

THE SURIGAO DEL NORTE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

An extensive archaeological excavation in the compound of Panhutongan Elementary School, Surigao del Norte (northeastern Mindanao) was carried out from 1991 to 1993. The Panhutongan site is a multi-component site with rich materials and significant features. Three archaeological periods are represented: 1) A stone formation from the Spanish Colonial Period; 2) Pit burials associated with tradeware ceramics of the 16th to 17th centuries A.D.; 3) Burials associated with dug-out log coffins and plank biers dating possibly from c.2000 BP.

INTRODUCTION

On September 20, 1990, the Panhutongan Elementary School had its septic tank repaired. During the work, the laborers accidentally unearthed three dug-out log coffins, human skeletal remains and trade ceramics. This chance discovery of cultural materials was reported to the National Museum and a team was sent to conduct a preliminary survey of the area.

In March 1991, a team composed of E.Z. Dizon (National Museum), L.E. Bauzon (Philippine Social Science Council), J.G. Kleinen (anthropologist from the University of Amsterdam, Netherlands), Prof. M.C. Barrameda (anthropologist from the University of the Philippines, Diliman), Prof. Yutaka Katayama (Political Scientist from Okayama University, Japan) and Prof. R.P. Paular (National Historical Institute) inspected the site and verified the information. Human skeletal remains, trade ceramics, earthenware pots and boat coffins were shown to the team. The visiting team found treasure hunters in the act of digging. Therefore, an immediate meeting with the people of Barangay Panhutongan was

called and the preservation and significance of the Panhutongan site and its prehistoric past was emphasized. It was suggested that the site would be a good area to test hypotheses concerning the continuity and discontinuity of human behavioral patterns (Dizon 1991).

The Panhutongan Archaeological Project was conceived by the Philippine Social Science Council, the Archaeology Division of the National Museum and the Surigaonon Heritage Foundation through Fernando Almada, Jr., President of the Foundation. From October 8 to November 6, 1991, a team from the National Museum conducted preliminary excavations in Panhutongan to verify the presence of ancient dug-out log coffin burials, stone structures and other cultural remains as well as to establish the stratigraphy of the site (Dizon and Orogo 1991).

Based on the results of this fieldwork, an extensive archaeological excavation was conducted from April 15 to May 29, 1992. The project was made possible by financial support from the Toyota Foundation, the National Science Research Council, the Daiwa Bank Foundation for Asia and Oceania and the Presidential Commission on Culture and the Arts. Archaeological exploration in the Panhutongan, Amoslog and Tinago areas was also undertaken in conjunction with the Consortium for a Field School in Archaeology, Anthropology and History. Students from Mindanao State University, University of the Philippines, and University of Santo Tomas participated in the Field School.

It was during the second phase that the full extent of the stone formation extending towards the school building became evident. An extensive archaeological excavation beneath the building was conceived. In order to do this the school would have to be demolished, so a site for the new school building had to be found (Dizon *et al.* 1992).

