

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR  
HARBOUR CITIES ALONG THE SILK ROADS

ANCIENT TRADING CENTRES  
IN THE  
MALAY PENINSULA

Leong Sau Heng  
Malaysia

Surabaya, Indonesia  
9 - 14 January 1991

Seminar on Harbour Cities along the Silk Roads

9th- 14th January 1991, Surabaya

Ancient trading centres in the Malay Peninsula

by

Leong Sau Heng

University of Malaya

Malaysia

Just thirty years ago, in 1961, when Dr. Alastair Lamb first reported on the presence of a pre-fifteenth century entrepot at Pengkalan Bujang on the Merbok estuary in Kedah<sup>1</sup> he also made the following comments:

The finds at Pengkalan Bujang provide us with the opportunity to extend our knowledge of the trade of Malaya back to the 13th century, if not earlier. They also suggest the fascinating possibility that similar sites of even earlier date may yet be found along the coasts of the Malay Peninsula. There is one such site, near Takuapa, in South Thailand, and others may well exist in the Malayan territory.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Lamb could not have been more correct. In 1980 a slightly earlier entrepot was discovered in Kampung Sungai Mas at the mouth of the Muda River in Kedah, about just 11 kilometers (as the crow flies) south of the Merbok Estuary.<sup>3</sup>

In 1981 large quantities of Chinese ceramics of the Southern Song and Yuan periods were accidentally unearthed at Kampung Juara on Pulau Tioman.<sup>4</sup> Subsequent excavations on the island by the staff of the National Museum at this site and at another slightly earlier site at

---

<sup>1</sup> Alastair Lamb, "Pengkalan Bujang an ancient port in Kedah", *Malaya in History* 7 (1) 1961, pp. 12-17. See also "Research at Pengkalan Bujang; a preliminary report", *Federation Museums Journal* 6, 1961: 21-37.

<sup>2</sup> Lamb, "Pengkalan Bujang an ancient port in Kedah", p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> See Nik Hassan Shuhaimi & Mohd Kamaruzzaman, "The probable location of the port-kingdom of Chieh-Cha and its monumental remains", Paper presented at the Research Conference on Early Southeast Asia, Bangkok and Nakhon Pathom, 8-13 April, 1985; Nik Hassan Shuhaimi, "The kingdom of Srivijaya as socio-political and cultural Entity", in *The Southeast Asian Port and Polity Rise and Demise*, J. Kathirithamby-Wells & John Villiers (eds.) Singapore, 1990 p.69; Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abd. Rahman & Othman Mohd Yatim, *Antiquities of Bujang Valley* Kuala Lumpur, 1990, pp. 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Adi Haji Taha, "Recent archaeological discoveries in Peninsular Malaysia 1976-1982", *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* vol.56(1) 1983, pp.58-59.

Teluk Nipah (which yielded wares of the Northern Song period) recovered further evidences for the island's involvement in this early (pre-fifteenth century) Asian maritime trade.<sup>5</sup> Archaeological work in 1987-89 by Dr. Nik Hassan Shuhaimi and his team at Pulau Kelumpang at the mouth of the Selinsing River in Perak have likewise uncovered important data on another early trading centre on the west coast region of Peninsular Malaysia. Dr. Nik's work at Pulau Kelumpang has provided us with a much clearer picture on the chronology of the Kuala Selinsing settlement. This is now more securely dated on basis of radiocarbon dates between 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>6</sup> Although the presence of an ancient settlement at Kuala Selinsing was known since the time of I.H.N. Evans in the late twenties<sup>7</sup> and excavated in 1932<sup>8</sup> and 1955<sup>9</sup> the dating of the settlement was made on purely typological and stylistic grounds on some of the finds recovered from the area. More importantly, the 1987-89 excavations have provided clear evidences of trade connections between this ancient settlement and the entrepot at Kampung Sungai Mas. Similar type of Middle-Eastern potsherds dating from about the 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> centuries to the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD had been recovered from both sites.<sup>10</sup> My own research in the late seventies at Jenderam Hilir in the Langat river valley in Selangor has also obtained some evidences pointing to possible trade links with Pengkalan Bujang in Kedah.<sup>11</sup>

