

ARCHAEOLOGY OF BATANES PROVINCE, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES: THE 1996-1997 STATUS REPORT

Eusebio Z. Dizon

Archaeology Division and Underwater Archaeology Section, National Museum of the Philippines, Manila, Philippines

ABSTRACT

To date, Philippine societies are still divided politically into barangay, a term which has the original meaning of "boat". The Batanes archaeological finds include boat-shaped burial markers and castle-like structures, the former reflecting the maritime adaptations of the ancient inhabitants of these islands. This paper covers the latest archaeological findings in the islands of Batanes, which suggest the maritime orientation of the ancestors of Filipinos.

INTRODUCTION

Batanes Province (Figures 1 and 2) is an archaeological surprise not only for the Philippines, but also for the rest of Southeast Asia. There is archaeological evidence for castle-like habitation structures locally known as *ijang* (also spelled *idjang*). The latter are similar to Okinawan castles called *gusuku*, located in the Ryukyu Islands between Taiwan and Japan (Dizon and Santiago 1994, 1995). Also, stone boat-shaped burial markers, which are quite similar to the Viking burials of Scandinavian countries, are found in the Batanes group of islands. These stone boat-shaped burial markers could be archaeological evidence of a true *barangay* community. The *barangay* is technically a boat, but the term was recorded by the Spaniards as referring to the basic socio-political unit of the Philippine societies at the time of their contact in the sixteenth century.

This report is a continuation of the Batanes Archaeological Project which was started in 1994 when it was funded solely by the Archaeology Division of the National Museum of the Philippines (Dizon and Santiago 1994, 1995). Since then the project has merited financial support from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts in 1995 (Dizon and Santiago 1995) and 1996. In 1997, the Archaeology Division received funds from the

congressional insertion of Representative Feliciano "Sonny" Belmonte, 4th District of Quezon City, to conduct further fieldwork in Batanes.

THE 1996 ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK

In 1996 the project undertook its initial fieldwork activities on February 5-14. The team (all from the National Museum of the Philippines) was composed of Mr Wilfredo P. Ronquillo, Chief of the Archaeology Division; Dr Eusebio Z. Dizon, Curator I, Archaeology Division and Project Proponent of the Batanes Archaeological Project; Mr Rey A. Santiago, Museum Researcher II; Mr Armand Salvador B. Mijares, Project Co-ordinator and Museum Researcher I; and Ms Mary Jane Louise Bolunia, Museum Researcher I. Dr Florentino Hornedo (professor at the Ateneo de Manila University in Quezon City, the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, and St Dominic College in Basco) acted as ethnohistorian with the Batanes Archaeological Project and guided the team to new archaeological sites. Mr Joaquin Nepomuceno, an avid photographer of Batanes, also joined the team.

The activities conducted during this period consisted of explorations of newly discovered sites in Diptan and Nakamaya, Basco, Batanes, and other sites in Mahatao, Batan Island. Jar burial sites were observed at Diptan in Basco, stone boat-shaped burial markers in Nakamaya, and standing stones with small perforations were located in Disbayangan and Rakwaydi, Mahatao (see Figure 2).

During the first stage of fieldwork, rescue archaeological excavation was also conducted on two sets of burial jars located along a road cut in Diptan. One burial jar was partially exposed at Naydi Hills, on an eroding clay matrix. The second jar was close to the main paved road of the area. These jars had already been damaged by both natural and cultural processes such as erosion, road building, and by people throwing stones on them. Skeletal remains such as