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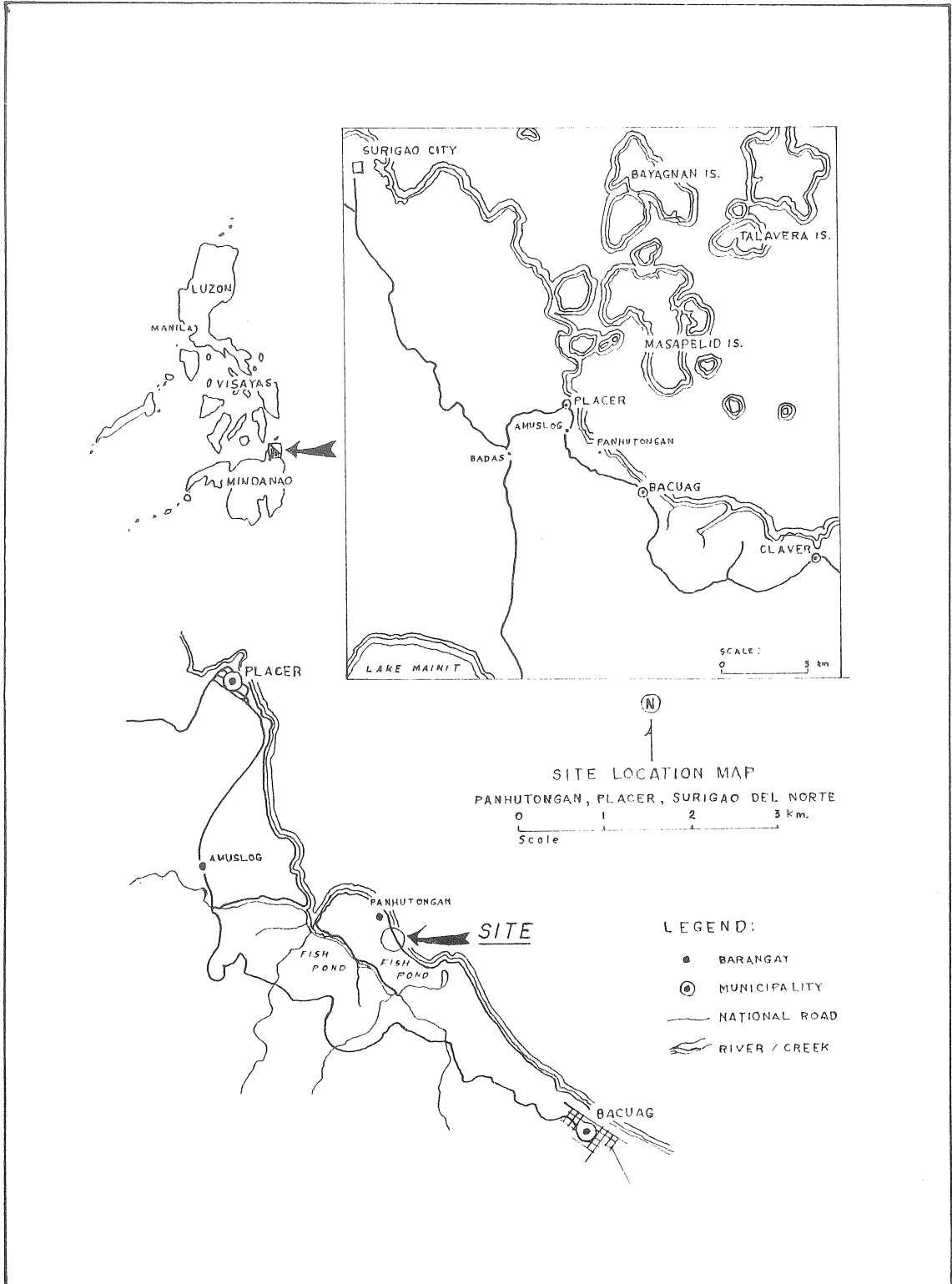


Figure 1. The location of the Panhutongan site.

The third phase of the project was conducted from July 15 to August 10, 1992. The team from the National Museum dug a transect trench to determine the archaeological significance of the proposed site for the new school building (de la Torre 1992). Upon confirmation that the proposed site was not archaeologically significant, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports approved the team's recommendation for the construction of a new school building and for the demolition of the old one.

From May 10 to July 2, 1993, a fourth phase of extensive archaeological excavation was carried out beneath and adjacent to the old school building, in order to find out the chronological relationship between the burial pits and the wooden coffins (de la Torre 1993; Bautista 1993).

LOCATION AND GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The Province of Surigao del Norte is located on the northeastern coast of Mindanao (Figure 1). The Municipality of Placer, famous for its rich gold and nickel deposits and other mineral resources, lies approximately 33 kilometers south the City of Surigao. Barangay Panhutongan is situated south of Placer; in 1990 its population was 396; the majority being engaged in fishing and a few in agriculture.

Panhutongan was a territorial part of Caraga or Caragha, a Hispanicized equivalent of *calagan* or *kalagan*, which means a place where soul or spirit worshippers are found or where skeletal remains have been discovered. In 1521, Pigafetta (1963) referred to it as *Calagan*. Combes (1667) called the inhabitants of this place *Caragas*, who were renowned for bravery, being "greatest in deeds and who buried their dead in caves, islets or solitary mountains".

