

A PREVIOUSLY UNREPORTED BRONZE KETTLEDRUM FROM THE KAI ISLANDS,
EASTERN INDONESIA

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The bronze Dong Son kettledrum reported here was examined in 1975 during archaeological survey in the Maluku region of Eastern Indonesia. The final report of this survey and other later work carried out in 1977 is not yet complete but the renewed interest in kettledrums and other bronze objects from Island Southeast Asia and western Melanesia suggests that separate publication of this find is in order.¹

In the most recent and comprehensive publication on Southeast Asian kettledrums, Kempers (1988:412-4) lists eleven drums as coming from Maluku, with a further three from the Vogelkop (Bird's Head Peninsula) of West New Guinea (Figure 1). Of the eleven Moluccan specimens three are from Leti, one (destroyed) from Serua south of the Banda Group, one from Luang in the Sermata group, one from Kataloka on Gorom Island off the south-eastern end of Seram, one from Kayeli on Buru², two (now lost) from 'somewhere in the Moluccas?' collected by Rumphius, and two from Kur (Koer) Island in the Kai group. Bellwood's statement (1985:281) that such drums have never been reported from the Moluccas should be taken to refer only to the more northerly Moluccan islands such as Halmahera.

The drum reported here represents a third occurrence from the Kai Islands. It is located at the former site (negeri lama) of the village of Fam on the island of Kai Kecil. The negeri lama, abandoned around 1890 at about the time the local people were converted to Christianity, is adjacent to the present village and the coast. Only the body or mantle of the drum is present. The mantle (Figure 3) is broken into two halves and some smaller pieces. It is set within a circle of coral blocks which hold it upright. A broken metal gong lies on the ground adjacent to it. The drum is revered by the villagers as equivalent to the stone dolmens or batu pemali which

¹ Recent publications on kettledrums and bronzes in the region include Ambrose (1988), Bintarti (1985), Hollmann and Spennemann (1985), Kempers (1988) and Spennemann (1985, 1987).

² Duperrey's account was not available to Kempers. When Plate 25 (Duperrey 1825-30) is examined a drum or large gong suspended on its side from a frame can be seen (Figure 2 this article). In form it does not closely resemble a Heger 1 type drum but the depiction seems quite stylized. Let the reader decide.

