



# The Ban Chiang

Newsletter for the  
Friends of Ban Chiang

# UpDATE

Preserving a **UNESCO** World Heritage Site Issue #10 Winter 2000

## From the Director ...

*This time I have some really REALLY exciting news.* We have surpassed the goal of the Thai Archaeology Challenge! The Henry Luce Foundation has pledged a grant of \$200,000 toward the University of Pennsylvania Museum's Thai archaeology publication program. Add this grant to the \$115,315 raised from private contributions toward the Challenge, and not only is the Challenge completed 10 months in advance of its deadline, but also exceeds the total Challenge goal by 38%. Moreover, if we add the total Challenge to funds previously raised from your contributions to the Friends of Ban Chiang (FOBC), and a \$50,000 grant by Thailand's John F. Kennedy Foundation for producing the first two volumes of the Ban Chiang monograph series, the total raised for Ban Chiang and related research, analysis, and publication since the founding of FOBC in 1993 is over half a million dollars!

### The Luce Grant

Our grant is an Asia Project Grant of the Luce Foundation. This fund enables the foundation to respond to a variety of opportunities to improve understanding between the United States and the Asia-Pacific region. These grants typically assist in innovative and strategic ways to advance scholarship, create new resources, and promote the exchange

of ideas between Americans and Asians.

### What will be funded?

The Luce and other funds are to be used primarily to support the personnel and resources to write and produce the next three monographs in the Museum's Thai Archaeology Monograph Series. In addition to our current staff, we will be adding personnel including interns (a Thai archaeologist and palaeoethnobotanist), and a post-doctoral fellow in ceramic analysis. Support of editorial assistance and post-doctoral research in metals will continue.

Luce funds will also be used to establish a website to facilitate scholarly exchange of data on prehistoric archaeology in Thailand. For example, we plan to provide access to the data used by Michael Pietrusewsky and Michele Douglas for their analysis of the Ban Chiang skeletons to other physical anthropologists via the envisioned website.

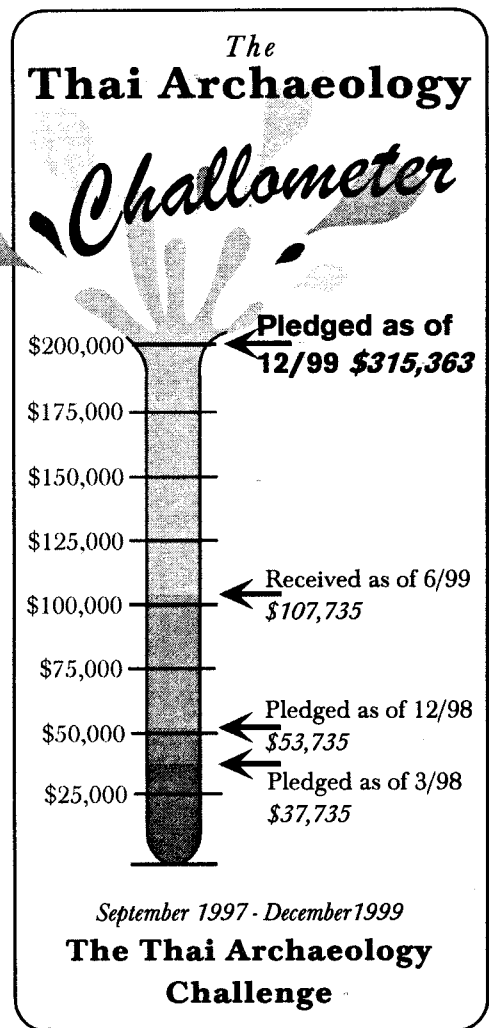
### Next step: Endowment

While we are incredibly gratified by this crucial funding, we must also be thinking of the future. We plan to create an endowment fund to support the research and publication of Ban Chiang and other research conducted under the auspices of the Museum on the prehistory of Southeast Asia. If we were to publish all the Museum-related research on the prehistory of Thailand, we would fill seventeen volumes! Thus, you can see

that the first 3-4 volumes for which we now have funding are just the first step.

