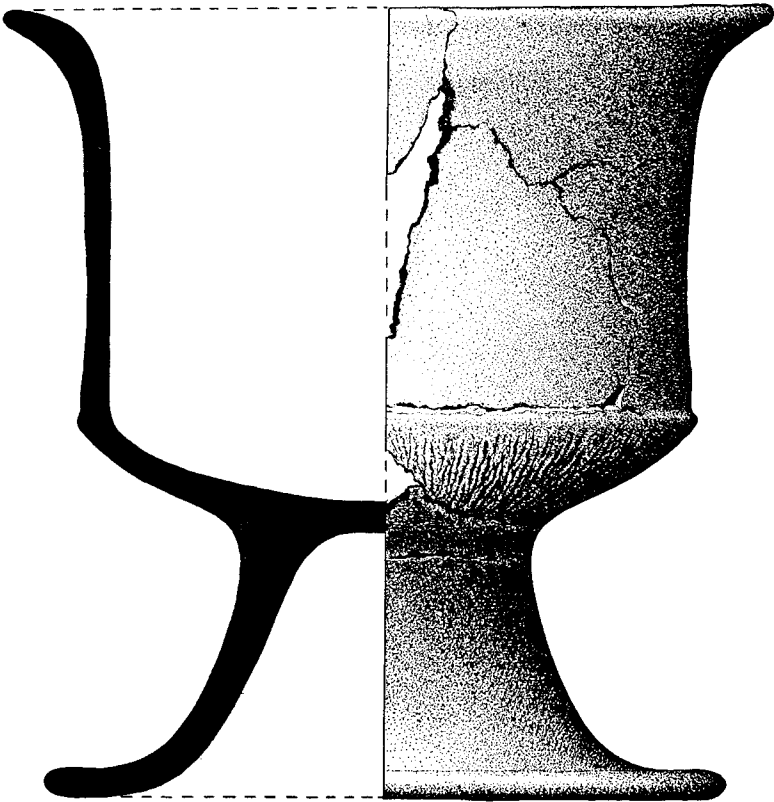


FIG. 13. Bukit Tengku Lembu. Goblet.  
(Scale: 1/2 natural size)

Williams-Hunt was called to the scene to witness virtually the last stages in the removal of the Tengku Lembu deposits. He was able to salvage quantities of sherds, a small selection of polished stone implements of fine quality, an antler gouge, some human skeletal material and, most important of all, a large number of vessels found intact but damaged during recovery.

Among the sherds were found some fragments of a shiny black ware which have since acquired a considerable notoriety. Several expert opinions, chief among them that of Mr P. E. Corbett of the British Museum, have been expressed in favour of a fourth to fifth century B.C. Greek origin for these pieces. They will be separately described in the section devoted to the Malayan sherds.

The types of complete vessels from Tengku Lembu are as follows (Figs. 14, 15).

- i.* Trumpet-shaped Vases. Fig. 14 *a, b, c*. See Fig. 16.  
Dark red-brown with patches of black; body cord-marked; flaring lip burnished.
- ii.* Cylindrical Vase. Fig. 14, *d, e*. See Fig. 17 and 18.  
Dark red-brown with patches of black; body cord-marked; rim burnished.
- iii.* Wide-mouthed Pots. Fig. 14 *f, g*.  
Dark red-brown; body cord-marked; rim burnished.

