

THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC POTTERY FROM AYUB CAVE, PINOL, MAITUM, SOUTH COTABATO, MINDANAO, PHILIPPINES

Eusebio Z. Dizon

Archaeology Division, National Museum, P. Burgos Street, 1000 Metro Manila, Philippines

ABSTRACT

Anthropomorphic earthenware pottery from a cave, in Pinol, Maitum, South Cotabato was reported to the Archaeology Division of the National Museum of the Philippines in June 1991. It included burial jars with lids designed and formed like human figures with complete facial expressions. The vessels can be attributed to the Metal Age of the Philippines, c.500 BC to AD 500. Archaeological research is being conducted on these very important and significant cultural remains, which are amongst the most important material evidence for Maguindanao prehistory and perhaps the prehistory of the Filipino people in general.

INTRODUCTION

Very little is known about Maguindanao prehistory. The earliest research on the archaeology of the area was conducted in the mid 1960s by Maceda on the Kulaman Plateau; this was preliminary in nature but has been published (Maceda 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967a, 1967b). Kurjack and Sheldon (1970) then published their research on Seminoho Cave in Lebak in Cotabato and later published more detailed descriptions of this work (Kurjack, Sheldon and Keller 1971). In 1972 Briones studied burial sites of Salansang, Salaman, Southern Cotabato (Briones 1972), and published his findings together with Chiong (Briones and Chiong 1977). All these researchers mention anthropomorphic limestone burial urns and some pottery; although no detailed analyses have yet been undertaken. Most recently, Solheim, Legaspi and Neri (1979) published their survey of southeastern Mindanao. After this there was a long silence about archaeology in

Maguindanao, but since 1991 the Archaeology Division of the National Museum has recommenced archaeological activity in the region (Dizon 1991a,b,c; Dizon *et al.* 1992a,b; 1993).

THE DISCOVERY OF THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC POTTERY

On 3 June 1991, I received a telephone call from Mr. Michael Spadafora, a consulting geologist who reported to me the existence of pottery in human form discovered in a cave while treasure-hunting for Japanese World War II gold bars somewhere in Maitum, South Cotabato. According to him the cave is approximately a 4-hour drive on a rough coastal road to the west of General Santos City. It is under the control of Hadji Ayub Mindug, Chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in South Cotabato.

Spadafora's phone call was followed by a letter dated 6 June 1991, accompanied by 12 color photographs of the site and some of the artifacts recovered by local people. The photographs were impressive enough to excite my curiosity and desire to get more information about the pottery and other associated cultural materials in their proper archaeological context. The artifacts appeared to be related to Metal Age pottery of the period c.500 BC to AD 500. The photographs were shown to colleagues and senior staff members of the Archaeology Division, including Dr. Jesus T. Peralta, Wilfredo Ronquillo, Cecilio Salcedo, Alfredo E. Evangelista and Fr. Gabriel S. Casal, Director of the National Museum. Everyone agreed that the artifacts in the pictures looked more interesting than the two pots of a set of five similar ones brought to the National Museum in November 1990 for sale by an antique dealer. Hence, our interest to conduct full scale archaeological research on these cultural materials.

On 20 June 1991, a meeting to discuss the pottery was held at the Mandarin Hotel in Makati between Spadafora, myself and "Roland", the Manila field coordinator of the MNLF. It was made clear that Hadji Ayub, representing the local people, wanted to sell all the artifacts for the economic development and the benefit of his people. The MNLF was willing to cooperate with the National Museum for the sake of science and the prehistoric data to be derived from these materials. Full scale archaeological research could be conducted if the right price could be raised and be paid to the people. Spadafora became the official contact between the National Museum and the MNLF.

A preliminary assessment was made of the cost of systematic excavation, including the purchase of the artifacts already recovered. The National Museum was certainly interested in acquiring some of the best pieces but it did not have enough funds to purchase everything or to finance a preliminary visit to make a feasibility study of the site. The possibility of applying for grants through funding agencies like the Ford and Toyota Foundations was discussed. Grants from these foundations, however, usually take time for approval with no prior guarantee that funding will eventually be approved. Suggestions were made that there were Filipino collectors who would be interested in acquiring some of the artifacts and who would keep them in the country. Antique dealers or middlemen who would make money out of the artifacts and perhaps sell them overseas were ruled out.

Our idea was to give Filipino financiers an opportunity to acquire some of the specimens through providing grants towards investigating, with modern archaeological methods, this important site for Philippine prehistory. Instead of providing grants to various charitable institutions, cultural celebrations, fiestas, basketball games and so on why should they not have the chance to contribute something towards increasing the knowledge of our prehistoric ancestors? Two names were suggested by Spadafora as possible donors.

On 12th July 1991, a meeting was held at the Club Filipino in Greenhills, San Juan between Spadafora, two Filipino businessmen and philanthropists and myself. The pictures of the artifacts were shown to them and they also showed an interest in conducting more investigations into these cultural materials. One agreed to finance my preliminary visit to the site in order to assess and evaluate the importance of the anthropomorphic pottery.

On August 2nd I flew to General Santos City, South Cotabato where I was met by Spadafora and his friends at Oscar's Hotel. The following day we visited Hadji Ayub and together left for the site at around 5 p.m., taking 4.5

hours to get there because of the rain and the rough muddy road. After my preliminary assessment the financial situation had to be assessed – the costs of buying the artefacts, of buying the rights to conduct archaeological research in the territory of the MNLF, and to run the field project. The original group of supporters proved unwilling to provide the finances required. At this point we met some other people who also had the interest and determination to preserve this part of our cultural heritage. They were able to put us in touch with a very generous Filipino donor who wished to remain anonymous. The research thus continued.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The site lies in the coastal area of Pinol, Maitum, South Cotabato where the majority of the population are Muslim Maguindanaos. The cultural materials were recovered from a Miocene limestone cave approximately 1 km inland and about 6 m above mean sea level (Figures 1, 2). The cave has been called Ayub Cave in recognition of Hadji Ayub Mindug. It is approximately 5 m wide and 3 m high and slopes down inwards at about 30° for some 8 meters from the mouth (Figures 3, 4). The digging for "Japanese gold" had mainly been carried out in front of the cave, with some in the center and back portions.

