

# Excerpts from article: "New Light On A Forgotten Past"

By Wilhelm G. Solheim II, Ph.D. — Professor Of Anthropology, University Of Hawaii

...For clear and powerful indications are emerging that some of the earliest steps toward civilization may have been taken in Southeast Asia.

Where Did Man First Grow Plants, Cast Bronze ?

— The evidence comes from archeological sites in northeastern and northwestern Thailand, with support from excavations in Taiwan, North and South Viet Nam, other areas in Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and even from northern Australia.

— Materials uncovered and dated by carbon 14\* are the cultural remains of people whose ancestors may have been growing plants and making polished stone tools and pottery thousands of years earlier than were the peoples of the Near East, India, or China.

— At one site in northern Thailand, bronze was being cast in double molds well before 2300 B.C.—perhaps earlier than 3000 B.C. This is substantially earlier than such work in India or China, and possibly earlier than the first bronze cast in the Near East, where, until now, most experts have thought that bronze metalworking began.

— Europeans found advanced cultures in India and China. When they saw similarities in the architecture and aristocratic lifestyles of those countries and Southeast Asia, they assumed Indian and Chinese influence. Even the name they gave the area—Indochina—reflected this attitude.

Migrating Peoples and "Waves of Culture"

— Prehistoric Southeast Asia, as I use the term, consists of two parts. The first is "Mainland Southeast Asia," which extends from the Ch'in Ling Mountains, north of the Yangtze River in China, to Singapore, and



from the South China Sea westward through Burma into Assam. The other I call "Island Southeast Asia," and are from the Andaman Islands, south of Burma, around to Taiwan, including Indonesia and the Philippines.

— Robert Heine-Geldern, an Austrian anthropologist, dealt with the coming of bronze to Southeast Asia, theorized that the original source of the Southeast Asian Bronze Age was a migration from eastern Europe about 1000 B.C.

The people in this migration, he believed, moved east and south, entering China during the Western Chou

Dynasty (1122-771 B.C.). They carried with them not only a knowledge of bronze working but also a new art form... They decorated their bronze with geometric patterns, spirals, triangles, and rectangles, as well as with scenes or pictures of people and animals.

— As applied to Southeast Asia, both Heine-Geldern and Bernhard Karlgren, a Swedish scholar, called this culture Dong Son, after Dong Son, a site in North Viet Nam south of Hanoi, where large bronze



drums and other artifacts had been unearthed. Both men felt that the Dong Son people brought bronze and the geometric art style into SE Asia.

— A few botanists who studied the origins of domesticated plants, for example, suggested that Southeast Asia had been a center of very early plant domestication. In 1952 Carl Sauer, a U.S. geographer, went a step further. He hypothesized that the first plant domestication in the world took place in Southeast Asia. He speculated that it was brought about by people much earlier than the Dong Son period, people whose primitive culture was known as Hoabinhian.

— The existence of a Hoabinhian culture had first been proposed in the 1920's by Madeleine Colani, a French botanist turned paleontologist and then archeologist. She based the idea on excavations of several cave and rock-shelter sites in North Viet Nam, the first of which was found near the village of Hoa Binh. Typical artifacts in these sites included oval, circular, or roughly triangular stone tools flaked on only one side, leaving the original surface of the rock on the other (...) ■