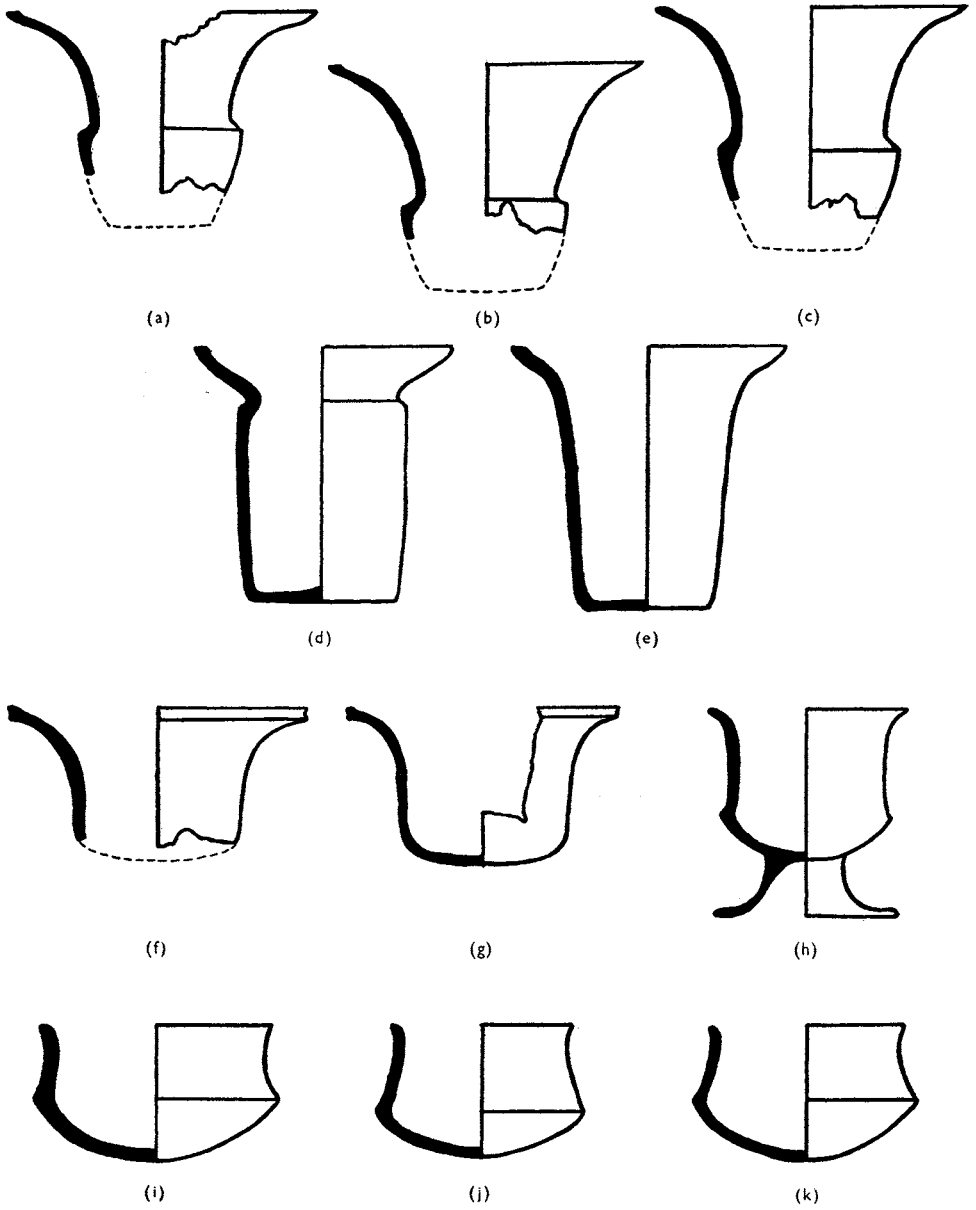


FIG. 14. Bukit Tengku Lembu.  
(Scale: 1/6 natural size)

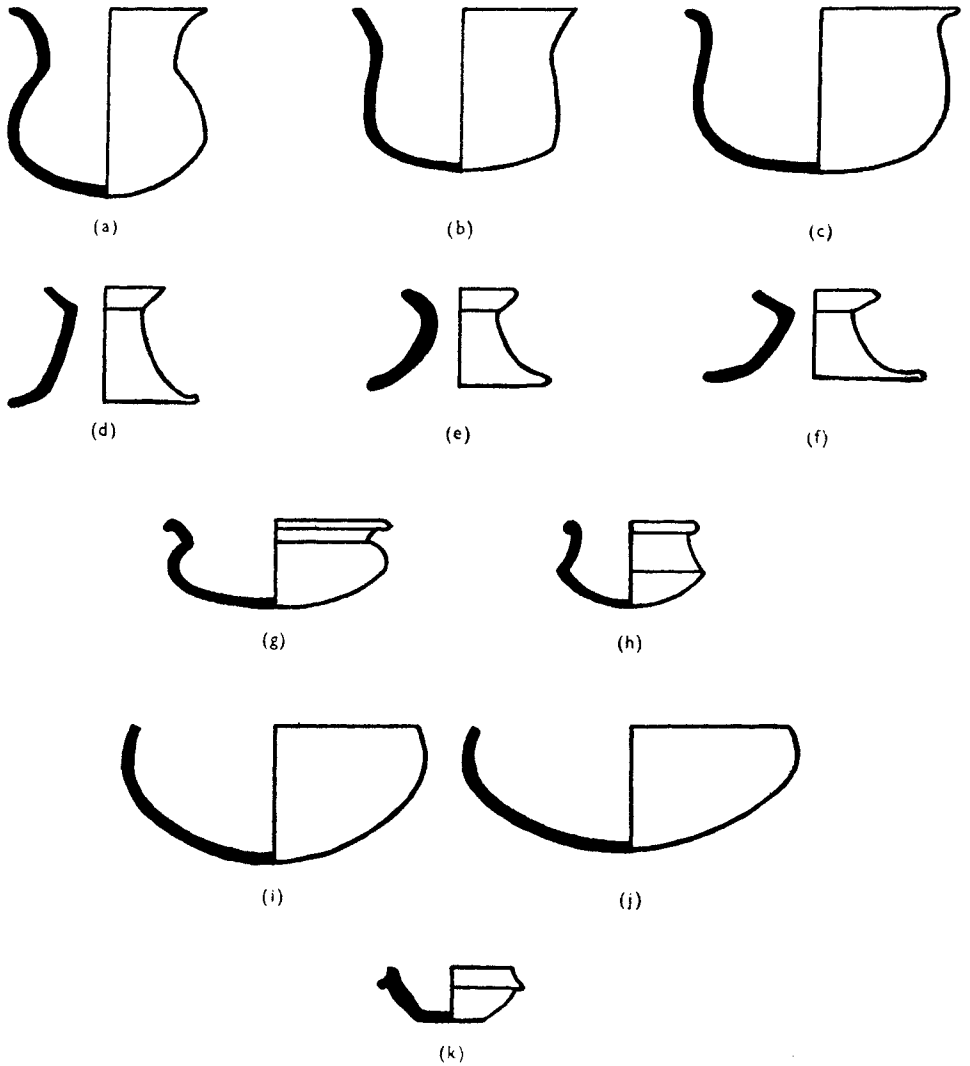


FIG. 15. Bukit Tengku Lembu.  
(Scale: 1/6.5 natural size)



