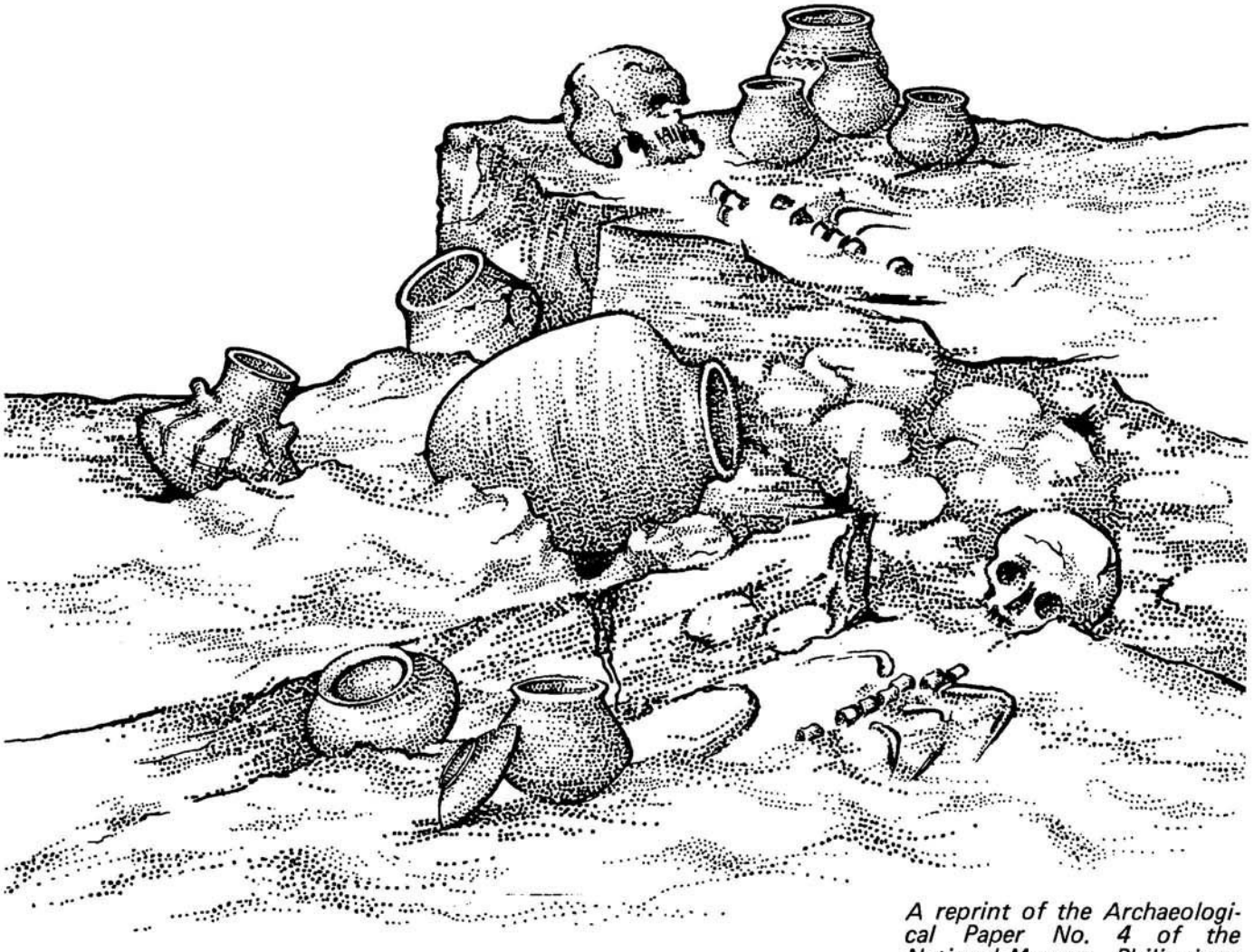
Prehistoric Burials in Calubcub, Segundo

