

# A DESCRIPTION OF POTTERY MAKING IN TALIBON, BOHOL

by Mary Jane CALDERON and Thelma ROALES

## INTRODUCTION

Bohol, with a land area of 4,000 square kilometres, is the tenth largest island in the Philippines. One hundred fourteen kilometres from Tagbilaran (the capital of Bohol), and lying between Ubay and Jetafe, is the municipality of Talibon. As of 1986, the population of Talibon was 34,097, with 27 barangays. One of the barangays in Talibon is Bagacay, a pottery village, chosen as the site of this study. There are around 51 household potters in the area.

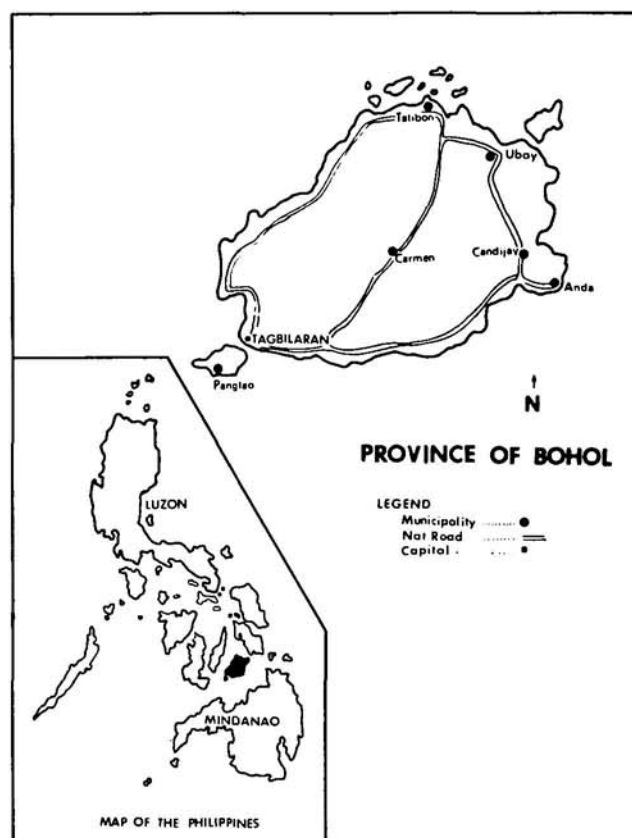
This study will focus briefly on the pottery types and functions, and will document the manufacturing process of pottery in detail. Our approach to the subject matter will be based on our interviews and observations during field work in 1986.

Daniel Scheans, (Scheans 1966) has surveyed the written descriptions on earthenware pottery manufacture among fifteen ethnolinguistic groups: the Ivatans (Scheans 1952), Ivanag (Solheim), Tingguians (Cole 1952), Ilocano (Scheans 1965), Bontok (Jenks 1905), Makakaya Kalinga (Scott 1958), Pampangan (Solheim 1952), Buhid (Conklin 1953), Bicol (Foster 1956), Panayon Bisaya (Solheim 1952), Cebuano Bisayan (Hart 1954), Bagabo (Cole 1913), Bukidnon (Cole 1956), Manobo (Garvan 1931), and Sulu (Szanton 1963).

Scheans also surveyed pottery manufacture in fifty

The authors attended the SPAFA Training Course in Ethno-Archaeology held in Bagacay, Talibon, Bohol, Philippines from July 22 to September 22, 1986. Miss Calderon is Curator of the University of San Carlos Museum, and Miss Roales is Research Assistant at Archaeology Division, National Museum of the Philippines.

provinces in the Philippines based on a 73-item questionnaire. One thousand two hundred black and white photographs were taken and 300 items of pottery specimens



Continued from page 8

HAAN, F de  
1910-11 *Priangan*, 4 vols. Batavia.  
HOORDUYN, J.  
1982 "Bujangga Manik's Journeys through Java: Topographical

Data from an Old Sundanese Source" in *Bijdragen K.I.T.L.V.*  
WELCH, Anthony  
1979 *Calligraphy in the Arts of the Museum World*, The Asia Society, New York.

were collected and housed in the Anthropology Department at Portland State University (Scheans 1977).