Sometime in May 1991 a Japanese visited Hadji Ayub and claimed he could locate buried treasure. He successfully convinced Hadji Ayub that gold bars had been buried in or near the cave and some digging was undertaken. Ancient artifacts, but no gold bars, were recovered. Some pottery decorated with haematite and incised designs was even interpreted as a sign of the existence of treasure on the basis of a mimeographed "dictionary of signs for treasure hunting" sold by the Japanese to Hadji Ayub.

Thus, the deposits in Ayub Cave had been severely disturbed and artifacts haphazardly collected from on and below the cave floor. The entrance of the cave had been bulldozed (Figure 4). There is evidence that portions of the cave wall near the mouth had collapsed. Remains of earthenware sherds and fragments of anthropomorphic pots were visible in the cave deposits at the time of my visit. All the cultural materials found were in the possession of Hadji Ayub, according to whom about 300 pottery heads had been recovered together with human bones. The human bones, except for two long bone fragments, were re-buried.

There were at least 25 pieces of restorable anthropomorphic pottery in the Hadji Ayub's collection, some being life-sized human heads. There were also decorated earthenware pots, some of unusual form, in various sizes

DIZON, THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC POTTERY FROM AYUB CAVE

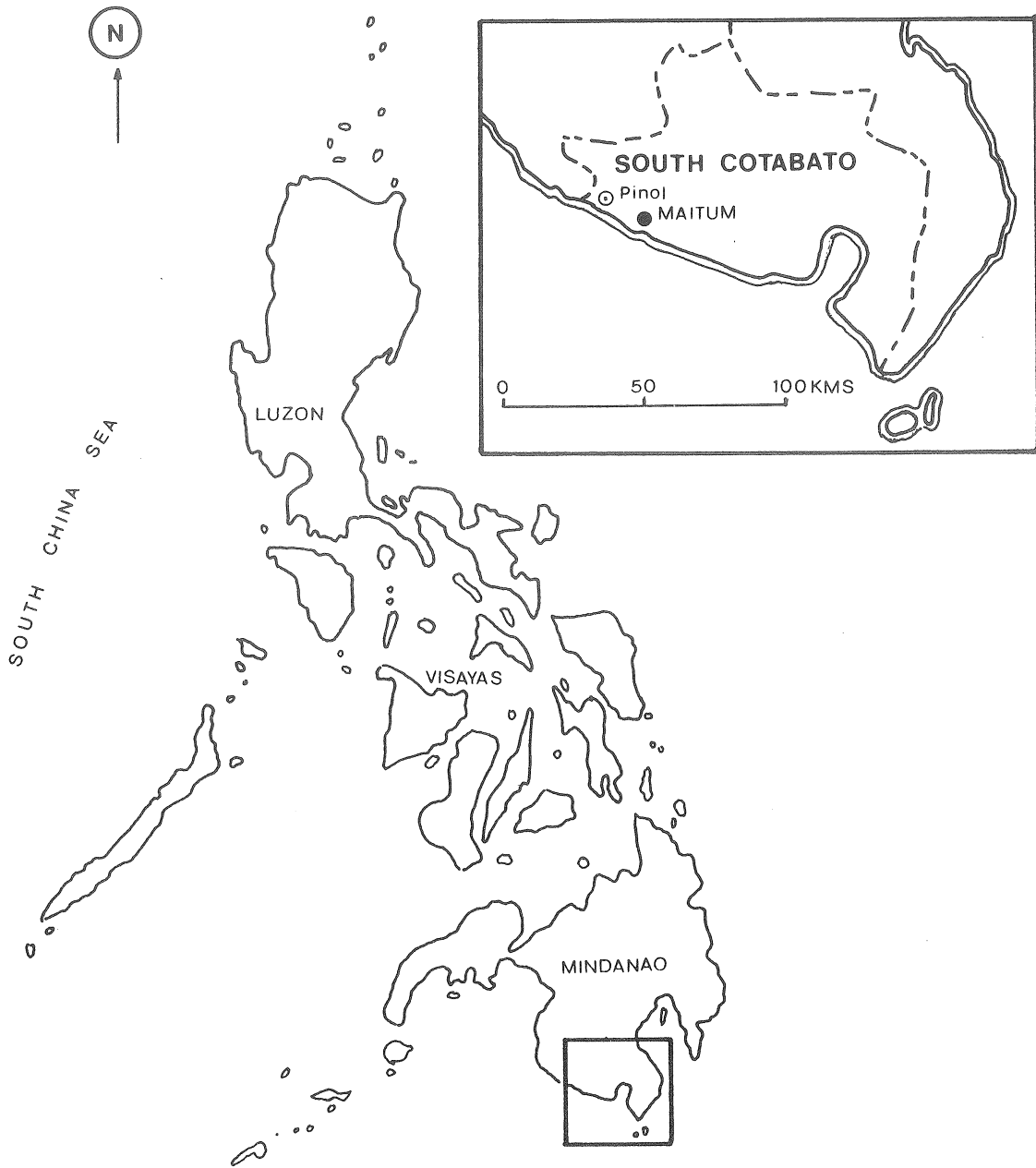


Figure 1: Map of the Philippines showing Pinol, Maitum, South Cotabato

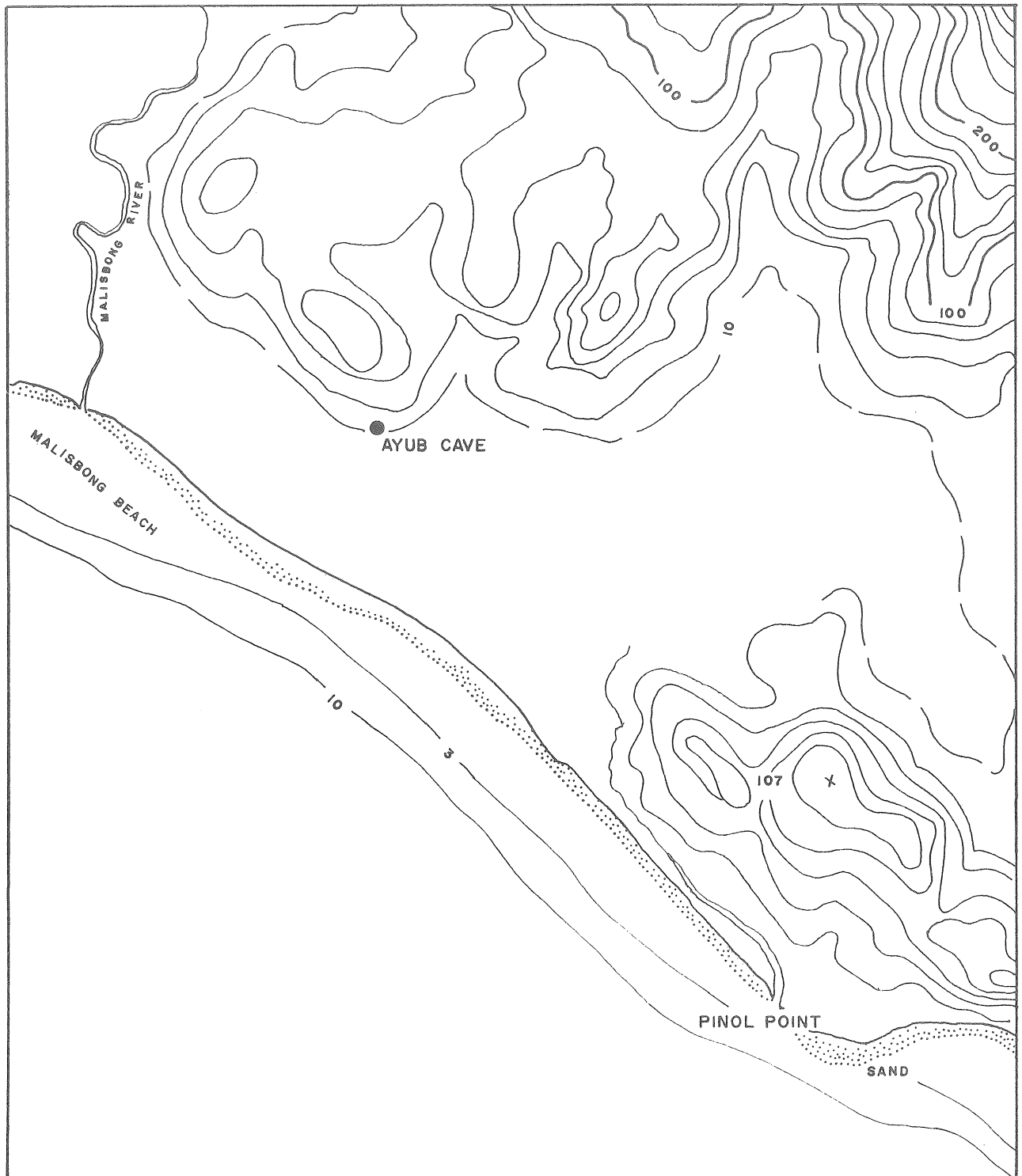


Figure 2: The location of Ayub Cave

DIZON, THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC POTTERY FROM AYUB CAVE

