

Preliminary study of the Memotian culture

ការសិក្សាជាដំបូង ទៅលើអារ្យធម៌មេមត់

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In Cambodia, the study of prehistory is going slowly compared with other studies and other Southeast Asian countries. Because up to now, we have only limited knowledge of our prehistory. All this information comes from foreign documents, but it is very little (see list of prehistoric research below).

Although no systematic research has been carried out in the domain, diverse evidence indicates that in certain areas in the basaltic red soil plateaux of south-eastern Cambodia and adjacent to the border of Vietnam, there are many large round earth structures which were inhabited in prehistoric times.

The round earth structures were first cited in 1930 in the *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, later, Louis Malleret (1959) identified eighteen Neolithic round structures, six located in Kampong Cham province (Cambodia) and twelve in Song Be (Vietnam) (fig.2). Most structures consisted of a concentric wall with an average diameter larger than 200 meters with a ditch circling inside the wall (Manh 1996). These structures are still thought to be Neolithic in origin (Kojo and Pheng 1997:181; Dega 1997:14-15).

The only excavation took place in 1962 when B.P. Groslier excavated one of the round structures located at Memot. In this excavation, a thousand stone objects

and more than twenty thousand potsherds were recovered from, as Groslier's mentioned (1966:195), fourteen cultural layers at a depth of over three meters below surface.

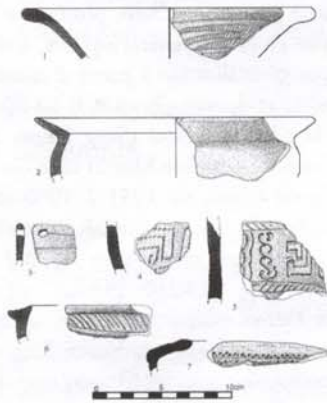
Based on the huge amount of cultural material, Groslier (1966) defined this culture as the Memotian civilisation. The structures together with the other Circular Earth sites of the region were said to represent a specific tradition in the region. Researchers claimed this to be the most important Neolithic vestige of south-east Asia (Groslier 1966; Manh 1996: 70).

In spite of the result of his excavation, Groslier did not publish anything in detail nor give an excavation report. For almost four decades the location of the site that he excavated was unknown. He did not allow any colleagues to visit the site during excavation nor to examine the findings, which were then transferred to Angkor Conservation in Siem Reap province. During the 1970's these collections were transferred to the National Museum in Phnom Penh (personally communicated by R. Mourer 1999).

Therefore nobody could know which part of the structure was excavated, what kind of stone and ceramic articles were collected from each stratigraphic layer, what they looked like, nor what the details of the so called Memotian culture were.

Due to the fact that most of Groslier's findings were stored in the National Museum, Phnom Penh, they have not yet been analysed, except for a brief examination by M. Dega (1997). We began to analyse these artifacts as our thesis (1999). The findings were divided into two different groups, stone artefacts and ceramics. Additionally, we also conducted a site survey and a site exploration in the same areas. In honor to B. P. Groslier who did the first excavation of the site, we decided to rename it "Groslier site."

The Groslier earthwork site was discovered on 1st March 1999 in Memot district. This paper focuses on the remains of cultural objects collected from circular earthwork sites in Memot by B.P Groslier in 1962 and from the Groslier site, excavated in 1999 by Heng and me. Our study of these cultural objects is lacking in data from the early excavation in 1962 and also not enough unites of excavation in 1999. However in this text we collected data of the cultural objects in the National Museum to compare with the recent



Potsherds from B.P Groslier excavated in 1962 from circular earthworks sites of the "Memotian Culture"

research in the Groslier site and the other sites. Mainly we want to show "what types of cultural objects were used by Memotian civilization" additionally to give evident of the use of the implements like pots, adze, axe, chisels, bracelet, lithophone etc. to assist in clearly understanding the Memotian civilization.

What B.P Groslier wrote about in a book I think that the excavation displays fourteen layers of stratigraphy in just over three-meter depth is unacceptable. In reality that is only one type of red soil sediment, the upper layer is reddish brown from sun bleaching. And this Memotian culture he cited as being Neolithic, but till now it is uncertain to say which exact period. Perhaps, judging by potsherds, polishing stone tools, one could guess Neolithic. It is not easy to make judgment about these circular earthworks sites because of the acidic red soil sediment and after only rush study. More researches need to be done by prehistorians or archaeologists to reveal the large value of prehistoric sites in the red soil region.

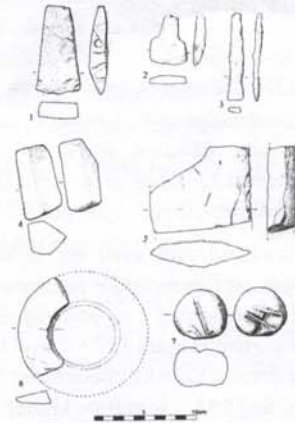


Fig- 1 simple adze, 2 shouldered adze, 3 chisel, 4 polishing stone, 5 lithophone, 6 stone bangle and 7 rounded polishing stone from the excavated of circular earthworks sites of the "Memotian Culture" in 1962.

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