- iv.* Goblet. Fig. 14 *h*.  
Dark red-brown with patches of black; underside of cup cord-marked, remainder burnished.
- v.* Bi-conical Pots. Fig. 14 *i, j, k*.  
Dark red-brown; lower half of body cord-marked; upper half burnished.
- vi.* Round-bottomed Pots. Fig. 15 *a, b, c*.  
Dark red-brown; body cord-marked.
- vii.* Waisted Pot-stands. Fig. 15 *d, e, f*.  
Dark red-brown; undecorated; burnished.
- viii.* Miscellaneous. Fig. 15 *g-k*.  
*g, h*: round-bottomed pots with everted lips. Dark red-brown in colour; body cord-marked; rim burnished.  
*i, j*: rounded bowls. Dark red-brown; cord-marked.  
*k*: lid? light brown; undecorated.

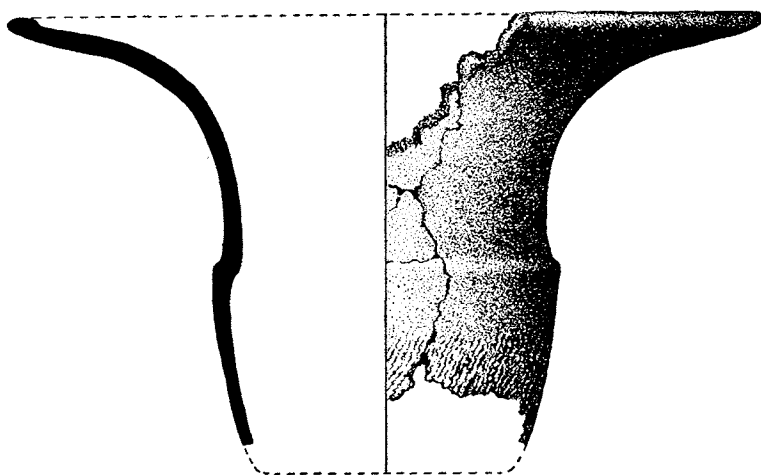


FIG. 16. Bukit Tengku Lembu. Trumpet-shaped vase.  
(Scale:  $\frac{3}{5}$  natural size)

### 3. THE SHERDS

For some reason Malayan archæologists have tended to neglect the sherds which occur in great quantities at all the sites so far examined. This preoccupation with complete vessels has given an extremely unbalanced and indeed unfair picture, as even a superficial glance at the sherd collections in the Perak Museum will confirm. At Gua Cha, to quote only one instance, analysis revealed upwards of forty different varieties as distinguished by combinations of rim form, colour, paste and other objective criteria. A proper study of the sherds is obviously essential if a full comprehension of the range of the prehistoric ceramics and an appreciation of the versatility and skill of the prehistoric potter are to be obtained. Without the data the sherds can supply our knowledge of decorative methods and designs and manufacturing techniques would be most incomplete.

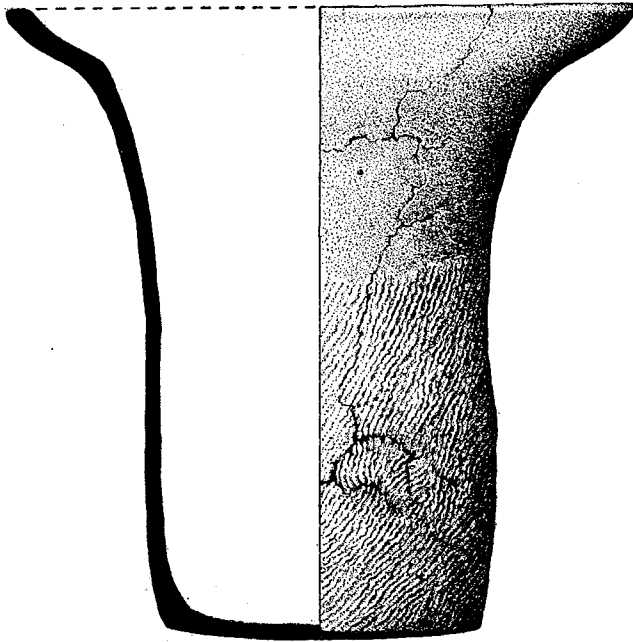


FIG. 17. Bukit Tengku Lembu. Cylindrical Vase.  
(Scale: 1/3 natural size)