P.J.F. Coutts and R.K. Fullagar recorded local pottery making traditions in Antique and Aklan (Coutts and Fullagar 1980) while Scheans described pottery manufacture in two poblacions in Bohol, Albur and Valencia, which is similar to the method of pottery manufacture to be described in this paper.

POTTERY TYPES AND FUNCTIONS

The pottery in Bagacay are of three types (1) cooking pots, (2) water container pots and (3) decorative pots. They are classified according to their sizes and the market prices in the 1930s. The smallest pot is called anlet (around

8 cms. in height and 9 cms. in width). The second to the smallest is called *segunda* (Spanish term for second) followed by *upat singco* (the price of four pieces of five centavos) *tagdusan* (the price of two pots for three centavos). *Uno y media* is the biggest pot and measures around 28 cms. in height and 30 cms. in width.

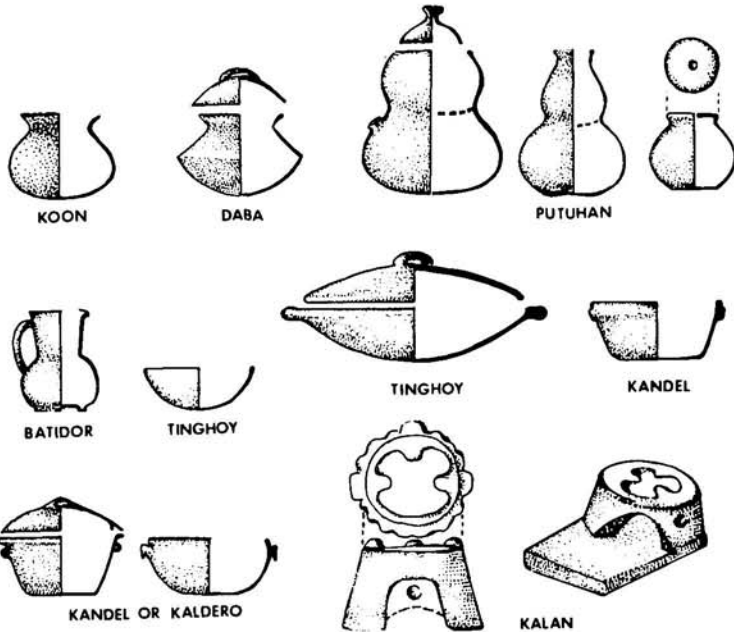
THREE TYPES OF POTS

A. Cooking Pots

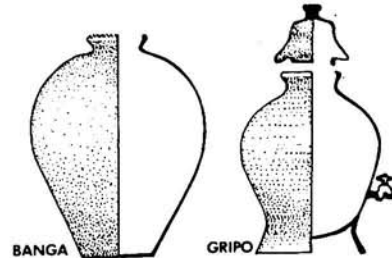
1. *Kolon/koon* - this is general term for all globular pots of different sizes, from the smallest to the biggest. The pots' rims are flaring and the semi-rounded lips have impressed linear designs called *giring-giring*.

POTTERY TYPES BAGACAY TALIBON, BOHOL

1. COOKING POTS



2. WATER CONTAINERS



3. DECORATIVE POTS



2. **Daba** - this is generally applied to all angled pots of different sizes.
3. **Putuhan** - this is a double-gourd pot serving as steamer for rice cakes.
4. **Batidor** - pitcher-shaped vessel purposely for preparing native coffee and cocoa.
5. **Hudnohan** - low cylindrical vessel for cooking rice cakes. Diameter is 40-45 cms.
6. **Tatso** - shallow hemispherical pot for cooking peanuts.
7. **Tinghoy** - small hemispherical pot for gold melting.
8. **Takkub** - the cover of a pot with a loop handle.
9. **Kalan** - (**sug-ang**) stove.

#### B. Water Container Pots

1. **Jar (banga)** - oval-shaped vessel for water storage. It has a circular flat base, a short neck and a rounded lip. Cement slipping around the exterior body of the pot reduces the vessel's porosity.
2. **Jar with a faucet (gripo)** - the jar with a faucet cemented on the lower portion of the body is called **gripo** and purposely made for drinking water. This vessel is usually made with a cover.

