

A SURVEY OF REPORTED ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN TAWI-TAWI

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INTRODUCTION

The Sulu Archipelago has been the front gate between the Philippines and the rest of Asia for centuries. It is strategically located at the southernmost tip of the Philippines between the islands of Borneo and Zamboanga, separating the Sulu Sea from the Celebes (Figure 1). It forms a continuous chain of volcanic islands, islets, coral reefs extending in the northeast and southeast meridians of 119° 10' and 122° 25' East and the parallels of 4° 30' and 6° 50' North (Saleeby, 1963). It is believed to carry a substantial amount of archaeological data (artifacts/ecofacts) that can tell the history and pre-history of the archipelago and its people (Beyer 1947; Cabanilla 1970).

Tawi-Tawi is the southernmost group of islands in the Sulu Archipelago (Figure 2). It became a separate province in 1973 and has been a part of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao since 1990. The area and number of islands vary from one source to another from the DILG estimated area of 1,431.19 square kilometers to the ARMM's estimate of 1,087 square kilometers. However, there are certainly 10 municipalities (Bongao, Languyan, Mapun, Panglima Sugala, Sapa-Sapa, Simunul, Sitangkai, South Ubian, Tadubas and Turtle Island) and 203 barangays.

Considered as one of the economically poorest provinces in the country, it is one of the most culturally rich provinces in Mindanao and the Philippines. Like its untapped agricultural potential [DILG], its cultural potential remains more undeveloped and even less or wholly unknown.

Written text about the culture, especially and specifically prehistoric culture, of the peoples of Tawi-Tawi are scarce. And that is where archaeology comes to the rescue. The periods in the past which have not been documented in folklore and history can be reconstructed through archaeology. By systematic and scientific study of the artifacts and artifact complexes, the graves and garbage heaps—these seemingly mute material witnesses of the past will speak of how the people of Tawi-Tawi lived and adapted to this place. Archaeology can help reconstruct the culture history of the people of Tawi-Tawi.

The Objectives of the Project

The project had three objectives: to (1) conduct an exploratory archaeological campaign to map out all the significant archaeological sites in Tawi-Tawi, (2) initiate an archaeological training program for local scholars, preferably students of MSU and, (3) help set up and/or initiate a set-up of an anthropological museum to showcase the cultural heritage of the people of Tawi-Tawi.

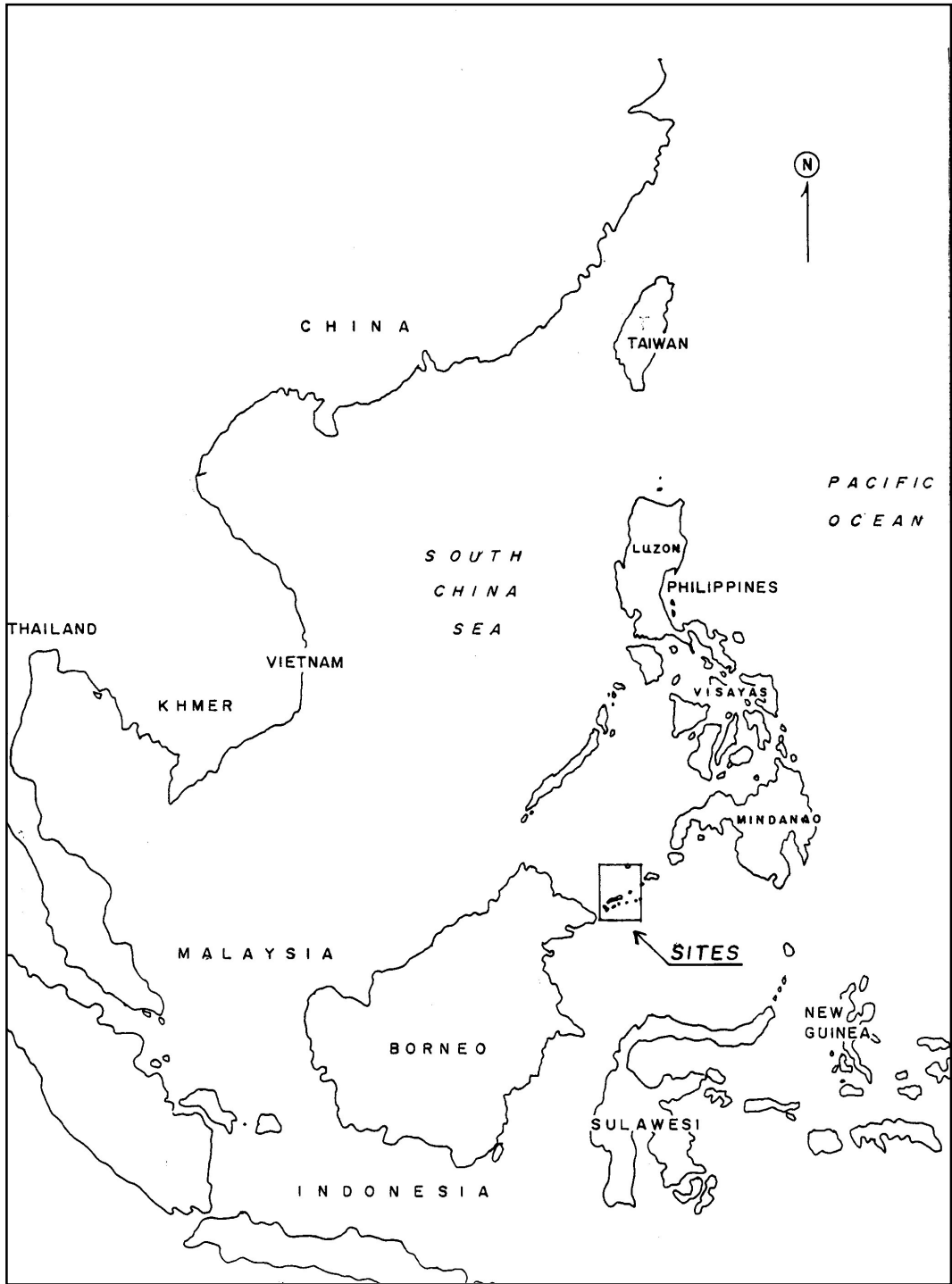


Figure 1 Map of Southeast Asia.

