

# Recent Archaeological Activity in North Korea (I): The Cave at Misong-ni

WILLIAM E. HENTHORN

OVER the past ten years or so there has been considerable archaeological work in North Korea, notably the investigation of prehistoric and protohistoric sites. The investigations have been under the direction of the Center for Research in Archaeology and Ethnology (Kogohak mit minsokhak yŏn'guso) of the North Korean Academy of Sciences. The actual investigations have been carried out by members of the Historical Museums in P'yŏngyang, Sinŭiju, Ch'ŏngjin, etc., and the results published in monograph form in two series: *Kokohak charyo chip* (*Collection of Archaeological Data*) and *Yujŏk palgul pogo* (*Report of Excavation of Sites*). The former series has apparently been discontinued as evidenced by the change in title (with No. 5) of *Kokohak charyo chip* to *Yujŏk palgul pogo*. At least one report has been issued outside of the series mentioned above: 'Najin Ch'odo wŏnsi yujŏk palgul pogosŏ' ('Report of Excavation of Prehistoric Site on Ch'o Island, Najin'), issued in the autumn of 1955.

Preliminary reports of excavations and reports that are not incorporated into the monograph series are carried in *Munhwa yusan*, the journal of the Center for Research in Archaeology and Ethnology. Articles of an interpretative nature, chiefly by To Yuho, Director of the Center, are also carried in the journal *Yŏksa kwahak* (*The Historical Sciences*), which began publication in 1955. Finally, all reports are published by the publishing firm of the Academy of Sciences (Kwahakwŏn ch'ulp'ansa), in P'yŏngyang.

Despite such widespread activity there has been practically no effort to make these reports available to professionals in the field at large, although several monographs do carry summaries in Chinese, Russian, German and occasionally English. Infrequently a report is summarized in *Chōsen gakuho* (issued by the Japanese Association of Koreanologists, Tenri University), e.g., the Ch'o Island report. Needless to say, reports appearing in the journal *Munhwa yusan* are solely in Korean. It is all the more significant, therefore, when the subject is treated in rare Western publications. One of these, by Werner Forman, is a photographic record of holdings of North Korean historical museums. With text by the well-known Czechoslovakian scholar, Jaroslav Barinká, it was published in German as *Alte Koreanische Kunst* (Prague, 1962) and in English as *The Art of Ancient Korea* (London, 1962).

I have recently been engaged in research on the cultural history of Korea under a summer [1965] grant of Ford Foundation funds from the Committee on International Studies, Indiana University. In the course of my research I have begun to cover systematically the archaeological reports from North Korea. It is my hope to make portions of this material available to a wider audience in a series of reports, of which this is the first.

### THE CAVE AT MISONG-NI

The first reports on the site were published by Kim Yonggan in two parts under the title 'Misong-ni tonggul yujök palgul chunggan pogo' ('Interim Report on the Excavation of the Cave at Misong-ni'), in *Munhwa yusan* (1[1961]: 45-57 and 2[1961]: 23-32). A supplementary report on the examination of the animal bones found there was carried in *Munhwa yusan* (6[1961]: 1-11). The site has also received much comment in other articles.

The cave is situated in a hillside limestone quarry located 77.7 km southeast of Misong-ni, a village about 10 km northeast of Ŭiju, N. P'yöngan Province. It was discovered on the southwest side of an east-west oriented hill. A small stream to the south of the cave runs east-west, joining the Yalu River 7 km away.

The west entrance to the cave was discovered in May 1954, during quarrying operations which crushed the entrance. A few stone arrowheads, stone net weights, and human and animal bones were found in the interior of the cave, but no further investigation was carried out at that time. Then, in March 1959, during the process of extracting clay to build a smelter for the Ŭiju Army Limestone Works, animal bones and earthenware were found at a site south of the previously discovered cave entrance. A team was dispatched from the Sinŭiju Historical Museum to investigate.

At the time of the investigation, the floor of the cave was 16 m above the stream. Extensive quarrying operations carried out in the area since the period of the Japanese occupation had crushed the entrance of the cave into sections. Because of the large amount of mud heaped up in the cave, its ceiling was only about 2 m above the mud layer on the floor. The wide floor of the cave gradually narrowed toward the ceiling. The cultural strata began at a spot 3-4 m south of the present entrance to the cave. Namely, a section of the ceiling of the south entrance to the cave had already collapsed at an early period. As mentioned previously, the cave also had a west entrance. Thus the outward appearance was that of two adjoining caves. In the west entrance of the cave, which ran from west to east, part of the ceiling had disappeared and the cultural stratum was exposed to the open air. The result was two entrances to a single cave.

