

Tradeware Ceramics found in the Philippines

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The earliest expeditions carried out in the country goes back to the later part of the 19th century. But it was only in 1921 that systematic archaeological activities were started.

Archaeological activities have been conducted by foreigners and notable among these were the ones conducted by Alfred Marche in 1881. Marche was a French traveller and explorer who came to the country for the purpose of collecting antiquities particularly trade ceramics. He travelled and explored the islands of Catanduanes and Marinduque. Upon his return to France, he brought back with him thousands of artifacts for the Paris Natural History Museum and Musee du Trocadero.

By 1921, there were already many archaeological sites reported and excavated that contained trade ceramics. These sites date back between the 10th and 17th centuries AD representing late Tang, Five Dynasties, Sung, Yuan, Ming and Ching Dynasties though Thai, Annamese, Khmer and Burmese wares were also found in several sites are found scattered throughout the country from Batanese Islands in the northernmost part of the Philippines to as far as Mindanao in the south.

In 1927, Karl E. Guthe led an archaeological work. The Guthe expedition appeared more significant because it involved systematic exploration and excavation of sites. From 1922–1924, Guthe explored and conducted his archaeological work in Samar, Bohol, Tablas, Romblon and Cebu in Central Philippines and Zamboanga, Basilan and Sulu in the Southern Philippines.

Guthe reported that the results of his archaeological works conducted on 542 sites were remarkable. He was able to collect a tremendous amount of artifacts of which seventy-five (75%) percent constituted unbroken ceramics and ceramic shreds. The whole pieces which nearly numbered to a thousand were in the form of jars, plates or dishes, bowls, cups and vases. Majority of the collections were Asiatic ceramics mostly of Chinese origin.

Another notable work on ceramics was by Olov R. T. Janse from Harvard University. In the 1940s,

Janse carried out excavations on burial sites in the town of Calatagan, Batangas, Philippines About 100 kilometers south of Manila. In this excavation, Janse encountered early Ming Dynasty and local ceramics. However, aside from classifying the high-fired ceramics as early Ming, he never attempted to trace the place of manufacture of these ceramics although he suspected that some of these ceramics were made from Sawankhalok kilns in Thailand.

During the American period in the Philippines and at the turn of the 20th century until the 1950s, Philippine archaeology has been dominated by Dr. H. Otley Beyer, an American national who came to the Philippines in the early 1920s.

In the 1940s, Beyer conducted an extensive archaeological work in Rizal, Bulacan and Batangas provinces which resulted in the collection of various classes of Philippine antiquities, particularly trade ceramics.

Based on his ceramic collections, Beyer proposed the period between the 9th and 16th centuries as the Philippine Porcelain Age to signify the prominent role that ceramics played in trade in the country.

Michael Sullivan, a visiting archaeologist, however observed that much of the tradeware ceramics found in the Philippines, particularly of the earlier period, appear to be the product of Kwantung and Fukien in China.

In the 1950s, major archaeological

fieldworks were undertaken by the National Museum led by Chief Anthropologist Dr. Robert B. Fox, an American national, Alfredo E. Evangelista, and several others from the Anthropology Division (Ronquillo, 1981).

The most extensive archaeological work in the 1950s conducted by the National Museum of the Philippines was the excavation of burial sites in Calatagan, Batangas (Fox, 1959). Over 500 burials were excavated from two large burial sites resulting in the recovery of more than a thousand Asiatic ceramics. Eighty percent (80%) of which were Chinese-made ceramics.

In March 1964, Avelino Legaspi, then archaeologist of the National Museum of the Philippines conducted archaeological work in Barangay Balingasay, Bolinao, Pangasinan, in the northwestern Philippines. Fifty burials were encountered containing local potteries and the most numerous artifacts recovered were Chinese-made ceramics belonging to the late 12th to 13th centuries AD to 14th and 15th centuries AD. Several bone ornaments in the form of bracelets, glass beads of various colors and sizes and gold ornaments were also recovered, together with various metal artifacts in the form of bolos and daggers.

Another important archaeological work conducted by the National Museum of the Philippines in 1966 was the excavation of habitation and burial sites in Sta. Ana, Manila. The excavated burials were associated with Chinese tradewares dated from

the late 11th to 14th century AD. These recovered Chinese tradeware ceramics provided a detailed data on the patterns of living and movements of the early people that settled in Sta. Ana, Manila some three hundred to five hundred years ago.

One of the most significant events in Philippine archaeology was the discovery of the ancient Philippine boats at Balanghai, Butuan, Province of Agusan del Norte in the island of Mindanao, Philippines. The ancient boats were recovered from a midden which appear to be a former shoreline in the early period. Based on the result of the C-14 date on one of the organic materials retrieved from the midden, the boats were made in the 4th century AD (Peralta, 1980; Scott, 1981).

Equally significant with the discovery of the boats was the recovery of Sung-type ceramics known as Yueh and Guangong which date to the 12th century. These materials are considered significant for the study of Chinese ceramics because these types have not been found in any other Philippine archaeological site (Ronquillo, 1978).

At present, the Archaeology Division of the National Museum is conducting an archaeological excavation in the undisturbed sites in Calatagan, Batangas.

The latest addition to the study of trade ceramics in the Archaeology Division of the National Museum of the Philippines was the creation of the Underwater Archaeology Section. This section paved the way

for the archaeological research of shipwreck sites in the country.

The first shipwreck site discovered was of the southwest coast of the island of Marinduque. The majority of the materials recovered were tradeware ceramics in the form of plates, bowls, jars and jarlets which were believed to be Swatow-type dated to the late Ming period, 16th century AD (Ronquillo, 1981).

The second shipwreck site discovered was off Puerto Galera coast in Mindoro Island. Hundreds of porcelain and stoneware materials dating to the Ming Dynasty were recovered. In both of the projects, the National Museum of the Philippines involved the services of experienced private divers to augment the much needed technical expertise and sophisticated equipment essential for this type of archaeological work (Conese, 1983.)

The most recent underwater archaeological project undertaken by the National Museum of the Philippines was the *San Diego* shipwreck site off Fortune Island in Nasugbu, Batangas, Philippines. The project was jointly undertaken by the National Museum of the Philippines and the World Wide First, a French outfit headed by Mr. Frank Goddio.

The *San Diego* which was refitted to become a Spanish warship sunk on December 14, 1600 off the coast of Fortune Island during a battle against the Dutch.

The archaeological materials

recovered from the *San Diego* wreck site included more than five hundred blue and white Chinese-made ceramics ascribed as belonging to the late Ming Dynasty specifically to the Wanli Period (1573–1619 AD). Thai, Burmese, Spanish or Mexican jars and Philippine-made earthenware were also found.

To date, most of the *San Diego* specimens are on loan to Paris for exhibit and the others are now on display at the National Museum of the Philippines Museum Branch in Cebu City, Philippines.

The importance of the recovered materials is tremendous inasmuch as this is the first time that a single site yielded various types of vessels like the rare kendi with the star-shaped mouth which can only be found in the British Museum. Also, the source of the trade goods is varied. It is not only the rarity of the materials but the information it is giving with regards to the type of ceramics traded during those times.

With all these auspicious events in the field of archaeological research and developments, the National Museum of the Philippines is still committed to protecting and preserving the Filipino cultural heritage by pursuing its basic scientific research, field investigation, collections and studies of artifacts specifically the tradeware ceramics for the purpose of making them available not only to scholars and students but to the general public as well.

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