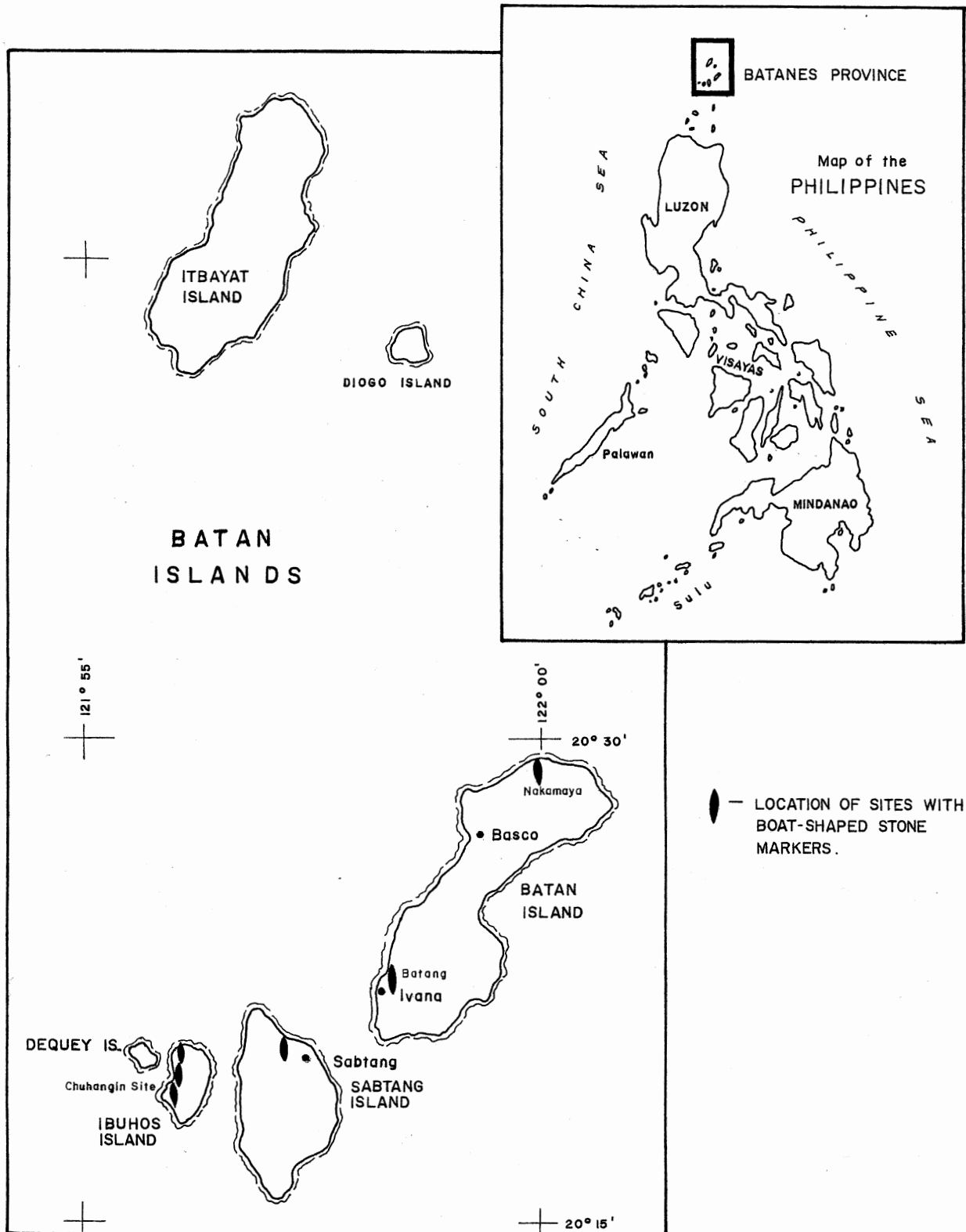


Figure 1: Map of Batanes Province, Northern Philippines.

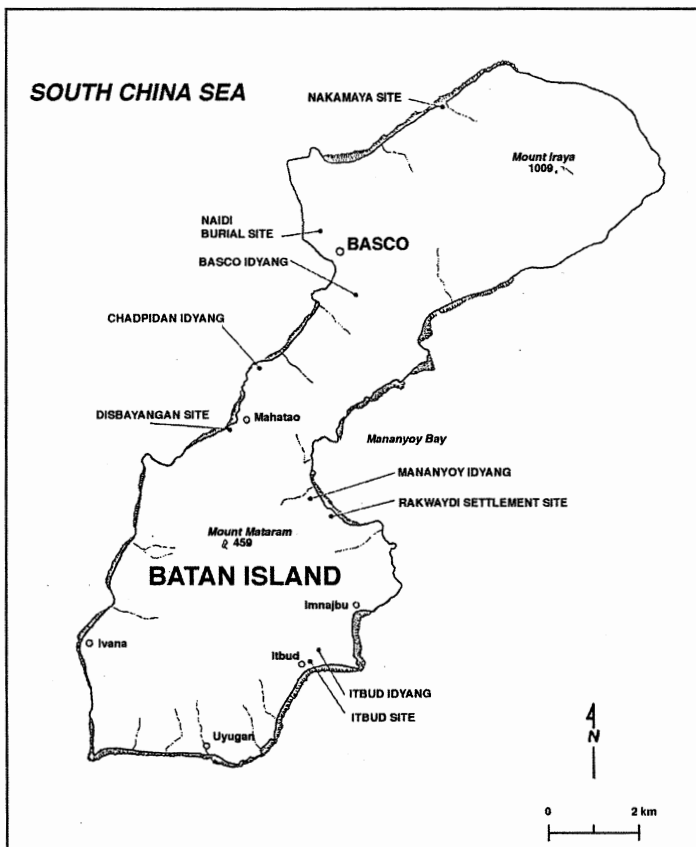


Figure 2: Archaeological sites surveyed and excavated on Batan Island.

long bones, crania and teeth were observed inside the jars (Figure 3). The jars have an average wall thickness of 1.3 cm, a diameter of 55-58 cm, and an approximate height of 60 cm. Jar 1 was covered by 55 to 65 cm thickness of clay loam and the matrix was dark brown clay.