Ultimately, we envision the establishment of an endowed Center for the Archaeology of Southeast Asia at the University of Pennsylvania. (more on this in another issue) ❖

Joyce C. White, Ph.D.  
Director, Ban Chiang Project



<http://www.upenn.edu/museum/Research/banchiang.html>

F. O. B. C.

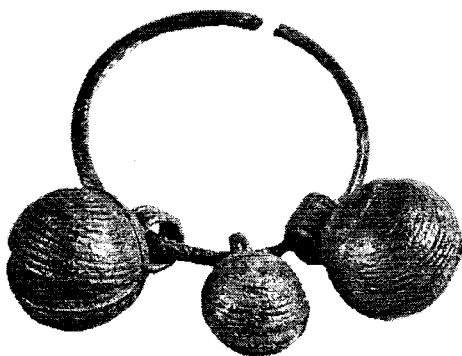
University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,  
33rd and Spruce Streets, Philadelphia, PA 19104 (215) 898-4028

# Ban Chiang ~~NOT~~ For Sale

by Ardeth Abrams

It is truly amazing what one can buy through the internet these days. Ban Chiang unprovenanced artifacts have now hit the auction block of a well known "person-to-person online trading community" on the internet. Yes, for a mere fifty American dollars you too can purchase your very own Ban Chiang copper bracelet. It comes with photo and description for your shopping convenience!

Periodically, "the market" in prehistoric artifacts from Thailand heats up, usually coming to the attention of Dr. Joyce (much to her grief). Nowadays instead of coming by mail, inquiries usually come by email. Recently, one very persistent man emailed Joyce a multitude of times about a "Ban Chiang jug," complete with attached photo files. He first wanted an estimate of the value of the



**Unprovenanced Ban Chiang bracelet like ones for sale through the internet**

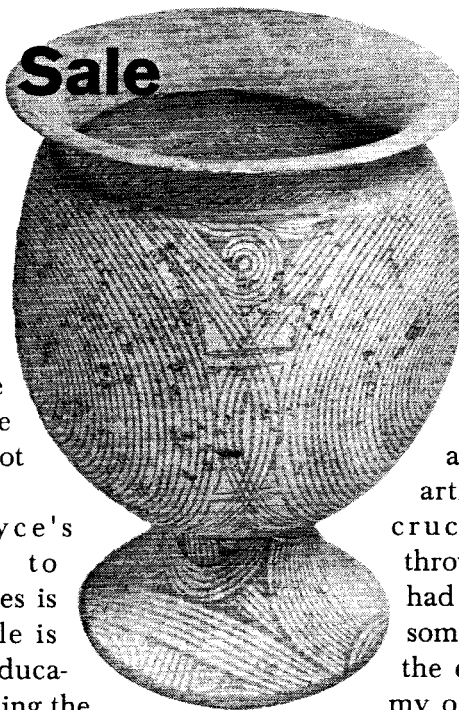
artifact. He explained how he had purchased it in London for \$100 and wanted to know if he had been taken advantage of by the seller of the pot. Even after Joyce explained why she could not answer his question, the man per-

sisted and eventually revealed that he wanted Joyce to buy the pot from him.

Joyce's approach to these inquiries is that her role is *education*: education concerning the real value of these objects (knowledge), the limitations of unprovenanced artifacts for contributing to knowledge, and the ethics of the situation from the point of view of an archaeologist.

What is wrong with these internet merchandising scenarios? Why does the sale of prehistoric artifacts bring anguish to Dr. Joyce and other archaeologists? In essence, artifacts removed from their in situ context (where they were left in the ground by the ancient peoples) have lost almost all their capacity to contribute to our understanding of the past. When such artifacts become commodities to be bought and sold, looting (haphazard removal of ancient artifacts from the earth) is encouraged for reasons of economic gain resulting in *irreplaceable* loss to knowledge.