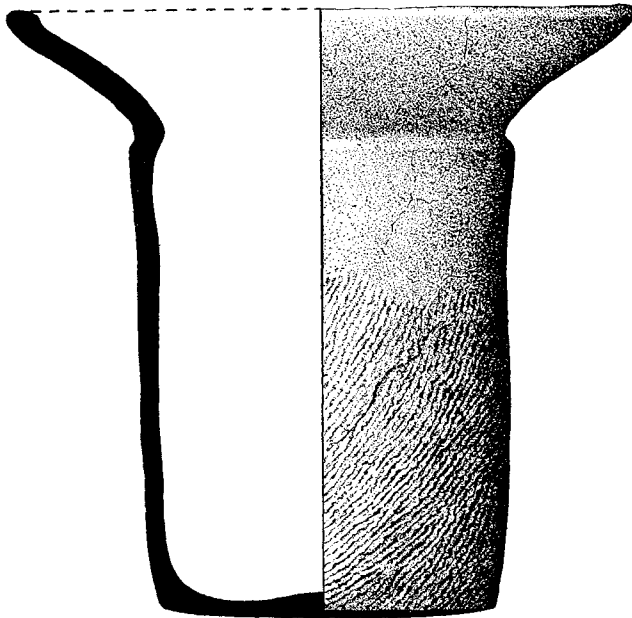


FIG. 18. Bukit Tengku Lembu. Cylindrical Vase.  
(Scale: 1/6 natural size)

The primary analysis on which this summary is based incorporated material from the following sites which produced the most significant assemblages of sherds:

## State of Perlis

*Gua Tembus*  
*Gua Bintong* } Bukit Chuping  
*Bukit Tengku Lembu*

## State of Kedah

*Bukit Baling*. (Three unnamed sites.  
Williams-Hunt collection)  
*Gua Berhala, Bukit Kaplu*

## State of Perak

*Gua Batu Tukang I and III*  
*Gua Kajang*  
*Gua Gelok*  
*Gua Badak*

## State of Kelantan

*Gua Cha*  
*Gua Sai I and II*  
*Gua Musang*

To supplement data gained at first-hand from the sherd collections, information from published reports was used with discretion, especially with regard to decoration and manufacture. Reports on the following sites were most useful in this respect:

## State of Perlis

*Gua Bintong, Bukit Chuping* (Collings 1937 *b*)

## State of Kedah

*Gua Debu, Gua Kelawar and Gua Pulai, Bukit Baling* (Collings 1936).

## State of Perak

*Gua Kerbau, Gunong Pondok* (Evans 1922; Callenfels and Evans 1928; Evans 1928 *f*).  
*Gua Kajang* (Evans 1918).

## State of Kelantan

*Gua Madu, Gua Musang* (Tweedie 1940).  
*Bukit Chintamani* (Tweedie 1936).

## State of Pahang

*Kota Tongkat, Gunong Senyyum* (Evans 1920 *b*).  
*Bukit Sagu* (Tweedie 1937).

Limitations due to the absence of stratigraphy are if anything more noticeable in connection with the sherds than they were in considering the complete vessels. But we must be thankful that these collections exist at all and our thanks are due in particular to Williams-Hunt to whose efforts we owe the vast majority of the sherds in the Perak Museum.

It is not our intention to enter into a laborious and detailed description of all the many varieties of pottery from the Malayan sites. The purpose of an overall description aimed at providing a basis on which comparisons may be made will be served best if we confine our attention to two important general aspects, namely techniques of manufacture and decoration.

## 4. TECHNIQUES OF MANUFACTURE

*The Slow Wheel.* Unquestionably the most striking first impression conveyed by the collections is the high degree of technical skill and sophistication of design. This impression is due no doubt to the wide use of some type of wheel in forming and finishing the pottery. Crude vessels like the jars from Gua Cha shown in Fig. 5 *j-l* are certainly not the rule. Despite fairly considerable divergences in respect of shape, material from all the sites maintains the same high standards. Methods of surface finishing naturally tend to obscure much evidence, but fortunately fashion decreed that rims should for the most part remain undecorated. Rim fragments show that virtually all the ceramics were wheel turned. That apparatus more elaborate and efficient than a simple turn-table was involved is indicated by the regularity and thinness of the walls and a pleasing symmetry, quite apart from tell-tale horizontal surface striations.

*Hand Modelling.* The simpler techniques of hand modelling must not be completely disregarded, for in addition to the jars from Gua Cha which we have already mentioned, this was the way in which a class of imposing, very large containers was made (Gua Cha, Fig. 4 *a to c*; Gua Musang, Fig. 8 *a, b*). The unique amphora-like vessel from Pulau Tuba was also modelled by hand (Fig. 12 *b*).

*Segmentation.* Many of the more complicated shapes were made up of a number of separate units which were joined together to form the finished vessel. Rims and ring feet for example were often added as separate stages in the process of manufacture. An outstanding illustration of this technique is to be seen in the interesting reconstructed pot from Gua Musang (Fig. 8 *c* and Pl. II) in which no less than three successive rims were added one above the other.

A firmer bond between different segments of a vessel was often achieved by cord-marking contiguous surfaces, the mating striations doing much of the work of holding the finished pot together. Evans illustrates the base of a pot from Gua Kerbau to which a ring foot had been attached by this means (Evans 1928 *f*: pl. lxxii).

The conical legs of the Kodiang tripods provide another excellent example of the luting together of separate units assisted by mating striations at the points of contact.