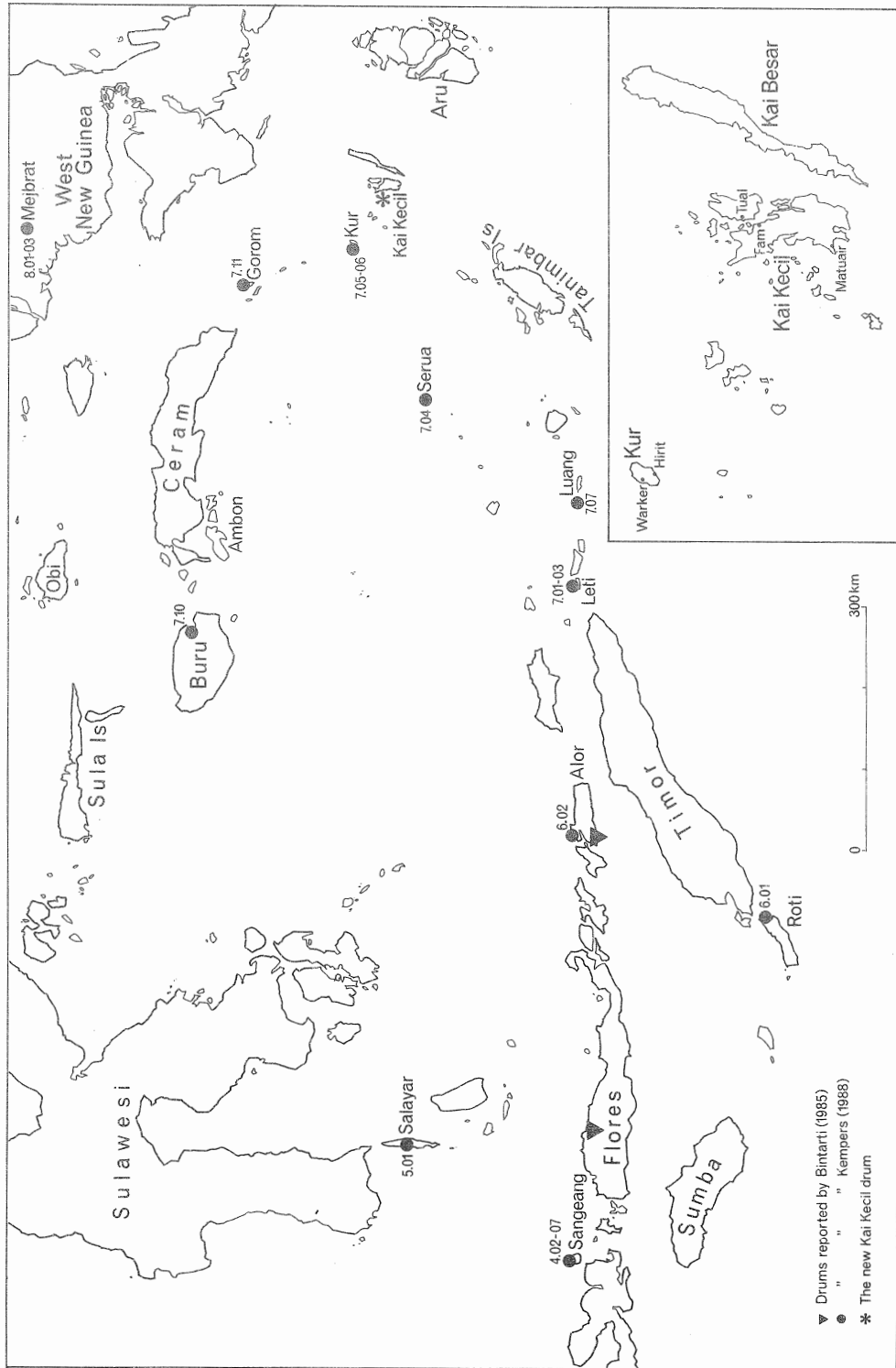


Figure 1. Distribution of bronze kettledrums in Eastern Indonesia, after Kempers (1988) and Bintarti (1985). Inset is of the Kai Islands, showing villages mentioned in the text. Map drawn by Win Mumford.