Unprovenanced artifacts are often beautiful and in excellent condition. In contrast, professional excavations only rarely produce such intact "perfect" artifacts. What thoughts go through the mind of the professional archaeologist when she sees one beautiful complete pot? Questions such as,



**Unprovenanced Ban Chiang pot**

How many remains were destroyed to get that one vessel? How many graves were disturbed? How many pots in fragmentary condition were tossed aside? How many humble artifacts like bone tools or crucible fragments were thrown out that could, if they had remained in the ground, some day have told us about the everyday life and economy of ancient times? And if that beautiful pot had remained with its original grave, what might we have learned from its associated skeleton and the overall context of the burial, e.g., if the prehistoric owner was male or female, adult or child, rich or poor. The pot might have contained clues as to what people were eating thousands of years ago, knowledge that is now forever lost.

*The National Geographic Society has estimated that if the present rate of looting continues, in less than 100 years, archaeological evidence for the human past around the globe will be completely destroyed!*

The reader may be wondering if there is any contribution that unprovenanced artifacts can make to understanding the past? The archaeologist will answer, very little. But to be honest, the archaeologist is generally not in favor of tossing collections of unprovenanced artifacts onto the garbage heap. Why? Unprovenanced artifacts, while having far greater potential to inform had they been left in the ground for future proper archaeological exca-

*continued on page six*

# More Pollen Stories

by Joyce White



This month (January 2000) the final report for the Thailand Palaeo-environment Project (TPP) is due at the National Research Council of Thailand (NRC). NRC is the arm of the Thai government that grants researchers permits for their work. The report will summarize findings to date of palaeopalynology (studies of ancient pollen by Dan Penny and Bernard Maloney), phytolith analysis (studies of ancient plant silica bodies by Lisa Kealhofer) and ethnoecology (a study of ethnic understanding of environmental variation and ecology by Joyce White). I thought FOBC would be interested in knowing where we are on this ancillary part of our research efforts.

Back in 1992 when the collaborating scholars first started to formulate this research program, very little palaeoenvironmental research covering the last 10,000-12,000 years of earth history had been undertaken in Thailand, or anywhere in mainland Southeast Asia. From the point of view of the modern archaeologist, this is a serious lack. Why? Because two of the most important transitions for human existence in any region on the globe are related to changes in the interactions of humans with their regional environment: the end of the Pleistocene (ice ages), and the period during which humans develop agricultural systems.

In this day and age, for archaeologists to be essentially guessing at what is happening to human/environmental interactions at these critical junctures with no basis in empirical data is, well, almost embarrassing in the context of the modern discipline of archaeology. Moreover, there are

some very interesting alternative scenarios under discussion particularly in the Ban Chiang region.

Like the archaeology of Southeast Asia, there are several lifetimes of work that could be undertaken in palaeoenvironmental studies of this region. TPP's strategy was to get "quick takes" or "baseline" data that could, in the future, be developed into more comprehensive research programs. The team also felt that it was important to get comparative data from more than one region in Thailand. Therefore in addition to the coring in northeast Thailand (see article by Dan Penny in issue 9), we also cored in north and south Thailand. Those two parts of Thailand also have important archaeological sites and environments that differ from the Ban Chiang region.

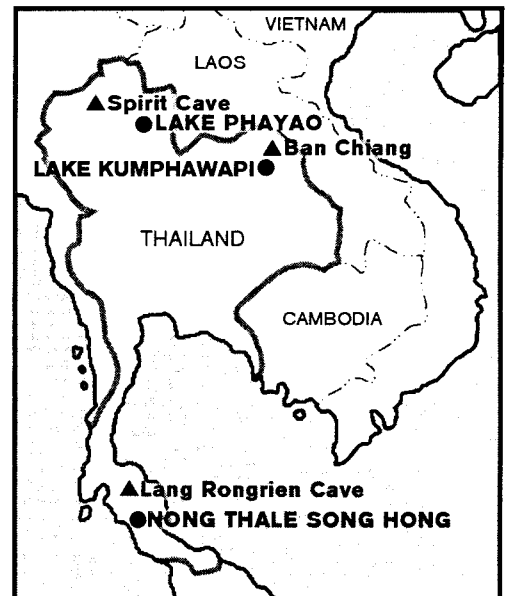
What have we in general learned? The data from the lake coring program will probably take years for scholars to fully digest and integrate, however the evidence suggests that throughout the last 10,000 years (the Holocene) vegetation was not stable. There is much evidence for changes in species composition and for many episodes of burning. In the case of the Kumphawapi pollen evidence, we can talk about "forest destruction" beginning during the 5th millennium B.C. But even in the core from the southern lake Nong Thalee Song Hong, the forest environment seems to have constantly changed. While the evidence is less dramatic, palynologist Bernard Maloney is surprised at the degree of burning and disturbance indicators (i.e., plants that like to grow in disturbed habitats) in the pollen during the early Holocene.