Significance of the Study

Identifying archaeological sites in Tawi-Tawi, as in all other parts of the Philippines and world, will not only help scholars of prehistory and history in making a more thorough and complete study of the past—not only of the peoples of Tawi-Tawi and the Philippines but of Southeast Asia and the world. The identification of archaeological sites will ideally, and hopefully, advocate the preservation and protection of these sites from natural and man made damages.

The history of a place and its people have universal and unique characteristics. Each group of people contributes to the healthy diversity of world cultures that have each uniquely found a way of adapting and living in their environment. Such adaptation and living must be recorded because each form of culture provides us with the clue of who we were, how we came to be who we are and who we want to be. That is why it is of a great importance to study and document the culture history of a people.

The training of local persons and people to record their own culture history is an important and innovative way of doing ethnography—who can better record the history of a people than the people themselves? Learning the methodologies of anthropology and archaeology will teach them about how information is gathered and perhaps provide more information and insight into their cultures than the “foreign” ethnographers. It is about time that ethnic groups themselves write their own ethnography. The training of local persons and people will enable and empower them to write their own ethnography.

An anthropological museum will be a repository of data and information about the peoples and place of Tawi-Tawi which they themselves can enjoy and appreciate. Secondly, it will be the information center about Tawi-Tawi for tourists and foreign visitors.

The Scope and Limitations of the Project

There were only thirty days to conduct the project. The nature of this expedition was a preliminary survey thus, a lot of time was spent making courtesy calls and informing the people about the project. It was of paramount importance that the people themselves know what we were doing because social acceptability was of prime importance. Explaining the project, answering their questions, stilling their doubts, getting their understanding, help and support, assisted us with our expedition.

No excavation of any kind was done. It was not necessary to dig a sondage when other techniques—scrutiny of road cuts, freshly dug graves, bulldozed surfaces, irrigation ditches and walking of the beds along the banks of streams, creeks and rivers—would suffice to indicate whether a place is archaeologically significant or not. These techniques coupled with information from key and knowledgeable informants help enhance the evaluation of the sites. Making a test pit is an expensive exercise and the results would not be significantly different from other techniques which would study natural and man made disturbances already made on the earth.

Surface finds were studied and, when feasible, were collected.

A sea-worthy boat was needed to go to most of the sites. Informants and guides were needed to point and take us to the reported sites since none of us were familiar

with the present conditions (natural and man-made) of the islands. Our expeditions were affected greatly with the willingness of our guides, informants and boatmen to take us to the reported archaeological sites.

Formation of the Team

The original plan was to travel alone from Manila to Tawi-Tawi and form a team composed of local scholars, especially students from the Mindanao State University (MSU). However, while getting a permit for archeological exploration in the National Museum, the curator of the Cultural Division, Mr. Efren Flores, informed me that I had to get one of his men to accompany me throughout the entire exploration so as to ensure the legitimacy and legality of my work. I did not object to this procedure except that I had to shoulder all the expenses of the National Museum representative which was not in my budget. I welcomed the presence of Mr. Leonardo Alegre to the team because I have known him since the late sixties and seventies, during my days as a museum researcher in the Division of Anthropology of the National Museum.

Another member was added to the team when a graduating anthropology student volunteered to become my official photographer. He is a professional fashion photographer. He professed tiredness in taking photographs of models in their Makati office and wanted to expand his experience and learn about field methods in archaeology by joining an archaeological campaign. I could not resist the offer of Pierre Cruz to become the team photographer. However, I showed him the budget proposal and told him that there are no funds for a professional photographer. I was, however willing to pay for his expenses (transportation, per diem).

Timetable

5 August	Flew from Manila to Zamboanga. Rode a boat from Zamboanga to Bongao
6 August	Arrived at Bongao 11:30 a.m. Took another boat from Bongao to Sanga-Sanga
7 August	Paid courtesy calls on Chanellor Alih, Col. Fransisco Alvarado Paid courtesy call on Tawi-Tawi Governor Sadikuladalla Salih, Bongao Mayor Samsaya and Datu Abubakar Halun
8 August	Shopped for provisions and looked for boat for three day trip to Dungon, Panglima Sugala.
9 August	Boat ride from Sanga-Sanga to Bongao to Dungon. Exploration of Kubo.
10 August	More exploration of Dungon. Searched for location of reported sunken anchor.
11 August	Returned to Bongao. Explored Sanga-Sanga Island. Organized students to join exploration.
12 August	Awaited guide who did not appear. Spent the afternoon exploring Nanil.
13 August	Spent entire day looking for a new base camp. Organized a tour of the Bolobok Rock Shelter, Pandan-Pandan and Lakit-Lakit with the Tourism office staff.
14 August	Moved base camp from MSU guest house to Datu Halun's house in Bongao. Took a boat trip to Bolobok Rock Shelter with four Tourism officials.