by Cecilio G. Salcedo



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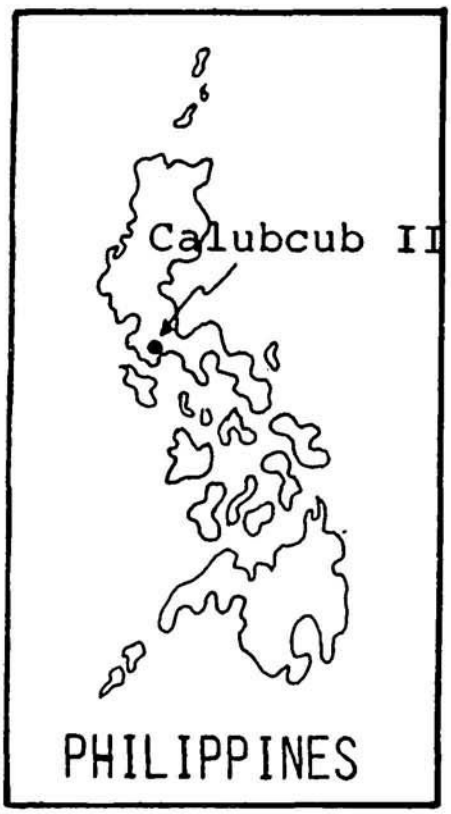


Map of the Philippines

The San Juan, Batangas Archaeological project is part of the Anthropology Division's Salvage Archaeology Program. This program intends to systematically retrieve cultural artifacts from sites which are in danger of being totally destroyed either by natural or contrived processes.

The site in Calubcub Segundo was first reported by the son of the present owner and administrator of the land after a number of earthenware pots surfaced from the ground being plowed. Human skeletal remains were also accidentally encountered by some of the tenants while erecting house posts. These developments eventually led to a formal contract signing between Mr. Ambrosio Makalintal Jr., the son of the lot owner, and the National Museum, represented by Assistant Director Alfredo Evangelista and Atty. Francisco Villanueva. After a series of deliberations, the first batch of researchers was sent out to look into the matter. This was mid-October of 1976.

The Province

The whole province of Batangas is elevated, with the land sloping down towards Cavite on the North and towards the West, Southwest and South coasts. Although the region is characterized by highlands and generously dotted with hills, the province's highest peak is only 1,109 meters high.

Climate

It has two types of climate. The region west of an imaginary line running Northwest/Southwest, from the foothills of Mt. Malipungo near the Batangas-Quezon boundary to Mt. Pinamuson, falls under Type A climate. There are two pronounced seasons: dry from November to April, wet during the rest of the year. The region east of this line falls under the B type of climate. Seasons are not very pronounced: relatively dry from November to April and wet during the rest of the year. The province has an annual average of 85.66 inches of rain and 112 rainy days. Frequency of typhoons is the same throughout the entire province. About 16% of the typhoons which touch the country yearly pass through this province (Phil. Almanac: 1975).

Soil type is predominantly volcanic tuff which is characterized by relatively deep soil and rather soft bedrock. It has a texture that ranges from sandy loam to clay loam which is good for upland crops such as citrus orchard. (Phil. Almanac: 1975).

Agricultural Products

Other major food crops, aside from rice, are fruits, nuts, and vegetables. Fruits include oranges, mangoes, calamansi, bananas, avocados, chicos, lanzones, pineapple and atis. The province is also a major producer of cash crops like cassava, cacao, coffee, and peanuts and commercial crops like sugarcane, coconuts, and tobacco. The cattle population in 1960 was the biggest in the country, while the total livestock was one of the ten biggest. (Phil. Almanac: 1975).

The entire length of the Batangas coast, especially the Balayan Bay, Tayabas Bay and Verde Island Passage, is a very rich fishing ground. Additional fish sources are 585,360 hectares of fish ponds. Still available for more productive ventures are 3,739 hectares of swamp lands. (Phil. Almanac: 1975).

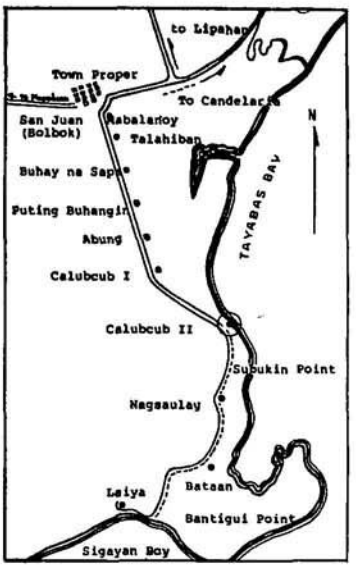
The municipality of San Juan, where the site is located, has a population of 49,000 as of 1975. It is classified as a second class municipality. It is best known for its fishing industry as well as coconut derivative industries like copra and coconut wine.