*Coiling.* The legs of the Kodiang tripods also constitute the only certain evidence of the use of a coiling process in the manufacture of Malayan pre-historic pottery. The outsides of these cones are completely covered with fine cord-marking, but the hollow interiors, which are quite rough and unfinished, clearly show the spiral path of a more or less continuous strip of clay.

*Surface Finishing.* The joints resulting from the luting together of segments in the composite vessels were sometimes concealed beneath a superficial layer of clay which might almost be regarded as thick slip. The whole pot was usually cord-marked before the application of this final layer to ensure that it adhered properly. Occasionally the outer skin was quite thick in places and was actually used to heighten that final contours of the vessels. The carination of the shoulders of the Kodiang tripods was intentionally accentuated by an outer layer of clay whose primary purpose was to hide the joints at the legs (*vide supra* p. 140).

It has already been remarked that the bodies of pots were usually cord-marked. The rims and internal surfaces were almost never so treated, but were frequently polished even to the extent of being highly burnished in not a few specimens.

In most cases it is difficult to be absolutely certain about the use of slips, though true slipped wares are known. One particularly distinctive slipped ware has a wide distribution (Gua Cha, Fig. 1 *a, b*.; Gua Musang, Fig. 8 *d*). So distinctive is it in fact that it has been suggested (Tweedie 1940: 15) that it is an intrusive type. This ware was given a fairly thick slip of fine texture over a relatively coarse core and then finished with a bright red wash on the outside. It is otherwise undecorated.

A factor which helps to make the recognition of slips difficult is that firing has rarely been complete. As a result sherds often have a skin of a different shade or even colour to the core and without care it can easily be taken for a slip. On the whole little control appears to have been exercised over firing and varying degrees of oxidation resulted in many different shades and hues from red to black even in the same vessel.

## 5. DECORATION

Malayan prehistoric pottery is not remarkable for ambitious decoration. Its charm, which is considerable, lies rather in attractive shapes and satisfying proportions. The following methods were employed to produce a narrow range of simple designs.

*Cord-marking.* Cord-marked pottery has been found in all the sites so far investigated in Malaya and in greater abundance than any other type. So common is it that it may almost be regarded as an essential feature more utilitarian than decorative in intent, since it provided a firm grip on rounded surfaces otherwise slippery and difficult to handle. There can be no doubt that cord-marking was applied by means of a beater or paddle wrapped with cord. No certain instances of impressions left by repeated applications of a single cord are known. Sometimes the cord-wrapped paddle was applied so as to leave clearly defined blocks of impressions which were either haphazard or arranged in orderly patterns, for example diamonds or chequers. Most frequently, however, successive applications overlapped to cover the whole surface evenly with the lines of cords running in the same direction.

There was much variation in the thickness of the cords used, some being particularly heavy, but there does not seem to be a mutually exclusive distribution of fine and coarse types. Indeed the same sherd may well bear both thick and thin impressions.

Different ways of winding the cord on the paddle seem to have been used to give different patterns. Close and open spacing of the cords have been observed and it is possible that the cords were sometimes wound on in criss-cross fashion.

The use of corrugated or otherwise carved beaters in decorating Malayan prehistoric pottery is rare. The patterns produced by these instruments are in many cases so similar to those made by the cord-wrapped beater that the distinction is an exceedingly fine one. However, on most Malayan pottery the twist of the cord is clearly visible, though naturally some borderline cases occur where judgment is

less sure. One or two specimens with patterns that could only have been produced by a carved beater are known. One such, a lattice design of squares from Gua Kerbau, is illustrated by Evans (Callenfels and Evans 1928: pl. LXX, 8).

*Impressed and Incised Decoration.* Forms of decoration other than cord-marking are of relatively rare occurrence. They are limited almost exclusively to impressions with various tools often in combination with incised lines. The tools most commonly employed to give these impressed patterns were:

- i. A pointed instrument.
- ii. The teeth of a comb (or perhaps a specially made tool with serrated edge).
- iii. The wavy edge of a shell.

One or two sherds bearing the impressions of carved stamps have been found, but these are most exceptional and the feeling is that they are perhaps intrusive but more probably anachronistic.

Designs of wavy lines made with the edge of a shell have so far been found only on sherds in Perlis, Kedah and Perak, or in other words on the west coast. They are particularly characteristic of the sites in the Bukit Baling limestone outcrop which were excavated by Collings in 1935 and from which collections were made by Williams-Hunt in 1952. Here shell impressions are found in many distinctive combinations with cord-marking, point impressions and faceting or indenting of the rim.

Lines of points produced by pressing the tips of a toothed instrument or comb into the clay have been used to great effect on vessels and sherds from a number of sites throughout the country. These 'comb-impressions' enclosed by incised lines and forming a pattern of spirals and chevrons were used to embellish the most elaborately decorated and in many ways the most striking vessel ever to be found intact in Malaya. I refer to the fine beaker excavated by Sieveking at Gua Cha (Fig. 5 *a* and Fig. 6). A similar method of using 'comb-impressions' within incised lines is to be seen on sherds from Gua Musang and Gua Madu (Tweedie 1940: pl. VII 5, 6, 7) not too distant from Gua Cha. See also Plate 1.

Only one instance of the decorative use of finger-tip impressions is known from Malaya. This is a sherd from Gua Cha with a faceted rim below which a ridge about one inch in width is irregularly marked with the impressions of a finger-tip.