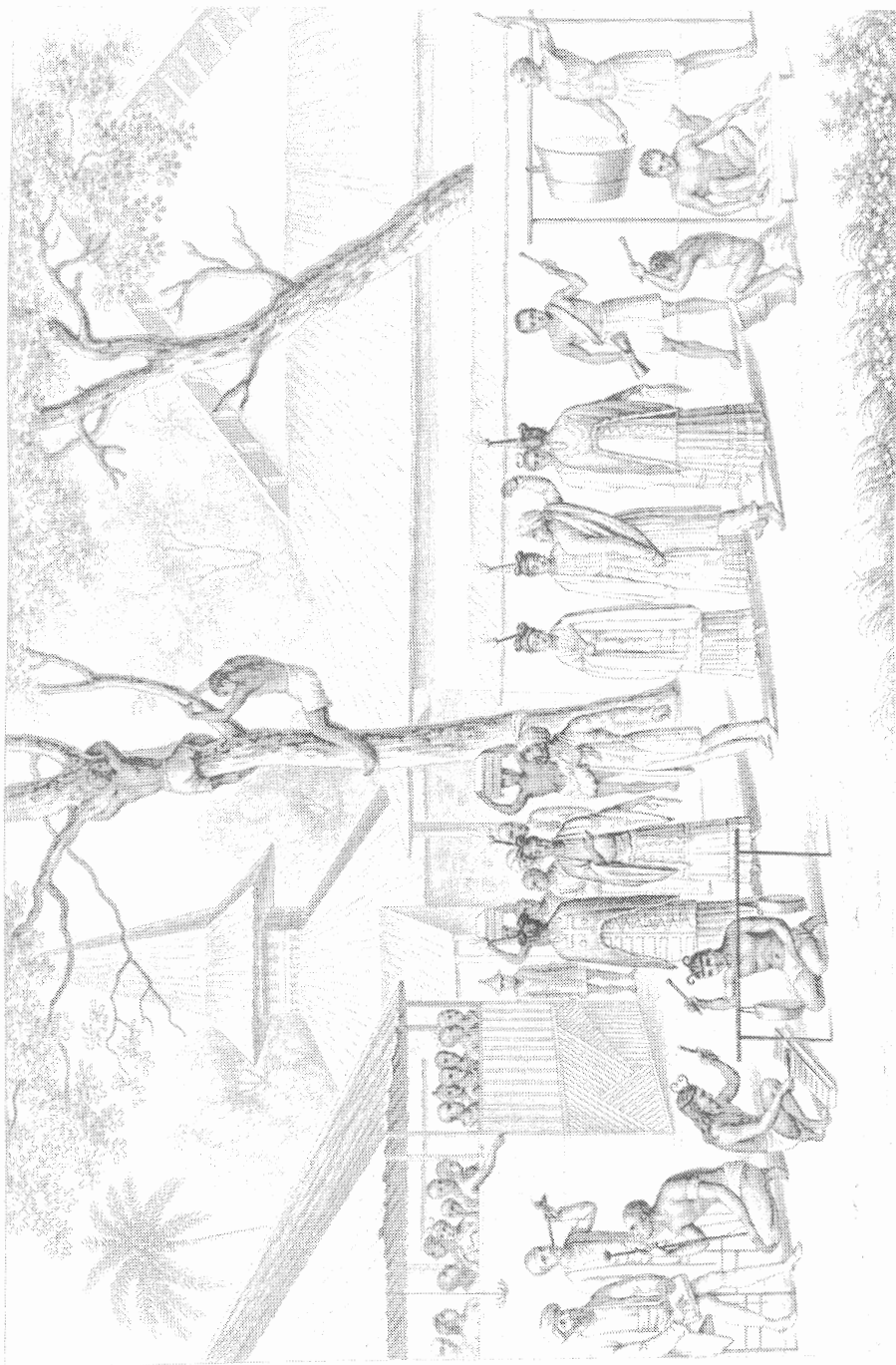


Figure 2. Fête religieuse des habitants de Caieli, Ile Bourou. Plate 25 from Duperrey 1825-30. Reproduced by permission of the Australian National Library, Canberra.

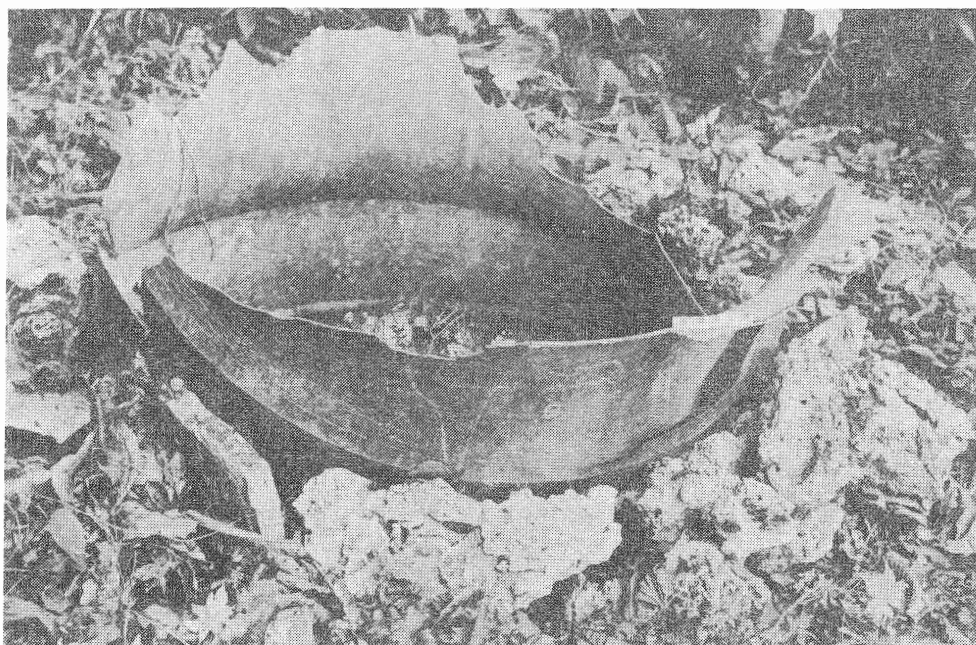


Figure 3. The kettledrum at Fam. Photograph by Danny Miller.

are found in many other village sites in Maluku. Batu pemali are sacred stones, sometimes in table form (cf. Sukendar 1985:Plate 1), which are used in adat ceremonies. The tympanum of this drum was said to be kept at the village of Matuair, also on Kai Kecil, with which Fam maintains a pela or exchange relationship (for an explanation of pela see Bartels 1977 and Cooley 1962). The tympanum is named Ngutupri and the mantle is called Tenanbis. No explanation of these names was obtained.