This corpus of new data on such ancient trading sites in Peninsular Malaysia has recently led me to identify these sites as collecting centres, feeder points and entrepots. As I have discussed this elsewhere<sup>12</sup>, I do not intend to repeat here all the details pertaining to the characterizing of these various types of trading sites. Briefly, however, the earliest of these are

---

<sup>5</sup> Adi Haji Taha, "Recent archaeological discoveries in Peninsular Malaysia (1983-1985)", *Journal of the Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society* vol.60(1) 1987, pp.42-44. Also see Jean Martin, "A ceramic legacy of Asia's maritime trade on Tioman Island", *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* vol. 58(1) 1985, pp. 81-90 and *A Ceramic Legacy of Asia's Maritime Trade: Song Dynasty Guangdong Wares and other 11th-19th century trade ceramics found on Tioman Island, Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur: Southeast Asian Ceramic Society, West Malaysia chapter, 1985. In fact, prior to the discoveries of the eighties a few finds of Chinese trade ceramics have been reported by Lord Medway in "Archaeological notes from Tioman, Pahang", *Federation Museums Journal* vol. 7, 1962, pp 55-63.

<sup>6</sup> Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Diu Nik Abdul Rahman, "The Later Prehistory of the Malaysian Peninsular" paper presented at the 14th Congress of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association in Yogyakarta, Indonesia 25 Aug- 2 Sept 1990.

<sup>7</sup> I.H.N. Evans, "On ancient remains from Kuala Selinsing, Perak", *Journal of the Federated Malay States Museum*, vol. 12, 1928, pp. 121-131.

<sup>8</sup> I.H.N. Evans, "Excavations at Tanjung Rawa, Kuala Selinsing, Perak", *Journal of the Federated Malay States Museum*, vol. 15 1932, pp. 79-133.

<sup>9</sup> G.de -G. Sieveking, "Recent Archaeological discoveries in Malaya (1955) ", *Journal of the Malay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 29(1), pp.200-205.

<sup>10</sup> Nik Hassan Shuhaimi, "The later Prehistory of the Malaysian Peninsular", p.9.

<sup>11</sup> Leong Sau Heng, "Ancient finds from Kampung Jenderam Hilir", *Malaysia in History*, vo.20(2) 1977, p.42.

<sup>12</sup> Leong Sau Heng, "Collecting centres, feeder points and entrepots in the Malay Peninsula, 1000 BC-AD1400", in *Tile Southeast Asian Port and Polity Rise and Demise*, J. Kathirithamby-Wells and John Villiers Singapore, 1990, pp.17-38.

the collecting centres. Since the late prehistoric times collecting centres had already emerged on both the west and east coasts of the Peninsula. These are Kampung Sungai Lang in the Kuala Langat district and Klang at the mouth of the Klang River in the west coast, and Batu Buruk at Kuala Terengganu on the east coast. These collecting centres served mainly as outlets for special local produce. Many of such sites owe their importance to the fact that they are located in or very near important Eco zones from which particular local products were obtained. The above mentioned sites are all located in areas rich in alluvial tin and /or gold or along river routes that led to such areas. Teluk Nipah and Kampung Juara on Tioman Island are later examples of such collecting centres. In this case, the island's most important asset was not so much her mineral resources, as there is neither tin nor gold on the island, but her other natural resources viz. freshwater, good natural harbours and her convenient location on the Asian maritime trade route. Besides serving as a halfway station for revictualling purposes, the island's geographical proximity to the Peninsula also meant that produce from this rich hinterland could also be assembled at these points to be picked up and injected into the international trade network. But the volume of trade handled by these collecting centres was comparatively much lesser than those handled at the entrepots.