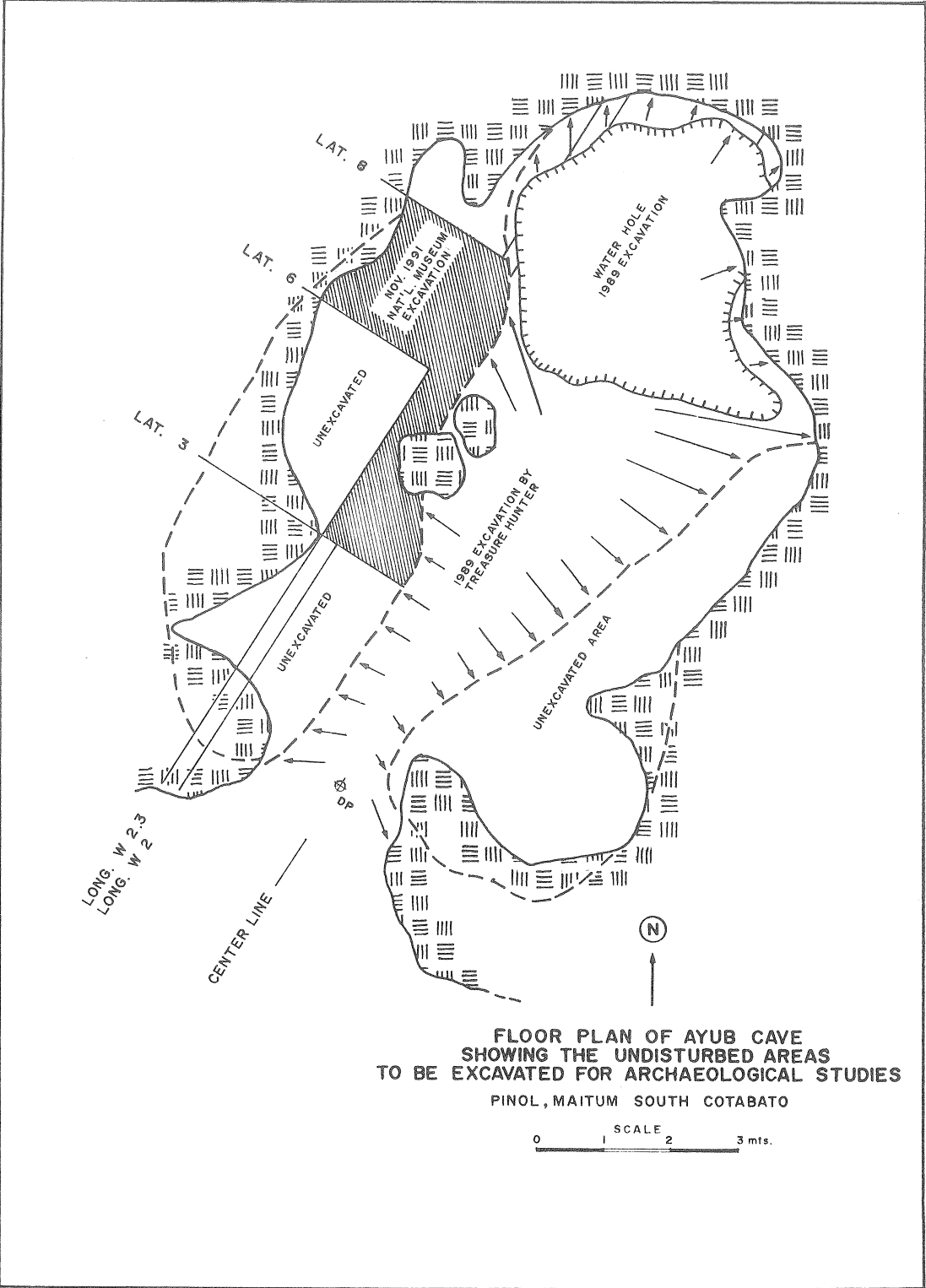


Figure 3: Floor plan of Ayub Cave

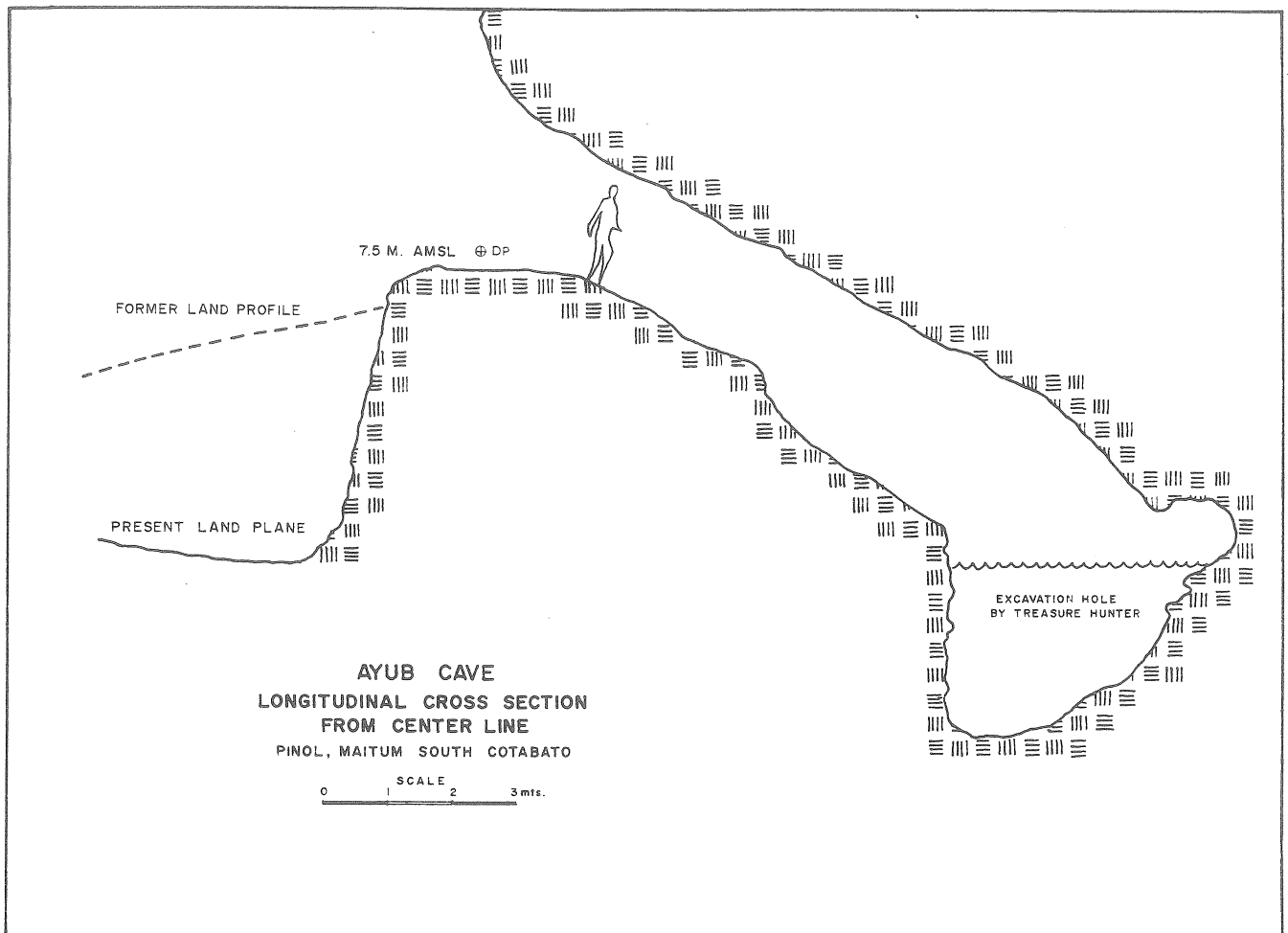


Figure 4: Cross-section of Ayub Cave

ranging from 7 to 14 cm high, 6 to 12 cm diameter and with walls 0.2 to 0.5 cm thick. It seems that the heads were parts of lids for secondary and/or multiple-person burial jars. Fragments of earthenware shoulders, arms and breasts were also observed. On some heads the details of ears, mouths and chins were modelled in appliqué, while on others these details were directly molded with the head. A number of heads were painted in red and black and some restorable earthenware vessels had red slip running-scroll motifs. There were also vessels with cord marked and incised decoration. The pottery was all low-temperature fired. It was hoped that some of the missing parts of the restorable pottery could still be found *in situ* in the cave deposit.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES

An archaeological team composed of myself, Rey Santiago, Jose Santiago and Miguel Accion, all of the Archaeology Division of the National Museum, left for General Santos City in November 1991. We were based in the compound of Hadji Ayub and immediately started work on the reconstruction and restoration of the cultural material recovered from the cave. At the same time the cave floor was mapped and contoured. A 2 x 2 meter grid was laid down and excavation of the cave floor following natural layers was begun.