Local traditions are confused about the origin of the drum but some informants claim that it was brought from West New Guinea by an individual called Tewi Tebai from Kampung Itnabai (Etna Bay on the south coast of the Vogelkop). Van Heekeren (1958:31-2) reported three different stories about the origin of the two Kur drums and two of these mention that there were originally four drums. In one version the four drums were brought from Banda in the early 17th century by refugees fleeing from the Dutch. After a dispute with the local population the Bandanese moved on without the drums, but it is not recorded what happened to the other two which were not left at Kur. In another version of their origin the drums descended from heaven at Hirit on the south-east coast when the island was created and were moved inland near Warker where they were venerated, presumably functioning like the Fam drum as batu pemali. The third account stated that four drums were washed ashore one day at Hirit.

The two in existence at Kur today were carried inland but the two others turned to stone. The two Kur drums were called "man" (the larger one) and "woman". The Fam drum, as will be described below, is typologically very similar to the Kur drums. An origin in West New Guinea thus seems unlikely and the Fam drum is possibly one of the "missing" drums referred to in the stories.

The two Kur drums have recently been analysed in detail by Kempers (1988:Chapter 24;Plates 7.05a-j) along with some other eastern Indonesian specimens, and this allows a more detailed comparison with the new drum than would have been possible using the earlier published descriptions (van Heekeren 1958; Steinmann 1941). In the appendix the Fam drum is described in the same format as Kempers' encoded list, and given the number 7:12. The mantles of Dong Son drums can be divided into three sections; the upper (A), the middle or cylindrical waist (B) and the lower mantle (C). The Fam drum is missing nearly all of the upper A section. This is most unfortunate as this section would be expected to include scenes of boats and animals as have been found on other drums from the region. We therefore have only the middle (B) and lower (C) sections with which to make comparisons (Figures 4, 5).

The middle section is divided into eight separate panels (the commonest number on such drums) of feather motifs (cf. Kempers 1988:163) which are conventionalised versions of more naturalistic feathered men on earlier drums. There are, as with two of the Sangeang (numbers 4.02 and 4.05 in Kemper's list) and the larger Kur drum (7.05), "a few naturalistic left overs among the stylised feathers" (ibid.). Ocelli ("eyes"), for instance, stand out as positive circles amidst negative feather designs and are located at regular spacing over the panels. Kempers' description of Sangeang 4.02 also applies exactly to the Fam drum. In the larger four panels the circles form, "three series (visually arranged in straight lines), of seven equidistantly placed ocelli, each circlet being vertically coupled with its two opposite numbers. In this way the positive ocelli formed an orderly scheme for drawing in the feather motifs" (ibid.:196). That is, there are three ocelli in the vertical axis and seven in the horizontal rows (21 ocelli/panel). The Fam drum also has four smaller panels which have three vertical series in straight rows of two ocelli (6 ocelli/panel). In between the feather panels are vertical panels of five bands of ladder motifs, double circles, z-shaped designs, double circles and ladder motifs. These extend above an upper horizontal band of z-shaped design. Below the feather motif and vertical panels is a lower horizontal set of four bands of (starting from the top) ladder motif, double circles, ladder motif, and z-shaped designs. The lower mantle (C) is undecorated except for a single horizontal line 2-4 cm from its top. The body of the drum is 2-3 mm thick and the inturred lip at the base of the drum is 1.8 cm wide and 2.4 cm high.

