Archaeological Survey of Southern Zamboanga and the Sulu Archipelago

Received 24 June 1968

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THE Sulu Archipelago is of archaeological interest in that it forms a southern route of entry into the Philippines and in historic times was a trading center for the exchange of goods between the Moluccas, Borneo, Sulu itself, China, and mainland Southeast Asia. At the same time, it has had close relations with the southern part of the Zamboanga Peninsula, as well as with northern coastal Borneo (see Fig. 1).

Previous archaeological explorations in Zamboanga and Sulu are summarized in Beyer (1947:318–338). These had as their primary interest the recovery of Chinese and Southeast Asian trade ceramics, as exemplified by the Michigan survey (Guthe 1929) and the work of resident officials such as F. G. Roth. No stratigraphic excavations have ever been undertaken in the area.

During July and August 1967, I conducted an archaeological survey of the southern tip of Zamboanga Peninsula, Jolo, and Siasi for the purpose of locating midden sites suitable for stratigraphic excavations. This note reports on the results of the survey. Survey collections are deposited at the National Museum, Manila.

Archaeological Survey

Certain practical problems confront any archaeological survey of the region. The southern tip of Zamboanga Peninsula has a good coastal road system linking the principal barrios. However, the limited road systems of Basilan and Jolo link a few coastal points by roads across each island, which makes land survey difficult, while other islands in the Sulu archipelago lack road systems altogether. Consequently, survey by sea for the Sulu islands is imperative. The archaeological survey of Zamboanga was conducted by jeep; of Jolo by both jeep and water craft; and of Siasi by motor launch.

During the survey, special attention was given to locales that combined ready access to the sea, reasonably fertile agricultural land, and fresh water. This selection was based on the

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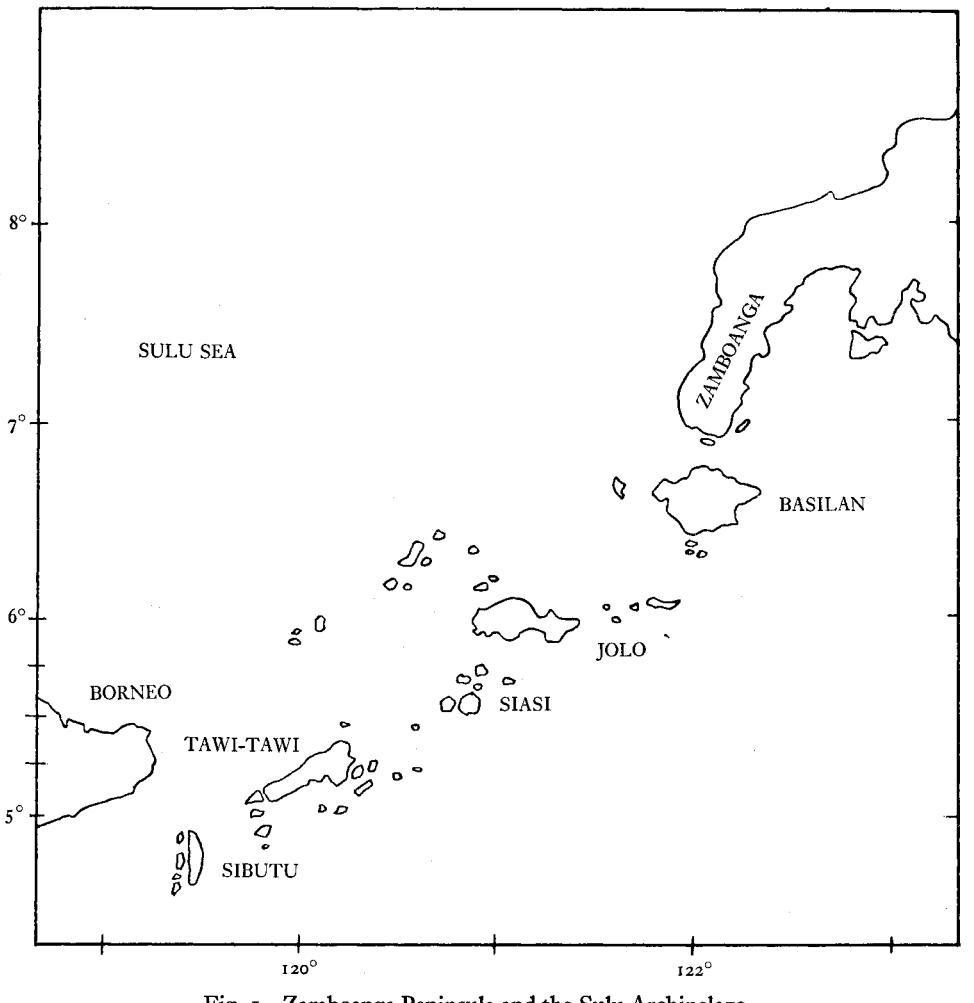