During the second phase of the project the same team conducted more extensive archaeological explorations from 8th April to 4th May 1992. Systematic excavation was continued since we suspected that much material lay in the undisturbed portion (Figure 3). We were able to

DIZON, THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC POTTERY FROM AYUB CAVE

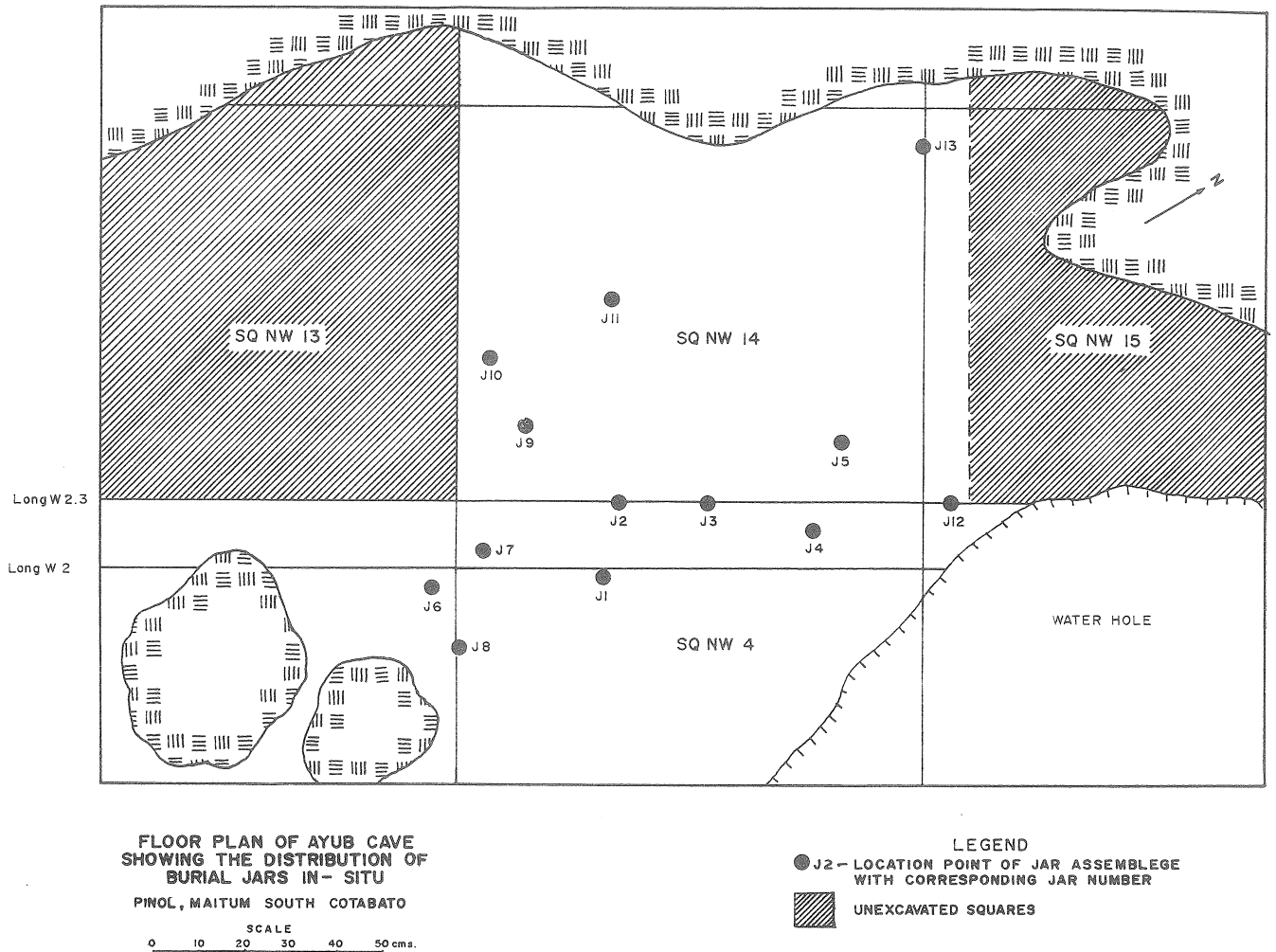


Figure 5: Jar burial locations in Ayub Cave

recover a number of *in situ* artifacts within their associated cultural matrices.

Because of the difficult field situation (lack of supplies and equipment) the archaeological materials, totaling 4 cubic meters, had to be crated and shipped to the Archaeology Division of the National Museum in Manila for restoration and reconstruction. The materials included 29 complete heads with only minor damage, 20 restorable heads and approximately 100 fragments of heads. Hence a provisional number of about 200 heads in varying degrees of preservation was recovered.

The locations of excavated jar burial assemblages within the cave, in plan and section, are shown in Figures 5 and 6. In Figure 7 a number of reconstructed whole vessels are shown, including burial jars with anthropo-

morphic lids and smaller accessory vessels. Among the anthropomorphic jar covers, the heads show various facial expressions. Some have traces of a smile and express joy and contentment. Others look very sad, even weeping. Some have their teeth well depicted, others seem to lack teeth. In terms of surface decoration, the heads can be plain, painted in red and black, and some have perforated hair positions (Figure 8)

One secondary burial jar (Figure 9), made of a low-temperature fired earthenware, was completely reconstructed. Without its lid, the jar, in the shape of a male human torso, is 43.5 cm high, 36 cm wide, 30 cm across the mouth and has walls 7 cm thick. The two arms project freely from the vessel and are slightly bent at the elbows. The pose suggests a serene mood, a sort of

