



# THE SOLHEIM FOUNDATION BULLETIN

A Publication of the Wilhelm G. Solheim II Foundation for Philippine Archaeology

## South East Asian Kingdoms By Cynthia O. Valdes

The first civilizations emerged from Neolithic cultures that flourished in alluvial plains made fertile by overflowing rivers. Early seafarers as well as travelers coming into contact with India and China brought about the establishment of the earliest kingdoms in Mainland and Island South East Asia. My professors notwithstanding, I prefer the word “kingdom” to “polity”. When the reference is to South East Asian communities ruled over by a monarch, it would become a “kingship” and therefore a kingdom. (Personal opinion, Cynthia O. Valdes, Independent Researcher/Scholar, May 27, 2007-05-27).

The term “polity” has come into recent usage by scholars such as Dr. Solheim and Dr. Victor Paz. The term originated in reference to Greek city-states. Aristotle used the word to describe a specific form of government. To my mind, “polity” has a “western connotation”. When referring to ancient kingdoms in South East Asia, whether it be Sri Vijaya, Angkor, Borobudur, Majapahit, or Melaka, or any politically organized unit headed by a king or queen, the word “kingdom”, I find to be more appropriate. The “word” kingdom is old even as Greek and Roman civilizations are old.\*

\* Prof John Miksic of the National University of Singapore (NUS) used the word to refer to the 14<sup>th</sup> c East Javanese Kingdom of Majapahit in a recent (ca 2002) publication.

## May to August 2007

We thank most sincerely and we congratulate Alfred F. Pawlik, Ph. D for accepting the Presidency of our Foundation. Alfred will be making the Philippines his new home while he assumes a full time teaching position at the UP Archaeological Studies Program. Our students at the U.P. ASP, as they go about “digging up the Philippine’s prehistoric past”, need as well to acquire a world view especially of events that transpired in the not too distant past. - COV

Major archaeological work began in India and China only in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (World History Vol. II Since 1500: The Age of Global Interaction).

It is in West Asia that the story of humans began. Their land, first known as Sumer and later Babylonia, stretched from present-day Baghdad to the Persian Gulf. The builders of that civilization called the Sumerians arrived on the scene only in 3500 BCE probably emanating from Central Asia, by way of Iran.

Although the great majority of Sumerians were in fact farmers, they produced the wealth that brought prosperity to the region. In the centuries that followed, Sumer attained unprecedented heights (for that period) in material wealth and political power. It was the Sumerians who brought us a system of writing through pictographs brought about by a practical need to keep inventories of their goods and produce. Pictographs became symbols or ideograms finally evolving into a system

we came to call "cuneiform". The Sumerians lived an urban mode of life, building the first cities in the fertile valleys around the Tigris and Euphrates. Until archaeologists came on the scene to dig in Mesopotamia, almost nothing was known of the empires that flourished in the land between two rivers some 6,500 years ago. The reason that the peoples of Mesopotamia remained forgotten for so long was, unlike the Egyptians, they built nothing in enduring stone, using only mud-bricks. Rains and floods soon leveled their towers and palaces, leaving only shapeless mounds as evidences that they once existed.

Through scientific analysis (the science has become state of the art with the advent of newer techniques we now call "Earth Sciences") of artifacts, archaeologists are able to compile increasingly clearer images of the world's earliest civilizations.

Archaeology is a fairly young discipline in the context of World History. A few archaeologists are already designated "scientist". Is Archaeology, a Program, a Discipline, a Study, now actually a Science? Perhaps our Lithics experts can further demonstrate that indeed, it is. Where it succeeds in validating History, as in India and China, Archaeology has contributed to the store of Knowledge.

I note that local Archaeologists from the ASP headed by Dr. Victor J. Paz, now involve "grass roots"/communities. The Foundation (of Archaeology) indeed has to be rooted in the people. Eventually, all this work is for the people. That we may be proud to tell future generations (our grandchildren) that indeed, our (their) forefathers were not parochial beings, isolated in their communities, they sailed, in homemade boats to distant shores, reaching out to others of their kind in a sharing of ideas, even genes, a barter for supplies, making friends, establishing contacts, and eventually, trade.

## RECENT EVENTS

### ***Memory, Images and Material Culture: Filipino-Chinese Culture Bond***

Held March 1 at the Dalisay Aldaba Hall, University of the Philippines, a celebration of Filipino-Chinese ties. Victor Paz opened the event with a warm welcome. Alfred Pawlik was introduced as the new President of the Solheim Foundation. Among the audience were Dr Bill Solheim, author Arnold Molina Azurin and Ms Petty Benitez Johannot, in-coming Director of the Ayala Museum.

The evening's featured speakers were Cynthia Valdes who presented her research on Filipino-Chinese ties from the Pre-hispanic period into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, citing her grandfather Roman Ongpin as a case in point, who was a product of his times; Charlson Ong, U.P.-based author, who introduced his new book. The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) and Peter Chua, filmmaker, kindly allowed the showing of an award-winning film (scripted by Peter) entitled "The Last Parian". We thank all and sundry who worked (on short notice) to make the event a resounding success. We thank as well all those who attended the event and/or generously gave cash donations to further the cause of archaeology in the Philippines.

#### **The Solheim Foundation Bulletin:**

Alfred Pawlik, Victor J. Paz, Jack G.L.

Medrana, Aya Ragrao

#### **Contributor for this issue:**

Cynthia O. Valdes

#### **Address:**

The Archaeological Studies Program, Palma Hall Basement, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City

**Website:** [www.solheim-foundation.ph](http://www.solheim-foundation.ph)