The 1734 map of Murillo indicates the three prominent towns of Surigao, Panhutongan and Gigaquit. The settlement names of Bacuag, Taganaan and Placer were not recorded before the 19th century, so perhaps they were only small villages or non-existent in 1734. This cartographic evidence shows that Panhutongan was an important settlement prior to 1734, with its own history and culture (Paular 1992). In 1778, Panhutongan ceased appearing in census reports.

The Jesuits took over the religious administration of Surigao in the 1870s, and Pastells (1912) reported that one Fr. Luengo had discovered burial boats with skeletal remains, surrounded by "olas y platos provisionarios de comida" (pots and dining wares) in Bacuag. When inter-

viewed by the priest, the natives said that the remains had been there for ages. Some opined that their ancestors could have died as a result of pestilence, but they could not explain further.

EXCAVATION RESULTS.

The excavation layout is shown in Figures 2 and 3, which show the portions of the stone structure uncovered in 1992 and 1993. Each excavation square was standardized at 4 x 4 m, with a 40 cm baulk maintained between squares to ensure stratigraphic control. Three transects were also excavated in the southern portion of the site on and adjacent to the site of the new school. (de la Torre 1992).

The stratigraphy of the area inside the stone structure comprises (top to bottom): a sandy-silt; a sand, a silt with clay and a sandy-clay cultural layer. The sequence sits on culturally-sterile silt from a swampy environment. Pot-hunting in some portions of the site has introduced modern artefacts as far down as the third layer.

The cultural layer is within a sandy clay soil, wet and plastic. It contains the burials described below, plus ash, charcoal and iron slag. Its thickness averages 50 cm. Log posts have penetrated this layer affecting the burial pit in Square S4W4 (Figure 3). The base of the stone structure lies on top of the cultural layer.

The basal silt layer is archaeologically sterile and an abrupt change of color and composition makes its boundary very discernible. It lies approximately 100 cm. to 130 cm below the ground surface. Remains of mangroves were observed in this layer.

The Stone Structure and Associated Features

After excavating to an average depth of 14 cm from present ground surface, alignments of compacted andesite, diorite and coral limestone rocks were observed. At the southern end lies an L-shaped extension to the plan of the structure. At the northern end, in squares N1W3 and N1W4, the stone structure turns west. In N1W5 it was met by another wall or paved path running northeast to southwest. It is clear that this stone formation enclosed a portion of the area where burial pits and dug-out wooden coffin burials were observed. Its walls averaged 1 m in width, 30 cm in surviving height.

Sixteen wooden posts were discovered in several of the squares. Wood samples were identified by the Forest Products Research and Development Institute. They include *Tristania* sp. (Myraceae); *Vitex parviflora* Juss. (Verbenaceae, vernacular name *molave*); *Ceriops* sp. (Rhizophoraceae) and *Syzygium* sp. Both large and me