	Visited Pababag Island.
15 August	More exploration of Bongao: near the commercial center and Datu Halun's house.
16 August	Visited Pababag Island again. Visited Prof. Abduljim Hassan at MSU, Sanga-Sanga to inquire about probable archaeological sites to explore.
17 August	Moved base camp from Halun's house back to MSU guest house in Sanga-Sanga.
18 August	Pierre Cruz, photo-journalist, goes home. Probably suffering from culture shock! Met Prof. Muktar Muhammad Tahil.
19 August	Organized 6 students of Prof. Tahil to meet Wednesday afternoon. Met with the 6 students. Planned to visit Sitangkai, Sibutu and Simunul.
20 August	Explored Bongao Gravel and Sand Quarry
21 August	Went to Sitangkai. Paid courtesy call to the mayor. Met with Musang Malabong.
22 August	Explored Sibutu; asked permission from lot owner to visit archaeological site.
23 August	Explored Sibutu and Sitangkai. Returned to Bongao.
24 August	Went to Simmunul. Explored Bohe Indangan and Tong Gusong.
25 August	Explored Bohe Susan I and II. Returned to Bongao.
26 August	Explored Manuk Mankaw
27 August	Looked for boat to bring us to Bannaran, Sapa-Sapa and Dungon.
28 August	Went to and explored Bannaran.
29 August	Explored Bannaran Proper.
31 August	Went to and explored Dungon.
01 September	Headed back to Sanga-Sanga from Dungon.
02 September	Paid courtesy good-byes.
03 September	Waited for the student volunteers to bring the Chinese ceramics found in Simunul. Took boat from Bongao back to Zamboanga.
04 September	Overnight at Zamboanga.
05 September	Flight back to Manila.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRAINING PROGRAM: ARCHAEOLOGY FOR NON-ARCHAEOLOGISTS

Part of my project was to initiate an archaeological training program for local scholars. My idea was to look for people in MSU who are interested in archaeology and bring them and/or their students to the field for a few days and expose them to archaeological field methods in archaeology.

My first few days were a bit frustrating. The people who professed interest in the endeavor, and were supposedly willing and able to go to the field with me did not show up. I cannot blame these professors because it really was very difficult to go out of their scheduled activities to do archaeology.

I went to the local Tourism office and met with the officials who very accommodating although the office was undergoing some major personnel changes. Four of them, Amin Sabal, Banhimar Balee, Darwin and Amil Huanja Uddin went

with me so I could orient them with the Bolobok Rock Shelter—the oldest and the only Stone Age site (so far) in the Southern Philippines.*

A few days later, I was fortunate enough to meet Prof. Muktar Muhamad Takil. Six of his students joined my archaeological training program. They are: Nursida Gabil, Melinda Yusop, Zeneida Jamad, Adha Sali, Abnel Biral, Faizal Sajili. I had an orientation briefing with them. I did not expect much from the student volunteers. I just wanted them to experience the various procedures and activities one goes through before, and while exploring a reported archaeological site: a courtesy call to the mayor, looking for informants, visiting the site-owners and getting their permission to visit the site, photo-documentation of the site and of surface finds.

I spent six days with the students. We spent three days in Sitangkai and Sibutu and another three in Simunul. I taught them how to map read, use a portable transit and how to operate a global positioning system (GPS).

One of them was from the island of Simunul and another was from Sitangkai—both places, according to two independent sources—Datu Halun and Prof. Abduljim Hasan, possess archaeological sites. They acted as my guides and informants for those sites.

I learned from the students as they learned from me. They brought me to places I did not know, introduced me to people who will help me with my archaeological mission, told me where to go and not to go and, most importantly, how to behave properly so as not to offend, consciously or unconsciously, the people of their community.

They also assisted me with the photo-documentation. Before this six-day exploration, my team photographer had to leave the project for personal reasons.

MUSEUM FOR THE MASSES

The third part of my mission in Tawi-Tawi was to help set-up or initiate an anthropological museum. I have always made it a mission in my life to preach the value of museums as a center for gathering natural and cultural specimens to showcase the resources of a given area. A good, well-documented anthropological research museum will go a long way in educating the people of a local community in appreciating what they have and what they are. The best way to instill ethnic pride is to show the unique as well as the universal characteristics of a given ethnic group. Since anthropological focus is on the ordinary and the social rather than the extraordinary and the individual—ethnic pride is instilled and social solidarity is achieved.

I managed to convince the Governor of Tawi-Tawi, the Mayor of Bongao and the Chancellor of MSU that an anthropology museum was needed. The officers and staff of the Tourism office were also very helpful and enthusiastic.

One of the best ways to start a museum is to think small, to think Third World. Do not aim for a museum that would compare in scale to the Smithsonian Museum or the bigness of the British Museums. One should look for a building, even a room

* Editors' note: Talikud, located next to Samal Island in Davao, is also a "Stone Age" site in the Southern Philippines (Solheim, personal communication).

where one can start to store whatever specimens one picks. There must also be people who are willing and able to start and see it survive.

An ideal place where to store and later display the collection is in a school building, barangay hall, or a house. What is important is that the specimens would be safe from the elements and from robbers. The community must be involved because they, more than anybody else, are the primary beneficiaries of such a project. It is their cultural heritage that is at stake. Nobody will nurture it except them. No amount of help whether material or mental, will suffice if they themselves are not interested in it.

