

by all reports, the orang utan, inquisitive and unafraid, is not hard to kill from the ground. Deer too can be trapped or corralled, yet their remains seem scarce. The gibbon has been found at deep level, and although by habit wholly arboreal, pregnant females would not be hard to kill from the ground (Harrison). Porcupine are easily caught by a strong trap or net across their burrow mouths. Wild cat come into the cave every night (nowadays), undisturbed by lights or watchers, to feed on fallen swiftlets and bats.

All the arboreal animals whose remains are found here occasionally come down to the ground, and their presence (as a very small proportion) may be due equally to natural accident, or human luck, and do not, in these small numbers, imply a shooting instrument.

Of the largest animals we have the one elephant bone, so far unsupported by other finds, and a few rhinoceros teeth. All but one fragment of the latter are scarcely worn or unerupted; yet none are associated with jaw fragments, and for this and other reasons detailed in a separate note below, it is considered that these particular teeth may not represent food remains.

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Rhinoceros' and Pigs' Teeth as Niah Charms?

by

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The "dragon" teeth identified by Professor von Koenigswald (above) from Chinese pharmacies in Sarawak are quite expensive medicine. In Kuching they are sold by weight at \$2.50 a tahlil (4s. 4½d. an ounce); by comparison dried frogs and centipedes cost 5 cents each, and sea horses 50 cents, but highest priced, and hard to find, are fresh rhinoceros teeth, at \$25 each (fossil and semi-fossil rhino teeth are sold as dragons'). If he wishes, the poor man may buy gratings of rhino teeth at a price pro rata.

No whole rhino teeth have yet been found in the main pit excavation at Niah, but we have eight fragments. Of these, all but one are lower jaw molars of young animals, either altogether unerupted or with just a suggestion of wear on the crowns, showing that the tooth had partially cut through the gums. Yet none were associated with mandible fragments, and no rhinoceros bone has yet been identified with certainty from the food remains excavated. This suggests that the teeth are not just the remnants of rhinoceros eaten in the cave, but were themselves valued objects, deliberately extracted from the jaws of rhino calves and kept for their own sake.

At Niah, the time/depth scale of the deposit as established by Carbon 14 dating, is very low; approximately 2½ inches of depth represent 1,000 years' deposition (see Harrison, *Man*, 1959:1). Most human burials are somewhat compressed, but never completely flattened, and in vertical section may be four or five inches deep, cutting through two thousand years on the date scale as they lie. Moreover the soil in which these burials occurred was already rich in the skeletal remains of the meals of the former cave visitors. For these reasons it is often hard to be certain that the association of foreign objects with human burials in this deposit is in fact deliberate and not accidental.

Some of the rhinoceros teeth were not even remotely associated with human burials, but one was very clearly. This was in E/A2 at 60-72", where many fragments of a human skull, painted

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red with haematite, were found under a big slab of stone, in a crevice at the foot of a buried boulder, with half an unerupted rhinoceros molar of the lower jaw among them. There was no patina on this tooth fragment.

A similar tooth, unerupted and broken, was found among the bones of a human neolithic skeleton buried in the southwest mouth, Gan Kira (see figure below).

It appears then, not only that whole teeth were valued (as charms or medicine?), but also that they were sufficiently valuable still to be important as fragments.

Rhinoceros is not the only species whose teeth are associated with human burials regularly. Sometimes whole masses of food bone are found around and above human remains; food offerings may well have been made with the burials, but these well broken fragments, often separated by several inches of matrix, seem more likely to be accidental rather than deliberate accumulations connected with specific human remains.

But sometimes again the association is unmistakable: in W/E3 pig and orang utan teeth were among the bones of a burial -at 54"; in W/E2 the upper canine of an aged pig was found in the middle of a burial, it was glossy and black; another shining black pig tusk was found associated with a skeleton in E/X2; and in W/X a child's skull was buried, and in the middle of the fragments was the incisor of a pig. There are also instances from the main stone-age cemetery, later in date than these deep burials under the over-hanging rock shelf.

Thus it seems that not only rhinoceros teeth but also those of pig—and perhaps other species too—were buried with human corpses in the cave.



Rhino tooth cap, Niah, 1958.

Punan Cemeteries in the Niah River

by

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There are at present five known Punan Cemeteries on the Niah River, in the general vicinity of the Niah Caves.

The whereabouts of these cemeteries are as follows:—

- (i) Kuala Sekaloh — upriver from Batu Niah
- (ii) Kuala Tangap — between Pangkalan Lobang and Niah
- (iii) Lubok Changkir — between Pangkalan Lobang and Niah
- (iv) Kuala Subis — between Pangkalan Lobang and Batu Niah
- (v) Sungai Sepupok — upriver from Niah (not visited).

DESCRIPTION OF CEMETERIES:

- (i) *Kuala Sekaloh*: On and around small hill on true right bank S. Niah. Existing cemetery area about $\frac{1}{2}$ acre in extent. Large dead *tapang* tree on site. Visible graves: 6 Punan (of which one is 'Salong' type); 38 Iban; 1 Chinese (married to Iban woman). Originally a purely Punan cemetery; has been used for about 100 years.
- (ii) *Kuala Tangap*: On and around low hill on T.R.B.S. Niah. *Tapang* tree beside site, at foot of hill. Visible graves. 22 Punan; 5 Iban. Has been used for about 100 years.
- (iii) *Lubok Changkir*: On and around small hill on T.L.B.S. Niah. Existing cemetery area about $\frac{1}{2}$ acre. No *tapang* tree. Originally the burial place of a Kayan named Agam Gong who came to Niah River from the Baram, married the daughter of a man called Melibeng, who was a Punan Melanau, and