

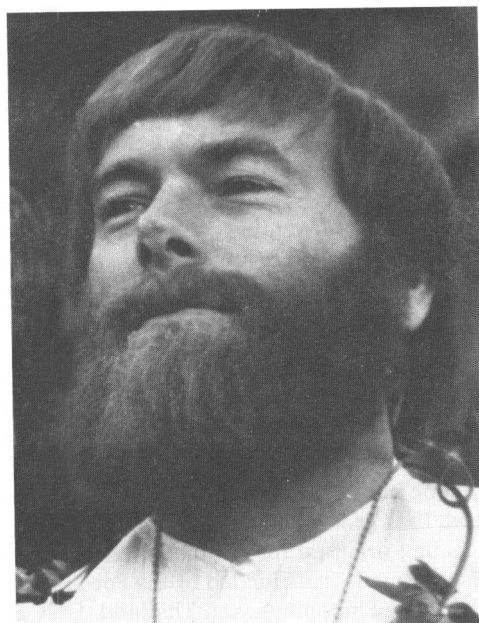
CHESTER F. GORMAN, 1938–1981

I do not know when or why Chester (Chet) Gorman became interested in Southeast Asian pre-historic archaeology but it had started before his graduation from Sacramento State College in 1961. He had written to me in late 1960 asking whether he could come to Florida State University to study Southeast Asian archaeology with me, and I replied that I would be happy to have him but I was moving to the University of Hawaii in the fall of 1961. We both arrived in Honolulu in August, in time to take part in the 8th Pacific Science Congress.

Chet first came to Thailand in September 1963, the beginning of the University of Hawaii's program in northeastern Thailand (supported by NSF grants) and Chet's continuing involvement in archaeological research in Thailand until his death. With Vitya Intakosai representing the Fine Arts Department of Thailand, Chet started our field survey, and they worked alone until joined by me and Allan Mosher (a graduate student in the Anthropology Department at the University of Hawaii) in February 1964. We worked together until May when the rains started, whereupon we returned to our field headquarters in Phimai. When the rains did not continue Chet asked if he could return to survey in the western portion of the future Nam Pong Reservoir until the rains began again. Staying too long, he was almost captured by the mud of the first 3 days of rain, but he discovered Nam Pong 7, now known as Non Nok Tha. This was the site that was to start the revolution in Southeast Asian prehistory. The final report on this survey, done with me, was his first publication.

Back in Hawaii in 1964–65 Chet started his study of Thai. This, combined with an NDFL Title VI Fellowship to study advanced Thai, and his use of Thai in the field made him fluent and able to read and to some extent write it as well. This fluency in Thai plus Chet's ability to empathize with his Thai colleagues and students who worked with him led to his acceptance as a Thai and not as a *farang* (loosely, a foreigner with white skin). He returned to Thailand in late 1965 to do the field research for his Ph.D. supported by an NSF Predoctoral Research Grant and funds from the Mosher Fund for Southeast Asian Archaeology.

Chet's thesis problem, in effect, was to test Carl Sauer's hypothesis of an early and independent origin of agriculture in Southeast Asia in a Hoabinhian context. The first three-quarters of the available dry season he found no appropriate sites, so with 6 weeks left of the dry weather he changed areas. Two weeks later he was taken by his Shan guides to Spirit Cave where he hit the jackpot, though he did not fully realize it at the time. There was a considerable delay in getting his charcoal samples off to the lab in Japan for dating and then no results thanks to the loss of the informing letter in the mail. Chet, seeing no reason not to believe in the traditional dating, expected around 5000 B.P. for his earliest date. I was at a congress in Tokyo in August 1968, called the lab, was given the dates, and called the information back to Chet that his dates ran from about 7000 to 12,000 B.P. From this site Chet dated the earliest yet known pottery and rectangular, edge ground adzes from Southeast Asia sometime between 7500 and 9000 B.P., as well as utilization of plants,



suggesting possible domestication of some of them back to the twelfth or thirteenth millennium B.P. The fire in Chet, which had been close to going out after the long delay in receiving the dates, returned with double the intensity and never died down again.