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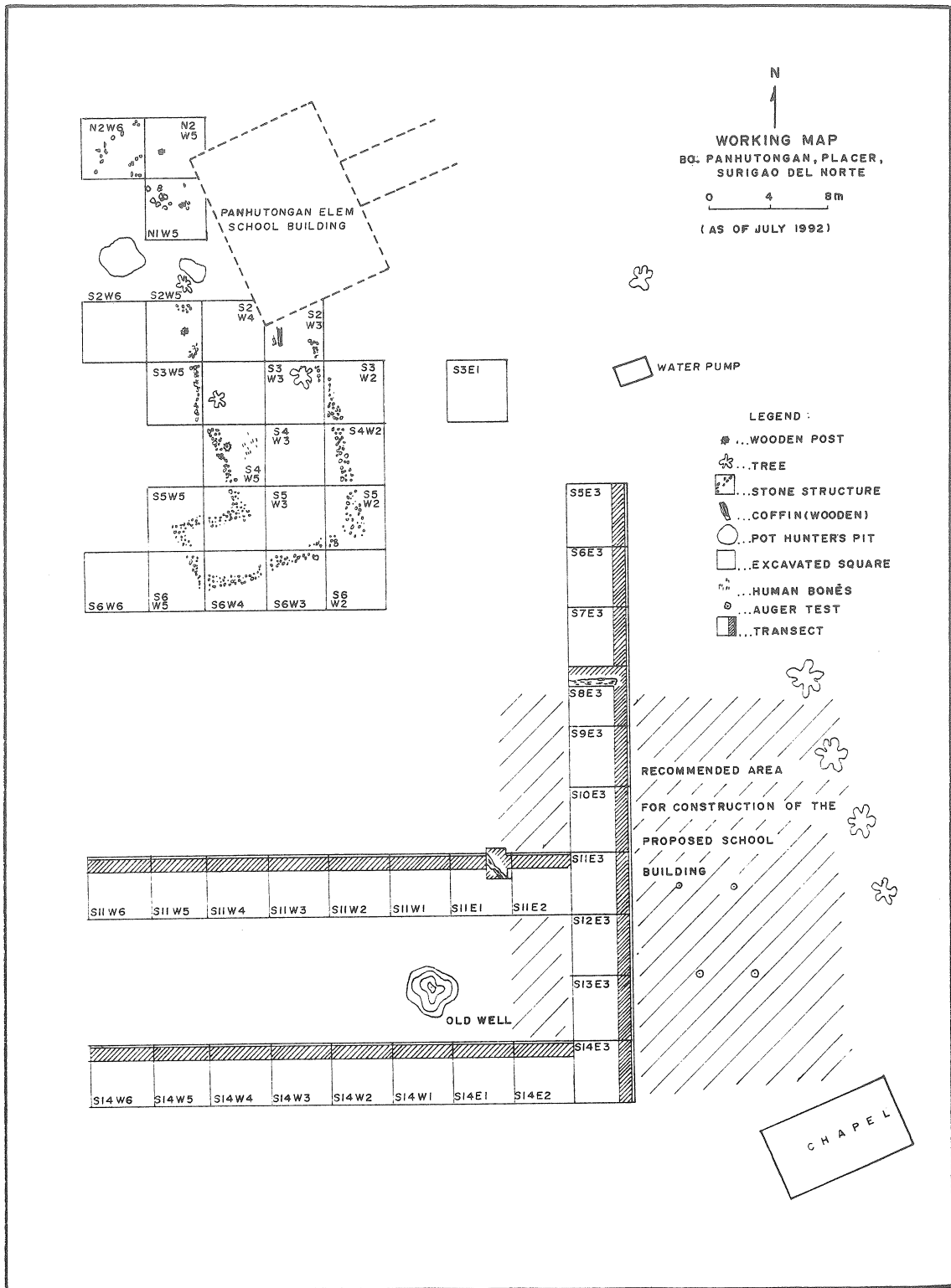


Figure 2. Panhutongan trench layout, 1992.