*Carving.* The decoration of pottery by removal of clay, that is to say by carving, is not commonly seen in Malaya. There are however two very important types in which the technique finds a limited application. In one, small sections of the rim or lip were sliced off to form numerous facets round the circumference. In the other, V-shaped notches were cut out of the rim to produce a serrated or frill effect.

In one most unusual sherd from Gua Tembus the faceting was carried out not on the rim but on a flange projecting from the shoulder of the pot to the extent of about half an inch. The bottom of the original vessel was probably cord-marked.

*Perforation.* There are a number of sites, particularly Gua Cha, where sherds and vessels with perforations occur. It is hard to say whether these holes were

decorative or functional or perhaps a combination of the two. Certainly the arrangement of the holes in some of the perforated vessels from Gua Cha points to rather more than merely a device for suspension (cf. Figs. 1 *j*; 2 *b, i*; 4 *f*; 5 *d, g, h, i, k*).

*Painting.* No class of pottery with painted designs has been found in Malaya. We have however previously mentioned a slipped ware with a plain bright red wash over its entire surface. This has a wide distribution, some unusual vessels made from it having been restored from fragments from Gua Musang (Fig. 8 *d, e*). Vessels of different shape in the same or very similar ware were found at Gua Cha (Fig. 1 *a, b*).

At Gua Debu, Bukit Baling, Collings (Collings 1936: pl. VII: 32) found a single sherd bearing a small part of a design, or what looked like a design, in red wash and another fragment with an overall red wash. In the neighbouring site of Gua Kelawar, Collings also found some sherds bearing a pattern of chevrons formed from a series of elongated impressed markings outlined by double incised lines. These incised lines bore traces of red paint (Collings 1935: pl. XII 2, 3, 5, 6, 7). Such instances as these are exceptional.

## 6. THE SLAB-GRAVE POTTERY

The first slab-grave to be recorded in Malaya was discovered in 1895 by J. A. Legge, a surveyor, at Changkat Menteri in Perak (Evans 1928 *a*: III). Since then ten others have been found and examined, four by Evans in 1927 and 1930 (Evans 1928 *a*; 1931 *c*), one by P. M. de Fontaine, taxidermist at the Raffles Museum, in 1935 (Collings 1937 *a*: 85) and five by Collings in 1936 (Collings 1937 *a*). Out of the total of eleven slab-graves so far known, all but one were situated in the extreme south of Perak in the region of the Slim, Kruit and Klah Rivers. The exception, reported by Collings (1937 *a*: 85), was not identified beyond doubt as a slab-grave, but a few granite and laterite slabs at the site hinted that this was what it must have been. It was found in north Selangor just over the Perak border on the Sungai Belata Estate.

Apart from quantities of beads of glass and semi-precious stones, a few corroded and enigmatic iron implements of the *tulang mawas* type and a stone bark cloth beater from the Changkat Menteri site, sherds of pottery are usually associated with the slab-graves. Unfortunately this pottery has generally been dismissed as too broken and worn to be worth much consideration. Great emphasis has been placed on its extreme friability and rough, sandy texture, despite the obvious fact that these qualities are not inherent, but are merely the results of prolonged burial in a corrosive soil. What has survived is nothing more than the core, but this has successfully prevented recognition of the essential similarity of this pottery to certain better preserved sherds from a number of cave sites.

The deterioration of the outer skin of the slab-grave pottery has taken with it most of those characteristics by which pottery is identified. However, certain features of form and some decoration have remained. The most distinctive of these constitute a class of sherds with wide, flattened lip on which easily recognizable designs made up of dots, crescents or lines have been impressed or incised (Collings 1937 *a*: 83, fig. 2; 86, fig. 3).

Collings, in his excavation of Gua Bintong in Bukit Chuping, Perlis, found two sherds of this 'lip-decorated' pottery (Collings 1937 *b*: 106 fig. 6, 7, 8). The designs on these, a series of impressed crescents on one and three parallel lines following the circumference of the pot on the other, are very close indeed to the slab-grave pottery. Collings did not remark on a possible affinity.

Since then the writer has found many more examples of this 'lip-decorated' ware from other cave sites. These are:

- i. Gua Tembus, Bukit Chuping, Perlis*
- ii. Bukit Baling (one of the three sites from which collections were made by Williams-Hunt), Kedah*
- iii. Gua Sai I, Kelantan*

In these the similarity to slab-grave pottery is even more striking than in Collings' sherds from Gua Bintong. See Fig. 19.

The occurrence of this 'lip-decorated' pottery in both the caves and the slab-graves is of great importance and interest. But here again lack of stratification steps in to prevent any definite conclusions from being drawn. Of the deposits at Gua Bintong Collings writes, 'No stratification was to be seen, the deposit was of the usual very fine powdery grey cave earth towards the inner part of the cave, gradually becoming a chocolate brown colour towards the mouth, perhaps because of changes brought about by rain and nearness to damp earth outside the cave. The deeper part of the deposit also became brown in colour as the distance from the surface increased' (Collings 1937 *b*: 96). Thus in this and the other sites mentioned we have no way of knowing whether the slab-grave 'lip-decorated' pottery was in true association with the other formally Neolithic artifacts and pottery.

