

Preliminary Archaeological Survey of the Municipality of Catanauan, Bondoc Peninsula, Quezon Province

Victor Paz, Andrea Rragio, Jack Medrana

Background of the Study

The archaeological sites in Catanauan in the province of Quezon were first brought to the attention of the Archaeological Studies Program and the National Museum of the Philippines by Mr. Deo Cuerdo, a resident of that town. Over the few months before approaching the ASP and the National Museum, Mr. Cuerdo had been following reports of accidentally excavated archaeological materials from different locations in this municipality. He approached the said institutions in the first quarter of 2007 with photographs of samples of the artifacts, as well as of the disturbed sites. As an immediate response he was formally deputized by the Archaeology Division of the National Museum to help stem the disturbance occurring at the sites.

Based on Mr. Cuerdo's own observations and the interviews he conducted with the locals, the sites in Catanauan appear to be jar burial sites. The materials that have been accidentally unearthed included huge earthenware jars containing human skeletal remains, stone covers with a groove on one side, and earthenware sherds with incised designs.

The ASP decided to send a team to conduct first-hand inspection of the sites to assess the feasibility of launching a wider research project in the area. The team, composed of Dr. Victor J. Paz, Dr. Jack Medrana and Ms. Andrea Rragio, stayed in Catanauan from March 23 to 24, 2008. Courtesy calls were conducted with the mayor, Atty. Ramon Orfanel, and with the barangay officials of the villages the team visited.

The team's methodology was intentionally limited to ocular inspections, digital image recording and interviews. Artifacts were not collected.

Catanauan, Quezon

Though it is still categorized as a third-class municipality, Catanauan has informally been called the capital of Bondoc Peninsula (www.catanauan.gov.ph). Catanauan is a coastal town that faces

Mompog Pass and the province of Marinduque. It is bounded on the north by the municipality of Lopez, on the northwest by the municipality of General Luna, on the northeast by the municipality of Buenavista and on the south and southeast by the municipality of Mulanay. It is approximately 264 kilometers from Manila and has coordinates of 13° 35' 30" N, 122° 19' 30" E. The town has a total land area of 266 square kilometers, and according to the 2000 Philippine Census, it has a population of 57,736 people in 11,283 households (www.wikipedia.org).

The topography of Catanauan is hilly and mountainous with some flat land. Close to ninety percent of the terrain is devoted to agriculture. The soils found here are Faraon clay, Catanauan Clay Loam and Beach Sand. Catanauan has two major bays: Tagabas and Catanauan; fishing is also a significant means of livelihood.

Catanauan has a total of forty-six barangays. During its brief stay the team was able to visit three reported sites in two barangays.

The Sites

Kanlagkit, Brgy. Matandang Sabang Kanluran

Kanlagkit is on a sand dune approximately 500 meters away from the present beach. Sand quarrying in 2006 accidentally uncovered at least five burial jars just below the present surface. This estimate was made based on the number of stone covers observed by eyewitnesses. According to reports, the jars, covered with these worked stone slabs with grooves, were arranged along a line and contained human skeletal remains. The residents also reported digging up extended inhumations with no associated containers, a possible parallel with the San Narciso sites (Solheim 1951) described below.

During the team's visit, at least three sand quarry pits were still partially open. Earthenware sherds and skeletal fragments were mixed in with the backfill. The sherds that were visible were all plain, and most were thick and poorly fired. The skeletal fragments the team were able to inspect were mostly long bone fragments. A maxillary (upper jaw) fragment with fully erupted molars indicate that an adult individual was interred here.

Punta, Brgy. Matandang Sabang Kanluran

Punta is a promontory facing Tagabas Bay. This was reportedly the site of an American air strip during the Second World War, thus, the terrain has been artificially flattened and the place has been informally named “Landing”. Earthenware sherds were reportedly found on the mangrove areas around the promontory.

In the absence of Brgy. Captain Pastorpide at the time of our visit, a courtesy call was made instead with her husband and other members of the Pastorpide Family.

Napa Property, Brgy. Tuhian

This site, part of the private property of Ermilando Napa, is a sand dune approximately a hundred meters from the beach. It is currently planted with Gmelina (*Gmelina arborea*) and mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) trees. Kagawad Arnel C. de los Santos, who guided the team, related how diggings five years ago unearthed earthenware sherds and other archaeological materials. The pit, according to Kag. De los Santos, measured approximately one meter by one-and-a-half meters and was approximately two meters deep. Mr. Cuervo also noted a feature composed of stones arranged in a circle that measured more than a meter in diameter. Inside this circle were sherds and bones. Based on this description, this feature may possibly be the support stones for a larger jar that has since been destroyed. This feature has previously been observed in other jar burial sites in Batangas (Dizon et al. 2005) and Sorsogon (Dizon 1979).

According to Mr. Cuervo, the stone circle was still partially visible; unfortunately, the team was unable to inspect it closely because we were unable to secure permission from Mr. Napa who at that time was in Manila.