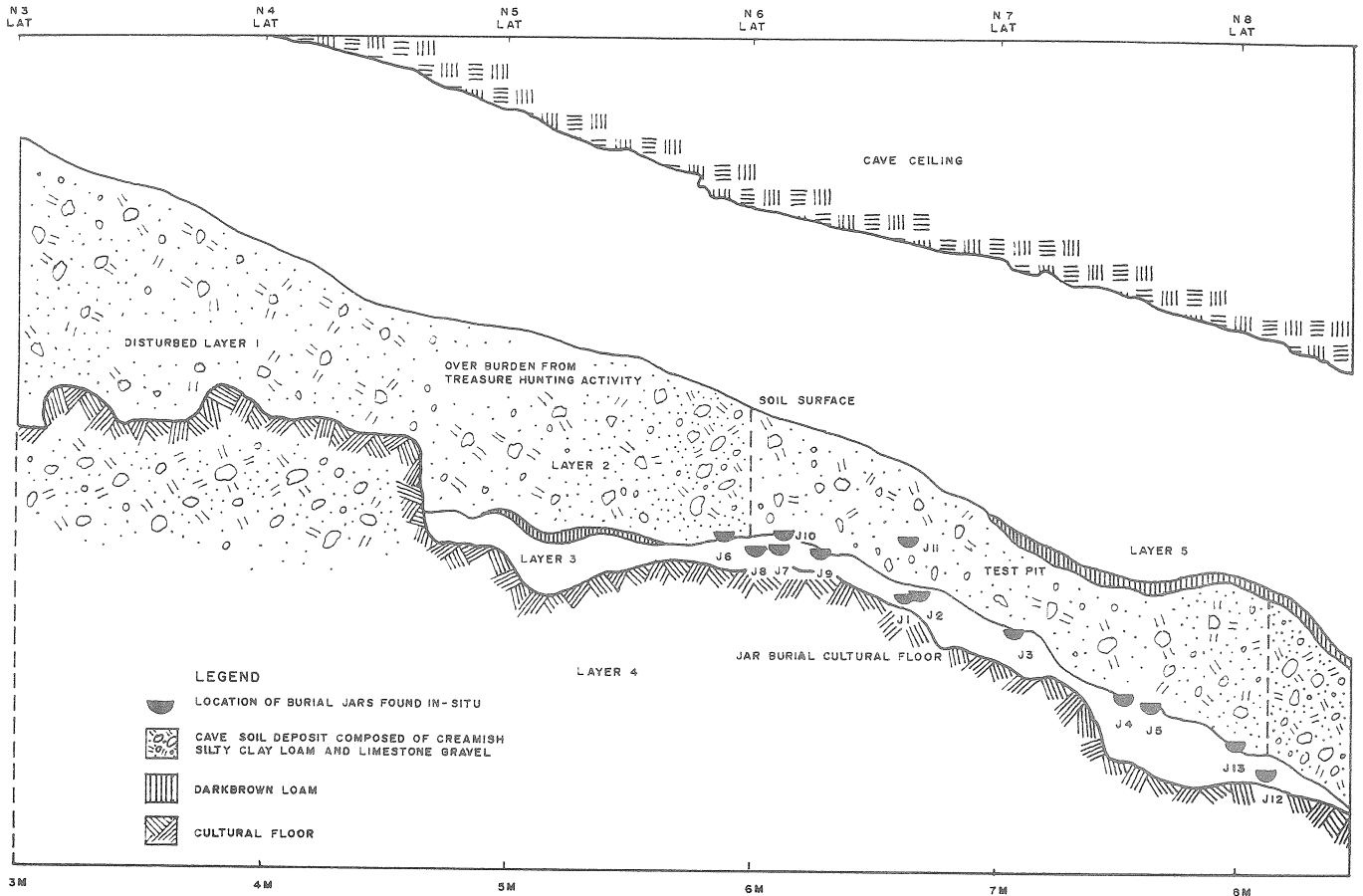


Figure 6: Stratigraphic profile of Ayub Cave

“togetherness”, as if the person depicted wanted to keep his family together. From shoulder to elbow the arms are 12 cm long and 17 cm from elbow to fingers. The body, although male, has the navel and nipples realistically depicted. With the anthropomorphic cover, the whole combination is 70 cm high.

These burial jars were associated with well-decorated earthenware jarlets, some with human teeth and phalanges inside, glass beads and bracelets, earthenware beads, shell implements and ornaments, and also iron blades. The main types of pottery decoration are paddle impression, cord-marking and incision, with the latter including geometric and angular incised designs. A scroll pattern painted in black and red is common. Foot rings with cut-out patterns also occur.

The red and black pigments have been analyzed by Orlando V. Abinon, Head of the Chemistry and Conser-

vation Laboratory Section of the National Museum. According to him, the red color comes from haematite painted on the surface before firing and the black is an organic carbon derived from burned plant materials and other deteriorated organic materials in clay.

COMPARISONS

Some of the pottery design elements are similar to those on earthenware sherds found in Tambler, General Santos City, South Cotabato (Dizon *et al.* 1991) and by Solheim, Legaspi and Neri (1979) in their exploration in southeastern Mindanao. At a more distant remove, similarities exist with some of the Ban Chiang pottery from Thailand (White 1982). Comparing the Ayub Cave anthropomorphic pottery with the designated National Cultural Treasure, the Manunggul Jar from Palawan (Fox 1970: frontispiece), one notices similarities in the use of the in

DIZON, THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC POTTERY FROM AYUB CAVE