#### C. Flower Pots, and Similar Plant Containers

1. **Masetera** - truncated pot, with its flat base perforated for water seepage. It has a wide mouth and a rounded lip for planting purposes.
2. **Hang-ing** - small pots with cut-out design or simple perforations for decoration and suspension. These are especially made for orchids.
3. **Kaang** - flower pots.
4. **Figurines** - anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures.
5. **Toys (toy-toy)** - these resemble the cooking pots and the water container pots, except that they are usually made smaller.

## PROCESS OF MAKING POTS

### A. Ritual

Every time a new source of clay is exploited, a ritual is performed near the source before the clay is gathered. The ritual is called (**pag-abang**) which means to "rent" and is explained by the potters as a means of payment

(**bayad**) to the surrounding spirits for the clay they gather.

During the ritual, **pag-abang**, a young red-feathered rooster which has not been used for cockfighting is offered. It is believed that the red colour of the feathers has an effect on the redness of the pot during the firing. A pig, raised in the community, may also be used as an offering.

If a single potter will utilize a clay source, he or she shoulders all the expenses for the ritual sacrifices. Otherwise, the expenses are shared among the other potters.

Aside from the rooster and pig offerings, tobacco, local wine, biscuits, cooked rice, candles, rice cakes and money are also offered. No salt is added to the cooked food since the potters believe the spirits dislike salt. After the offering, some food are left on the table near the new clay source, and salt is added on the food to be eaten by the guests.

The ritual is officiated by a **mananampit** or **kamao manampit** (someone who calls or knows how to contact the spirits). There are five persons in Bagacay who act as the **mananampit** or spirit callers. Two are women-potters and the three are husbands of potters. The **mananampit** usually come from a family of potters who **themselves** had the gift or ability to **contact** the spirits who guard the clay source. Prayers are transmitted by mananampit parents to their children.

### Paghakut ug Yuta (Gathering Clay)

Clay is gathered during the daytime. The source of clay (**gigikanan**) can either be near the potter's house or as far as the neighbouring village. Clay sources are usually shared.

A tool commonly used in clay gathering is the **budlong** an iron bar 70 cms. long with one end flattened and sharpened. Sacks, baskets or banana leaves are used as containers.

The different clay types (brown, red, and sandy clay) are either mixed at the clay source area or at home.

### B. Preparing Clay

- Magluka o magkubkub** - digging of different clay types
- Dukdukin** - pounding the clay types in compact pieces using the **makmak**, a short bamboo stick.
- Ibulad sa init** - drying the pounded clay to make them brittle.
- Bisbisan** - sprinkling water on the clay.
- Takuban ug dahon o sako** - covering the wet clay with a plastic sack or dry coconut leaves, to be left for a few hours or overnight to soften the clay.
- Pilion ang bato ug** - removing the impurities like plant roots and pebbles as these can

- pislitan** - cause breakage (**liki, buak**) during firing, hard soil pieces are separated and discarded.
- Maglikit** - kneading the clay to have the proper consistency. The clay is again covered with a plastic sack or dry coconut leaves and stored.
- Magsagul ug-yuta** - mixing the clay types
- Maggumos** - mashing the clay, and if desired, adding water for plasticity.
- Mag-umol** - preparing the clay lumps called **umol** for pot making.

### C. Paggama ug Koon - Pot-Making

Two techniques of pot-making are commonly practiced in Bagacay namely, the pinching/handmolding technique and the paddle and anvil technique. Two other techniques (coiling and clay sheet-end joining) are not often practiced.

#### Pinching/Handmolding Technique

These methods involve the potter's hands and fingers. A lump of clay is squeezed between the fingers, creating a rhythmic pattern of finger marks.

- Magbangag** - inserting the thumb at the centre of the clay lump while the rest of the fingers hold on to the exterior in a pinching manner with the fingers scraping the clay exerting sideward, upward and downward pressures towards the bottom.
- Gahimu ug wait** - shaping the interior rim with a bamboo stick in a circular manner and with the rotation of the **ginit**, flattening the lip and making it



A male potter making a stove by hand-molding

- even with a slight, downward pressure.
- Paglimpyu ug wait** - clamping the rim with wet fingers in a rotating manner and air drying the pot.

#### Paddle and Anvil Technique

This technique involves the use of a wooden paddle and a stone anvil. The former is used on the exterior and the latter on the interior. The purpose is to lessen the porosity of the pot and make it more compact.