The question then arises as to what are the causes of the vegetation changes. To what degree does the disturbance evidence reflect natural processes? To what degree did human interference play a role? And what activities did the humans undertake that resulted in vegetation

change? The answers to these questions are very much mysteries. For the Kumphawapi forest destruction, natural causes seem unlikely, but archeological research has so far not found evidence of humans living in the Kumphawapi region during the 5th millennium B.C. when the evidence for forest destruction first starts. In the case of the south, we know that during the early Holocene there were humans living within 75 kilometers of the lake we cored based on "Hoabinhian" stone tools found at Lang Rongrien River Cave. Archaeologists have assumed that these people were hunter-gatherers which are generally called "Hoabinhian." In both cases, the evidence for disturbance is greater than what scholars initially expected might have been caused by low densities of groups of simple hunter-gatherers. Moreover the evidence of disturbance is earlier than archaeologists have argued for plant-cultivating societies in the two regions.

Did natural processes cause more vegetation change than we normally conceive in the tropics? Did hunter-gatherers cause more disturbance

*continued on page six*



- Coring locations of the Thailand Palaeo-environment Project
- ▲ Important archaeological sites near coring locations

## UpDATE Marks Its 10th Issue

...with Highlights of the Past

The first issue of the Friends of Ban Chiang's newsletter, *UpDATE*, looked quite different from this 10th issue. We have come a long way since then, fewer typos, better layout and graphics. However, what remains the same since that first issue of Fall/Winter 1994 is the intent to inform the Friends of Ban Chiang with a variety of articles from a variety of authors.

We began *UpDATE* with an introduction to the Project, the Lab, and its workers, including a spotlight on volunteer Bill Henderson.

**Issue 2** came with articles about the opening of the Museum's April 1995 exhibition, *"Illuminating the Past: Art and Artists of the Ban Chiang Project."*

**Issue 3** brought news of Thailand's JFK Foundation supporting the production of the first two volumes of the Ban Chiang monograph series. In addition, the Thailand Palaeoenvironment Project was featured, when Joyce and Lisa Kealhofer returned to Thailand in late 1995 for a second field season to core lakes in north and south Thailand.

**Issue 4** Stephen Young wrote about his visit to Ban Chiang, thirty years

after his discovery of the site. He was attending the celebration of Ban Chiang's new UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

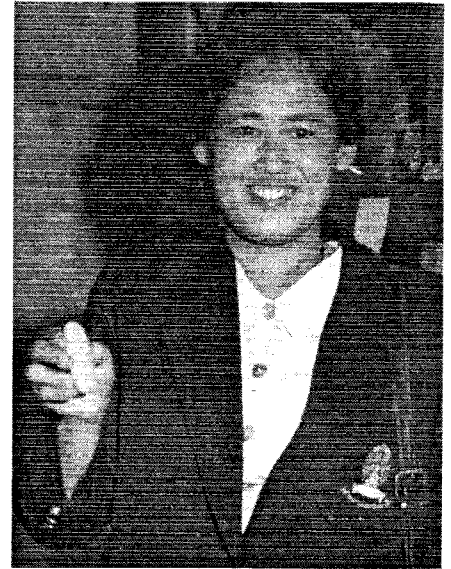
**Issue 5** Vince Pigott contributed an article in which he reminisced about how he found his way to Southeast Asian archaeology. Our first, and so far only, letter to the editor was by Alex Ovenden, proprietor of the Lakeside Sunrise Guesthouse in the village of Ban Chiang. Alex, a permanent resident of Ban Chiang, had a somewhat different perspective on modern day Ban Chiang in contrast to Stephen Young's article.