#### *Strata*

West entrance, top to bottom:

humus and recent mud deposit	60 cm
mud	45 cm
humus	50 cm
mud	45 cm
humus in which rocks were mixed to a depth of 13 cm and in which a 10 cm cultural stratum was found	65 cm

South entrance, top to bottom:

humus and mud	80 cm
mud	50 cm
humus	45 cm
mud	20 cm
humus containing traces of baked earth and a 30 cm cultural stratum	50 cm

The excavation at the south entrance proceeded from the outside into the cave as follows. In the stratum which extended inside the cave 1 to 1.3 m, the bones of a dog and feathers were found mixed with recent accumulation. Beneath that was the stratum with cultural remains. Numerous pieces of earthenware, arrowheads, rings, bone needles and human bones were found mixed together in an abnormal state. The human bones were in a heap; a portion was mixed with earthenware sherds, and a portion had been crushed by rocks of a diameter of 30-40 cm, which had fallen from the ceiling. In a corner of the east wall of the cave was a human cranium under which was a human thigh bone; rocks had been driven into the skull itself. Teeth were found scattered about this area; a human jawbone was lying somewhat to the east. That they were crushed in a cave-in is clear, since the cultural items, bones, rocks, and dirt were all mixed together. The cultural strata area exceeded 1 m in length; at the cave entrance it exceeded 1.4 m. Only in the interior of the cave were bones and artifacts mixed with rocks, not at the entrance. The upper cultural stratum was followed by a 15-20 cm sterile layer, beneath which a second cultural stratum of 15-20 cm was found. Very few artifacts were found in the lower stratum; both inside and outside the cave the stratum revealed bits of earthenware, bone fragments and a few stone implements.

Items found in the lower cultural level included one stone net weight. In the extreme south were fragments of what appeared to be arrowheads, beside which were found a pierced ornament of 'white jade' and a bone drill. The earthenware found in the lower cultural stratum was entirely different from that of the upper cultural level.

Soil formation at the western entrance was shown to be similar to that at the southern entrance. The area of the cave was small in the west and so only a few cultural items were found. In the upper cultural level at the side of a reconstructable earthenware piece, a cylindrical gem of jasper was found. Earthenware sherds, bones, and bone fragments were also found. Traces of charcoal and ashes were found, but no tools were discovered.

### *Artifacts*

#### *Lower cultural stratum*

*Stone net weights*—two. One was a flat rock with a diameter of 4 cm having two indentations beaten away on either side so a cord could be fastened; south of cave was the second stone sinker, fashioned similarly and found together with a bone drill and some earthenware fragments.

*Bone drills*—three.

*White jade ornament*—one. A very tiny pierced ornament: length 16 mm; width 7 mm; thickness 4 mm.

*Pottery fragments.* A number of sherds were found but not one vessel could be reconstructed. These fragments did not suggest a similarity in form with earthenware found in the

upper cultural stratum. The fragments were all brown in color and a fine sand had been mixed with the paste when the pottery was made. They were decorated in the manner of the comb ceramic ware with incised lines or stippling, in contrast to the pottery of the upper cultural level (Fig. 1c). The so-called larch leaf design was evidenced.

#### *Upper cultural stratum*

The upper cultural stratum was distinctive in the large amount of pottery found. Some twelve vessels were reconstructed and the forms of five others could be ascertained, although they were not completely reconstructable (Fig. 1a). These included:

*Tall jars* with a distinctive throat whose entire surface was polished or rubbed down. Two to four handles were attached to the body of the vessels. The jars were decorated with a series of parallel lines around the widest part of the body and at the throat. Several types of handles were evidenced. The best-preserved vessel had a height of 23.5 cm; length of neck, 6 cm; diameter of body at widest point, 17.5 cm. The body was gray in color and the throat and lip were brown. The handles were attached to the body at its widest point. Three bands of lightly incised parallel lines decorated the vessel. One undecorated vessel was found; one had two regular handles and two small knobs.

*Large bowls* which were rather shallow and wide-mouthed. One example, brown in color, was 14 cm high, had a diameter of 14 cm at the mouth and a diameter of the body at its widest point of 16 cm. Some of the bowls were decorated with bands of parallel lines around the body; some had a row of short, curved incisions around the lip; some were completely undecorated. Two nipple-like 'handles' were common.

*Footed vessels.* One example found had a shallow foot, flaring neck, stipple design at the point where the neck joins the body, and was 11.5 cm high. The diameter of the lip was 11 cm and the diameter of the foot was 5.5 cm. Some 4 cm from the lip were nipple-like 'handles.' One tall footed vessel was found. The height of the foot was 3.2 cm; diameter of base 13 cm; diameter of throat 10 cm. The color was reddish-brown and four protuberances or handles were attached. This was a rather rare type of footed vessel and the first of its kind found on the Korean west coast.

*Bronze ax.* One very small bronze ax with flared cutting edges, 5 cm wide and 4.5 cm long (Fig. 1b).

*A stone chisel* made of limestone. The cutting edge had been made by bevelling on two sides: length 9 cm, width 2.5 cm, and thickness 2 cm.

*Arrowheads.* Sixteen arrowheads made of schist were found, of which thirteen were notched and had concave bodies and a general length of 3.5 to 6 cm, width 1.4 to 2 cm. Three arrowheads had convex bodies with *hsing* for shafting, an overall length of 5-6 cm, with the length of the *hsing* being 1.5 to 2 cm.

*Spindle whorls.* Two were found: one of schist, diameter 6 cm, thickness 7 cm; the other of clay, diameter 4.8 cm, thickness 5 mm.

