PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS ON THE METAL AGE SHELL MOLLUSC REMAINS FROM MELANTA TUTUP, SEMPORNA, SABAH .

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Abstract

The archaeological site of Melanta Tutup in Semporna, Sabah was excavated in 2003, 2004, and 2006. The excavation was led by the Center for Global Archaeologiccal Research (CGAR), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Penang with the help of the Sabah Museum Department. The volcanic rock shelter site was found to bear evidence of prehistoric habitation ranging from the Late Palaeolithic (10,270 BP), Neolithic (3,300-2,930 BP), and Metal age period, or around 1,400 to 1,130 BP. Besides that, the site also revealed evidence of prehistoric burial traditions using a carved wood coffin, aged at 1,070 to 840 BP. Among cultural materials found in the Metal Age cultural layer were mollusc shell remains (bivalves and gastropods), faunal vertebrate bone remains, metal objects, stone tools, pottery shards, beads, and human skeletons. Based on the result of a preliminary zooarchaeological analysis, the mollusc shell remains from the Metal Age cultural layer consisted of various shell mollusc species of marine, estuarine, and freshwater habitats. It shows that the prehistoric society around the area had maximally exploited the resources of their surroundings as their source of diet. The various species of mollusc shell and their habitats also shows that their subsistence and strategy of shell-gathering activities were relatively high. This adaptation shows their prehistoric environment to be around the years 1,440 to 1,130 BP. Besides their diet, analysis of the shell mollusc remains also shows that it was used multi-purposely as grave goods based on its association with the finding of human skeletons, as well as shell ornaments based on morphological and taphonomic analysis.

Keywords: Metal Age and Shell Mollusc.