Previous Excavation

Though Batangas province has proven to be one of the most important archaeological areas yet discovered in the Philippines, no systematic excavation made in the general area of San Juan has been mentioned. Beyer in his "Outline Review of Philippine Archaeology" talked about a Batangas Archaeological Survey which lasted for nearly a decade (1932-1941). This included Cuenca, Alitagtag, Taal, San Luis, Bauan, San Jose, Lipa, Calatagan and Tanauan.

Assistant Director Alfredo Evangelista and Mr. Rey Santiago of the National Museum conducted an initial exploration and test trenching of the area last April 1975. They came up with cultural materials ranging from earthenware pottery to Chinese porcelain sherds. The latter showing up only as surface finds. It was through their recommendations that the project materialized.

The same site was then excavated by Mr. Manuel Gonzales of the Ateneo de Manila University using grant-in-aid money from the R.T. Villanueva Foundation Inc. In May 1976. He uncovered cultural materials such as earthenware pottery and beads. This particular dig was performed in the banks of the dried-up river just a hundred meters away from the Makalintal residence. The writer intended to incorporate Mr. Gonzales report in his work but unfortunately only a brief statement of his finds was available.



MAP SHOWING THE CALUBCUB II
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

LEGEND: SCALE: 1: 175,000

Road
Path Trail
Barrio or Sitio

The Site

Calubcub Segundo is one of the ten barrios situated south of the municipality of San Juan. It is approximately twelve kilometers from the town proper and is situated close to the shores of Tayabas Bay. It is bounded on the North by the barrio of Calubcub Primero, on the South by the barrio of Nagsaulay, on the East by sugarcane fields and on the West by the vast stretch of Tayabas Bay.

From San Juan, Calubcub can be reached by a passenger jeepney that negotiates the twelve kilometer part asphalt, part dirt feeder road in forty minutes. Being a dirt road, it is dusty during dry summer months and a quagmire during the rainy season.

At present, the primary occupation of the roughly 97 household that lie within the Makalintal property is fishing. Next to fishing is cultivation of sugarcane and coconuts. Rice farming used to be an old and extensive occupation among the barrio folks until a Sugar Central was established; hence the rice fields were converted to sugarcane fields. A number are also engaged in the breeding of animals such as cattle but this number is negligible. An important supplement to a family's income is the popular home industry of distilling native coconut wine more commonly known as "lambanog".

The National Museum Excavation

The Makalintal property in the barrio of Calubcub Segundo covers an area of 42 hectares, 12 of which stretch along the coast of Tayabas Bay. The diggings are specifically situated southeast, and later extended to the northeast of the Makalintal residence.

So far, the extent of the excavation shows the area to contain two burial sites: one exhibiting primary inhumation, the other displaying secondary inhumation through burial jars.

The First Phase

The initial phase of excavations was conducted in November, 1976. Two grid patterns were laid out in the site. The first grid system, designated CB-1, was a 14 x 16 meter-area planted to coconuts. The second, CB-2, covered 20 x 15 meters of untended grassland. Both grids were located close to the shores of Tayabas Bay. (The Marine Field Station was used as the main datum point as shown in sketch at the right.) These grids were further divided into 2 x 2 meter squares to make them appear like a checker board.

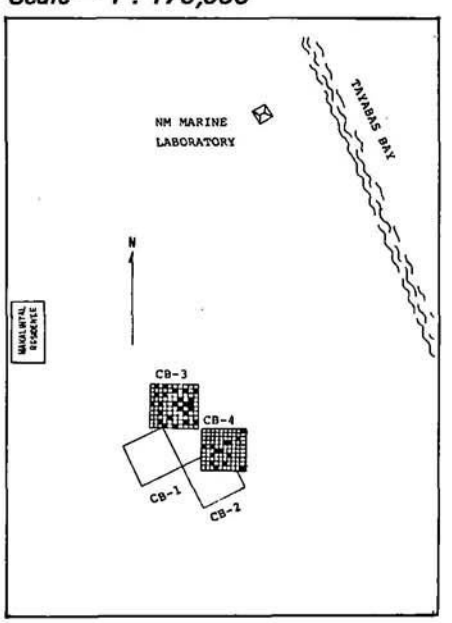
The condition of the soil posed some problems to the excavators. The walls of the squares eroded easily especially after the soil had been exposed to the sun. The same thing happened to the skeletal remains. To remedy this, the excavators built some lean-tos to provide some amount of shade to both laborers and the soil.

