

Finds and Analysis of Five Archaeological Pottery Sites in the Philippines

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Pottery is the most common cultural material found in an archaeological site. This durable material is believed to have been used in the Philippines since the Neolithic period (Fox 1970). Research on Philippine pottery dates to the beginning of this century. Early publications on the subject were written by Cole (1922) and Garvan (1931), among others. Other anthropologists who have written on ceramics include Harold Conklin (1953), George Foster (1956), and Daniel Scheans (1965). The most extensive and well-known writing on archaeological pottery of the Philippines is by Wilhelm Solheim, who put forth the idea of the Sa Huynh Kalanay Pottery Tradition (1977). Solheim classified his findings into three groups based on complexes: Kalanay Pottery (incised ware and impressed ware without cord-marking); Tabon Cave Pottery (including cord-marking); and Asin Cave Pottery (with cord-marked and hand-painted pottery).

Methods of Manufacture

The prehistoric pottery was primarily produced using a paddle and anvil method. Ethnoarchaeological specialists (Longacre 1992) tried to approximate the prehistoric method of pottery manufacture. Clay was pounded to test for compactness. Then sand was identified as the basic tempering material. Shapes were formed by hand moulding, coiling, or the paddle and anvil method. The vessels were polished with

round, smooth stones. Decoration was done either by impressing or incising while the paste was soft or leathery. Then the vessels were dried in the sun. Firing usually took place in an open fire. No kiln has been found at a prehistoric site in the Philippines. Cogon, coconut husk, or dry wood was used as fuel and the vessels were placed upside-down on top of the fuel; then the vessels were covered with more fuel and finally they were fired.

Selected Archaeological Pottery Sites

To present the state-of-the-art in archaeological pottery analysis in the Philippines, five sites were chosen for inclusion in this paper.

Tabon Cave Pottery Complex Robert Fox and a team from the National Museum surveyed and excavated the Tabon caves in Quezon, Palawan from 1962 to 1966. This site yielded a wealth of information that contributed towards reconstructing the prehistory of the Philippines. Fox analyzed the earthenware found at the site and suggested that the pottery be grouped under the general term of the 'Tabon Pottery Tradition.' He dated the site from the Late Neolithic to the Metal Age. The wares were made by the paddle and anvil method and were generally fired at a low temperature.

Fox constructed a typology based on the treatment of the surface and the form and grouped the pottery into nine provisional types: (1) Tabon Plain; (2) Tabon Polished; (3) Tabon Impressed;

(4) Tabon Incised; (5) Tabon Painted; (6) Tabon Organic Glazed; (7) Tabon Incised and Impressed; (8) Tabon Incised and Impressed; Painted; and (9) Tabon Incised and Painted. The forms included jars (with and without covers), bowls, restricted vessels, footed vessels, boxes with covers, and miscellaneous vessels.

The most outstanding find amongst the Tabon pottery is the so-called 'Manunggul Jar', which is now considered a National Treasure. It is a burial jar with a cover and decorated with a 'ship-of-the-dead.' Fox described it as 'perhaps unrivalled in Southeast Asia; the work of an artist and master potter.' (1970).

Calatagan Pottery The Calatagan site in Batangas Province was excavated by Robert Fox in 1958 and yielded numerous ceramics. Dorothy Main, then the Honorary Curator of Ceramics, analyzed the Calatagan Earthenware in the 1960s and divided it into three groups: Kay Tomas Complex, Pulong Bakaw Complex, and intrusive ware. As Fox did with the Tabon ware, Mead classified the pottery on the basis of the treatment of the surface and decoration. The pottery excavated at the Kay Tomas Complex was divided into four groups: (1) slipped and polished; (2) plain; (3) incised; and (4) coarse. Two groups – incised and impressed, and plain – were identified at the Pulong Bakaw Complex.

Further pottery analysis was carried out on the Calatagan Pottery. The Geological Survey Division of the Bureau of Mines in 1963 conducted a petrographic analysis of selected shards and determined that the composition of the clay was crystalline minerals embedded in ferruginous mica-clay material. The temper consists of small particles of quartz, feldspar, hornblende, pyroxenes, and, sometimes, grains of volcanic rock. All of these materials are produced by volcanic action. The Ceramic Section

of the National Institute of Science and Technology also tested the shards to try to determine the temperature of firing. Sample shards were refired in a modern kiln in an oxidizing atmosphere at a temperature of 800 degrees celsius. The results confirmed that the earthenware was fired at a low temperature.

Pottery of Bohol Province The pottery of Bohol province in the Visayas, Philippines, is classified by type, form, decoration, function, firing temperature, and method of manufacture. Decoration is further divided into incised, impressed, and excised designs or a combination of the three types.

The method of manufacture differs from one place to another. The paddle and anvil is the most common method, although hand modelling and coiling were also used. Coiling was often used to make a rim on a vessel whereas modelling was used to give a pot its initial shape which was then refined with a paddle and anvil.

Maitum Pottery Low-fired anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic secondary burial jars were found at Maitum in Sarangani Province in Mindanao. A unique feature is that the facial expressions are varied. The anatomical features (eyes, eyelids, ears, nose, mouth, breasts, arms) of the anthropomorphic head were applied. The anthropomorphic heads have been classified into painted and unpainted. The painted heads are further divided into an unpainted head with a painted face; the unpainted heads were either with or without perforation. The painted anthropomorphic heads are either oval, round, or square in shape. Sometimes a combination of shapes occurs on a single head. The unpainted anthropomorphic heads are further classified into the presence or absence of a red slip, and by the number of perforations, partitions, and deformities.

The red and black pigments of the jars were analyzed in a scientific laboratory and the results showed that the red colour is a natural red clay. Hematite (Fe₂O₃ x H₂O) was mixed into a clay paste and painted on the surface before firing (Dizon 1993). The black colour is an organic carbon derived from burned plants and other deteriorating organic matters in the mud.

These burial jars were found in association with earthenware jarlets with paddle impressions, geometric and angular incised designs, cut-out foot rims, black and red painting, etc.

Kalinga Pottery William A. Longacre of the University of Arizona in an ethnoarchaeological study at Kalinga Apayao in northern Luzon noted patterns of abrasion, pitting, and sooting, and analyzed the relationship of these methods to the patterns of stirring, steaming, and other cooking methods and the washing and cleaning of vessels (1992). ■

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