We could set up a small museum immediately by bringing a lot of maps—topographic, geological, meteorological, and ethnographic—photographs of the place and the people and writing a brief profile of how the people live—earn a living, raise a family, bury their dead, etc. We could also get information about their songs and dances and have these audio, photo and video documented. This will take four to six months to complete depending upon the manpower available and logistical allotment.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Little archaeological study has been done in Tawi-Tawi. In the 1920's, H. Otley Beyer¹ made some primary exploration of some of the islands and he proposed that a more in-depth campaign be done. In 1969, Spoehr² excavated in the Bolobok rockshelter. In 1969 and 1970, Israel Cabanilla did excavation work in Sanga-Sanga (Cabanilla 1992). The National Museum followed with other expeditions in the later years (see site reports).

There has yet to be a campaign to systematically map out all the archaeological sites in Tawi-Tawi or any other part of the Philippines. This is the beginning of that campaign.

Methodology

The primary task of this project was to conduct preliminary surveys, exploration of as many sites as I can in thirty days. My strategy toward this end was to look for key informants who were qualified to know what I was looking for and were willing to help. I was very lucky to have obtained the help of Datu Halun of Bongao, Mr. Musa Malabong of Sitangkai and Prof. Tahil and his students.

No excavation of any kind was done. No test pit was dug. However, it is not necessary to dig a sondage when other techniques would suffice such as scrutiny of road cuts, freshly dug graves, bulldozed surfaces, irrigation ditches, walking of the beds along the banks of streams, creeks and rivers. These man made and natural disturbances on the earth were more than enough to indicate whether a place is archaeologically significant or not. These techniques coupled with information from key informants helped enhance the evaluation of the sites. As mentioned earlier, a formal test pit excavation was not necessary at this stage of the research.

¹ In 1921 and 1923, H. Otley Beyer along with Coleman made the first archaeological expeditions to Tawi-Tawi. He focused on the islands of Siassi, Tawi-Tawi and the Sibutu island group.

² Spoehr test excavated in the Bolobok rockshelter in 1969.

I have made a table of the sites visited, informants names, surface finds, if any. I have assured Chancellor Ali, Governor Salih, Mayor Samsuya and all that I have met that I will not take out any artifact. If and when I do, I promise to return it to the place where I got it. I have assured them as I have assured all the people I have dealt with for the last thirty years of research that I only take photographs and memories.

Underwater Archaeology

There are two types of archaeological sites reported to me: underwater sites and open air ones. I cannot conduct underwater archaeology. I do not have the gear, the guts, or the gumption to go underwater. There were neither local individuals nor institutions, whether government or private, that can do a full-scale underwater project because it is a very expensive enterprise. And this is the primary reason why only foreigners with huge capital outlay have been involved in full-scale underwater archaeology.

Most, if not all who report to me about underwater sites are very cautious and sometimes vague about the exact location of the site. People know the (economic) value of such sites and feel that as finders they should have some proprietary rights over it. They feel that information they give should have a monetary equivalent or a percentage of the finds.

There are informants, however, who wholeheartedly give reports of supposed shipwrecks beneath the sea but add that they mysteriously appear and disappear depending upon the mood and whim of spiritual guardians. This was the case when we went out in search of a huge anchor around Kubo, Dungon, Panglima Sugala. My informants claimed that sometimes the anchor could be seen from the surface of the water and sometimes it could not. We went there twice and did not see an anchor because the water was too murky and the informants were not certain about the exact location of this elusive anchor.

I have listed two underwater sites that do not belong to Tawi-Tawi: one in Jolo and another in Zamboanga. My listing of underwater archaeological sites might help future archaeological projects. I could verify if these sites truly exist or if they are only in the minds of my informants. An underwater scanner would authenticate or debunk these reported sites. Such equipment is available in Manila but the price is unaffordable—six to eight thousand dollars (\$6,000-8,000). And of what use would it be if I could locate a shipwreck beneath the sea? Only foreign funded commercial treasure hunters would benefit. I believe that we should leave such artifact complex as is until we, Filipinos, are capable of doing it ourselves with our own manpower and our own funding. I have a sneaky suspicion that a lot of our cultural treasures are lost because of joint enterprises where we cannot closely monitor the extraction of artifacts on a 24-hour basis. As a professional archaeologist, I am duty bound to give the list of underwater sites but I hope that it is deleted or withheld from public access to prevent the loss and destruction of our cultural heritage.

Terrestrial Archaeology

With only twenty days allocated for actual field exploration, it was tactically impossible to cover the whole province of Tawi-Tawi. What I tried to do was to visit the outlying islands and reserve the main island for another time. My plan was nothing fixed but tentative—depending upon my informants. There were places I

wanted to explore but my informants would not allow me for various reasons because of ethnic difference, family feuding, pirates, political rivalry and religious and magical sanctions. It was in this sense that I was wholly dependent upon my informants and guides. The land sites that were explored were mainly on the southern part of the island group.

Bongao

There were no new prehistoric archaeological sites discovered, despite the fact that an extensive exploration was conducted for a couple of days along the coastal area of the island. Nanil, Pahut, Tubig Tama—all yielded negative finds. The invasion of present-day population could have destroyed the prehistoric sites. This is also the case with Pababag Island.

Pababag Island

Pababag Island is less than a kilometer northeast as the crow flies from Bongao. It is approximately two and a half (2.5) kilometers long and one and a half (1.5) kilometers wide. There were negative finds.

Pababag was extensively used by the Japanese imperial forces during the Second World War. It was their naval headquarters, heavily fortified with pillboxes located at strategic points. There is a sunken Japanese ship north of the island. This ship is visible from the surface. The present day people are relatively new in the area—no evidence of prehistoric settlements. What is significant about the place is that they produce pottery that is sold commercially in Bongao. I highly recommend that an ethno-archaeological study be conducted among the pottery makers of Pababag. I have not seen other pottery makers working on the other islands I've visited. Perhaps it will yield more information of the existence of the wide distribution of earthenware vessels in association with trade wares in all the islands that yielded positive results.