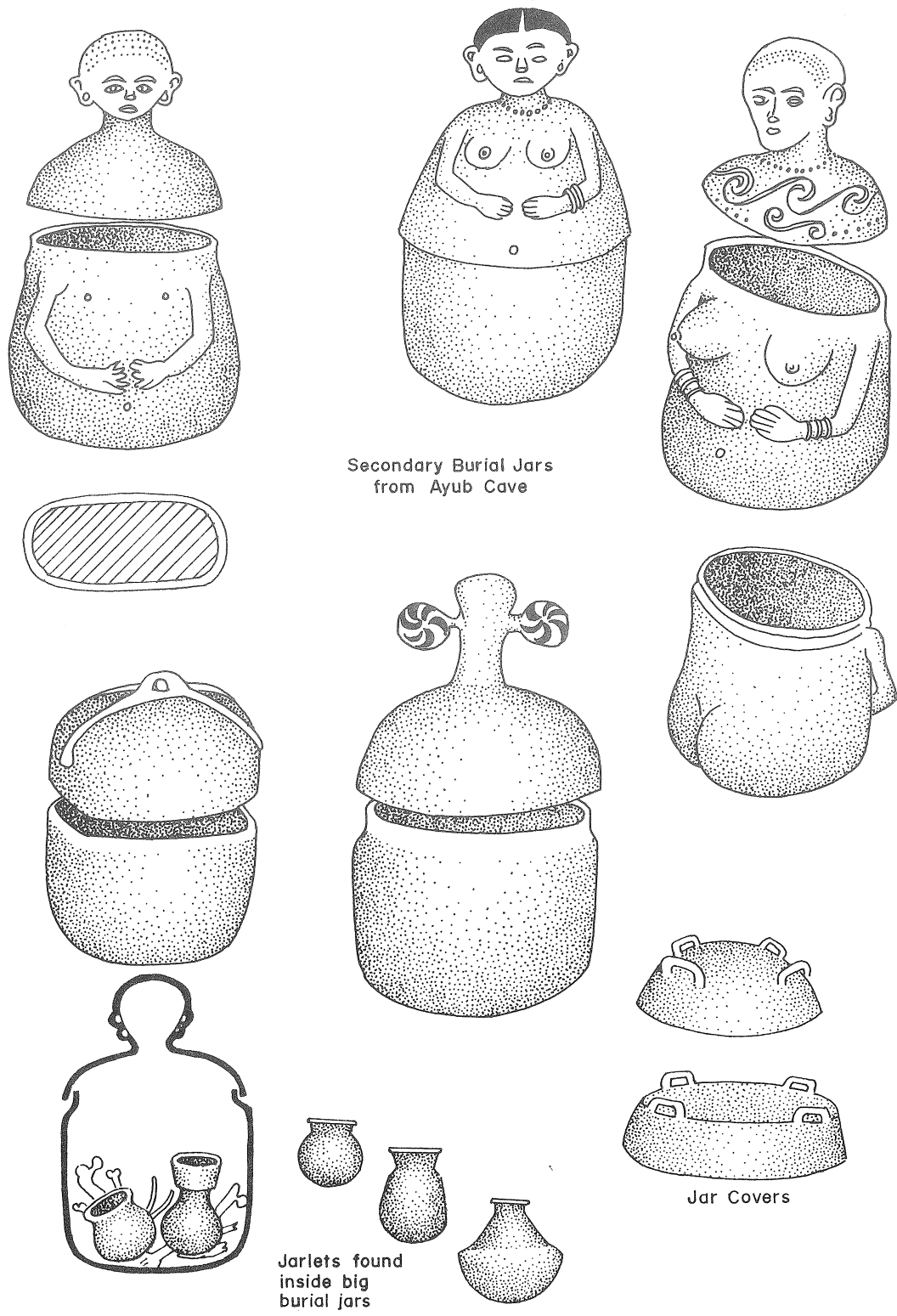


Figure 7: Secondary burial jars from Ayub Cave

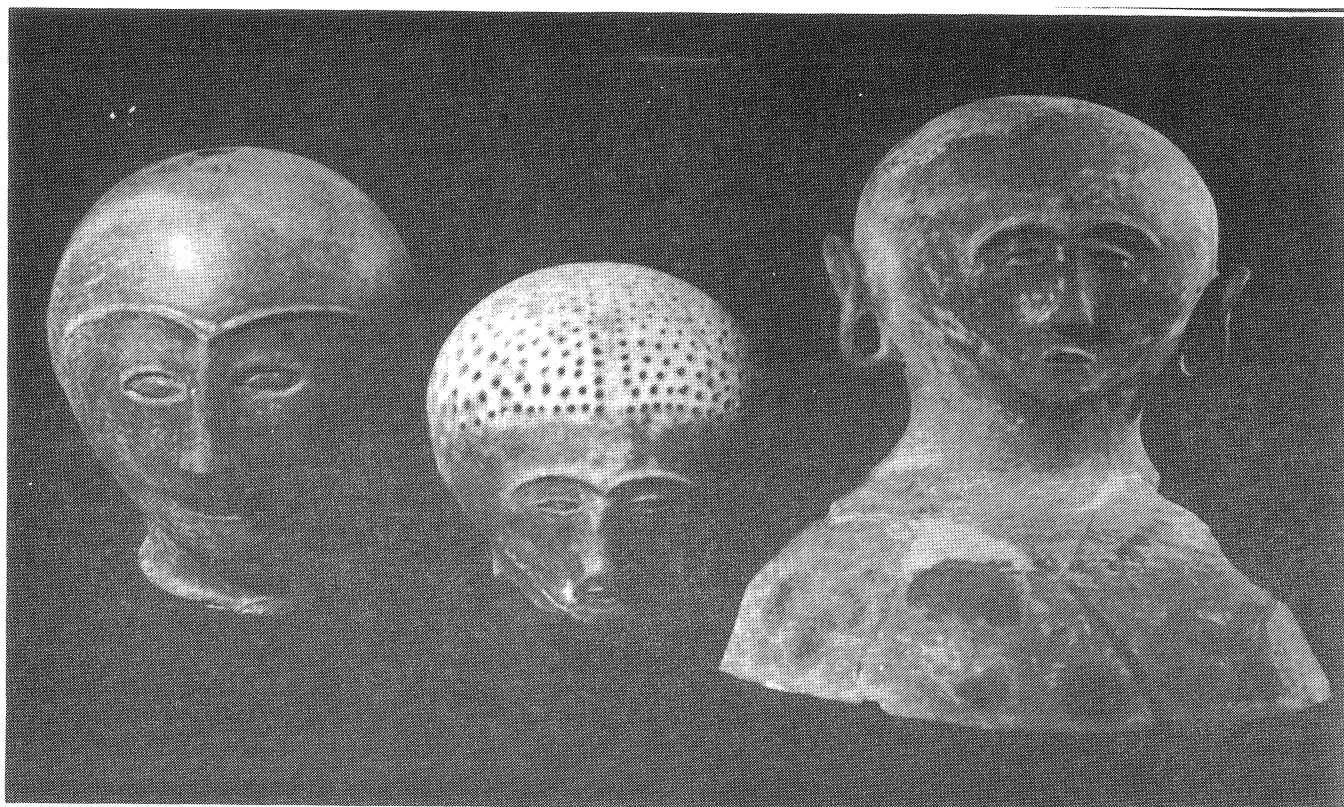


Figure 8: Three different types of human head portrayed on lids

cised and red-painted S-shaped scrolls. However, the Cotabato anthropomorphic pottery has more detailed facial expressions.