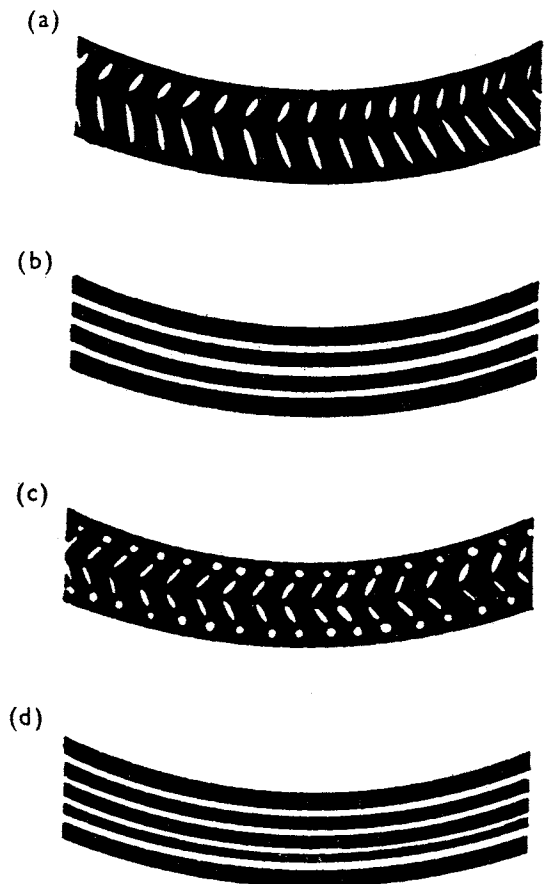


FIG. 19. 'Lip-decorated' Pottery. Typical Motifs.  
(Scale: 9/10 natural size)

- a.* Gua Tembus.      *b.* Gua Bintong, Bukit Chuping.  
*c. d.* Slab-graves, Perak.      *b. c. and d.* after Collings.



### 7. THE POTTERY FROM NYONG, PAHANG

The ancient settlement of Nyong on the banks of the River Tembeling in Pahang was discovered as a result of erosion produced by the floods of 1926. No excavations were carried out there until late in 1930 when Evans dug eight trial trenches and two main cuttings (Evans 1928 *c*; 1928 *e*; 1929 *a*; 1930 *a*; 1931 *b*).

The excavation was made in a series of layers of roughly equal depth so that the stratigraphy as reported is artificial. Evans claimed that almost all the 'post-Neolithic' objects were confined to the upper layer, layer A. These included a number of comparatively recent Chinese porcelain fragments and a modern Malay reaping knife. It is likely, as Evans suggests, that the superficial level was disturbed by modern cultivation, but it is of great significance to note from the plans he published (Evans 1931 *b*) that virtually all the objects from his layer A lie at the base of that layer and close to the upper border of layer B. There is therefore more than a strong suspicion that much of the formally Neolithic material was in reality associated with 'later' objects including much iron slag, especially when we read (Evans 1931 *b*: 58), 'In the second, and smaller, excavation fragments of Neolithic pottery were found in layer A . . .'

The pottery from Nyong was much weathered and resembles closely in state of preservation and general appearance the slab-grave sherds. Little can be made of it since most of its principal features have been corroded away, but one or two pieces with a pronounced serrated edge like a frill and others with a faceted rim have been found. These are remarkably similar in shape to sherds from Gua Cha and slightly less so to specimens from the Bukit Baling sites. Taken together with the evidence of the last section they raise a number of doubts and strengthen the possibility that some at least of the Malayan cave sites may date from a considerably later period than has hitherto been supposed and may in fact be contemporaneous with an iron-using culture.

### 8. THE BLACK POTTERY

The report of Greek pottery from the rock shelter of Tengku Lembu in Perlis which Williams-Hunt published in 1952 (Williams-Hunt 1952: 187-188) attracted a great deal of notice at the time and tended to divert notice away from the other remarkable finds at the site. Mr P. E. Corbett of the British Museum who received one of the sherds for examination and whose report Williams-Hunt quoted at length, said that the glaze on the outside and the clay strongly suggested Attic black glazed pottery, but that even if the fragment were not Attic there could be no doubt about its Greek origin. The shape pointed to a date somewhere in the fourth century B.C., according to Mr Corbett, although he admitted that he was unable to cite exact parallels. Moreover, the horizontal grooves below the shoulder of the fragment were a rare feature in Greek pottery which Corbett said he knew only on examples dating from the fifth century B.C.

Williams-Hunt referred to only two fragments of this hard black ware and said that he sent the larger to the British Museum. Six fragments of this particular vessel are however in existence and they were at some subsequent date incorporated in a rather questionable reconstruction.

Regarding shape, all that can safely be inferred from these sherds is that the original vessel had a wide mouth about 11 cm. in diameter with an everted lip and a straight neck about 2.5 cm. high. The body, which has been almost completely lost, was decorated over at least part of its surface with horizontal grooves. The bottom was evidently gently rounded, but unfortunately the base is missing.