If we compare the designs on the Fam drum with the larger and better preserved of the Kur drums (7.05), we find that the pattern of

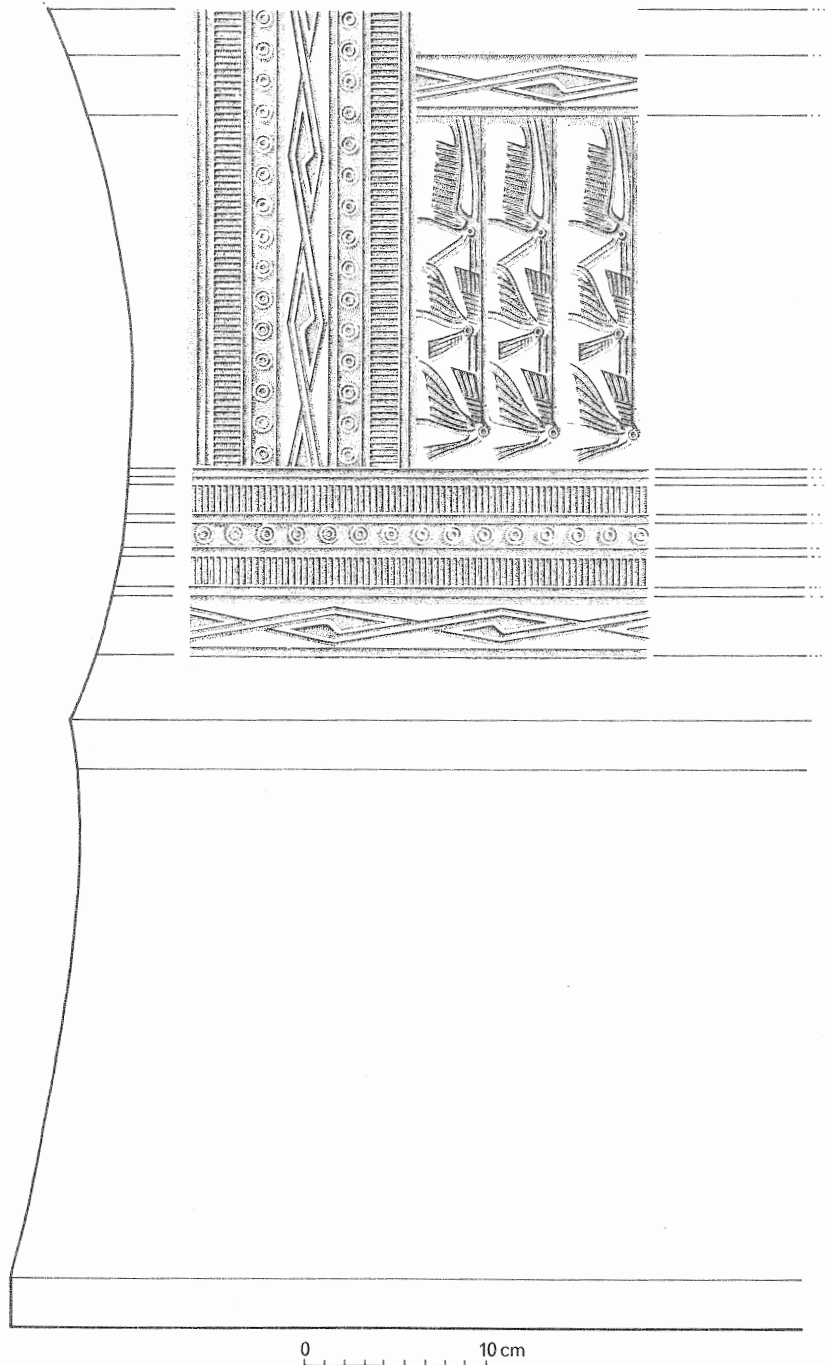


Figure 4. Schematic section of the Fam drum, from field drawings and photographs. Only part of one of the larger feather panels is shown. Drawn by Win Mumford.

the lower horizontal bands of the Fam drum are exactly matched in the four outer bands of the tympanum of the Kur drum (ladder/circles/ladder/z-shapes). The lower horizontal bands of the Kur specimen are in a different order but utilize the same motifs (ladder/circles/z-shapes/circles/ladder). The vertical panels of five bands of the two drums are exactly similar as are the single upper horizontal bands of Z-shapes. The style of the feather motif panels is quite similar although a more exact comparison is between the depiction of the feathered men on the boats from the upper mantle (A) of the Kur drum and the Fam feather motif panels. The estimated heights of the two drums are also the same. The lower mantle (C) of the Fam drum is 30.5 cm in height, the cylindrical waist is 35 cm, and based on the very similar proportions of the Kur drum, we estimate total height to be about 87-88 cm. These similarities suggest a comparable age and an origin presumably from the same workshop.