The Ayub Cave incised and painted designs are characteristic of the Metal Age in the Philippines, from about 500 BC to AD 500. However, this is only an estimated age and no absolute dates for the site are as yet available. Maceda (1967a, 1967b) was of the opinion that similar artifacts from Kulaman Plateau could date from at least 1000 BC, while Kurjack *et al.* (1970, 1971) provided a single radiocarbon date of AD 585±85 from collagen in human bone taken from a burial urn with similar cultural materials.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The age of this anthropomorphic funerary jar tradition discovered in the Maguindanao area needs further research, as does our understanding of the people who produced these artifacts for the benefit of their ancestors and for future generations. This is a rich cultural tradition

which had been lost for perhaps centuries or millennia. It is not certain that the people buried in these anthropomorphic urn burials were the direct ancestors of the present people of the Maguindanao area; in order to investigate such possible genetic continuity DNA tests should be conducted on the skeletal remains for comparison with the genotype of the present populations of the region.

The Filipino people must work hard in order to reconstruct their origins within their archaeological past. We must help to protect, preserve and conserve these important archaeological sites in Philippines.

REFERENCES

- Briones, S.M. 1972. The burial sites of Salansang, Salaman, Lebak, southern Cotabato, Philippines. Paper presented on the Seminar on Southeast Asian Archaeology and Prehistory, sponsored by the National Museum of the Philippines, June 26-July 3, 1972, Manila.
- Briones, S.M. and Chiong, L.T. 1977. Salansang urn burials. *Filipino Heritage* 1: 205-29. Manila: Lahing Pilipino Publishing Inc.

DIZON, THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC POTTERY FROM AYUB CAVE



Figure 9: A completely reconstructed anthropomorphic secondary burial jar from Ayub Cave

- Dizon, E.Z. 1991a. A report on the assessment of an archaeological complex site in Pinol, Maitum, South Cotabato (2-6 August 1991), NM Code XI-91-P2. Manuscript, National Museum, Manila.
- Dizon, E.Z. 1991b. Project and budget proposal: anthropomorphic potteries from Maitum, South Cotabato. Manuscript, National Museum, Manila.
- Dizon, E. Z.. 1991c. First status report on the archaeological project in Pinol, Maitum, South Cotabato. Manuscript, National Museum, Manila.
- Dizon, E.Z., Ronquillo, W. P., Aguilera, M., Santiago, J. and Cuevas, M. 1991. Archaeological assessment and evaluation of the proposed Agro-Industrial Fish Port Complex at Sitio Supu, Barangay Tambler, General Santos City, South Cotabato, Mindanao. Manuscript, National Museum, Manila.
- Dizon, E.Z., Santiago, R.A., Santiago, J.G. and Accion, M.C. 1992a. Second status report on the archaeological project on Pinol, Maitum, South Cotabato (X-91-P2). Manuscript, National Museum, Manila.
- Dizon, E.Z., Santiago, R.A., Santiago, J.G. and Accion, M.C. 1992b. Anthropomorphic potteries from Ayub Cave, Pinol, Maitum, South Cotabato. A photographic album of the project. Archaeology Division. National Museum, Manila.
- Dizon, E.Z., Magdaraog, G.L., Cuevas, M., Santiago, J.G., Bersamira, E.D. and Batoon, L.M. 1993. Archaeological Survey, New GSC Airport, Tambler, South Cotabato. A Report prepared by Southeast Asian Institute of Culture and Environment. Quezon City.
- Fox, R.B. 1970 *The Tabon Caves*. Monograph of the National Museum No. 1. Manila.
- Kurjack, E.B. and Sheldon, C.T. 1970 The archaeology of Seminoho Cave in Lebak, Cotabato. *Siliman Journal* 17(1): 5-18.
- Kurjack, E.B., Sheldon, C.T., and Keller, M.E. 1971. The urn burial caves of southern Cotabato, Mindanao, Philippines. *Siliman Journal* 18(2): 127-53.
- Maceda, M.N. 1964. Preliminary report on ethnographic and archaeological field work in the Kulaman Plateau, Island of Mindanao, Philippines. *Anthropos* 59: 75-82.
- Maceda, M.N. 1965. Second preliminary report on the archaeological excavation in the Kulaman Plateau (Cotabato), Island of Mindanao. *Anthropos* 60: 237-40.
- Maceda, M.N. 1966. Archaeological and socio-anthropological field work in Kulaman Plateau, Southern Cotabato. *Science Review* 7: 12-20.
- Maceda, M.N.. 1967a. A preliminary report on the Feneffe Cave excavation, Kulaman Plateau. In Mario D. Zamora (ed.), *Studies in Philippine Anthropology*, pp. 265-272. Quezon City: Alemars Phoenix.
- Maceda, M.N. 1967b. Preliminary studies of figures and ornamentation of some selected jar covers from Kulaman Plateau (southwestern Cotabato), Island of Mindanao, Philippines. *Anthropos* 62: 527-8.
- Solheim, W.G. II, Legaspi, A.M. and Neri, J.S. 1979. *Archaeological Survey in Southeastern Mindanao*. Monograph No. 8. National Museum of the Philippines and the University of Hawaii. Manila, Philippines.
- White, J.C. 1982. *Ban Chiang: Discovery of a Lost Bronze Age*. Philadelphia: The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania and the Smithsonian Institution.