The glaze to which Corbett refers is not a true glaze but rather an exceedingly fine slip and as such typically Greek. The surface has a faint trace of iridescence in some lights and quite large patches occur, especially on the shoulder and body, which are not black at all but a buff-orange in colour. The inner surface of all the sherds is deep black. Tooling marks, fine horizontal striae, are present on all surfaces.

In addition to the six pieces of this vessel, the writer found among the sherds from Tengku Lembu one fragment from each of five other pots. These five fragments are of the same black ware with the exception that the paste is in some cases rather more red.

It has been suggested that this black pottery could have a Far Eastern provenance and affinities with the plain black ware of Lung Shan have been proposed. This is a tempting idea with certain aspects in its favour. Shapes for example parallel quite well and the un-Greek horizontal grooving is almost characteristic of Lung Shan. However, although the Lung Shan pottery has been described (Wu, G. D. 1938) as having a surface 'like blackened leather, or black lacquer', a simile which would be just as apt for the Tengku Lembu sherds, its shiny surface was produced simply by burnishing and not by slipping as in the case of the Malayan specimens. Even though a final decision has yet to be made, it can be said that the black pottery is certainly intrusive and the weight of evidence is in favour of a Greek origin for it.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The main value of the analysis on which this summary is based must lie in listing and describing the ceramics from the Malayan prehistoric sites as comprehensively as possible; also perhaps in pointing out its shortcomings as a key to the understanding of Malayan prehistory. This must inevitably appear an unambitious goal, even a negative one, but that little more can be hoped for in the way of interpretation of existing material is obvious in view of the almost total lack of essential archaeological data.

We have had, it is true, glimpses of one or two fascinating possibilities. The black pottery from Bukit Tengku Lembu, the 'lip-decorated' ware from the slab-graves and some of the caves, the links between Gua Cha and the settlement at Nyong: all these are of first rate importance to the archaeology of Malaya. But these clues are incapable of further development and extension unless and until other sites on the scale of Gua Cha can be found and subjected to proper investigation.

On a wider field we have the unquestionable affinity between the site of Kodiang in Kedah with its tripod pottery and Buang Bep, some two to three hundred miles to the north in Thailand. There can be no doubt that one of the most promising areas for further archaeological research in this region is Peninsula Thailand with its extensive limestone hills.

Vaguer comparisons may be made with the prehistoric ceramics of Indo-China. The goblets from Bukit Tengku Lembu (Fig 14 h) for example are very close to the vessels shown in fig. 7 C, page 331 and fig. 8 A, page 332 of Parmentier's article 'Dépôt de jarres à Sa-huỳnh' (Parmentier 1924). Many other formal similarities spring to the eye on looking through Parmentier's illustrations, particularly with regard to the Gua Cha material. But until the sequence as well as the content of the prehistoric cultures within the different regions of Southeast Asia have been fully and satisfactorily described, such comparisons will continue to be fraught with danger and of uncertain value.

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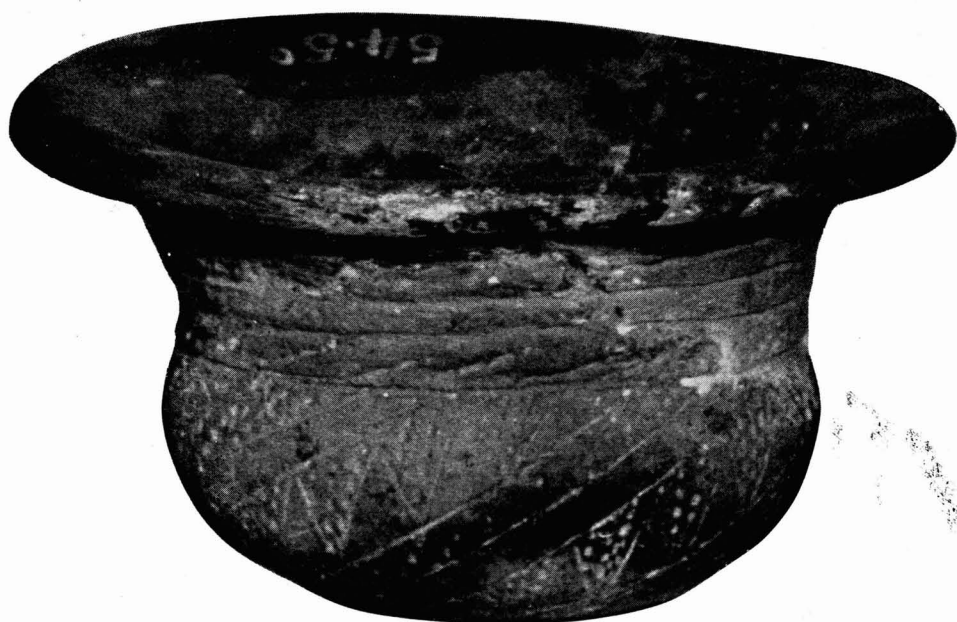
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a



b

*Gua Cha Specimens in Perak Museum Collections.*

- a. Base of beaker with 'comb-impressed' decoration (scale 1/6).
- b. Small bowl or beaker (scale 1/1).



Gua Musang Specimen in *Raffles Museum Collections*  
Beaker with triple rim (scale 1/5.7)