

The Late Neolithic-Early Iron Age Limestone Secondary Jar-Burial Complex in the Caves of Salangsang, Lebak, Sultan Kudarat, Philippines and its Implications in the Chronology of Southeast Asia,

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Migrating movements of people in small groups have indeed been an urgent element in the cultural history of Southeast Asia in general and of the Philippines in particular. The inquiry with the settlement pattern of present day hill tribe people brought about the discovery of cultural materials which yielded several interesting contributions to the continual reconstruction of Philippine prehistoric gap and the overall picture of Southeast Asian Chronology.

Setting.

Barangay Salangsang is considered a part of the Kulawan plateau. In 1967, it was proclaimed as a reservation for the indigenous mountain tribe - the Manobo and Tiruray. The area sprawls in 10,000 hectares of cogonal and fastere, craggy slopes about 2,500 feet above sea level. It is predominantly inhabited by about 500 Manobo families in scattered

seasonal hamlets. A large number of Tiruray and lowland families live in the "centre" and within two kilometers periphery.

The cave sites and rock-shelters are distributed within the territorial limits of Salangsang. Special mention is hereby credited to the Manobo as they were responsible for the discovery of these sites. Their sad experience of having been driven away from their forestal lands has developed mistrust toward outside groups and thus, they have settled further back into the forest so that they could be out of reach to outsiders. Today, they live largely as hunters, gatherers and swidden agriculturalists. They grow rice, corn, sweet potato, taro, manioc and depend directly on a variety of forest products for supplementary subsistence. They have been instrumental in serving as guides, assistants and interpreters while the research team was engaged in the project.

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Earlier in 1965 and 1966 several funding and research institutions did work on the area. These are: The National Science Development Board; Silliman University, where the writer was then attached; Miami University (USA) and the University of Oregon (USA). Presently, the Mindanao State University at Marawi City is undergoing further investigation of the caves and exploring new sites as a result of the regionalization of the archipelago and the awareness of its contribution to Philippine culture.

Sites and Finds:

Distinction should be made between the caves and rockshelters. Caves are natural rock formations extending inward to different chambers. There is the presence of stalactites and stalagmites and often forming into columns. It is damp inside and is often not penetrated by sunlight. At one point of history, caves were used as habitation and burial grounds. The rock-shelters on the other hand are also limestone formation formed along ledges and walls of mountains. It is exposed to the sunlight and do not have the characteristics found in caves. One notable factor when it comes to the jars deposited in these sites is that in the former the jars are definitely brittle and soft in texture while in the latter jars are almost solidified, durable and harder in texture.

The following site presentation will give the reader a rundown of what have been found therein:

I. CAVES

Inatao. The presence of both variegated limestone urns and pottery vessels with anthropomorphic figures on covers; clay beads and what appears to be a limestone "mortar" at the far end of the cave wall; human skeletal remains and wild animal skeleton near the mouth of this cave.

Maluao-Lange. Absence of limestone jars; all earthenware vessels and decorated

pottery; intact skull found lying on the soil in one of the shelves at the inner portion of the cave.

Ugong-Ugong. The presence of both limestone and earthenware jars; yielded the largest count and biggest sizes of both quadrilateral and circular jars compared to the other sites; arrowheads and spearheads attached to rotten wooden shafts; corroded and patinated brass bracelets inside limestone jars; powdery bones.

Kiriag. The presence of assorted limestone and earthenware urns and vessels with some anthropomorphic figurines on the covers.

Bulbook. The presence of a great number of limestone jars with a variety of pottery wares with excised designs and anthropomorphic figures.

II. ROCK-SHELTERS

Semenoho. Mainly limestone jar deposit with a few pottery vessels; well-marked anthropomorphic figures; a fossilized skull embedded on a limestone wall.

Bale't Usa A and B. Principally, a limestone jar deposit with a fair amount of earthenware vessels.

Sebeden. The presence of both limestone and earthenware vessels with intact skulls inside jars; pottery with paddled and incised designs; more variety of anthropomorphic figures on the lids of the urns.