Fig. 1. Zamboanga Peninsula and the Sulu Archipelago.

premise that prehistoric nucleated settlements, if they existed at all, were based on a combined fishing-agricultural adaptation.

Zamboanga. About 70 km of coastal area along the southern tip of Zamboanga Peninsula was surveyed. The results were largely negative and suggest that nucleated settlements, at least on land rather than over the water's edge as is the contemporary Samal custom, may have only a recent history in this area. It is possible that in prehistoric times the land back of the shoreline was very thinly settled by swidden agriculturalists, most likely the ancestors of the Subanun. However, two locations deserve future strati-testing. One is Fort Pilar and the immediately adjacent area in Zamboanga City proper. Fort Pilar, whose massive masonry walls are still standing, dates from 1635, and around it grew the small settlement from which the present Zamboangueno population is derived. It may well have been the location of prior settlements. The other location is an unoccupied strand where the Ayala River flows into the sea, west of Zamboanga City proper. According to tradition, this was the site of a settlement at the time the Spanish arrived.

Along the south and east tip of Zamboanga Peninsula, a number of rivers originating in the mountainous interior cut through thick beds of limestone. In this limestone area, which rises from the coastal plain, caves have been formed. I explored 8 large caves in the barrios of Salaan, Bolong, and Bunguaio. Of these, 1 discovered in Bolong by Juan Posadas in 1919 was noted by Beyer (1947:322). It yielded only a few sherds. With one exception, a large cave in the barrio of Bunguaio, the caves explored were either too wet or had been so disturbed by guano fertilizer hunters that they offered no archaeological possibilities. More significant are rock-shelters. A very promising rock-shelter, which had evidently been used as both a habitation and burial site, was located in Bunguaio. No doubt, others exist.

Jolo. Land survey was concentrated on the Parang and Taglibi areas in the western part of the island, and a sea reconnaissance was made of the shoreline from the town of Jolo to Bun Bun along the west and north coast, and from Jolo to Maimbung along the west and south coast. Both Parang and Taglibi yielded coastal midden sites with abundant surface sherds. In addition, to judge from foundation excavations for buildings in the town of Jolo, much of the upper part of the town is built on a large accumulation of mostly trade ceramics going back at least to Ming times.

Siasi. Most of the island is fringed by mangrove swamp and there are very few coastal locations of potential archaeological significance. However, on the north coast of Siasi directly opposite Tara Island, a sherd area was discovered on a bench about 5 m above sea level. This location may be worth stratitesting.

Future survey in Sulu. Islands important for future survey include Basilan, Tawi-Tawi, and Sibutu; all present considerable physical difficulties for such an undertaking. The large and fertile island of Basilan provides today as in the past a small stream of trade porcelains from burials and deserves careful attention. On the west coast of Sanga-Sanga in the Tawi-Tawi group, an important coastal cave site yielding large shell adzes has been reported by Eric Casiñ of the National Museum (personal communication). Finally, the low island of Sibutu has a curious high hill from which trade porcelains have been obtained in the past and which should be examined. Beyer (1947:324–338) has made additional suggestions. It is important in the future to procure site samples from the entire archipelago, despite the difficulties involved.

SURVEY COLLECTIONS

Surface collections of sherds were made at all sites discovered. These sherds are described below, with particular attention to local pottery. Other artifacts found were negligible and consisted of two small, blue, glass beads (Bunguiao Rock-Shelter) and one small unfinished glass ornament (Parang).