Four graves were unearthed in grid CB-1. Each had an average depth of 60 centimeters. Their grave furniture consisted of native earthenware pots, an earthenware stove and glass beads. Some net weights were also found but they were not associated with the burials. All the skeletal remains were found in supine position but with varying orientations. Three were pointing towards the southwest; one was facing the west.

In grid CB-2, a similar soil condition was found. Balks in-between adjoining squares were used in addition to the lean-tos to prevent sudden erosion of the soil. This particular grid yielded six graves, all having local earthenware pots without design as grave furniture. Two graves were oriented towards the northeast and four towards the southwest. Of the skeletons found in the six graves, two exhibited complete teeth-filling.

After the initial phase of excavations, the excavators hypothesized that the site could be chronologically classified as Late Metal Age. The ten burials displayed a consistency in their cultural material content: earthenware pots, earthenware stoves and glass beads. Beyond the one meter-deep range level where most of the graves were deposited, material belonging to a different cultural period was distinctly absent. Test trenches were opened up at strategic areas and were purposely made to reach the three meter level to cast out doubts that another cultural level might accidentally show up. Only two soil levels were identified: the humus or top soil, mainly loose sand that went down to some 10 to 12 centimeters from the surface,

The Excavated Portion
Scale – 1 : 175,000



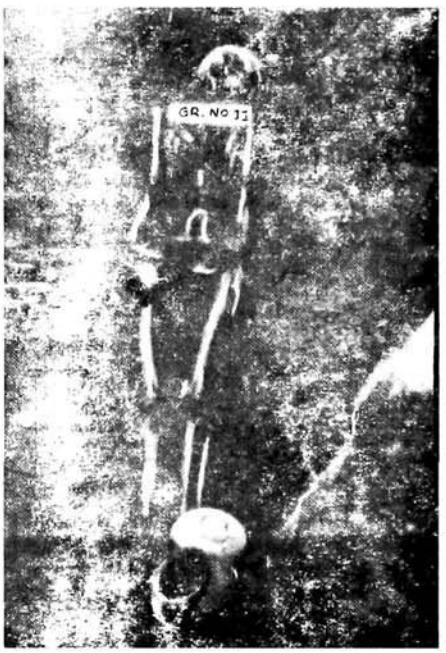
and the next layer of slightly compact sand that stretched to three meters below the surface which is already the water level.

The Excavations in December

The second phase of the excavations carried out in December raised some questions about the dating of the site. Six more graves, bringing the total dug to 16, were unearthed in the two grids, CB-3 and CB-4, opened up. They yielded cultural materials similar to those found in the earlier excavations plus a Chinese tradeware, a crackled-glaze Celadon bowl. The procelain material was found *in situ* along with five earthenware pots.

The doubt that the celadon find had cast on the hypothesis regarding the dating of the site warranted the third phase of excavations. It became necessary to ascertain whether that celadon bowl was intrusive or not: if it was not, the site should then be classifed under Contact Period. A careful evaluation of the quantity and frequency of porcelain remains was also required.