The next fieldwork activities were conducted from February 26 to March 27 1996. The team was composed of Eusebio Dizon as the leader, along with Messrs Rey Santiago, Antonio Peñalosa (scientific illustrator) and Pablo Pagulayan (utility man), and finally Mary Jane Louise Bolunia. The aims of this fieldwork were the excavation of a large, boat-shaped stone burial marker in Chuhangin Site I (Figures 4 and 5) on Ibhuhos Island, and continued exploration of the islands of Ibhuhos and Sabtang. Further habitation sites as well as a number of stone boat-shaped burial markers, jar burial sites, and the combination of a jar burial inside a stone boat-shaped marker, were located on the western side of Ibhuhos Island. Stone boat-shaped burial markers were also found at Havay, Malakdang, on the eastern side of Sabtang Island.

Three burials were excavated on the island of Ibhuhos. All the skeletons were males, about 50 to 60 years old at

death, and in flexed or supine position. The right femur of the skeleton in Grave 10, at the stone boat-shaped marker in Chuhangin Site I, was subjected to a radiocarbon test, producing a result of 355 ± 70 BP. The Geochron Laboratories at Cambridge, Massachusetts, produced this date, through the generous financial support of Dr Tsang Cheng-hwa of the Institute of History and Philology, Archaeology Division, Academia Sinica in Taiwan.

The third stage of fieldwork was conducted from March 18 to April 15. Armand Mijares headed the team, accompanied by Messrs Ricardo de Gunman, Museum Researcher I acting as scientific illustrator, and Eduardo Caranon, Museum Technician. Ms Lourdes Valerio, Museum Researcher I in the Botany Division, who was given the task of conducting botanical explorations and studies on both Ibhuhos and Adequay islands, joined the team. The aims of this team were to conduct test excavations at the Vula Nakavajayan site, Ibhuhos Island, and to carry out an exploration of island Adequay island. During this stage, two geologists from the National Museum came to conduct geological surveys in both Ibhuhos and Adequay as part of the study. That team was headed by Mr Roberto de Ocampo, acting chief of the Geology Division and Mr Luis T. Omania, Senior Museum Researcher, Geology Division.

From June 19 to July 8 1996, Rey Santiago conducted further explorations and mappings at Nakamaya, Basco and Rakwaydi, Mahatao. He discovered another stone boat-shaped burial marker in Nakamaya, now known as Locality II. A plane-table map of the area was also made. On the basis of Santiago's studies and map, two teams were formed to conduct test excavations.

The two teams were restricted to Batan Island during the session of fieldwork from September 30 to October 14. This decision was mainly due to weather conditions and the efforts made by Rey Santiago in identifying and mapping the sites in question. The aim of these teams was to conduct excavations at Nakamaya near Basco and Rakwaydi near Mahatao. Eusebio Dizon headed the first team, along with Antonio Peñalosa and Ms Mary Grace Lualhati Barretto from the Archaeological Studies Program at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, as members. The team was enjoined to excavate the stone boat-shaped burial markers at Locality II, Nakamaya, Basco. The second team was composed of Messrs Armand Mijares as the team leader, Sheldon Clyde Jago-on (Museum Researcher I), and Jose Santiago (Museum Researcher I, also working as scientific illustrator). This team was entrusted with conducting a test excavation at the Rakwaydi site, Mahatao. Roberto de Ocampo briefly joined both teams; Dr Florentino Hornedo and Mr Noli Gavilo, an official of the Office of the Northern Cultural Communities