Trade ceramics. Zamboanga and all the major islands of the Sulu Archipelago have yielded Chinese and Southeast Asian trade pieces, either heirlooms or taken from burials (Beyer 1947:318–338). In their catalog of the Roth-Hester-Beyer Sulu Collection, Hester and Roth (1936:2) comment on the high proportion of Southeast Asian, non-Chinese pieces in the collection, the high percentage of Sawankhalok ware, and the unusual number of doubtful pieces that may be of Than-Hua or Hanoi origin. During the course of my survey, I observed Chinese and Southeast Asian porcelains and stonewares taken from burials in the Zamboanga City market and in private collections in Zamboanga and Jolo.

The purpose of my own survey was to locate midden sites, and hence, I devoted no time

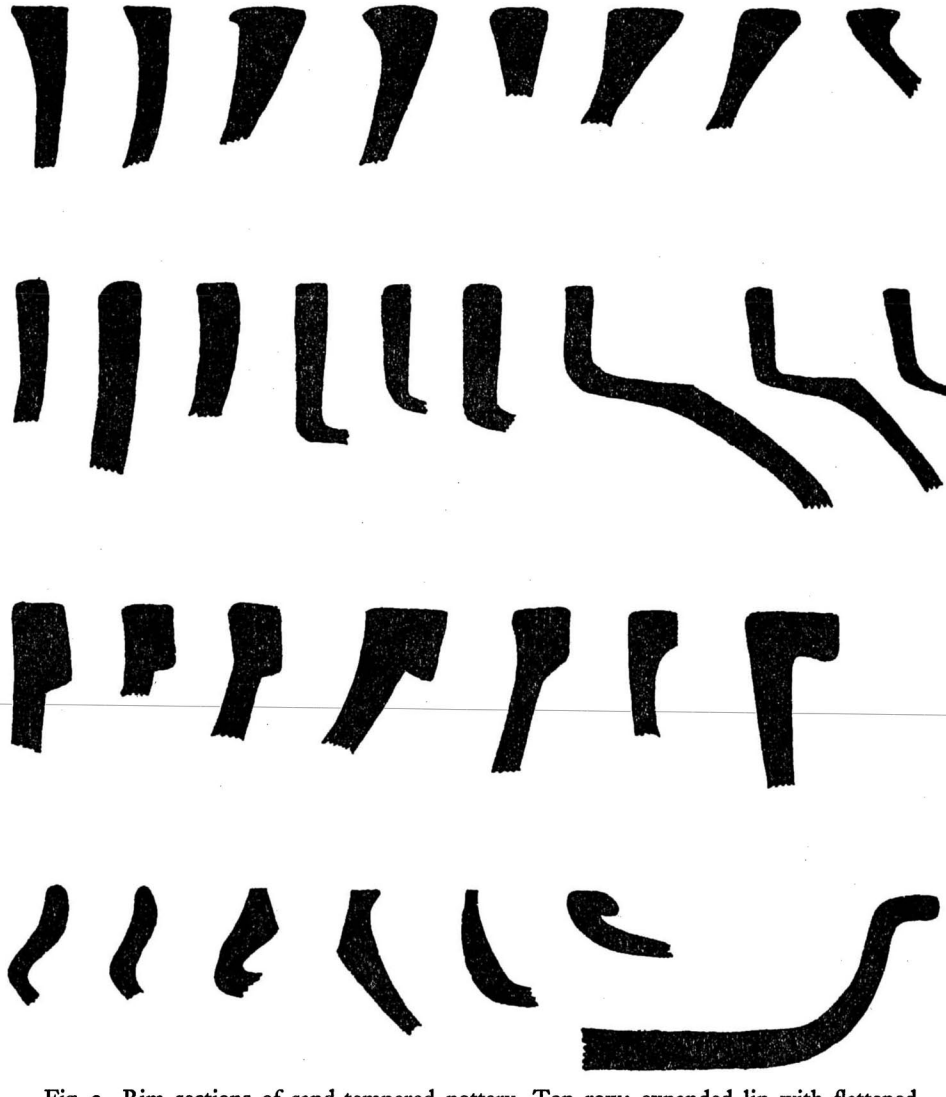

Fig. 2. Rim sections of sand-tempered pottery. Top row: expanded lip with flattened top surface. Second row: parallel sides, neck sections of bowls. Third row: projecting collar around top of rim. Bottom row: miscellaneous. Exterior surface of sherds to right.