**Issue 6** The Challenge grant was offered to the Museum to fund the Thai Archaeology Publication Project: raise \$200,000 by October 2000 and the donor will give \$100,000! The articles "Skeletons Beneath a Village," by Michael Pietrusewsky and "Bones Tell of Ancient Life in Ban Chiang," by Michele Douglas were other highlights.

**Issue 7** On October 24th, 1997, the Museum and the Thai Embassy in Washington, D. C. co-hosted *A Celebration of Thailand's Ancient Cultural Heritage*. The event recognized 30 years of archaeological cooperation between Thailand and the University of Pennsylvania and commemorated the 5th anniversary of UNESCO's

inscription of Ban Chiang as a World Heritage Site.

**Issue 8** October 1998, Her Royal Highness Princess Sirindhorn visited the Museum, the Ban Chiang



**HRH Princess Sirindhorn at the University Museum**

and MASCA labs. Volunteer Bill Henderson wrote of his "Melakan Experience" when he and his wife, Barbara, attended the IPPA (Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association) conference.

**Issue 9** Joyce wrote an article about the workshop she attended in January 1999 in Burma entitled: "Bronze Age Culture of Nyuang-gan, Myanmar." Dan Penny contributed "Pollen Stories," on his analysis of the core from Lake Kumphawapi.

**Issue 10** The Challenge Grant is met! —with nearly one year to spare thanks to the Luce Foundation and the Friends of Ban Chiang.

As I was examining the past nine issues of the FOBC *UpDATE*, I got a sense of how far we had come in six years. I was amazed at how the series documented improvements in our financial base, step building on step. The articles came from a potpourri of sources, including Ban Chiang volunteers, archaeologists, Friends of Ban Chiang, and more. It will be exciting to see what the next 10 issues will bring... ❖ A.A.

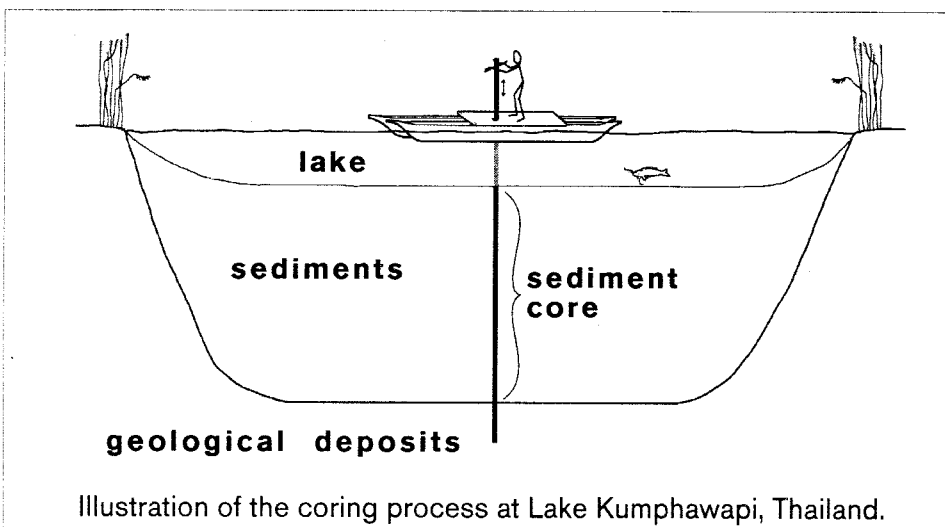


Illustration of the coring process at Lake Kumphawapi, Thailand.

## Faces around the Ban Chiang Lab



**Judy Volker**

is a Ph.D. candidate at SUNY-Buffalo, New York. She is currently working on her dissertation, ceramic research she conducted in northeast Thailand. Judy is a well-known face around the Museum, as she worked for Vince Pigott as a research assistant a few years ago. She is also a great addition to our brown bag lunches held weekly at the Ban Chiang Lab.



**Alyc Helms**

is a junior at Penn with a double major in Folklore and Anthropology. She is a work study student and was hired by the Ban Chiang Project to help Dr. Chris Sherman (our editor assistant). Alyc is currently formatting the appendices of the Ban Chiang monograph on the human remains and helping

with the Ban Chiang Web site. Alyc is originally from California and is an award-winning Highland and Irish Dancer.