Two of the most significant finds in Tawi-Tawi are the presence of locally made earthenware vessels and foreign-made trade ware.

Sanga-Sanga

Bolobok Rock Shelter is archaeologically the most significant find for the entire Tawi-Tawi province. Numerous scholars from Casino, Spoehr, Cabanilla, Roquillo, Dizon and some Japanese scholars from Okinawa have visited the site, affirming that Bolobok Rock Shelter is indeed the earliest and most significant find (Ronquillo *et. al.* 1992).

When I returned to Bolobok, to help orient the Tourism office people, I found out that a large portion of the site was pot hunted. Holes eight to ten feet deep were found at the back of the rock shelter.

When I visited Pandan-Pandan, about 30 minutes north of Bolobok by boat, the place was not what I thought it was to be—another rock shelter similar to Bolobok. It was nothing but a sinkhole, too dangerous to explore.

There were other sites in Sanga-Sanga that should be visited which were recommended to me by Prof. Abduljim Hassan: Luuk Pandan, Lato-Lato but military authorities told me to defer the exploration for peace and order reasons.

There were other sites north of Sanga-Sanga that were recommended for more exploration but, once more, I was prevented from going because my Badjao boatman refused to go.

Simunul Island

The island of Simunul is approximately eleven (11) kilometers south of Bongao as the crow flies. It is eight (8) kilometers long and six (6) kilometers wide. I got most of the information about the place names of Simunul from Hadji Bashirudin Ulama, the 78-year old Grand Imam of Tong Gusong, Simmunul Island. According to him, Simunul was coined by Makdum, one of the seven Muslim missionaries who came to Sulu in the late 1380's. It is a combination of two Arabic words "*simu*" which means "my name" and "*nur*" meaning "light". "Simunur", therefore, means "my name is light". Since in Sinama the letter "r" is pronounced as "l", Simunur became Simunul.

There were three areas visited in the island of Simunul: Bohe Indanan, Tong Gusong and Bohe Susan. Except for Bohe Susan, all sites in Simunul are old cemeteries near the coast. The people presently living in these areas do not know who are buried in these graves except those which have been made recently. The *tridacna gigas*, which the locals call *kima* are associated with these graves.

All other finds are also surface ones—pottery sherds which are too fragmentary to be reconstructed and/or determine their original form. The majority of these finds are locally made earthenware vessels and foreign-made trade wares belonging to the 14th and 15th century and the 17th and 18th century, according to Mr. Alegre, from the National Museum.

Bohe Indangan (Sinama) and Tubig Indangan (Tausug) are one and the same place. These names replaced the older name Timbakkang, a Sinama term which refers to a tree that was used as fuel by Simunul residents.

There are two archaeological sites in Bohe Indanan. One is in the town proper and the other is 1.5 km south of it. The Bohe Indanan cemetery is about 5000 square meters. Some of the graves have markers made of wood while some are made from coral slabs. The newer ones are made of hollow blocks and fenced with iron grills. It is easy to determine which graves are new and which are old because of the presence and absence of the Okir designs. These graves have been spared by treasure hunters because of the belief that whoever disturbs them will be cursed. This belief was especially emphasized by Mr. Natchier Sali, an uncle of my main informant in Simunul, Adha Sali.

Tong Gusong is one of the northwestern-most towns of the island. It is located at the tip of a natural cove. Tong Gusong is a Sinama term meaning "tip of a sand bar." The site in Tong Gusong contained very fragmentary earthenware sherds associated with Chinese trade ware belonging to the late Ming and/or early Ching dynasties. The authority from the National Museum identified some of the sherds as attributable to the late Ming.

The earthenware sherds are too fragmentary to reconstruct. Some of the sherds, which are incised are very thick and contain heavy incisions in the surface while others have very light incisions (Figure 3). Some show impressed designs on the outer edge of the lip while others have red slipping. Most, however, are plain. It is common for these sherds to have been tempered with grainy or ground shells.

Bohe Susan is two kilometers east of Bohe Indanan and is inland. There are two caves in the general area frequented because they contain pools of fresh water which make them ideal for picnics. There are no surface finds in this area. I do not think that pre-Spanish Filipinos would have utilized this because it is far from the coast. It may have been used by hunters and gatherers but not long enough to leave any

recognizable artifacts. Or if there were artifacts, they could have been removed by present day picnic crowds.

Bannaran Island

Bannaran Island is about thirty-six (36) kilometers east of Bongao as the crow flies. It is approximately ten (10) kilometers long and two (2) kilometers wide. The settlement is oriented toward the north side of the island strip.

Two sites in Bannaran were visited: one outside the MSU High School compound (A) and another in the town proper (B). Both sites are extensive cemeteries that appear to be very old—and apparently well preserved.

Bannaran A is located about 100 meters from the shore, below low hills, near a mosque. Bannaran B is a very old cemetery with plenty of wooden and coral grave markers with the Okir design, newer ones and transition ones—the types abound. The cemetery covers an extensive area. The barangay halls, the mosque, the volleyball grounds have been built over it.

Most of the pottery is local earthenware sherds and Chinese trade wares belonging to the 14th and 15th century (late Ming Dynasty). Some of the Ming sherds have unglazed portions at the bottom of the inner surface. There are some sherds which have been identified by National Museum experts as Singaporean ware belonging to the 17th and 18th century well into the Ching Dynasty. Most of the wares are blue and white.