to searching for burial areas that typically yield whole porcelains. However, at Parang and Taglibi on Jolo and at the Bunguaio Rock-Shelter on Zamboanga, a total of 150 trade sherds was found on the surface. These have been examined by Alfredo Evangelista of the National Museum. At Parang, most of these sherds are modern, but include some Ming and Ching and a number of doubtful sherds of probably Southeast Asian origin. At Taglibi, most of the trade sherds are Ching or modern. The Bunguiao Rock-Shelter yielded an interesting lot of 37 sherds, probably dating from the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, of both Chinese and Siamese provenience.

Local pottery. As a time-space framework for Philippine archaeology is developed on the

Fig. 3. Pottery decoration. Top row: sand-tempered pottery. Three left sherds show incised designs on rims with projecting collars. Second and bottom rows: incised and punctuate designs on pottery with grit temper, grit and a little sand, or no visible temper.

basis of stratigraphic excavations, much reliance will have to be placed on sequences of locally made wares, as well as on the chronological evidence provided by trade ceramics. In Zamboanga and Sulu, pottery is still being made and is relevant to any prehistoric sequence of pottery types. Before I describe the survey material, I will devote the following few comments to comtemporary pottery.

Szanton's useful account of Sulu art notes that contemporary pottery is made in Jolo, Tara, and Siminul and includes his observations on pottery-making in the latter two islands (Szanton 1963:61–63). Pottery is also currently produced at Sangali on the east coast of Zamboanga and on Basilan. The products of these manufacturing centers are sold in the principal markets of Zamboanga City and Sulu for local use. To the best of my knowledge,

all pottery is made by Samal. One tends to think of pottery being associated with an agricultural people, but although the Samal do farm, they tend to be more specialized in fishing.

All contemporary pottery that I examined conforms to a single type. As Szanton notes, it is strictly utilitarian. It is unslipped and undecorated, except for an occasional piece with simple incising on the rim or on the body. Some bowls seen in Jolo have a brown-gray band, probably resin, painted around the neck. Surface color ranges from red-brown to brown-gray. The paste is characterized by a relatively large amount of fine sand temper. There is little difference between the color of the paste and of the surface. The paste is friable and unlaminated. The surface tends to erode easily. Thickness of body sherds is from 4–12 mm. Finished products include bowls with constricted necks in a variety of sizes, flat-bottomed plates, small pans with handles, stoves for cooking in houses and smaller ones used on canoes, and jars (cf. Szanton 1963).

At a future date, a thorough study of contemporary pottery-making in Zamboanga and Sulu should be made in conjunction with archaeological work. It seems probable that the contemporary, utilitarian, sand-tempered pottery represents a traditional ware of considerable antiquity.

During the survey, a total of 786 sherds of presumably local pottery was collected from five sites (Parang, Taglibi, Siasi North Coast, Bunguiao Rock-Shelter, Bolong Cave) and subjected to megascopic examination. In the following analysis, no attempt has been made to establish formal pottery types. In the absence of excavated materials, and until a numerically larger corpus of sherds is obtained, such an attempt seems premature. Instead, I have described certain technical differences that may be significant for the future determination of pottery types, their distribution, and their temporal relationships.

The most obvious differentiating characteristic in the sherd material is the nature of the paste. More than two-thirds of the sherds contain an abundance of fine sand temper. In this they are in every way similar to contemporary Samal pottery. The remaining sherds are grit-tempered, grit-tempered with a little sand, or have no visible temper at all (in the absence of microscopic examination of sherd sections). I have accordingly set up two preliminary categories on the basis of paste. A third category consists of a small sample of redware.

Sand-tempered pottery. Provenience: Parang (438); Taglibi (104); Siasi North Coast (1); Bunguaio Rock-Shelter (5); Bolong Cave (1). Total 549. The paste includes a large amount of fine sand temper. Color of paste is red-brown to brown-gray, with little color difference between core and surface. Paste is unlaminated and often friable. Surface may have a sandpaper feel, with the sand temper sometimes visible on the surface. On many sherds the surface is eroded. Thickness of body sherds is from 4–15 mm and averages from 6–8 mm. No evidence of coiling.