Grave 4 with associated materials of stove and pots



Grave 2 furniture included celadon bowl and earthenware pot

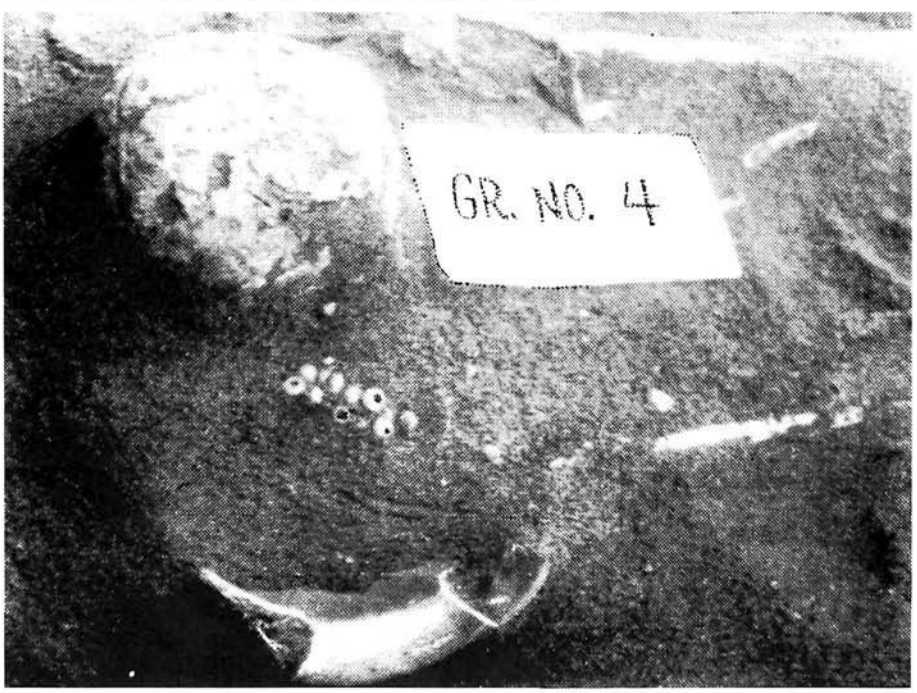
The Third Excavation Period

Further excavations were therefore aimed at systematically digging for archaeological remains to shed light on the porcelain found in one of the areas suspected to date as far back as the Metal Age. They showed that the celadon bowl was not at all intrusive. Chinese tradeware sherds were present up to a depth of 80 cm. below the surface.

An open-air jar burial site was also discovered. Although the site was small, it was very significant since most of the materials bore different patterns and methods of design. Its importance was highlighted by the unearthing of a large quantity of glass beads. Most of the jars were found within the 20 to 40 cms. level. Beyond this, no traces of other cultural level was apparent. Porcelain, either in whole pieces or sherds, were absent from the 5 to 80 cms. level.

Two grids were opened up during the third phase of excavations. The first, CB-5, measured 20 x 20 meters and the other, CB-6, 26 x 24. Roughly 52 squares comprised these grids. Grid CB-6 need to be checked for qualitative and quantitative purposes. Additional excavations should be done to come up with valid and substantial data. The only problem which would likely hinder such operations would be the negative reaction of the lot owners since, this time, the areas to be excavated lie exactly within the perimeters of their yards and gardens.

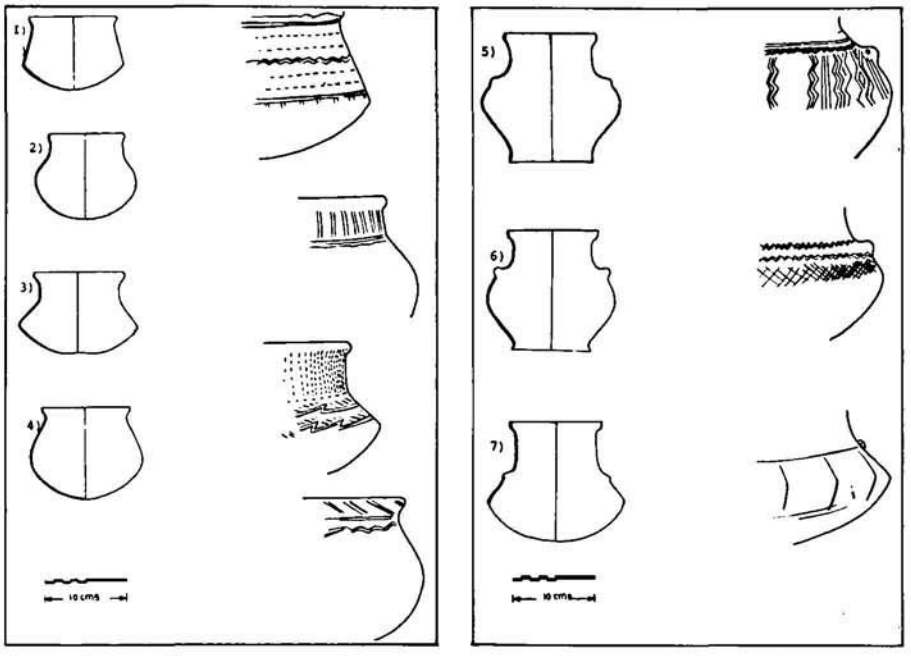
Grave 4 also exhibited a number of glass beads. They had been covered by the earthenware stove in the photo above left.