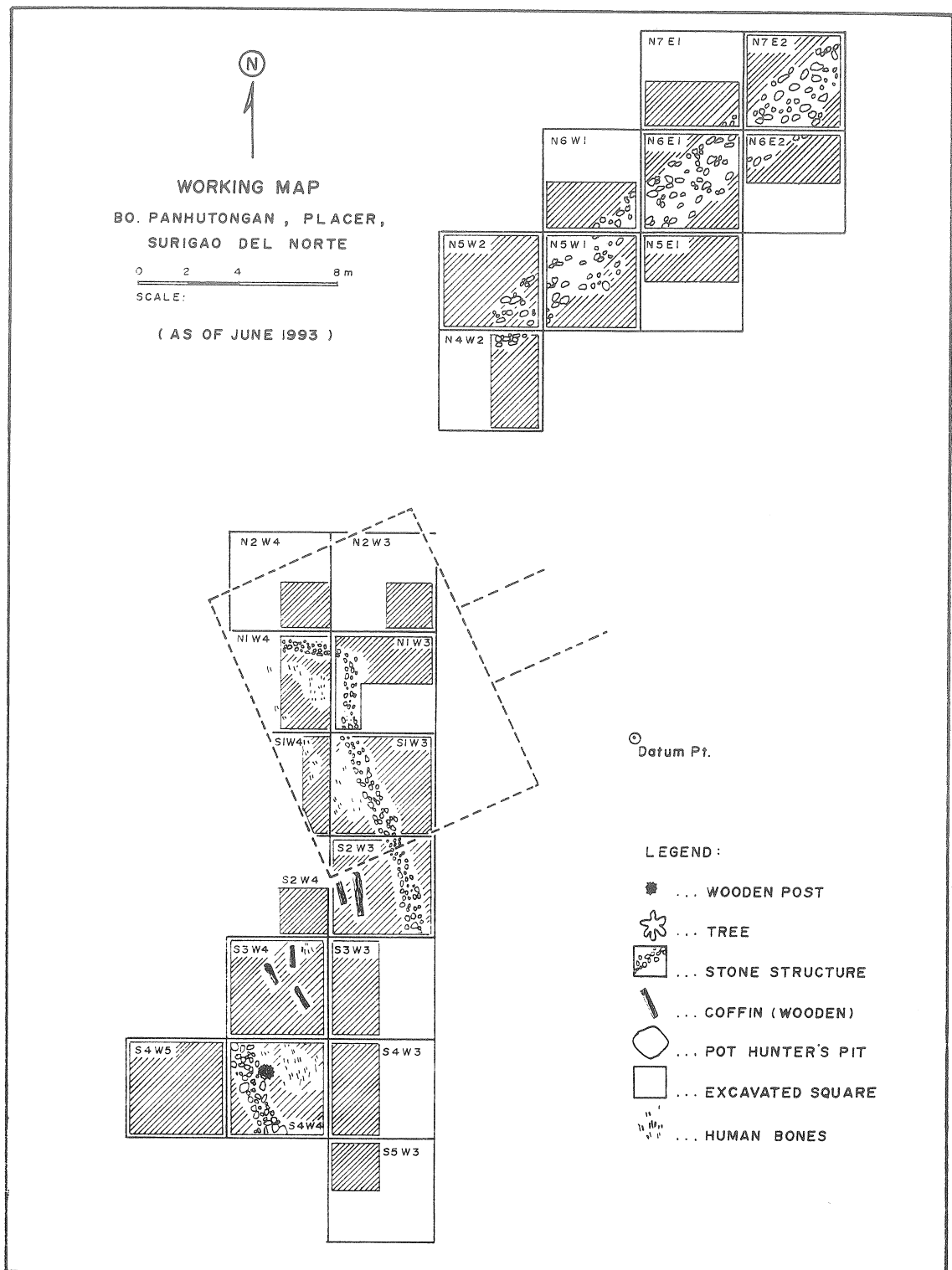


Figure 3. Panhutongan trench layout, 1993.

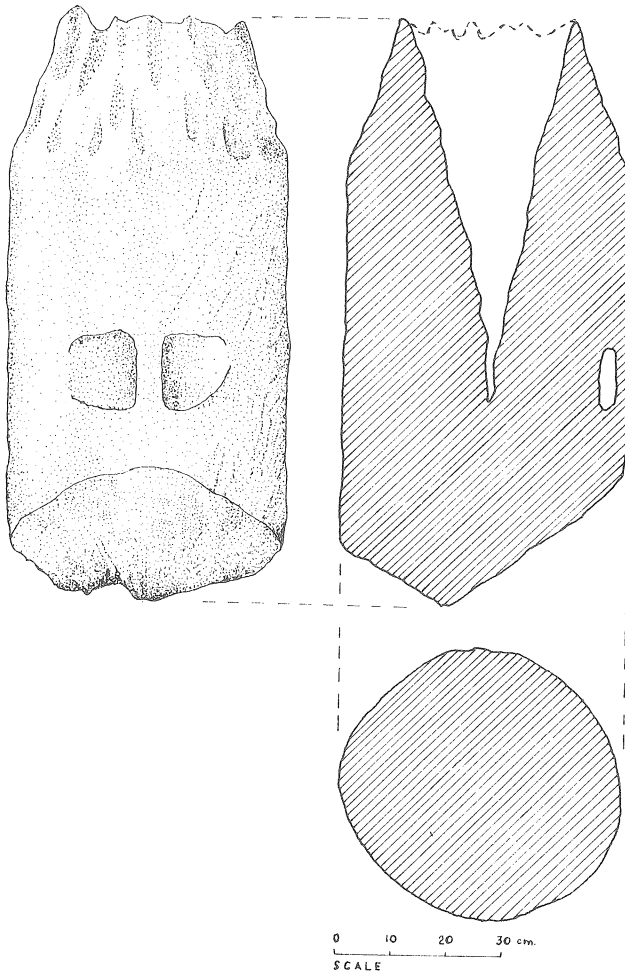


Figure 4. Piece of wooden post with a carved notch at its base (for carrying?).