- Magbaul** - paddling the pot
- Mag-abog** - shaping the body of the pot using the paddle and supported by the anvil inside, gradually defining the neck and the shoulder.
- Magpatubo sa binaul** - raising the base, slowly defining the body.
- Maggiring-giring** - applying an impressed design on the rim with the edge of the paddle.
- Magtiltig** - final paddling

#### Coiling Technique

Series of circular coils are laid to a desired height and size of pot. To form the vessel, the paddle and anvil technique is used.



A potter at work. On the Foreground are partially worked vessels intended for flower pots. Techniques involve are hand-molding and paddle and anvil technique.

### Clay Sheet-End Joining Technique

A lump of clay is flattened into sheets on a sack which is fastened on the ground. Then the sheets are rolled on the potter's arm and brought to an upright position with both ends joined and polished by wet hands.

### D. Decorating the Pot

Bagacay potters use three types of decorative treatment on their pots. The most common decoration is called **giring-giring** and is usually found on cooking pots and water containers. Using the side of the paddle (**pikpik**), successive short and linear impressions are made on the lips of the pot.

Another decorative treatment is the **pagkulit**. Coconut midrib (**tungog sa lubi**) or a sharpened bamboo stick is used to incise the surface of the pots. The most common design for this treatment is the **buak-buak** (floral design) which is usually found on the covers of the pots.

A slip made from a thin mixture of cement is also applied. This type of slip is only applied on jars and sometimes on flower pots. Slip application is not a decorative treatment, but a sealant to lessen porosity and permeability.

### E. Pagbulad - Drying

The pottery undergoes gradual air drying during the formation of the pot. After the pots are finally formed, the pots are dried under the sun. These are sun-dried in an open place near the potter's house and at different times of the day, and are occasionally turned around to different positions to obtain an even result. The pots are completely dried after three days.

Fire drying is resorted to when orders from clients have to be hurriedly met. The process of fire drying is the same as firing but less fuel is used. After the pots are completely drained of their water content, some portions are polished.

### F. Magbuwaw or Magpasinaw - Polishing

The exterior portion of the pot is polished with a glass **garapa** or a quartz stone, **bato**. Some potters slightly wet the exterior of the vessel before polishing it. After the pots are polished, they are sundried again, exposing the different portions of the pot (**balihun**) for an even result. After 80-100 pots are made and collected, (some polished, while others remain unpolished), they are ready to be fired.

### G. Pagba - Firing

A sunny day, with moderate winds is the ideal condition for pot firing. The firing area is an open field usually small around two metres in diameter, and located not far from the potter's house generally about fifteen to twenty metres away.

Four kinds of materials are used as fuel for firing; coconut leaves (**palwa**), dried coconut husks, cogon grass and any available dry wood. One hundred pieces of



*Open firing is a common sight in Bagacay especially on Saturdays. Every member of the family shares in this activity - gathering of firewood, pots' arrangement in the firing area, actual firing and packaging of pots.*

coconut leaves normally costs from six to eight pesos. These are gathered around the community or bought in the neighbourhood. Firewood are usually gathered just a few hours before the actual firing, about 3-4 hours.

Heavy pots are arranged on the bottom layer followed by smaller pots on top. The pots are arranged in such a way to allow air circulation to be maintained during the firing process. More firewood are placed on top of the pots in preparation for firing.

A match is lighted and the firewood at the bottom of the heap is burned. This allows the heat to flow upward and to spread evenly around the pots. In case more fuel is needed, cogon grass or dried coconut leaves are added. After firing, each pot is removed with a long piece of bamboo and taken out of the cinders to cool. The firing process takes about thirty to forty-five minutes to complete. After the pots are cooled, they are ready to be used or sold.

## CONCLUSION

Several studies on pottery manufacture have been done which gives a general description of pottery making. This study tried to document the step-by-step process of manufacture of pottery. The potters of Bagacay believe that a ritual has to be performed as payment to the spirits for the clays they gather. Through offerings to the spirits the potters insure themselves against sickness and the chances of pot breakage.

Most potters in Bagacay belong to the third or fourth generation of potters. Unfortunately however, very few of their children have followed the family tradition and instead prefer to be hat weavers or salaried workers. Though there continue to be a demand for Bagacay pottery, the prevalent use of aluminum pots and plastic containers has resulted in diminished demands for pottery.