The locally made pottery is mostly plain. The biscuits were tempered with shell. Some sherds were incised on the outer edges of the rim. The incisions could have been made by metal or a sharpened bamboo instrument.

Sapa-Sapa, Secubin Island

Sapa-Sapa is approximately twenty-seven (27) kilometers northeast of Bongao as the crow flies. It is approximately seventeen (17) kilometers east of Bannaran Island. It is approximately six (6) kilometers long and two (2) kilometers wide. Pamasan is located in the northern coast of the island. There are very old neglected unknown graves. Only those of Datu Halum's great, great grandparents are known.

Manuk Mankaw Island

Manuk Mankaw is approximately twenty-seven (27) kilometers south, as the crow flies, from Bongao. It is only approximately three (3) kilometers south of Simunul Island. It is six (6) kilometers long and four (4) kilometers wide.

Datu Halun advised me to go there and see Hadji Matal Adil, a former principal of Manuk Mankaw High School. He (Hadji Matal) became my chief informant. He told me the settlement pattern in the island, that the settlements are mostly on the northern side. He was the one who told me to go to Luuk Datan.

The barangay Luuk Datan used to be called Luuk Satan meaning South wind because when the South wind blows during the months of July to October the place is calm. However, the "s" was mispronounced and thus, Luuk Datan.

Finds collected from an old unknown cemetery were earthenware sherds with the outer edges of the rim impressed with decorations. It is very difficult to determine whether these sherds formed plates, bowls or jars. There are also Chinese trade wares belonging to the 14th and 15th century. These finds are similar to those I have found in Simunul.

Both these sites are located along a beach and no more than two meters above the high water mark. Both sites are preserved. The grave is relatively untouched while the other is being eroded by the sea.

A grinding stone, one foot in diameter and which informants described as huge, is near a solar dryer which has been built on a midden. This was the only midden that I saw in the course of my exploration in Tawi-Tawi. The midden remains undisturbed because it was accidentally cemented.

Reports of a grave significantly bigger than extraordinary was not seen at its reported location near the municipal hall. It is normal for people, not only in Tawi-Tawi but elsewhere, to claim that the graves unearthed are larger than normal. This was also the case in Cagayan, Isabela, Pangasinan, Bicol and Banguet. Ordinary people normally think that skeletal remains in their sites are larger than normal. Like all the other islands which yielded positive finds which should be excavated, an archaeological campaign should be conducted in Manuk Mankaw.

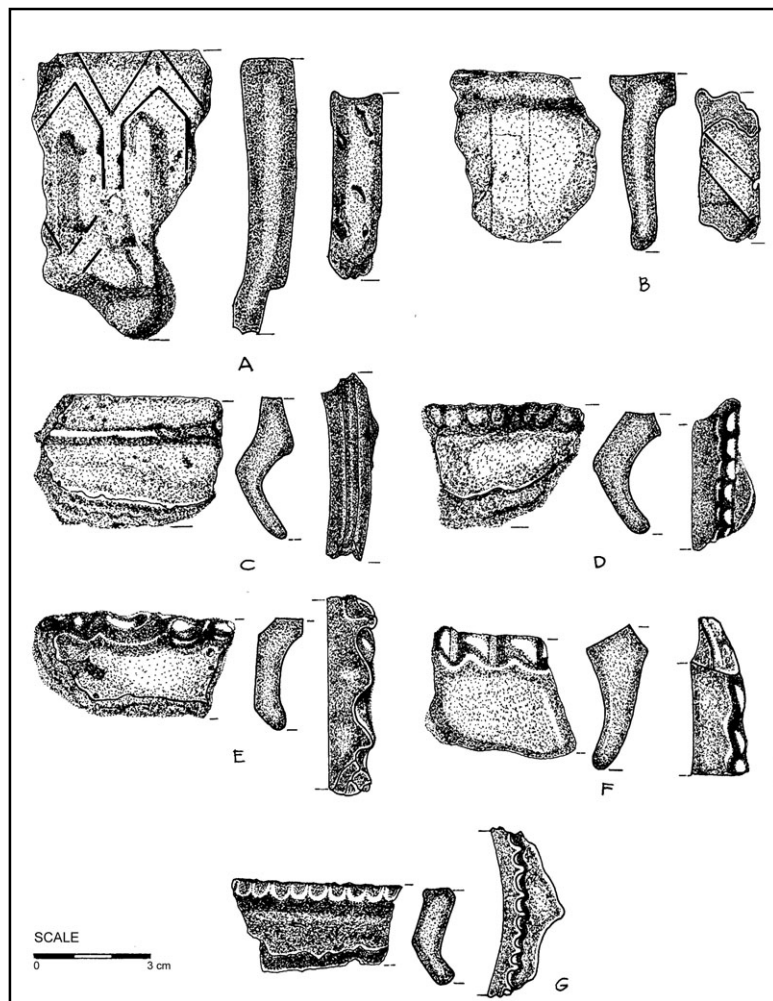


Figure 3 Earthenware sherds from Simunul Island (illustrated by Jonathan Jacar).

Kubo, Dungon, Panglima Sugala

Kubo is located in Tawi-Tawi Island. The distance between Bongao and Kubo is fifty (50) kilometers west as the crow flies. We could not go directly to the site and had to take a circuitous route because of seaweed farms and coral reefs that abound in the general area. There were two sites explored in Kubo: one, the archaeological site, below the sea level and the shrine of Sheik Makdum, ten (10) meters above sea level.