Rim sections (total 166) are shown in Fig. 2. The most common rim types are expanded, either inward or outward, at the lip with a flat top surface (Fig. 2, top row), or have parallel sides and are probably the neck sections of bowls with constricted necks (Fig. 2, second row). A third type, while not so numerous, has a distinctive projecting collar around the top of the rim (Fig. 2, third row) not observed in contemporary pottery.

Surfaces are unslipped and unpolished and for the most part undecorated, except for a few sherds with simple incising, or with impressed and punctate designs usually on the rim. Fig. 3 (top row) illustrates designs on sand-tempered ware.

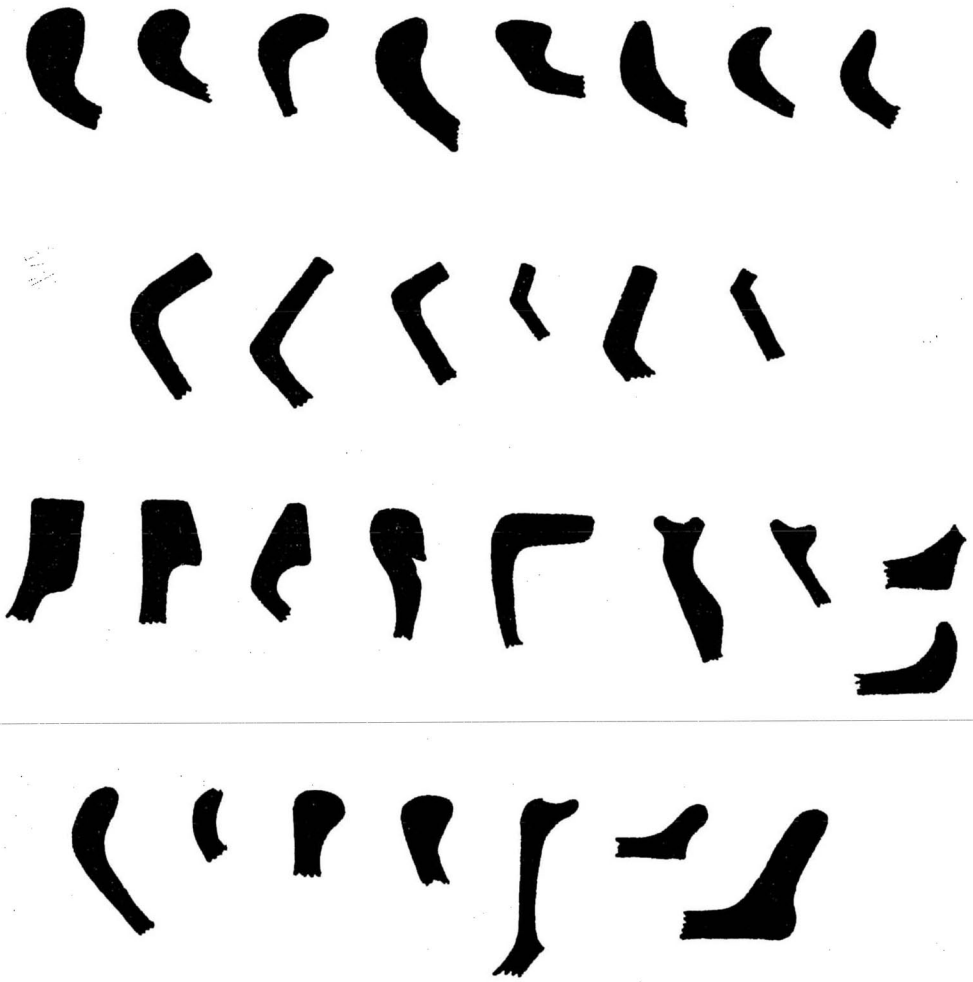

Fig. 4. Rim sections of pottery with grit temper, grit and a little sand, or no visible temper. Top row: expanded lip with rounded top surface. Second row: parallel sides with sharp angle to rim. Third row: miscellaneous. Two sherds at left have projecting collar around rim; two at right are from flat-bottomed plates. Bottom row: redware rims. Two sherds at right are from flat-bottomed plates. Exterior surface of sherds to right.