Findings

Grids CB-1 to CB-4 (Contact Period Site)

All the earthenware potteries recovered from these grids were glo-



San Juan, Batangas earthenware pottery forms and decorations.

bular in form; the majority exhibited short everted rims. They were unslipped with the majority exhibiting distinct traces of soot at the bottom and shoulders. No pottery bearing incised, impressed, applied or even painted designs was found. All the pottery materials were retrieved in a vertical position with the majority set at an upright position.

A number of opaque and translucent yellow as well as clear glass beads were recovered from the area. Two minute gold leaves were also found in association with two burials.

Apart from the skeletons found in graves 1, 2, and 10, the rest had all their major bones present. These included cranium, mandible, clavicle, scapula, sternum, humurus, ribs, vertebrae, ulna radius, innominate bone, carpal bones, phalanges, femur, tibia, fibula and tarsal bones. The poor condition of such bones and the surrounding soil precluded the proper raising of the skeleton or parts of the skeleton within blocks of containing earth. Fragmented bits and pieces of the crania, femur and some number of teeth for each burial were the only items that were "salvageable". The burials were all primary inhumation and the majority followed the east/west orientation.

Grids CB-5 and CB-6 (Probable Lage Metal Age).

All six burials unearthed from this area indicated secondary burial, that is only the bones were placed inside the jars which were subsequently reburied. However, they were just partial secondary burial since only portions of the bones of the deceased were stored in the jars. Five of the jars showed multiple secondary burials for bones of more than an individual were found inside. On two occasions, broken pieces (earthenware sherds) seemed to have been positioned at the outer rims and shoulders of the jars to reinforce their walls.

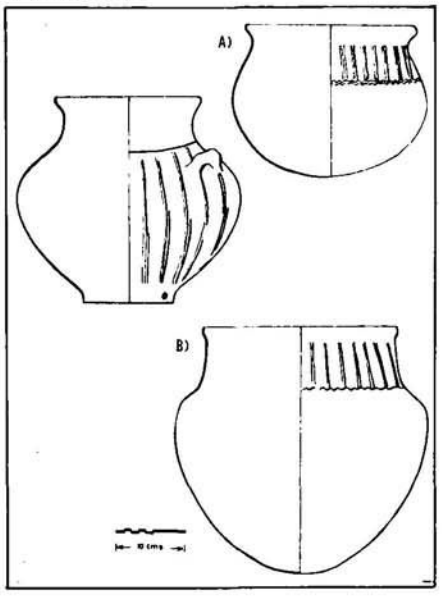
All the six burials jars were in the vertical position when unearthed. They were plain and had rounded bottoms. The covers originally used for the earthenware jars, as gleaned from the sherds and other fragments, were also made of local clay. However, the disintegrated condition of such covers, except for one, precluded the determination of their original shapes.

The burial jars recovered generally contained fragments of human skeletal remains along with a number of yellow and translucent glass beads. After intensive screening, using a 1/4 inch mess, no other material trace was encountered. Neither evidence of cremation nor the presence of extended burials lying within the range of the jar burials was noted.

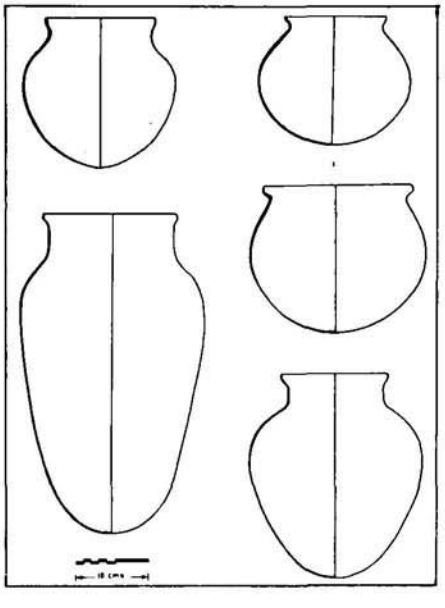
Interpretations[3]

All the burial jars and pottery unearthed at the site are poorly-fired local earthenware. They are of fine clay tempered with coarse

Other pottery forms and decorations



Jar forms



particles. The method of firing employed in their manufacture is possibly open-firing, a method commonly practiced by the early and present-day Filipino potters.