Dungon has a reputation for being a no man's land. If Tawi-Tawi and Sulu have a reputation of being dangerous, Dungon, by consensus among the residents of Tawi-Tawi, is a place to avoid. All this is folklore. One of the primary reasons given by the residents of Tawi-Tawi that perpetuates the myth of Dungon's "notoriety" are the presence of armed illegal loggers and illegal fishermen, smugglers, pirates and other lawless elements. We went and stayed for a couple of days there, unarmed. And nothing untoward happened to us. The only danger that confronted us were natural: crocodiles (in the sea) and Malaria-carrying mosquitoes and the isolation from any commercial area.

The archaeological site in Kubo alone is enough reason for going back to Tawi-Tawi to conduct a full-scale archaeological campaign. This is very rich and humanly undisturbed. Within every radius of a hundred meters, artifacts, mostly of Chinese origin dating from 17th to 18th century abound.

The site is surrounded by pristine mangroves on one side and by a dipterocarp forest on the other side. The sea in the area abound with marine and wildlife. I saw a crocodile and huge *pawikan* (sea turtle). There are monkeys and parrots too. Mosquitoes abound by the millions—one of the reasons why this place is sparsely populated. There is also no mosque in this predominantly Muslim area. The Ilocanos who were sent there during the early 1950's have all left, mostly due to malaria.

The site is rich but it is located in an area that is adversely affected by the tide. During the high tide the artifacts are covered with water but when the tide ebbs the artifacts can be seen. This is one of the problems that will confront the excavator. The inaccessibility of the place is another reason why it would be expensive to excavate in this site. Dungon is half a day's boat ride from Bongao. If an archaeological excavation is to be conducted all of these problems must be factored in. But the rewards of a scientific excavation will be amply returned in terms of artifacts recovered and information gathered. From surface finds alone, we were able to see all sorts of trade ware sherds—plates, bowls, jars, earthenware sherds and it is probable that we will be able to get a lot of whole pieces if there would be an excavation.

The logistics of mounting that campaign is going to be expensive and quite tedious and slow because excavation can only be done when the tide is low. The excavation will be limited and dictated by the ebb and flow of the tides. One will always be submerged in water and underlying soft soil. The dangers of being infected by Malaria is real. This is one of the reasons why this site is safe for now—relative isolation from the rest of the world.

The value of the site archaeologically is that it is undisturbed and therefore a very good site for understanding the 17th and 18th century Tawi-Tawi. Other sites, such as on the other islands I have visited, will be better understood if it is compared with the excavations in Dungon. A Dungon archaeological site may be made the basis for comparing other islands which have been disturbed that have deposits of 17th and 18th century artifacts. I do not know if we would be able to find any midden sites in the

area but certainly it would just be a matter of time and more exploration to pinpoint the burials and the middens.

Dungon, therefore, is the primary archaeological target for the understanding of the 17th and 18th century Tawi-Tawi. Beyer (1947) was correct in his assessment of the area.

Sibutu

The island of Sibutu is approximately thirty-seven (37) kilometers southeast of Bongao as the crow flies. It is a long and narrow island strip measuring approximately thirty (30) kilometers in length and four and a half (4.5) kilometers in width. The sites explored are located in the southern parts of the island. Agal-agal farms are extensive and tidal flats cover the southern tip of the island.

Ligayan is located at southeastern-most part of the island. Two brown vessels, perfect specimens, were recovered 60 years ago by Muhamud Tahang's family.

The Shrine of Sheik Muhamud is located in the west, approximately five (5) kilometers from the southern tip of the island, facing the Tumindao Channel which separates Sibutu from the island of Tumindao. There was a stoneware jar with a dragon design, glazed stoneware, no glaze on the inner base and around the center, however, the center is glazed.

Tanduowok island is a very small island approximately 150 meters from the southern tip of Sibutu. Tanduowok refers to the tree of crows. The finds were mostly Chinese ceramics similar to those found in the shrine of Sheik Muhamud.

Sitangkai

Sitangkai is 60 km southwest of Bongao as the crow flies. It is a very small island measuring only about half a kilometer by half a kilometer at its longest and widest point.

The name Sitangkai is believed to be the name of a Chinese trader, Tang Kai, who used to live in the island. People would say that they will go and see *si Tang Kai*.

The site in Sitangkai is similar to the sites in Bannaran and Sapa-Sapa. Although not quite as extensive, the grave site revealed the same sherds types of Chinese tradewares belonging to the Ming dynasty and local earthenware sherds.

Reported Archaeological Sites

I wanted to explore more sites however there were constrains: (1) the guides and informants, (2) the geographical location of the site and (3) the (natural and social) situation of the places. For example, ethnic differences prevented me from exploring the barangay of Pakyas which was only a few kilometers from the MSU compound. I wanted to visit the next barangay after Pangasinan but my guide, who was a Sinama, refused to go to Pakyas, which was a Tausug barangay.

There were religio-magico sanctions in Gusi a small triangular island about one and a half (1.5) kilometers from the island of Sitangkai. It is believed and feared that, if the party goes there, one of us will be harmed or even killed.

Mantabuan Island, only a few kilometers from Bannaran, was not visited Datu Halun thought it unwise to risk the safety of the archaeological team. Some of his relatives have a feud with some Tausug bandits whose relatives are living in the

island. The Tausug bandits were collecting protection money in the area until very recently when the residents decided to terminate the extortion by terminating the extortionists. All the bandits were killed. Soon after, the bandit killer was also killed at point blank range in Jolo.