Pottery with grit temper, grit and a little sand, or no visible temper. Provenience: Parang (96); Taglibi (84); Siasi North Coast (28); Bunguiao Rock-Shelter (7); Bolong Cave (1). Total 216. This is a catchall category, and as sherds of this type become more abundant in the future, the category will have to be subdivided, particularly on the basis of a more detailed analysis of the paste than is provided here. However, this pottery is technically superior and markedly different than the sand-tempered variety. Paste includes a little grit, a small amount of grit and sand, or no temper visible with a hand glass. Color of paste is red-brown through dark gray. If the paste is dark gray, the surface color is much lighter. The paste is well compacted and the sherds are harder throughout and of better quality than the sand-tempered ware. Surfaces are unslipped and unpolished but sometimes well smoothed. Surface color ranges

from light brown to reddish brown to brown-gray. Thickness of body sherds varies from 3–12 mm and averages about 4–6 mm; therefore they are generally thinner than the sand-tempered pottery. No evidence of coiling.

Rim sections (total 54) are shown in Fig. 4. The most common rim form has an expanded lip with rounded top surfaces (Fig. 3, top row). A second rim type has parallel sides, but with a sharp and well-defined angle to the rim (Fig. 4, second row). A few rims exhibit the projecting collar around the lip also found in the sand-tempered sherds (Fig. 4, third row).

Most of the sherds are undecorated, but 9 body sherds exhibit rather faint, cord-marked impressions on the exterior surface. There is an additional small sample with incised, or incised and punctate designs (Fig. 3), and 8 rim sherds have impressed notches along the exterior angle of the top surface of the lip.

Redware. Provenience: Taglibi (20); Bolong Cave (1). Total 21. The paste is tempered with a small amount of grit and is hard and well compacted. Color of paste ranges from red-brown to dark gray. Thickness of body sherds ranges from 2–10 mm, but most of the sherds are thin and less than 5 mm in thickness. No evidence of coiling.

Rim sections (total 10) are shown in Fig. 4 (bottom row). The common rim form has an expanded lip with a rounded top surface. The sherds have either a thin red slip or paint applied to the exterior surface or to the exterior and to the interior surface of the rim. They are undecorated, except for one rim sherd with parallel, horizontal, incised lines below the lip and a second rim sherd with finger impressions on the top surface of the lip.

Conclusion

Although midden sites proved elusive and difficult to find, particularly in Zamboanga, enough were discovered to warrant additional survey and future stratigraphic testing. The local pottery collected during the survey hardly justifies any conclusions as to temporal sequences of pottery types, other than that only sand-tempered ware is made today. However, the differences in the local pottery that was found do indicate that distinct pottery wares have existed and will be of significant aid in the eventual construction of cultural sequences for the area when actual excavations are undertaken.

On the basis of the survey material, little can be said about the relations of Sulu to other areas. It should be noted that the survey pottery is relevant to the problem of relationships between the Philippines and Micronesia. Thus Osborne (1966:81) has described a distinctive sand-tempered pottery in Palau. As a technical tradition, sand-tempering may link the Philippines with Palau, as well as with the Marianas. A similar relationship may exist in the presence of redware in both the Philippines and western Micronesia.*

* Grateful acknowledgement for generous assistance during the course of the survey is made to the following:

Zamboanga. Mr. Adolfo Navarro, Commissioner of Tourism, Zamboanga City; Honorable Hector Suarez, Mayor of Zamboanga City; Mr. Cristostomo Cacho.

Jolo. Rev. Francis Crump, O. M. I., Rev. Andrew Chalkey, O. M. I., and their colleagues at Notre Dame of Jolo College; Honorable Aminkadra Abubakar, Mayor of Jolo; Honorable Mam Barawi Mohammad, Deputy Mayor of Taglibi.

Siasi. Rev. Peter Nami, O. M. I., Rev. Richard Weixelman, O. M. I., Mr. Arip Taup.

Manila. Mr. Alfredo Evangelista, Mr. Eric Casiño, Division of Anthropology, National Museum.

The survey was made possible by a grant from the International Dimensions Fund of the University of Pittsburgh.

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