Entrepots are true supercenters for trade. These are known in the Peninsula only from the first millennium AD onwards. These were great seaports and foci of communications strategically located on the east-west maritime route. Here goods from various lands viz. from the Near East, India, Sri Lanka, and China were landed, sold and reshipped to their final destinations. Besides handling goods from foreign lands, local Southeast Asian produce were also channeled to these centres. Large and regular supplies of these local produce, which in the case which in the case of the Peninsular Malaysian entrepots included forest products and minerals, especially tin, were channeled to these entrepots from their numerous feeder points. Examples of such entrepots in the Peninsular Malaysia are Sungai Mas and Pengkalan Dujang. Archaeological work has uncovered vast quantities of trade debris at these sites. These are apparently wharf sweepings of goods broken on shipment. They comprised a great admixture of goods from many lands viz. sherds of a wide variety of Chinese trade wares, fragments of Middle Eastern glassware, innumerable glass and stone beads, and earthenware sherds which might have originated from either India or other centre of Southeast Asia. Both these entrepots predate that at Melaka, the most well-known entrepot of the early historic period. An entrepot which was probably a contemporary of the entrepot at Kampung Sungai Mas is Takudpa<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> A. Lamb, "Takudpa: the probable site of a pre-Malacca entrepot in the Malay Peninsula" in *Malayan and Indonesian Studies*, J. Bastin and R. Roolvink (eds.), London 1964, pp.76-86; Leong Sau Heng, "Collecting

located also on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, almost 500 km to the north of Sungai Mas. Other major ancient trade centres found in this northern part of the Malay Peninsula (i.e. in Peninsular Thailand) is Chaiya, Nakon Si Thammarat (Ligor) and Satingphra. These are all located on the east coast facing the Bay of Bandon and South China Sea. These might have been commercial centres functioning as the eastern terminus of the trans-peninsula routes as has been suggested by several scholars.<sup>14</sup> Whether they were also operating as entrepôts, however, require further investigations.

Feeder points are small local supply centres dealing mainly in the special produce of particular Eco zones. These were not points, where foreign traders could come and pick up their goods, but rather places which regularly sent supplies of their local produce to the entrepôts. The emergence of feeder points, like that of the entrepôts is a phenomenon of the proto- and early historic times. Their development were apparently linked with the rise of major regional centres of trades such as entrepôt. This type of trading sites may be found on the coast or in inland riverine areas. In the inland areas the most likely locations for these sites were confluences of river tributaries draining a large resource base. Jenderam Hilir, located near the confluence of the Langat and Semenyih rivers is an example of such a feeder point located in an inland riverine area. To this day alluvial tin is still being mined in the valleys drained by both the Langat and Semenyih rivers. An example of a feeder point located in the coastal region is Kuala Selinsing. Like Jenderam Hilir, this site is also located near the rich tin deposits of the Larut tin field. The trade connections that these feeder points had with the Kedah entrepôts have already been mentioned above.

With the rise of entrepôts and feeder points in the 6th/7th century AD the pattern of trade in this region can be said to be more structured with trade being conducted at a number of centres operating on different scales and at different levels. It is interesting to note that most of these early entrepôts are found on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula at the northern entrance to the Straits of Melaka. The presence of these early entrepôts from about the mid first millennium clearly attest to the growing importance of the Straits of Melaka as a major sea-lane linking regions west of the Bay of Bengal and those bordering on the South China Sea and further north. While this is indeed one of the most significant aspects of the

---

centres, feeder points and entrepôts", p. 28 and Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abd. Rahman and Othman Yatim, "Takuapa revisited: A commentary on Alastair Lamb's pre-Malacca entrepôt in the Malay Peninsula", *Jurnal Arkeologi Malaysia* 2 1989, pp. 93-96.