dium wooden posts were found; the large ranging from 42 to 57 cm in diameter and the medium from 9 to 19 cm. The large posts, made from *molave*, were set approximately 4 m apart from each other. One had a carved notch at its base (Figure 4), which could have been used to fasten a rope in order to transport it from its source to the site (Dizon and Orogo 1991:3). The medium posts were of *Tristania* sp. and *Ceriops* sp. The majority of these were sharply pointed or wedge-shaped, stuck directly into the ground and probably used as a timber building foundation.

The burials

Two forms of burials were found; some placed unenclosed in pits and others in wooden coffins. Parts of 69

individuals were recovered; 53 from the pits, 13 from dug-out wooden coffins and three on plank biers. The burial pits generally overlay the coffins, except in squares S3W4, S3W3, S4W3, S1W4 and N1W4, which had been disturbed by pothunters.

All individuals were buried lying on their backs. The heads of five (numbers 14, 17, 33, 37, 41) were facing east, four (15, 25, 53, 63) were facing west, two (45 and 57) faced southeast and twelve (18, 19, 21, 28, 31, 32, 36, 40, 55, 56, 64, 65) faced upwards (Bautista *et. al.* 1994).

The burial pits were associated with 16th-17th century tradeware ceramics and metal implements. Burial 5 in square S4W4 was found with a Chinese 16th-17th century porcelain bowl lying on top of its skull. An iron implement with an encrusted spherical stone was found against the lower part of the thoracic cage. Many white and yellow faceted Dutch glass beads (AD 1650 to 1730) were found around the neck and on the chest.

Burial 8 (square S4W4) was situated below the edge of the stone structure. The skull and the upper torso were still intact while the pelvic and posterior limb bones were found to have been disturbed by one of the wooden posts. Glass beads with the burial included Dutch faceted white and yellow ones near the cervical vertebrae and blue and white berry types, white beads with curvilinear embossed designs and Prussian-blue spherical glass beads in the chest region.

A good quality blue and white plate was found covering the face of Burial 7 in Square S3W4 and S4W4 (Figure 5). It has two dragons in its center and a potter's mark at the exterior base, and can be dated to the 17th century AD.

Burial 9 (square S1W3) was one of only four positively identified as female. This was associated with a late 16th-17th century blue and white plate with a floral design and a polychrome ceramic sherd of the same date with overglaze green, red and light brown decoration. Another female burial included a bronze bracelet by the right forearm, a pair of brass earrings with several pieces of black thread, and two bronze finger rings, one on each hand.

Goods found with other burials in pits include more of the late Ming blue and white ceramics, corroded metal implements and a terracotta stamped and appliqué pipe bowl. Burial 37 in square N1W4 was identified as a Caucasoid male; the skeletal remains pointed north and the skull faced east. The skull was covered with a greyish-green glazed dish with an incised scroll on the interior, of a type similar to late Song "Kiangsi Ware". Over the dish