*Bone needles.* Only one example was found and it was broken: length 4.6 cm; diameter 3 mm.

*Bone drills.* Three small drills of animal bone were found, each approximately 6 cm in length.

*Cylindrical gem.* One example found: length 3.7 cm, diameter 1.9 cm, diameter of the bore 3 mm.

*Red earthenware fragments.* Three sherds were found. Many human bones were also found but the examination report has not yet been released.

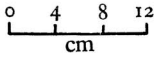
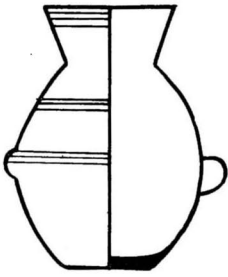
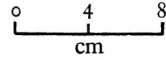
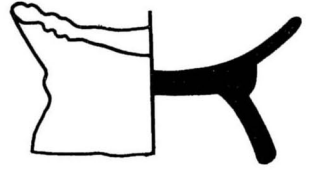
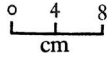
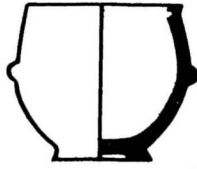


Fig. 1a



Earthenware from upper level at Misong-ni

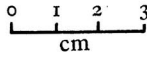
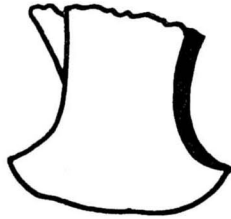


Fig. 1b

Bronze *ax* from upper level

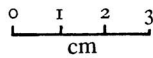
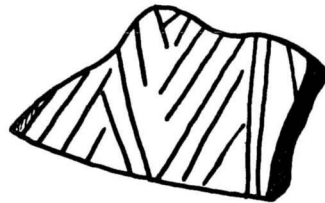
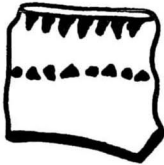


Fig. 1c

Pottery sherds from lower level

Examination of the animal bones found in the upper cultural stratum disclosed that over 50 per cent were deer or pig, with *Cervus Nippon* being the most plentiful. Animal bones found with human bones included pheasant (*Phasianidae*), tiger (*Felis tigris coreensis* Brass), wild and domesticated pigs, and two types of deer (*Capreolus capreolus pygargus pallas* and *Cervus elaphus xanthopygus* Milne-Edwards?).

Other animal bones found that were not in direct association with human bones included mountain rabbit (*Lepus Coreanus* Thomas); weasel (*Mustelidae* gen. sp.); leopard (*Felis pardus orientalis* Schlegel), and an unidentified member of the cat family; badger (*Nycterentes procyonoides*); dog and an unidentified member of the dog family; wild and domesticated pig; and four types of deer (*Hydropotes inermis swinhoe*, *Cervus Nippon hortulorum swinhoe* and the two previously mentioned types).

Both deer and pig bones are especially common in early sites on the west coast. Bones of the domesticated pig have been found at a number of early sites in Korea, with principal distribution extending from northeastern Korea up into the Soviet Maritime Provinces, but none of these are known to have been found in early sites on the west coast of Korea. The examination also revealed that the domesticated pig found at the Misong-ni site differed morphologically from the regular domesticated pig in having a smaller submaxillary bone. It has been suggested that this occurred when the pig was first domesticated.

#### Comment

North Korean archaeologists have taken the position that there were distinct bronze and iron periods in Korea, particularly in the northern portion of the peninsula. The bronze age is given as the latter part of 2000 B.C.; the iron age began in Korea and in the Soviet Maritime Provinces in the first half of 1000 B.C. This means that they believe that neither bronze nor iron periods in Korea were the result of Chinese influence, since the major Chinese influences commenced with immigration into the Korean northwest during the period of the Warring States i.e., from about the 3rd century B.C. One effect of this interpretation is to postulate an independent state, *ko Chosôn*, 'Old Choson,' extending over North Korea, part of southern Manchuria and into the Jehol area. Associated with this have been the bronze period culture and the megalithic culture represented by the dolmens.

On the basis of the bronze ax and gourd-shaped pottery, To Yuho, in an article in *Munhwa yusan* (4[1961]: 82-85), places the upper level of the Misong-ni site in the late bronze-early iron period. Chong Ch'anyong, in an article in *Munhwa yusan* (2[1961]: 34-44), places the Misong-ni site generally in the period 1500-500 B.C.; but Chong also remarks that gourd-shaped pottery, which is believed to have influenced Japanese Yayoi ware, belongs in the middle of the first millenium B.C.

The lower cultural stratum at Misong-ni belongs in the neolithic period and is characterized by flat-bottomed comb ceramic ware. On the basis of the latter, the lower level would date earlier than 2000 B.C. The scarcity of cultural items and the thinness of the cultural level indicates that these people dwelled in the cave for a relatively brief period and then abandoned it. Some time later, toward the end of the bronze period, the cave was used as a tomb, as represented by the upper cultural level. Still later, the cave was used as a temporary shelter by others who built the fires whose traces were found.