

THE PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF ARTIFACTS FROM A METAL-AGE BURIAL SITE IN TAGBILARAN CITY, BOHOL, CENTRAL PHILIPPINES. By **Andrea Yankowski**, San Francisco State University (ayankow@onebox.com)

Project Background

In August 1998, a burial site was discovered during a construction project on private property in Tagbilaran City, Bohol. This site proved to be rich in material goods dating to the Metal Age. Unfortunately, the site was destroyed before the stratigraphy and context of the burial and artifacts could be recorded, but the materials were subsequently donated to the local museum (Bohol Museum) where they are currently on display and stored.

In May 2000, under the auspices of a U.S. Fulbright scholarship and with the support of the National Museum of the Philippines and the Bohol Provincial Government, I commenced a detailed analysis of the artifacts. The results of the preliminary analysis have provided important data for the understanding of the early political-economy and social practices of the region. The final results will be published later this year when they are submitted for the completion of my MA at San Francisco State University.

Preliminary Results

The site was located in a small coastal cave in the district of Ubujaan, Tagbilaran City. As reported by the laborers working on the property, approximately 1 meter from the surface an extended human burial was encountered surrounded by a large quantity of grave goods. Somewhat deeper, at what may have been another cultural level, additional artifacts were again encountered, including more earthenware vessels and glass beads. Relative dating indicates that the site dates to the Metal Age (400BC-900AD). Absolute dating will be undertaken if funding becomes available.

Due to the destruction of the site, it is not clear how many burials were represented, but it is certain that there was one extended burial and probably some associated jar burials. This interpretation is based on the skeletal remains of an adult individual as well as the presence of a large quantity of human teeth from individuals aged 3-4 years old to adult. Associated with these burials was a large quantity of grave goods including numerous earthenware vessels, iron implements, glass beads and bracelets, and both modified and unmodified shells.

Similar artifact types are found in other Metal Age burial sites throughout the Philippines, most notably, similar pottery forms and styles. These common elements include round bottom pots with angles, ring-footed bowls and dishes with cut-outs and perforations, as well as a decorative technique known as "scalloping and notching". This similarity suggests that there was a well-developed and widespread pottery industry and/or trade network in the region during the Metal Age.

Preliminary analysis of the non-plastic inclusions in the clay further confirms this interpretation. It has been noted that a variety of clay sources were being utilized, originating from different geographic regions. For instance, volcanic glass was noted in some of the samples suggesting that the pots (or raw material) originated from the northern volcanic area of the island, or from one of the surrounding volcanic islands.

Several unique vessels were noted which may indicate a local tradition or the work of an individual potter. One was a small flat-bottomed, narrowed-mouth jarlet. There were also two quadrapods, which are currently only documented from one other site in the Philippines- the Kalanay site in Masbate. Quadrapods have also been sporadically noted in some other sites in Southeast Asia, e.g., in Sulawesi. Further archaeological research in the region should help determine the historical relationship or these artifact types.

Some other important artifacts at the site include iron tools, glass beads and a fragment of a glass bracelet. All of the beads were monochrome, predominately red and yellow. The beads were manufactured using two different types of glass technologies- wound and drawn, once again indicating that there was probably an extensive trade network in place at the time. One glass bead type that deserves special mention is a 14-sided opaque orange bead, 10 millimeters in diameter. This may have been modeled after the more common faceted carnelian beads from India.

In summary, the artifact includes 78 earthenware vessels, over 1800 sherds, 130 glass beads, 31 fragments of iron implements, 96 human teeth, 2 fragments of glass bracelets, a few shell and stone artifacts, and some fragmented osteological remains. The quantity and range of artifact types, styles and technologies associated with this Metal Age burial provides important data for our understanding of early trade, technology and burial traditions in the region.