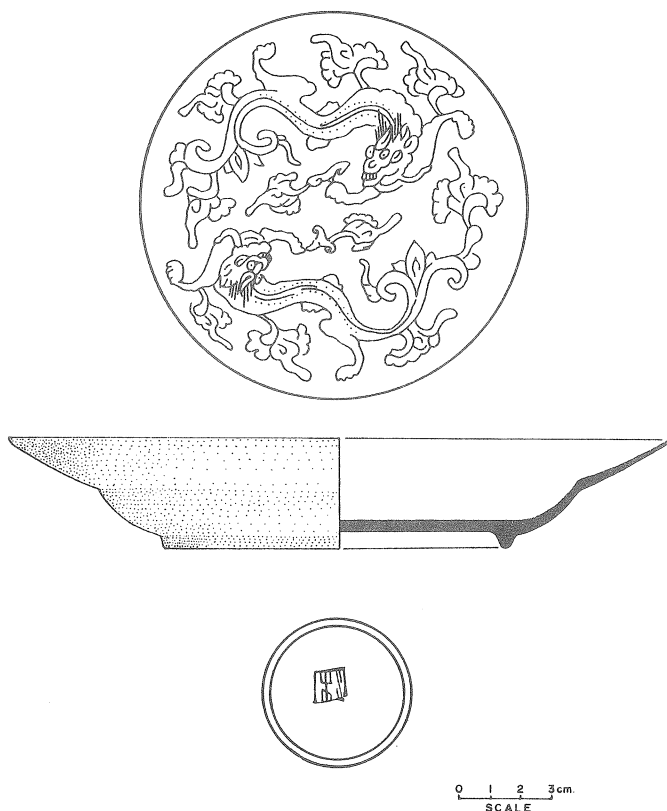


Figure 5. Late Ming blue and white plate from burial 7.

was a large 17th century blue-and-white dish with a floral design in a blurred cobalt blue glaze. Evidence of convex teeth filing was noted on Burial 55, an extended male in square N1W4.

Sixteen dug-out wooden coffins were also found with human skeletal remains and metal implements at an average depth of 85 cm below the present soil surface. Some coffins were rectangular and other tapered towards the feet. The rectangular coffins range from 180-185 cm long and 35-38 cm wide, while the tapered ones range from 140-200 cm long and 37-45 cm wide. Wood samples from some of the coffins were identified by the Forest Products Research and Development Institute of the Department of Science and Technology. Timbers represented include *Lagerstroemia* sp., *Litsea* sp., *Vitex parviflora* (molave), *Mangifera* sp. (pahutan), *Pterocarpus indicus* (narra), *Terminalia* sp. and *Shorea polysperma* (tangile).

Many of the coffin burials had been disturbed by pot hunters, but surviving grave goods included *bolos*, a metal spearhead (Figure 6) and beads. Three burials (27, 60, and 65) were placed on biers consisting of five long pieces of cut wood, each 174 cm long by 4 cm wide.

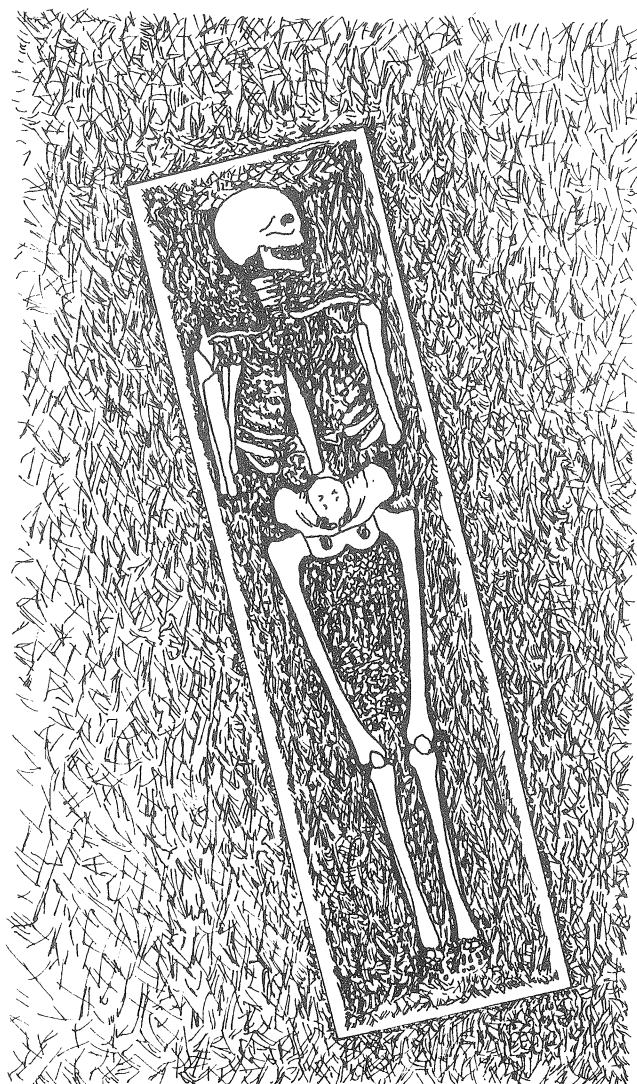


Figure 6. Coffin burial 17, with an iron spearhead on its chest.