I would have explored more around the coastal area of Sanga-Sanga but the marine authorities would not allow me to visit the site. I was also unable to visit other sites near the MSU compound in Sanga-Sanga because my informants and guides would not show up. Some precious exploration hours and days have been lost due to these no-show guides.

Mapun was another island I wanted to explore. Three informants told me that it is a very rich site. But Mapun is a very isolated island. It takes an eighteen to twenty (18-20) hour boat ride from Bongao to reach it. A student and an MSU high school teacher told me about the artifacts they have seen from Mapun. Both of these informants are native to the island. Their stories were confirmed by a marine sergeant who was stationed there for a year. Sergeant Castro told me that he saw human bones and Chinese trade wares when the MSU compound was being bulldozed for new construction.

CONCLUSION

A total of ten islands were explored: Bongao, Sanga-Sanga, Pababag, Simunul, Manuk Mankaw, Sibutu, Sitangkai, Bannaran, Secubin (Sapa-Sapa), Dungon on Tawi-Tawi Island.

Bongao and Pababag Islands could be written off as having no more prehistoric archaeological sites. It is not worth investigating further. The increase of the populations of Bongao especially during martial law years in the seventies have wiped out whatever archaeological resources or records prehistoric man left in the area. However, Pababag Island is interesting because of the pottery industry which is struggling to survive. An ethno-archaeological study of the industry could be made to see whether or not it could help in the reconstruction of the culture history of Tawi-Tawi. It would be interesting to find out how old this pottery making is and how it has been affected by the importation of foreign made ceramics in the 17th and 18th century.

Sanga-Sanga Island is still the oldest site that contains prehistoric materials dated to 6,550+ 180 C-14 years B.P. and 7,945+190 C-14 years B.P. (Spoehr, 1973).

All the islands surveyed yielded similar locally made earthenware vessels and 17th and 18th century foreign made ceramics. These dates could be pushed back a couple of centuries earlier, perhaps even as far back as the 12th and 13th centuries.

The sites in Manuk Mankaw, Simunul, Bannaran, Secubin (Sapa-Sapa), Sibutu and Sitangkai appear to be traditional cemeteries which contain a lot of materials attributable to the 17th and 18th century. These sites are constantly being disturbed by present day populations that need habitation and burial areas.

Dungon, Panglima Sugala in Tawi-Tawi Island appears to be the only undisturbed site. Various natural and cultural factors have contributed to the site's preservation.

The similarities of the finds on all the positive sites leaves no doubt in my mind that the peoples of Tawi-Tawi in the 17th and 18th century were coastal dwellers

belonging to the same ethnic group, exploiting the same or similar environment/s with the same or very similar technological equipment.

The systematic archaeological survey of Tawi-Tawi has just begun. Although the sites visited gave us a fair sampling of the whole province, the Island of Tawi-Tawi has yet to be surveyed. We have pinpointed where the archaeological sites are and gave them tentative dating based on typology of foreign made ceramics. Contacts have been established. The next step now is to conduct a more problem oriented archaeological campaign for Tawi-Tawi.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is amazing that all the open air sites recommended by my informants Datu Halun, Prof. Abduljim Hassan and Musang Malabong were true. All contained trade ware and locally made earthenware pottery. Most of the surface finds were very fragmentary and impossible to reconstruct. This is not surprising since most of the sites we visited were traditional cemeteries and most of them are still being used to this day.

What puzzles me most is that although these cemeteries have apparently been used for centuries, the people who are presently living in these communities do not know who was buried there. I think there must have been a hiatus in the use of these gravesites. As to why and when—those are the questions that need to be answered.

The islands which yielded positive results should be excavated but there would be a lot of problems involved, mainly anthropological: (1) people, Muslims do not want Muslim graves to be excavated and this would be the primary difficulty in doing a dig. Except for the site in Dungon—which is below the sea level—the technical aspects of excavation are relatively simple because the sites are very near populated area/s and labor would not be a problem. The sites are relatively stratified and exposed. There is no need to hurry because the sites are not being disturbed except when a new grave will have to be made. A tactic that could be followed is to wait for death to occur and help excavate a new grave and use this new grave as a test pit to use for archaeology. This will, to some extent solve the problem of the sociology of archaeology. There would be two purposes for digging a grave—religious and scientific.

Tawi-Tawi is in a transition period. Islands such as Simunul, Sitangkai, Sibutu, Manuk Mankaw are undergoing rapid population increase and is therefore encroaching on archaeological areas. This is the reason that the cemeteries found in these islands are being reoccupied and used other than for graves. Schools, barangay halls, mosques are being built over these cemeteries. Such a phenomenon is not uncommon. People all over the world built on what is available and accessible and graves and cemeteries are no exceptions. This is especially true if the people buried are unknown—if there are no recognized and recognizable ties between the dead and the living. This is now what is happening all over Tawi-Tawi. It is now time to document these archaeological sites before they are altogether lost.

The sites surveyed covered only the smaller islands east and south of Tawi-Tawi. There must be an effort to explore Tawi-Tawi Island, itself, sits on the west, that are along the area of the Bolobok Rock Shelter, and sites on the east. This would require at least another two months of exploration. What we need to do now is to look for

sites with dates similar, older and younger than that of Bolobok. The gap between the finds in Bolobok and the results of this exploration is too wide. We need to look for the sites that fill the gap between these two dates. I believe that there are sites similar to Bolobok in age or much later which could be found on the west coast of Tawi-Tawi island. The thirty-day archaeological campaign was not enough. We recommend that another exploration be conducted now that we know more or less the brief archaeological resources of the eastern islands.

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