Amfayag. All limestone jars with evidences of being presently re-used by Manobo; desiccated flesh still attached to the bones and accompanied by foul odor; brass bracelets are also present.

Kinogitan. All broken limestone jars due to disturbance; one neck-shoulder decorated pottery ware.

The condition of these jars when they were discovered showed proofs of having been disturbed by either human population or ani-

mal taking shelter within these places. Except for a few sites like Amfayag, Malunao-Lange and Ugong-Ugong, the burial jars have been in almost a perfect state.

Several hardships were encountered while in search of these sites because the Manobo who knew where they were found refused to reveal the locations. In the first place, these places are considered sacred and a hallowed ground where nobody is allowed to tread. Secondly, the sites are situated in far locations usually taking a day to traverse by foot to be able to reach the place. Thirdly, these sites were on steep ledges high atop the rugged and mountainous terrain. Nevertheless, with the interest raging among the team members, they ignored all these drawbacks and pursued the lead.

The caves are generally feared by the people inhabiting the area because of the belief that it is here where the dreaded busaw (malevolent spirits) reside. Therefore, one must be careful not to dare trample on the items found inside these caves if one does not want to suffer from illness.

It would also be worthwhile noting the present-day Manobo burial practices in relation to the age-old limestone burial customs. This is a vital factor because as mentioned earlier, in the site description there has been an evidence of these jars being presently re-used. The author would like to say presently re-used because in one of the rock-shelters visited (i.e. Amfayag) one of the jars contained a fresh human skeletal remain with still some flesh clinging to the bones with stains of blood and stench of rotten flesh. This was perhaps the reason why some of the Manobo refused to pinpoint the locations of these jars because of what they considered a "hidden secret". However, when a person dies, it is the custom among the Manobo to keep the corpse inside

the house for undetermined number of years. The corpse is placed inside a coffin made from a hollowed-out trunk of a tree. This coffin is sealed with resin and other saps of tree mixed with other local substances gathered within the area. It is tightly lashed with rattan and is placed on a platform somewhere in the house and kept there until it is felt that it is time to transfer the corpse, which by now has turned to bones, into the ground. Rituals are observed in the transferring of the corpse from the wooden coffin to the ground and from the ground to the limestone receptacles. If this is so, then this author might say that the long tradition of secondary burial has been carried on to this day with possibility of tertiary utilization.

Methodology:

The initial explorations were followed by a series of visits. The system used in identification was that of the National Museum. In this system, both the urn and its cover were labelled with letters that indicate the site, the day found, and the artifact number. A chart with 1:10 scale was drawn to show the exact position of the urns and covers. The location of artifacts proved an important key to historical interpretation. Drawing of the urns, covers, and pottery was also done. The measuring, photographing, examining, recording and selecting of representative samples from each site completed the methodological procedure.

Chronological Considerations and Implications:

Reference is greatly acknowledged of Edward B. Kurjack of Miami University and Craig T. Sheldon of the University of Oregon in the analysis of the contents found inside these jars. In the analysis of the collagen from human bones in one of the jars, it

yielded a radiocarbon date of 585 A. D. plus or minus 85 years. It was also found out based from these finds that these sites seem to represent the long *in situ* development of Late Neolithic or Early Iron Age secondary urn burials.

Most, if not all of these finds were found on the surface. Thus, there was no actual excavation done except for slightly buried pieces pinned under toppled jars. A test pit has also been dug to determine the presence of associated cultural materials below the soil surface but did not yield any historical importance.