Another quite similar drum is Salayar 5.01 (from an island south of Sulawesi) whose cylindrical waist has an upper horizontal band of z-shapes and which has vertical panels with similar patterning to both the Kur and the Fam drums. The outer tympanum pattern mirrors the lower horizontal bands of the Fam drum with the addition of an extra band of circles (ladder/circles/circles/ladder/z-shapes). The Sangeang drum 4.02 (from an island northeast of Sumbawa) has similar feather motif patterns to the Fam drum in its middle mantle (B) and has an equivalent pattern of vertical bands except that the circles are linked by tangents. Also similar is the "East Java" drum 2.26 which is described but not illustrated by Kempers (ibid:408). On its middle mantle it has an upper horizontal band of z-shapes, above feather design panels, and the pattern of its vertical bands is the same as Sangeang 4.02 with the addition of two outer bands of chevrons (chevrons/ladder/circles with tangents/z-shapes/circles with tangents/ladder/chevrons). In size all five drums are in Kempers' (ibid:44-5) "extra large" category of drums between 70 and 101 cm high. The only other drums of this size are three other Sangeang drums (4.03, 4.05, 4.06). A height could not be reconstructed for the other Kur drum 7.06 although the size of its tympanum would place it almost certainly in the extra large category.

At numerous points in his monograph Kempers details similarities between the Sangeang, Salayar and Kur drums and ascribes to them a position at the late end of the Heger 1 series along with two of the Leti drums, 7.01 and 7.03 (ibid:356-7). There was not enough information available on the other Maluku and the West New Guinea drums to allow any relative chronological placement. The production in northern Vietnam of drums which found their way out to eastern Indonesia thus appears to be late in the development of this type of drum. Kempers ascribes relative lateness on the basis of factors such as profile (his type 1c, ibid:47), size, presence of frogs on the tympanum, the elaborateness of decoration and the conventionalised depiction following on from earlier more naturalistic forms. The eastern Indonesian drums are examples of his "Late Tonkin" style.

Spennemann (1985, 1987, see also Hollmann and Spennemann 1985) has independently suggested that these same drums are late in the Heger 1 sequence corresponding to his own profile types Ib (two Sangeang drums), Ib/c (two Sangeang and Salayar) and Ic (the two Kur drums). He also notes a tendency for a greater proportion of lead in the bronze drums over time and on these grounds the larger Kur drum and one of the West New Guinea specimens, which are the only two chemically analysed from eastern Indonesia, would be late in the Heger 1 sequence. He assigns the West New Guinea drums tentatively to his type Id on the basis of the number of points on the stars in the centre of the tympanum.

The discovery in 1956 of Chinese characters on the larger Kur drum, and details of the decoration of Sangeang drum 4.02 allow Kempers to suggest absolute dates for this late group (ibid:214, 282-5, 345). The characters on the Kur drum include those for "the Triple World", a specifically Buddhist expression. Kempers notes that Tonkin received its first Buddhist missionaries early in the third century A.D. (ibid:283). In relation to the Sangeang 4.02 drum he suggests that, "the Indoscythians in the border scenes and the 'chinoiseries' in the figured band on the tympan, likewise point to a Tonkinese provenance and a date of, again, about the middle of the third century A.D. or somewhat earlier" (ibid:345).

CONCLUSION

The Fam drum has been shown to be closely similar to at least the larger of the two Kur drums and therefore should be included in Kempers' "late Tonkin" group of Heger 1 drums which are found in eastern Indonesia. The dating of Kur drum 7.05 and Sangeang 4.02 to the third century A.D. allow us to suggest a similar date for the Fam specimen. Indeed it is so similar to the Kur drum that we suspect they are products of the same workshop.

