

PREFACE

While conducting research in Burma in 1974, I visited the storage area of the Pagan Museum on several occasions. During one of these visits, my gracious host and knowledgeable guide, Saya U Aung Kyaing, brought out two bronze drums. Being generally familiar with these objects, I recognized that they were examples of two different drum types as established by Franz Heger in 1903.¹ I was told that the older, Heger Type I drum had been unscientifically excavated from a tomb along the Northern Burma-China border, therefore, little was known of its archaeological context.² The second drum, a Heger Type III, was of far greater interest since it had been given by the Burmese King Shwebo-Min (r. 1837–1846 A.D.) to the Shwezigon Pagoda after he had received it as tribute from a Karen prince.³ This piqued my interest and after returning to Rangoon, I was able to locate additional Type III drums in private collections. Slightly later, while in Bangkok for several days, I was surprised to find large numbers of Type III drums offered for sale in antique shops. The availability of these drums for sale was a direct result of the Vietnam conflict having spilled over into Laos where many Hill tribe groups who owned drums had been forced to sell them to alleviate the impoverishment of forced relocation. Because no records were kept when these drums were sold to an international clientele, the opportunity for conducting research decreased with each sale. I thus decided to undertake an emergency data gathering project to identify and record as many drums as possible before they were forever lost to research. I returned to Rangoon and there, conceptualized, developed, and implemented my data gathering methods while I still had continued access to a variety of drums of unquestionable authenticity. After recording data, photographing, and making impressions of sixty drums, I scrutinized my methods to ensure that I was recording information on relevant variables. The following year in Thailand and Laos, I continued my survey fearing that the opportunity for research would soon end. During those two years, I developed data from over 370 drums which later formed the basis of my Ph.D. thesis at Cornell University. That dissertation is the nucleus of this publication which includes further analysis and an enhanced understanding of the original conclusions.

Since 1979 there has been little new research in the West concerning Karen drums. The one possible exception is *The Kettledrums of Southeast Asia*, an extensive and most impressive survey-catalogue by A.J. Bernet Kempers of all the bronze drum traditions of Southeast Asia. The major concerns of his volume are Type I drums and the drums of Indonesia and how they relate to overall cultural traditions. The literature concerning Karen drums is reviewed but does not, however, include new research or novel conclusions.⁴

¹ Franz Heger, *Alte Metalltrommeln aus Sudostasien* (Leipzig: Kommissions-Verlag Von Karl W. Hiersemann, 1902). Hereafter cited as *AMAS*.

² Taw Sein Ko, "Chinese Antiquities at Pagan", *JBR* 1, pt. 2 (1911), pp. 1–5.

³ U Tin, *Myamma Min Okchokpon Sadan* [Treatise of the Administration of Burmese Kings], Vol. 3 (Rangoon: Government Press, 1970 (reprint)).

⁴ A.J. Bernet Kempers, *The Kettledrums of Southeast Asia*, No. 10 (1986/1987), *Modern Quaternary Research in Southeast Asia*, eds. G. Bartstra and W.A. Casparie (Rotterdam/Brookfield: A.A. Balkema, 1988). Herein cited

In recent years Chinese scholars have published a number of works on bronze drums that include several new but controversial schema that organize the drums into eight rather than four categories.⁵ Importantly, the Karen type is included as part of Type no. 8, the Ximeng Type which is subdivided into early, middle and late. My chronology for Karen bronze drums as proposed in 1979 grew out of an intense, comparative analysis of the evolving and devolving tympanum motifs which identified a proto-Karen drum from which the Karen type developed. This more recent Chinese research allows for that drum to be identified as an example of the early Ximeng type and, thus, confirms the primary position of that drum in the development of the Karen type. Therefore, it has been reassuring to realize that our independent paths of investigation have established the same developmental base line and the credibility of our divergent methods has been consequently strengthened. The Chinese scholars do not, however, address the question of when the Karen drum type first evolved, the Ximeng type having been used by a number of different groups such as the Wa, Dai, and Thai and their progenitors. The data in the present study indicate that there is a real change in drum form and ornamentation after the proto Karen type which the Chinese refer to as early Ximeng. Therefore, the Karen drum type as discussed in the present study is synonymous with the Chinese designation of middle and late Ximeng.⁶

The present study is based on data taken from 370 drums which were located in Burma, Thailand and Laos in 1974–1976. The development of the Karen Drum is traced through four major subtypes: the Terrestrial Sequence Drums, the Aerial Sequence Drums, the Square Spiral Drums and the Dotted Square Drums. This extended chronology is established according to the continuation, rejection, and addition of motifs leading to the depiction of a predominantly aquatic environment, which is then explained as a manifestation of the Karen's indigenous concept of prosperity, the motivating cause for the motivic alterations through time.

as *KSA*. A source on Karen drums frequently cited by Bernet Kempers is a brief article by Sylvia Fraser Lu in *Arts of Asia* which itself was based, as acknowledged therein, on my original thesis. Therefore, the factual content of this article will not be cited herein.

⁵ Chinese Association for the Study of Ancient Bronze Drums, eds. *Ancient Chinese Bronze Drums* (Peking: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1988) pp. 99–105. Herein cited as *ACBD*. Museum of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, eds., *An Illustrated Listing of Guangxi Bronze Drums* (Peking: Wen Wu Publishers, 1991). Herein cited as *ILGBD*. Wang Ning Sheng, "Wa Drums", in Chinese Association for the Study of Ancient Bronze Drums, eds., *Proceedings of the Symposium on Ancient Bronze Drums*, (Peking: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1982) pp. 201–211. Herein cited as *WD*. See "Classification of Bronze Drums and Dong Son Drums" in Ha Thuc Can, ed. *The Bronze Dong Son Drums: A Collective Work of Archaeologists*, (Hanoi, Ha Thuc Can, 1989) for a discussion and table of the various Chinese proposals. The Ximeng type appears as Si Ming.

⁶ The conclusions of the Chinese scholars are based on a study of only 41 drums of the Ximeng Type that were found in Yunnan and Guangxi. The number of drums in each classification is not cited and the developmental relationships between the early, middle and late drums is not discussed nor visually mapped by the authors. Additional subtypes are not identified.