<sup>14</sup> H.G. Quaritch Wales, "A Newly-explored route of ancient Indian cultural expansion", *Indian Arts and letters* vol.9 (1) 1935, and *The Malay Peninsula in Hindu Times*, London 1976; A. Lamb "Kedah and Takuapa: some tentative historical conclusion", *Federation Museums* vol. 6 1961, v. 75, Paul Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese*, Kuala Lumpur 1961, p. xxxvi.

region's history these developments should not, however been seen in isolation. The rise of entrepots was but a culmination of a long process of the Peninsula's increasing participation in the Asian trade. I have already mentioned the existence of trading centres in Peninsular Malaysia predating the rise of these early entrepots. These are the collecting centres which have been archaeologically documented at the mouths of the Klang Terengganu Rivers. Many of early trading sites believed to date from about the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD mentioned in various early literary records such as the *Geographike Huphegesis* and the *Liang-shu*<sup>15</sup> were probably major collecting centres where native produce of the region could be obtained. Although scholars have long recognized the presence of these trading centres the actual location and dates of most of them remain highly controversial.

Recent archaeological works elsewhere in Southeast Asia, however, have been able to throw some light on this question of Southeast Asia's early commercial contacts with regions outside. Ban Don Tha Phet in west-central Thailand, in the investigators' own words "produced the earliest and most abundant evidence to date for Indian links with Southeast Asia"<sup>16</sup>. Numerous etched agate and etched carnelian beads of Indian manufacture have been excavated from this site. The site is now dated to the earlier part of the 4th century BC<sup>17</sup>. Elsewhere in west and central Thailand, etched agate and carnelian beads and a few Roman carnelian intaglios have been found at Klong Thom (Khuan Luk Pad) in Krabi province in Thailand, and a Roman coin of the third century AD was reported from U-Thong.<sup>18</sup> From these recent finds in Thailand it is very likely that regular trade links between this region and India were established long before the mid-first millennium AD. Some may, however, argue that since these are not coastal sites the trade routes in use at that time might have been via the land, or at best by coastal trading i.e. by hugging the coast, the exotic Indo-Roman goods finally reaching their respective markets via river- and overland routes. Recent evidences from Bali in Indonesia, however, have provided indubitable evidences for the existence of actual long distance sea-borne trade from as early as the first century AD. At Sembiran, a coastal site in north-east Bali, archaeologists have found some 55 sherds of Indian rouletted ware and Indian sherd with graffiti in Kharoshthi, 2 carnelian beads and over 500 glass beads.<sup>19</sup> All these recent findings, therefore, have simulated once more our research interest

---

<sup>15</sup> See Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese*.

<sup>16</sup> I. C. Glover *Early trade between India and South-East Asia: a link in the development of a world trading System*, (2nd ed.), Occasional Papers no.16, University of Hull centre for South-East Asian Studies, 1990, p.3.

<sup>17</sup> Glover, *Early trade...*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>18</sup> Glover, *Early trade...*, pp. 5-9.

<sup>19</sup> I Wayan Ardika and Peter Bellwood, "The beginnings of Indian Contact with Bali", Paper presented at the 14th Congress of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association at Yogyakarta, 25-2 sept. 1990.

on ancient trading centres in Peninsular Malaysia itself. Was the Straits of Melaka already an important sea-lane by at least the beginning of the Christian era? Were there trading centres of this period in Peninsular Malaysia that we can identify archaeologically?