Before completing his Ph.D. in 1971 Chet taught for 1 year in the anthropology department at the University of California, Riverside. In 1970 he held a University of Otago (in Dunedin, New Zealand) postdoctoral fellowship which funded one further field season in Thailand to complete excavation of Spirit Cave. In the fall of 1971 Chet and I, as co-principal investigators, received a 3-year NSF grant, through the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Hawaii, to continue his research on the Hoabinhian in northwestern Thailand. My part in the program was to help with the paperwork here in Hawaii. He found many more Hoabinhian sites, including open sites, but unfortunately very little about this has ever been published though he assured me several times that a final report was near completion. Towards the end of this program he met Froelich Rainey, Director of the University Museum at the University of Pennsylvania, and his activities shifted to northeastern Thailand and Ban Chiang. In 1974 he joined the University of Pennsylvania and at his death was Associate Professor of Anthropology as well as Curator-in-Charge of the South and Southeast Asia section of the University Museum.

The last 7 years of Chet's life were centered on the Thai Fine Arts Department-University of Pennsylvania Ban Chiang Program. Chet and Pisit Charoenwongsa of the National Museum of Thailand were codirectors of this project. It involved not only several years excavation at Ban Chiang but extensive survey in the general area of Ban Chiang by the University of Pennsylvania and Thai graduate students, supported by NSF and Thai funding. An extended archaeological training program for Southeast Asian archaeologists, both in the field and at the University of Pennsylvania, was funded by the Ford Foundation. This included students from Burma, Indonesia, Pakistan, Philippines, and Thailand. Only a few preliminary reports have appeared on this program. Chet had planned that the first volume of the final report would go to press in the fall of 1980, but his cancer intervened.

Ban Chiang had been discovered in 1968 and the Fine Arts Department of Thailand had sponsored two excavations there before the start of the program involving Chet. Because of three thermoluminescence dates of unprovenienced sherds and widespread rumors among collectors, it was thought that the beautiful Ban Chiang red painted pottery dated back to 5000 B.C. At its peak, I have heard that individual large and unusual whole vessels of this pottery were selling for between \$5,000 and \$8,000 in Europe. All available areas at Ban Chiang were thoroughly and illegally mined for this pottery and its associated bronzes. As a result of the program's excavations, six prehistoric phases have been provisionally dated from about 5500 B.P. for the beginning of the first phase with the black pottery, bronze artifacts, and rice, to the sixth phase around 2000 B.P. The typical red painted pottery was dated from about 3000 to 2000 B.P. It has been found that thermoluminescence dating at the site is totally unreliable. Whatever the dating, the results Chet obtained from the Ban Chiang program, his work at Spirit Cave and other sites in northwestern Thailand, and Non Nok Tha which he discovered, have been instrumental in changing the position of Southeast Asia in prehistory from a passive, totally recipient backwater to an early innovative center.

In 1979 Chet was invited to visit Hanoi, by the government of Vietnam and its archaeologists, which he did with support from the Ford Foundation. The Vietnamese archaeologists apparently found Chet as *simpatico* as had the Thai, and had he lived he would have become considerably involved in the research on the prehistoric archaeology of Vietnam. His melanoma cancer was first noted when he was visiting Hanoi in November 1979 but not diagnosed until his return to Philadelphia in December. It was surgically removed, supposedly successfully. With ups and downs in 1980, he received tenure at the University of Pennsylvania and was on his way to Thailand on his first sabbatical when his cancer took over while he was at his home in Sacramento. There he died on the seventh of June 1981. He is survived by one son, Tracy by his first wife, and his wife Mary. The world is not quite the same without him.

WILHELM G. SOLHEIM II

Acknowledgment. Accompanying photograph courtesy of the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

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