The reasons for the extension to eastern Indonesia and West New Guinea of an exchange system including bronze drums in the early centuries of the present era need further investigation³. As Ellen has noted (1987:Footnote 3) the distribution closely parallels his Banda-east Seram-New Guinea exchange network reconstructed for the sixteenth century onwards. This included Kai and other southern Moluccan Islands. It may suggest a long continuation of this network

³ Kempers' discussions (1988:Chapters 5, 14) of how the drums may have reached eastern Indonesia are the weakest parts of the book. His rejection of the possibility that the drums were involved in exchange relations for local products seems unfounded (ibid:69, 78), and his alternatives of Dongsonian aristocratic refugees or use in "maritime magic" on Dongsonian ships seem unconvincing. The drums may have been used, however, to cement alliances between foreign traders or emissaries and local elites rather than entering exchange networks directly.

starting earlier than the Ambon-Lease-West Seram and Ternate-Tidore-Halmahera-New Guinea networks which became more prominent after the arrival of the Portuguese and Dutch. Spices, other rare forest products and slaves may well have been going along the exchange route as was the case at European contact in the 16th century (Ellen 1979, 1984, 1987). The appearance of the bronze drums along the exchange route in the early centuries A.D. does not necessarily mark the beginning of the network, but the inclusion in it (probably for a brief period of time) of these durable and impressive objects make a moment of that network archaeologically visible.

APPENDIX: Description of the Fam Drum according to Kempers' (1988)
Encoded list

Fam, Kai Kecil (Kai Islands), eastern Indonesia (7.12) cn

Greater part of the mantle. Tympanum reportedly located elsewhere on Island at Matuair
d.? h. 87-88 (est.)

A missing

B hor. upper band ZX; lower band = 0 = ZX

vert. = 0 ZX 0 = 8[(m)]

C single line horizontal 2.4 cm from top

0 are double on mantle

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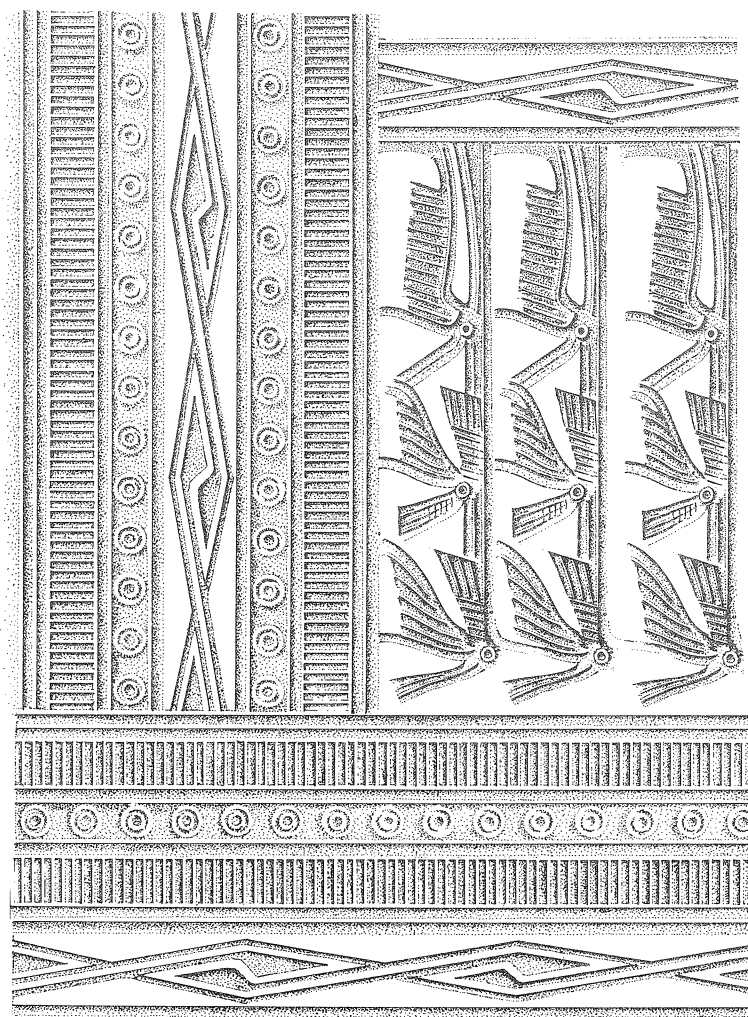


Figure 5. Detail of the middle section of the Fam drum showing part of one of the larger feather panels. The three vertical series of ocelli in all panels are shown, as well as three of the seven horizontal rows of feather motifs found in the larger panels. Drawn by Win Mumford.