Some of the sites generally grouped as Metal Age sites viz. Kampung Sungai Lang in Kuala Langat, Bukit Kuda in Klang, Batu Pasir Garam in the Tembeling Valley of Pahang, and Batu Buruk in Kuala Terengganu may date from this period. However, most of these sites can be only relatively dated from this period. However, most of these sites can be only relatively dated based on the finds of Heger type I drums found at these sites. Glass beads too have been found at both Kampung Sungai Lang and at Batu Buruk, but no etched beads occur on these sites. I have already identified the latter sites of collecting centres of the late prehistoric times. Radiocarbon dating on samples from a wooden dug-out (?) at the Kampung Sungai Lang site gave three different sets of dates ranging from viz. 580-390 BC, 295-95 BC, and AD 10-190.<sup>20</sup> There is now some reason to believe that the first set (GX-280) dated at 2435± 95 by the Geochron Laboratories to be the most likely date. This is because this date is well within the range of a cluster of radiocarbon dates that I have obtained from samples of two types of seeds and a wooden artifact from Jenderam Hilir located further up the Langat River. The radiocarbon dates obtained all fall within the range of 2490-2450±90 bp. Another radiocarbon date from an oarblade from Jenderam Hilir has been dated 2500±70 bp (NZ4480A)<sup>21</sup>. In view of these dates, I suggest a 5<sup>th</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> century BC date for the Kampung Sungai Lang site and the late prehistoric settlement at Jenderam Hilir<sup>22</sup> as most likely. This rather early date is now also not surprising in view of the fact that the recent radiocarbon dates from Ban Don Tha Phet dated at Oxford ranged from 2340-2310 BP.<sup>23</sup> The pair of bronze drums found at Kampung Sungai Lang also suggest trade ties with Mainland South Asia. As for the glass beads these too, may have come from the same source, although originally they might have been first brought into the mainland from outside. Glass and stone were apparently widely traded in the Mainland since the late prehistoric times. Stone and glass

---

<sup>20</sup> See R.B. Smith, "A checklist of published carbon 14 datings from South East Asia", *Early South East Asia: essays in archaeology, History and Historical Geography*, R.D. Smith and W. Watson (eds), New York, 1919 p. 503.

<sup>21</sup> B. Batchelor, Post "Hoabinhian" coastal settlement indicated by finds in stanniferous Langat River alluvium near Dengkil, Selangor, Peninsular Malaysia", *Federations Museums Journal* 22, for 1977, Addendum.

<sup>22</sup> My research at Jenderam Hilir has shown that the Jenderam Hilir area near the confluence of the Langat and Semenyih rivers was settled intermittently since the time of the early Neolithic times. See Leong Sau Heng, "A tripod-Pottery complex in Peninsular Malaysia" in *Proceedings of the First Conference of the Association of Southeast Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe*, Ian and Emily Glover (eds.), BAR International Series 561, 1990, pp. 65-76.

<sup>23</sup> Glover, *Early trade...*, p. 36-39.

beads have been recovered from the classic bronze drum site at Dong Son in North Vietnam.<sup>24</sup> Monochrome glass beads were also reported from the Ongbah cave in Thailand dated around 330-130 BC.<sup>25</sup> Heger type bronze drums rather similar to those found at Kampung Sungai Lang have also been recovered from this cave.<sup>26</sup>

Yet another interesting data from Ban Don Tha Phet is the occurrence of high tin bronze bowls found in hurried as grave goods at the cemetery site . Analysis made on these bowls found them all to contain between 23-24% of tin.<sup>27</sup> According to the same report such high tin bronze bowls have also been found at various sites in India, further suggest exchange between northern and Eastern India and Thailand. Such high tin bronze bowls are now considered to be of Southeast Asian, not Indian, origin.<sup>28</sup> They are now known from several places in Thailand and were apparently traded also into Peninsular Malaysia. In my recent paper on slab graves and socketed iron tools found in Peninsular Malaysia<sup>29</sup>, I have already drawn attention to the occurrence of high line bronze bowls found at various Metal Age sites:

| <u>Site</u>                       | <u>tin(sn)%</u> | <u>lead%</u> | <u>copper%</u> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|
| Changkat Mentri (slab grave site) | 32.5            | 0            | 47.7           |
| Kampung Sungai Lang               | 22.3            | trace        | 69.1           |
| Bt. Jong                          | 23.5            | 0            | 69.2           |

None of these sites, except for Kampung Sungai Lang have absolute dates. Of special interest here is the slab grave site at Changkat Mentri situated on a low hill not far from the banks of the Bernam River in Perak. The site was discovered in 1895.<sup>30</sup> Broken earthenware pottery and three round carnelian beads were also found at the site. The fragment of a bronze bowl, more earthenware sherds, a stone bark-cloth beater a socketed iron tool were also found

<sup>24</sup> Olov R. T. Janse, *Archaeological Research in Indochina vol. III*, Bruges, 1958, pp. 78-79.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, "A Check-list...", p. 502.