Another factor to consider is the shape and type of limestone jars because it shows a chronological order as to which among these varieties came first and which came later. Basically, there are two major types of limestone jars—the quadrilateral and the circular. This categorization is further characterized by fluted designs and basal flanges. In the Kurjack and Sheldon serriation analysis, the quadrilateral urns came ahead than the other circular ones. The serriation, method of the urns by shape, decoration techniques and location, says Kurjack et. al., provides a tentative sequence, but a more detailed gathering of data of the representative samples would provide a more definitive chronological answer. An attempt is made here to show sequence of the different jars. Again, with a strong reference to Kurjack et. al. they found that the earliest urns are those with quadrilateral shape, basal flanges and excised decorations. This is followed by urns of still the same shape but are fluted in decoration. Then this is followed by fluted quadrilateral urns without basal flanges and then lastly followed by the circular urns with fluted designs and with basal projections.

There were three established sizes noted among these burial jars—the large, medium and small. It is our opinion that the sizes of the jars were directly proportional or depended on the size of the skeletal remains interred therein. Thus, an individual with a large body structure would likely be placed inside large jars; average or regular built individuals in medium size jars and those of children would be for the small jars.

Still another interesting aspect of these jar studies are the many variegated covers. Just by the look of the lids on these jars one could immediately say that the sex of the interred person was a male or a female. Many of the jar covers had phallic symbols protruding on them. These protruberances vary from a simple handle-like figure to anthropomorphic images. On these figures one can notice the sex of an individual. We venture to state that the remains interred inside the jars was a male owing to the presence of the male phallus. A female would be symbolized by the presence of a pair of mound breasts and what also appears to be a vaginal structure. At one instance, we also found a cover with two heads sculptured back to back. We hypothesized that this rare cover of this particular urn could have been a receptacle of twins. All these, of course, are tentative statements and will be substantiated when the detailed report of Kurjack and Company will be readily available.

Conclusions:

At this point it would perhaps be valuable to draw some conclusive remarks on what these jars tell us. Based on Kurjaeks correlations and valid associations, the Kulaman Plateau area of which Salangsang is a part, has been inhabited for the past 2,000 years by people subsisting in almost the same manner that the present Manobo highlanders are existing today. The cultural materials found therein also indicate a

long period of accumulation that have changed through time and are still being modified by the present Manobo population. These traditional practices as shown in the pottery techniques could have evolved from mainland Southeast Asia and came via Malaya, Indonesia, Borneo reaching its own sophistication and development in Mindanao by utilizing raw materials that were readily accessible.

These limestone jars and pottery vessels could also give us a picture of how the people

belonging to this cultural level lived and survived. The present-day Manobo still seem to be revealing traces of a wide range of traditional practices that have been patterned from these prehistoric population.

These carved limestone jars and pot wares found in numerous caves and rock-shelters of Cotabato have become a major contribution to the ongoing quest of studying the past both in the Philippines and Southeast Asia.

NOTES

1. This exploration was done in three periods: January-June 1966; November 1967; and May-July 1968. It was sponsored by Silliman University, National Science Development Board; Miami University (Ohio), University of Oregon and the Explorer's Club, U.S.A. and directed by Professor Edward B. Kurjack (Miami University-Ohio) and Professor Craig T. Sheldon (University of Oregon). Presently, the Mindanao State University at Marawi City, under the direction of Professor Samuel M. Briones, returned to the area and intends to continue exploration and examination of the sites and finds in a more detailed procedure.
2. Edward B. Kurjack and Craig T. Sheldon, "The Ura Burial Caves of Southern Cotabato, Mindanao, Philippines," *Silliman Journal*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2 (1971) pp. 127-153. (Southern Cotabato was renamed Sultan Kudarat when the entire Cotabato province was redivided into four provinces by legislative fiat in 1972).
3. Robert von Heine-Goldern, "Urgheimat and früheste wanderungen der Austrenesier", *Anthropes*, Vol. 27 (1932), pp. 543-619.
4. H. Otley Bayer, "Outline of Philippine Archaeology by Islands and Provinces," *Philippine Journal of Science*, Vol. 77 (1947), pp. 205-374.
5. Samuel M. Briones, "Preliminary Report on the Cotabato Jar-Burial Practices Among the Late Neolithic-Early Iron Age Population", *Silliman Journal*, Vol. XVII, No. 1 (1970) pp. 135-147.