**Veronica De La Rosa**

is currently a freshman in the undergraduate School of Arts and Sciences at Penn. Her search for a work study job led her to the Ban Chiang Project, where she applied for the position of artist. She is currently drawing iron artifacts from the Ban Chiang site. Veronica plans to major in biology and enjoys having Ban Chiang as an artistic outlet.

Following this issue we will return, for the time being, to annual production of *UpDATE*. Why? So we can devote all our energies to publishing monographs!

In the meantime, we will try to post any important new news on the Ban Chiang website:

[www.upenn.edu/museum/Research/banchiang.html](http://www.upenn.edu/museum/Research/banchiang.html)

*Editor, Ban Chiang UpDATE*



**Is it time for you to renew your support to the Ban Chiang Project? – every contribution is gratefully received!**

**-Levels of Giving:**

over \$1000	<i>Bronze Castor</i>
\$500-999	<i>Pottery Painter</i>
\$100-499	<i>Iron Smith</i>
\$25-99	<i>Stone Carver</i>

**-Send to:**

Friends of Ban Chiang  
University of Pennsylvania Museum  
of Archaeology and Anthropology  
33<sup>rd</sup> and Spruce Streets  
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6324

**Become a Friend of Ban Chiang!**

Enclosed is my contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ payable to the:  
**TRUSTEES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.**

I would like to renew my contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to support the Ban Chiang Project.

I would like more information about the Ban Chiang Project.

I have changed my address. The following is my new address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## More Pollen Stories

*continued*

than we formerly thought they would? Did intentional plant cultivation and attendant interference with natural vegetation appear earlier than archaeologists had considered for these regions and cultures? These mysteries will only be resolved with continued focused and integrated archaeological and palaeoenvironmental research! ❖

*Joyce C. White, Ph. D.  
Director, Ban Chiang Project*

## Ban Chiang NOT For Sale

*continued*

vation, can help with typology.

Some comparisons can be made between excavated and unproven-

nenced artifacts. For example, a broken roller *can* be compared to a similar but whole roller of questionable background. Maybe the complete roller can fill in some information that is missing from the excavated one. However, the archaeologist must be cautious with his/her observations. Given the bustling industry of faking and repairing artifacts, authenticity of the unproven material is always questionable.

So many questions remain about the extraordinary culture of ancient Ban Chiang as well as other yet unknown sites and ancient cultures. *Will the evidence of these cultures stay in the ground long enough for the archaeologist to retrieve and decipher it?* ❖

*Ardeth Abrams  
Ban Chiang Illustrator*

## LAB notes



❖ On September 28th, Joyce spoke at the Museum's R & R series (Research & Refreshments). Her topic was "**Smog Clears Y2K B.C., Kumphawapi**". Thanks to all who attended.



❖ On October 27th and 28th, Joyce also spoke at the Maxwell Museum in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

❖ *And yet again!!* Joyce spoke at the Museum's Reports from the Field evening event on

December 1st. Her topic was "**Probing the Ooze of Kumphawapi: The Significance of Crocodile Lake to Ban Chiang, Thailand**". Other speakers that night were Dr. Paula L. W. Sabloff and Dr. Philip G. Chase.

❖ The current issue of Volume 41 of *Expedition* magazine with article by Dan Penny is now for sale. If you are interested in purchasing this or any other issue of *Expedition*, telephone orders are accepted between 10 and 3 pm, Monday through Friday. Call (215) 898-4124 or (215) 898-0657 or visit [www.upenn.edu/museum/Zine/orderform](http://www.upenn.edu/museum/Zine/orderform).

❖ The annual meeting of the **SAA** (Society for American Archaeology) will be held in Philadelphia, PA, April 5-9, 2000. In a symposium on current Southeast Asian archaeological research, Joyce will review the results of the Thailand Palaeoenvironment Project.



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33rd & Spruce Streets  
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Visit the Ban Chiang website:  
<http://www.upenn.edu/museum/Research/banchiang.html>

## Recent Publications

Daniel Penny

1999 "Pollen Grains in Sands of Time: Lake Sediments Contribute to the Archaeology of Thailand." *Expedition*, Volume 41, no. 3, pages 32 - 36.

## EXPEDITION



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