<sup>26</sup> P. Sorensen, "The Ongbah Cave and its fifth drum: in *Early South-East Asia* p.78-97.

<sup>27</sup> Glover, *Early trade...*, p. 29.

<sup>28</sup> Glover, *Early trade...*, p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> Leong Sau Heng, "Kubur kepingan batu dan alat besi bersoket: satu perbincangan kronologinya", paper presented at the Seminar Arkeologi Malaysia Ke-2, at Taiping, Perak, 23-25 November 1990.

<sup>30</sup> See I.H.N. Evans, "On slab-built graves in Perak", *Journal of the Federated Malay States Museums* 12, 1928, p. 119.

at this site when the latter was further examined in 1919. Other similar type of slab graves, some also found with socketed iron tools generally described as “tulang mawas” are also found in the Bernam valley (at Slim and Sungkai). Many scholars have noted the rather limited distribution of these sites in Peninsular Malaysia. Their occurrences in the Bernam valley of south Perak and possibly another one at Kerling in north Selangor just to the south of the former were most probably connected with the early exploitation of the Peninsula’s tin and gold resources, particularly those of the Perak and upper Pahang areas.<sup>31</sup> In the ancient times the Bernam river was probably an important trade route into the tin and gold fields of inland Perak and upper Pahang.<sup>32</sup> The Bernam, according to one writer was:

“far more suitable for ocean-going craft than the larger Perak river: to this day Straits Steamship boats of small tonnage can reach Ulu Bernam Oil Palm Estate, which is only a few miles from the slab-grave site of Changkat Menti. There are beaten tracks through the Ulu Sungkai and Ulu Slim into the Ulu Jelai both of which bring the Jelai gold by more direct routes than southern ones into the navigable Bernam, and so to the west coast”.<sup>33</sup>

There are, therefore, some grounds to suggest here that there might have been an ancient trading centre which we may classify as a collecting centre in the Bernam valley, most probably in the vicinity of Changkat Menti. The dating of this site (and all the slab graves in the valley), however, await further research. Most of these sites were excavated some time ago, and no absolute dates are available. In my recent paper on these slab graves<sup>34</sup> I have suggested a date of about the mid second century AD for these slab graves and socketed iron tools sites. This date is based on a thermoluminescence date samples of baked clay found adhering to the top of a clapperless bronze bell from Kampung Pencu in Johor.<sup>35</sup>

The clapperless bronze bell from Karupung Pencu is almost identical in size, shape and decoration with one of the three bronze bells found earlier in 1905 at Klang.<sup>36</sup> This is decorated with S-spirals and saw-teeth designs all over the outside surface. Both this ornate

---

<sup>31</sup> Evans, “On slab-built graves”, p. 117; H.D. Noone, “The Penarikan and Bernam land routes”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 17(1), 1939, pp. 144-145 and R. Braddell “An introduction to the study of ancient times in the Malay Peninsula and the Straits of Malacca”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 17(1), p.147.

<sup>32</sup> F.W. Douglas, “Further notes upon a study of ancient times in the Malay peninsula”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 15(1), 1937, pp. 25-26.

<sup>33</sup> Noone, “The Penarikan and Bernam land routes”, p.145.

<sup>34</sup> Leong Sau Heng, “Kubur kepingan batu dan alat besi bersoket: satu perbincangan kronologinya”.

<sup>35</sup> The date given here is 1800 BP or AD 150. See Adi Haji Taha, “Recent archaeological discoveries in Peninsular Malaysia 1976- 1982”, p. 61.

