

Book Review

Jesus T. Peralta. 2002. *The Tiaoqui Collection: Pre-Hispanic Philippine Pottery at the Ateneo de Manila University. Breathing into Clay Philippine Prehistory*. Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press.

—*Wilhelm G. Solheim II*

The text of this book, *Breathing into Clay Philippine Prehistory* by Jesus Peralta, sets the stage for the photographic presentation of the collection of primarily prehistoric earthenware pottery donated to the Ateneo de Manila University by Manuel de Santos Tiaoqui.

The book is meant for a general audience so the text does not include any references or footnotes that would support specific statements the author made. This makes it a bit difficult to review as I thought I knew quite a bit about Philippine prehistoric and recently made earthenware, but I find myself not acquainted with some of the sources that may have been used to come by some of the information presented. The latest references in the “Bibliography” are from 1984. There have been considerable publications on Philippine prehistory and earthenware pottery since that time.

The first problem that I found in Peralta’s text was on the dating he presented on the first entry of man into the Philippines. The first sentence of his text (p. 12) states that prehistory in the Philippines began 750,000 years ago as shown by man-made objects of that dating found in the Cagayan Valley in northern Luzon. I do not know of any recent archaeological excavations that have pushed back the first arrival of man in the Philippines to much more than 20,000 years ago. The finds of fossil remains of Elephas, Stegodon and Rhinoceros (p. 12) “found in the same lithology” as stone tools (as first thought) have been generally agreed by geologists who have worked at the site, and archaeologists, to be only accidentally associated. Personally I think it could be possible that they were associated, but it is unlikely. It would appear that the first arrival of man in the Philippines came from the south to Palawan when it was joined with Borneo and Mainland Southeast Asia at the time of much lower sea levels in the Late Pleistocene. Ancestral hominids

were present in Java as early as 1,800,000 years ago so it is possible that related hominids could have gotten as far as Palawan, but no hint of this has been found as yet.

The second problem is the dating of the beginning of the Neolithic in the Philippines; this, assuming the domestication of some plants, Peralta puts at the end of the Palaeolithic “with the end of the Ice Age at about 11,000 to 7,000 B.C.” (p. 2). Here I agree with him, but I know of only one other person, a non-archaeologist, who would also agree (Oppenheimer 1999, 111-12). My presentation of the dating for this early spread of horticulturalists into Island Southeast from coastal South China and Viet Nam has not yet been published.

The archaeologist best known and accepted by most other archaeologists outside of the Philippines is Peter Bellwood. He hypothesizes that agriculture spread out of South China to Taiwan, along with the development and spread of the Austronesian languages (Bellwood 1997: 202-24, 241-42). This movement of people from southern China to Taiwan, according to Bellwood, probably started in the late fifth or fourth millennium B.C. and then continued south into the Philippines by at least 2000 B.C. (pp. 241-42). According to Bellwood this means the beginning of the “Neolithic” in the Philippines would have been around 2,500 B.C. My most recent disagreement with this hypothesis of Bellwood’s was published in 2000.

The next problem is Peralta’s dating of the beginning of pottery manufacture in the Philippines. For the sites with the earliest pottery manufacture, Peralta (p. 13) says: “The dating of the sites have [*sic*] been placed at 6650 BP at the latest and 7945 BP at the earliest ... The subsequent dates clustering about the fifth millennium BC establish pottery technology as already widespread in the northern and southern portions of the archipelago.”

Again, Bellwood, the most widely accepted authority outside of the Philippines, had this to say about the earliest pottery in the Philippines, a red slipped ware: “The Philippines reveal a widespread horizon of red-slipped pottery beginning perhaps around 2500 BC.” I disagree with this as there are several—controversial, according to Bellwood—earlier dates for pottery in different areas of the Philippines, but most of them less than 3,000 B.C. I feel that the 6650 BP date (4,600 B.C.) for pottery could be possible, but that it is probably as much as a thousand years too early. I have no idea what the source of the date 7945 BP (ca. 5,900 B.C.) is.

I disagree with several other early datings of pottery that Peralta presents (pp. 13, 15, 16, 18, 19). The latter two datings refer to the timing of what he calls the "Golden Age of Philippine Pottery" (p. 19). Fox suggested that this "elegant" pottery was probably "already well distributed all over the country by the 8th century AD" (p. 18). This statement is likely to be the source for Peralta's "Golden Age." The earliest pottery reasonably well dated from Palawan and islands just to the north is the most variable in form, well-executed, and beautifully decorated Philippine pottery that I know; the pottery from Letta Letta Cave is a good example of this (Fox 1970, 16). New methods and varieties of very nice decoration came into eastern Palawan soon after this and reached its height there in the "Early Metal Age" around 400 B.C. to A.D. 200 or so. This continued to be made in Palawan and gradually expanded to islands in the Visayas, after which the pottery gradually loses variety in form and decoration until the Late Iron Age. By this time hardly any of the early high quality pottery was being made (Solheim 2002). Peralta considers (as I understand him) this Late Iron Age is when Philippine pottery is at its best (p. 19).

Peralta's generalizations about Philippine pottery (forms and decoration) and its relationships outside the Philippines are well presented.

The presentation of the Tiaoqui Collection (pp. 23-43) is well done. The collection is unusual in that it includes many plain pots of the cooking variety that are seldom illustrated in archaeological reports. They are well made and nice in their simplicity. Little study has been made of this kind of pottery except ethnographically by William Longacre and his students in Kalinga, northern Luzon (see a few references on p. 48), and it deserves to be the subject of extensive and intensive research.

References

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