These were supported by three short pieces about 40 cm. long and 4 cm wide (Figure 7). The wood used was *Livistoria rotundifolia*, a palm species known locally as *bahi*.

CONCLUSIONS.

Based on the materials excavated it is clear that Panhutongan is a multi-component site. There was utilization of the area from the prehistoric period up to the present time. The periodization of the site can be summarized thus :

1. The stone formation, possibly used as an enclosure for a formal cemetery, the first structure of this type ever to be excavated in the Philippines. No burials were found outside the enclosed area and the structure

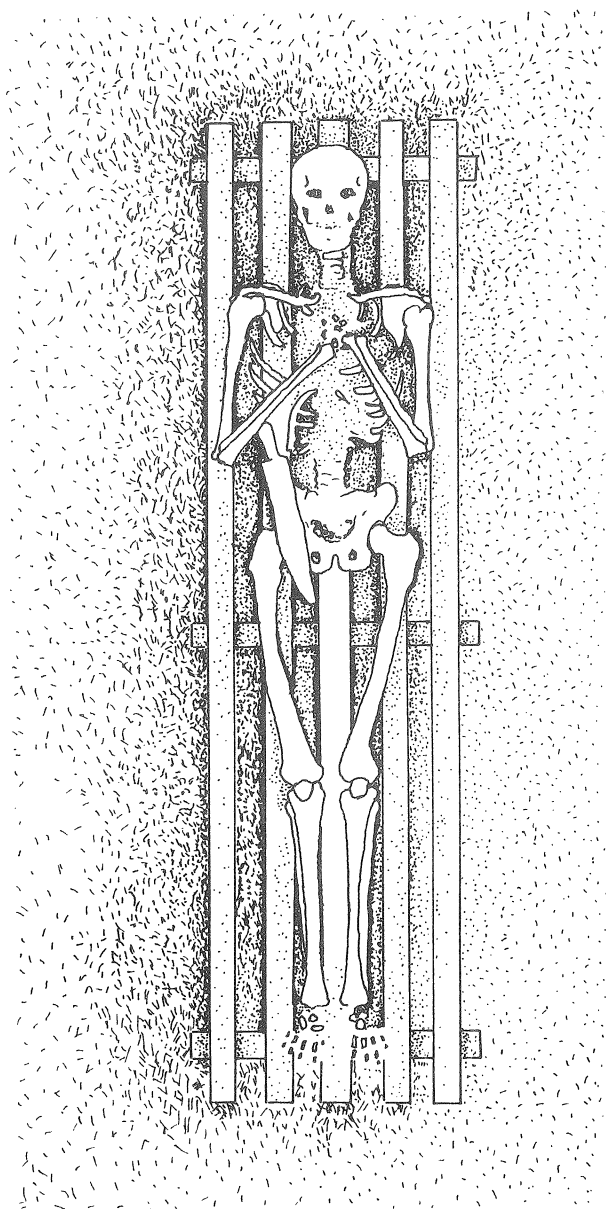


Figure 7. Burial 65, lying on a plank bier and with a bolo at its waist.

was possibly constructed during the Spanish Colonial Period. The posts served as the foundation for some kind of above-ground structure, but the nature and function of this are still unclear.

2. The pit burials clearly date from the 16th-17th centuries AD based on the associated ceramics and glass beads.
3. The dug-out log coffins and biers are probably Iron Age. Wood from one coffin has been radiocarbon

dated to AD 140±390 (GAK 17636).

For the pit graves, goods consisted of tradeware ceramics, metal implements and ornaments such as glass beads, brass earrings, a bronze bracelet and bronze rings. The late Ming tradeware ceramics were either used to cover the face or placed at the head. Some of the beads are of Dutch origin. The dug-out log coffins have no tradeware ceramics, beads or ornaments. The only grave goods associated with them were varieties of metal *bolos*.

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