<sup>36</sup> W. Linehan, “Traces of a Bronze Age culture associated with Iron implements in the regions of Klang and the Tembeling, Malaya”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24(3), 1951, pp.8-11.

decoration and the very size of the bell (58 cm high and 32 cm in diameter at its base) suggest that this is no ordinary trade object. It is most likely that these bells are ceremonial objects. A total of four such bells are found in Peninsular Malaysia, and one, very similar in decoration and size has been reported from Thom Mong Rusei in Battambang, Cambodia.<sup>37</sup> The limited distribution of these large bells in Southeast Asia, compared to the Heger type I bronze drums is highly interesting here. Like the drums, it is apparent that these are not locally manufactured objects; there are no workable copper deposits in Peninsular Malaysia. The bells must have originated from the Mainland. In the past scholars have grouped the Klang bells with the bronze drums and had suggested that they are objects of the Malaysian Bronze Age. The thermoluminescence date on the Pencu bell has shown that these bells are objects from a much later period. I am inclined to view these bells as ceremonial objects of the early historical times. They are most likely state gifts from a mainland power to at least two Peninsular local powers (chieftains?), one based in the Klang valley at the mouth of the Klang river (where the three bells were found) and further south along the same west coast in the Muar river valley.<sup>38</sup> The mainland power concerned here may have been early Funan.

What is interesting to our discussion in this present paper is the very location of this bronze bell sites viz. Klang, Pencu and Battambang. We know that the Battambang region, for instance, during the Angkor period was an important area strategically located where control could be exercised over the overland route to Thailand.<sup>39</sup> This could have been the case also in the early Funan Umes. More importantly, the Klang site and Kampung Pencu are likewise located strategically, this time on the lower half of the west coast of the Peninsula. Political ties with local powers at the mouth of the Kiang and Muar rivers could ensure safe passage and cooperation for Funan ships entering the Straits of Melaka from the south. These are probably also important collecting centres from where the Peninsula's produce especially tin and gold could be obtained.

The above discussion has focused on several archaeological sites in Peninsular Malaysia which were probably trading centres. I have drawn attention to a few sites which

---

<sup>37</sup> Linehan, "Traces of a Bronze Age culture...", p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> See my discussion on the bronze bells in "Prasejarah dan Protosejarah Selangor: satu tiujauan awal", paper presented at the Selangor History Colloquim, Kuala Lumpur 21 Jan 1989. Chinese sources (*The history of the Three kingdoms*) has also once recorded the arrival of a trade embassy from Funan sent by king Fan Can. Among the gifts brought to the Chinese court include several local produce of Funan and a group of musicians. See G. Coedes, *The Indianized States of South East Asia*, Kuala Lumpur, 1968, p. 41.

<sup>39</sup> Kenneth R. Hall, *Maritime trade and state development in Early Southeast Asia*, Honolulu, 1985, p.175 and 317.

could have been trading centres predating the mid-first millennium AD. These early centres functioned mostly as collecting centres rather than entrepots. More archaeological work in these areas is required to provide us with more data on these early trading centres. One final observation that I would like to make here is that initially, during the time of intra-regional trade where Peninsular Malaysia were in quite regular trade exchange with areas in Mainland Southeast Asia, most of the major trading centres, such as the collecting centres, found on the west coast were located in the lower or more southerly part of this coast. It is evident that trade, especially the export of heavy commodities like tin was conducted via sea-routes and that the locations of these early collecting centres were all easily accessible to the Mainland traders via the southern entrance of the Straits of Melaka. It was only very much later, when entrepots emerged on the Peninsula's west coast, this time at the northern entrance of the Straits that we see the pattern changing. Direct trade with the Mainland probably ceased. The flow of local produce was then channeled to these major regional centres of trade at the northern entrance to the Straits of Melaka such as at Sungai Mas and Pengkalan Bujang.