Discussion

The Archaeology of the Bondoc Peninsula

Very little is known about the early history of the Bondoc Peninsula. Beyer’s Outline Review (Beyer 1947) lists three sites for the peninsula; of these, two were only minimally described. The first was the Burdett Late Neolithic Site, where a small well-polished adze was found at the foot of a natural gravel-bank near the landing of the Richmond Petroleum Co. In the James Wright Site in Barrio Piris on the eastern side and near the northern part of Bondoc Peninsula, ceramic fragments

unearthed from the construction of a house indicate early Ming settlement. In both cases the towns where these sites were located were not identified.

The third site identified by Beyer was the San Narciso Jar Burial Site. Unlike the first two sites, San Narciso had been investigated by National Museum personnel led by Ricardo Galang in 1938. This work resulted in the excavation of a number of large burial jars that Beyer identified as an “early” type (Beyer 1947:252). These jars were found near the coast and were associated with stone covers with grooves on the underside to fit the mouth of the jar. Beyer also mentions the presence of middens in the vicinity. According to him, the barrio of San Andres showed the most potential, with Galang unearthing shell bracelets, beads, and 14th and 15th century ceramics. At another site called Tala, a glazed Chinese jar, possibly early Ming in date, was found to contain bone fragments.

After the Second World War there have been only two archaeological studies done in the area and these consist of site excavation reports with very preliminary interpretations.

The town of San Narciso, which had previously been identified by Beyer, was re-excavated by Wilhelm Solheim II (Solheim 1951). He excavated the Recudo and Tumagudtud sites, both located on coastal areas. Recudo site yielded at least seven burials jars. Based on the sizes of the jars, at least two served as secondary containers. Most of the jars were associated with stone covers; other associated artifacts were paste beads of various colors, one glass bead, iron and bone implements and modified shells.

Tumagudtud site yielded thirteen jar burials and three extended burials. Based on the stratigraphy, the extended burials were placed slightly later than the jar burials, though they were found in the same occupation layer. Like Recudo, some of the jar burials had stone covers and were associated with paste beads, iron and stone implements, modified shells, and smaller earthenware vessels. A midden with shells and earthenware sherds was also uncovered near the edge of the excavation area. Apart from this midden, there were no other archaeological evidence for habitation proximate to the burial area.

The town of San Andres also yielded similar materials when it was excavated by personnel from the National Museum (Ronquillo personal communication).

Based on this brief review we can see that a lot may still be learned from the archaeology of the

Bondoc Peninsula. The sites reported are mostly of burials, which leaves the question as to where and how the people who buried their dead in this manner lived. Further, the Bondoc Peninsula occupies an interesting location relative to other provinces. To the west it directly faces the island of Marinduque where several sites were explored and excavated by Alfred Marche in the latter part of the nineteenth century, including jar burials in both cave and open sites (Beyer 1947). The southern end of Bondoc is very near the northern islands of Masbate province, where one of the type sites of the Sa-Huynh-Kalanay Pottery Tradition is located (Solheim 2002). These sites mostly generally fall under the metal period of the Philippines, and taken together, this can improve our understanding of this particular era of our country's early history. As for current ethnic categories, the peninsula is spatially located in the midst of three groups: the Tagalogs to the north and west, the Bikols to the east and the Visayans to the south. The archaeology of the Bondoc Peninsula may very well have implications on the relationships these major regions had in the past.

The archaeology of Catanauan town

Based on the team's initial findings, coupled with Mr. Cuerdo's observations and the accounts of locals, the sites in Catanauan are inhumation sites, mostly of burials in jars. The photographs of artifacts that Mr. Cuerdo showed us, the descriptions given by the residents, as well as the disturbed remnants observed by the team point to similarities with other jar burial sites that have already been excavated in the Bondoc Peninsula, specifically in San Narciso and San Andres towns. This is hardly surprising, given the spatial proximity of the three towns.

In the event that a full-fledged research project be launched in the area, there are possible research objectives which could be addressed. These include establishing the spatial extent of the sites, not only of the burial sites but nearby habitation areas as well. As briefly discussed above, no definite habitation or permanent settlement sites that can be associated with the people who buried their dead in jars have been identified in the previously explored areas of the Bondoc Peninsula. The same can be said about most other jar burial sites elsewhere in Luzon. Looking for domestic deposits is therefore also a suitable objective for a project.

Recommendations

The town of Catanauan has high archaeological potential. During the team's brief stay it was able to go to three reported sites and gather information on other sites that, due to time and logistical constraints, we were not able to personally visit. The sites that we were able to see, though disturbed, probably still hold intact archaeological deposits, particularly Kanlagkit in Brgy. Matandang Sabang Kanluran and Napa Property in Brgy. Tuhian. These sites should be subjected to systematic archaeological excavations before more sand quarrying and other human activities obliterate the archaeology in the area. Suggested research objectives have already been discussed above.

It is also recommended that an exploration team be organized to survey the other reported sites in Catanauan, particularly caves and other inland locations. Finally, the concerned citizens and local government officials of Catanauan are open to the idea that a local museum be established in their municipality, where artifacts and other significant objects of the town's early and recent history may be exhibited. The Archaeological Studies Program and the National Museum of the Philippines will surely support any initiative of this sort in any way they can.

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