The presence of soot in a number of pots could have been due to their other functional use as a funerary items. It, too, may well have been the result of "food preparation during rituals" probably performed at the time of interment of a burial jar (Fox 1970:74).

The data gathered at this site indicate specific similarities with the other previously reported jar burial sites in the archipelago (Batanes, Sorsogon, Marinduque, Mindoro, Masbate, Samar, Palawan and Basilan). The Butong, Batangas finds, to date, are the closest to the Calubcub Segundo artifacts.

Evaluation of Pottery Decorations

The finds in Grids CB-5 and CB-6 differ greatly from those in the earlier grids in terms of form. The pottery materials in the former are possibly contemporaneous with the Calatagan type of Fox. One thing is certain though; the changes in form evolved from complex to simple. The wide range of elaborated decor was phased out through time with later pieces showing no trace of decoration. The earlier pieces contain elaborated designs and are mostly ritual vessels. The later ones are mostly functional vessels where clear traces of soot are evident. This indicates a degeneration in the quality of Philippine pottery possibly due to the introduction of foreign tradeware, specifically those from China. These changes could actually be the result of assimilation of two cultures when the less dominant tends to absorb the culture traits of the more dominant. More often, this results in the formal and functional atrophy of the native culture traits of the less dominant culture.

Of the sixteen graves unearthed, twelve had their heads positioned to their left sides. The majority of the bodies follow the east/west orientation. At times, this is considered valuable information especially in determining whether a cemetery is pre-Christian or not; nonetheless it sometimes leads to misinterpretations. Hence at the moment, the excavators intend to withold their assumptions on this topic.

The report is only preliminary, based on the initial finds at the site. A study of the quantity of the materials obtained and will still be obtained will require many more months of work by the research team.

Footnotes

[1] Table 1 contains the description of the graves.

[2] The inferred technique of manufacture of the potteries is apparently the same as that used by local potters today. Solheim describes this: "after the initial hollowing out of a lump of moist clay, the rim was probably formed by pressure between wet fingers or a damp fabric while the vessel was being turned on some form of slow wheel. When the rim was finished, and hard enough from drying to retain its shape, the vessel was probably held in the hand and the body formed by paddle and anvil, thus doing away with the necessary flat bottom present while the vessel was on a slow wheel. Carved and smooth paddles were used, with most pots smoothed by using a smooth paddle or a damp fabrics."

[3] A total of sixteen graves is not sufficient to come up with a sound basis for any theory on morphological relationships. It is difficult to deduce from a limited number of specimens, more especially graves. Le Gros Clark (1975) has criticized the over confidence of earlier anthropolgists who were often prepared to draw far too many conclusions from a single specimen. Singer (1958), in a critique of the Boskop skull which he has discovered in 1913 in a Transvaal farm, points out that what may have been justifiable speculation at the beginning of the century is inexcusable now.

Even the sexing of fossil human remains appears to be far more difficult than was previously imagined, as Genoves (1954) has emphasized in his study of Neanderthal remains. This is not to say that a single find is valueless. Certainly in the case of Paleolithic remains, each bone demands rigorous examination and description. In later man, where it is necessary to study less outstanding differences between groups, a series of at least 40 or 50 skeletons of the same sex is needed before reliable statistical analyses can be made. Thus, if only one or two dated skeletons are excavated, sex, age, disease and measurement may be noted but deductions as to the morphological affinities of these individuals with other people of the period could only be very tentative, if they are possible at all. The value of reports on one or two skeletons is not to serve as the basis of any theory of morphological relationships, but to provide standardized data which may eventually be built into a general picture of population at one period through time.

Continued on page 48

Graves 1 and 2 demonstrate a probable case of decapitation as suggested by the absence of major bones.