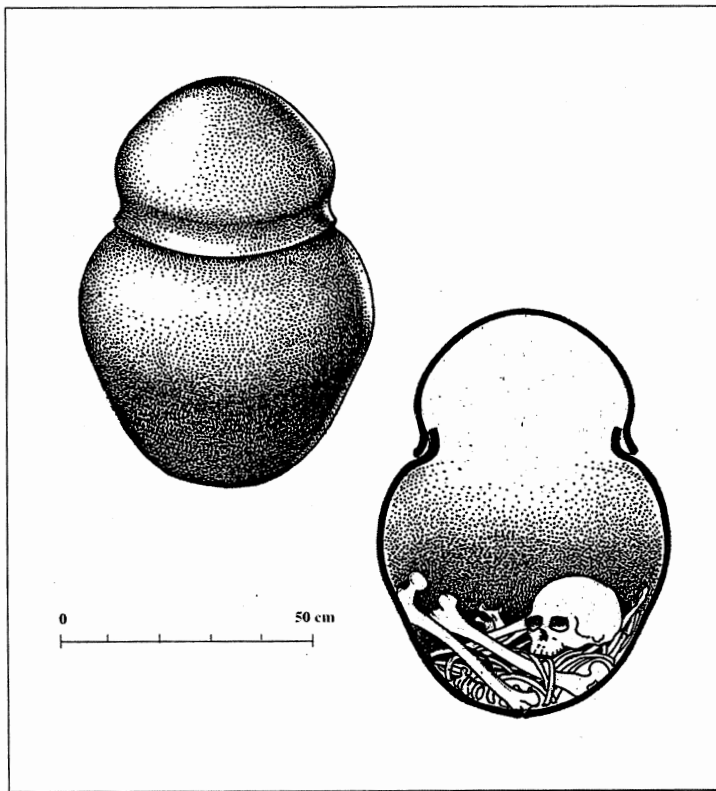


Figure 3: Reconstruction of a typical Batanes burial jar.

in Batanes who also works for the office of Congressman "Butch" Abad, made a visit to the first team at Nakamaya.

From 17 to 23 November Eusebio Dizon and Rey Santiago were consulted by UNESCO officials, namely architect Augusto Villalon and Mr Philippe Delange. A brief visit was made to all the sites where the National Museum teams had worked in Batanes, including the small traditional villages such as Chavayan on Sabtang Island. The purpose of this visit was to make a preliminary assessment of the sites, which may be nominated for the UNESCO World Heritage List.

THE 1997 ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK

Only one fieldwork session was conducted in Batanes in 1997 owing to lack of funds. It was only through the congressional initiative of Congressman Sonny Belmonte for a budgetary insertion in favour of the National Museum's Archaeology Division that it proved possible for the team to conduct fieldwork over the period between 15 September and 13 October. The team was composed of Eusebio Dizon, Rey Santiago, Armand Mijares, Antonio Peñalosa and Eduardo Caronan, along with Ms Josefina Belmonte (honorary researcher of the Archaeology Division), and three student volunteers from the Archaeological Studies Program,

University of the Philippines, namely Jun Cayron, Arnulfo Dado and Mary Grace Barretto. The team was divided into two groups. One group excavated Locality I of the Nakamaya site, and the other performed both explorations and excavation at Rakwaydi and other sites in Ivana, Batan Island.

Stone boat-shaped marker Number 7 at Locality I, Nakamaya, was excavated and scientifically documented. It was also found to have already been disturbed by treasure hunters, apparently between five and ten years ago on the basis of a candy wrapper excavated at a depth of about one metre beneath the surface. Nevertheless, remains of a tibia were found at about the same depth. The stone boat-shaped marker is 5.56 m in length and 2.78 m at its widest girth. It lay at an elevation of 100 metres above mean sea level. The stones were mainly andesite, and no limestone or coral stones were observed.

At the Rakwaydi Old Settlement, Balugan, Mahatao, further exploration revealed new features, such as the *dap-dap* or stone pavement discovered in the lower part of the settlement. Two test pits in these stone features revealed archaeological materials such as earthenware sherds, stone implements, shell, and animal bone fragments, suggesting a habitation area.

A jar burial reported by Mr Cordel, principal of Mahatao Elementary School, was checked by the Rakwaydi group at Maydahas, Mahatao, located at 20°25'08"N 121°58'12"E. It was given the National Museum Accession Code II-97-W3. Another site with a pitted stone tool was located at the Kaumbakan trail and given the NMA Code II-97-X3. A possible Palaeolithic site was also noted at Diura, Mahatao, on the basis of a chert flake tool and source material for potential knapping. The Diura site was given the NMA Code of II-97-Y3.

Two sites were explored in the municipality of Ivana, Batan Island. One is the Vatang stone boat-shaped marker located at 20°23'42"N 121°55'47"E, at an elevation of approximately 100 m asl. This marker has a maximum length of 5.98 m and a width of 2.40 m. It was given the NMA Code II-97-F4. About 60 m west of the stone boat-shaped marker, a habitation site was discovered. Some columns, paving, dry stone walls and earthenware sherds were observed in the vicinity. Unfortunately, men working on a tank nearby had already quarried some of the stones, and we reported this to the local officials.

The San Vicente Idyang in Ivana was also explored. The site has the co-ordinates of 20°22'52"N 121°55'19"E. Stone paving and dry stone walls were observed in the lower levels of the *ijang*. Samples of earthenware sherds were collected. The site was given the NMA Code II-97-G4.

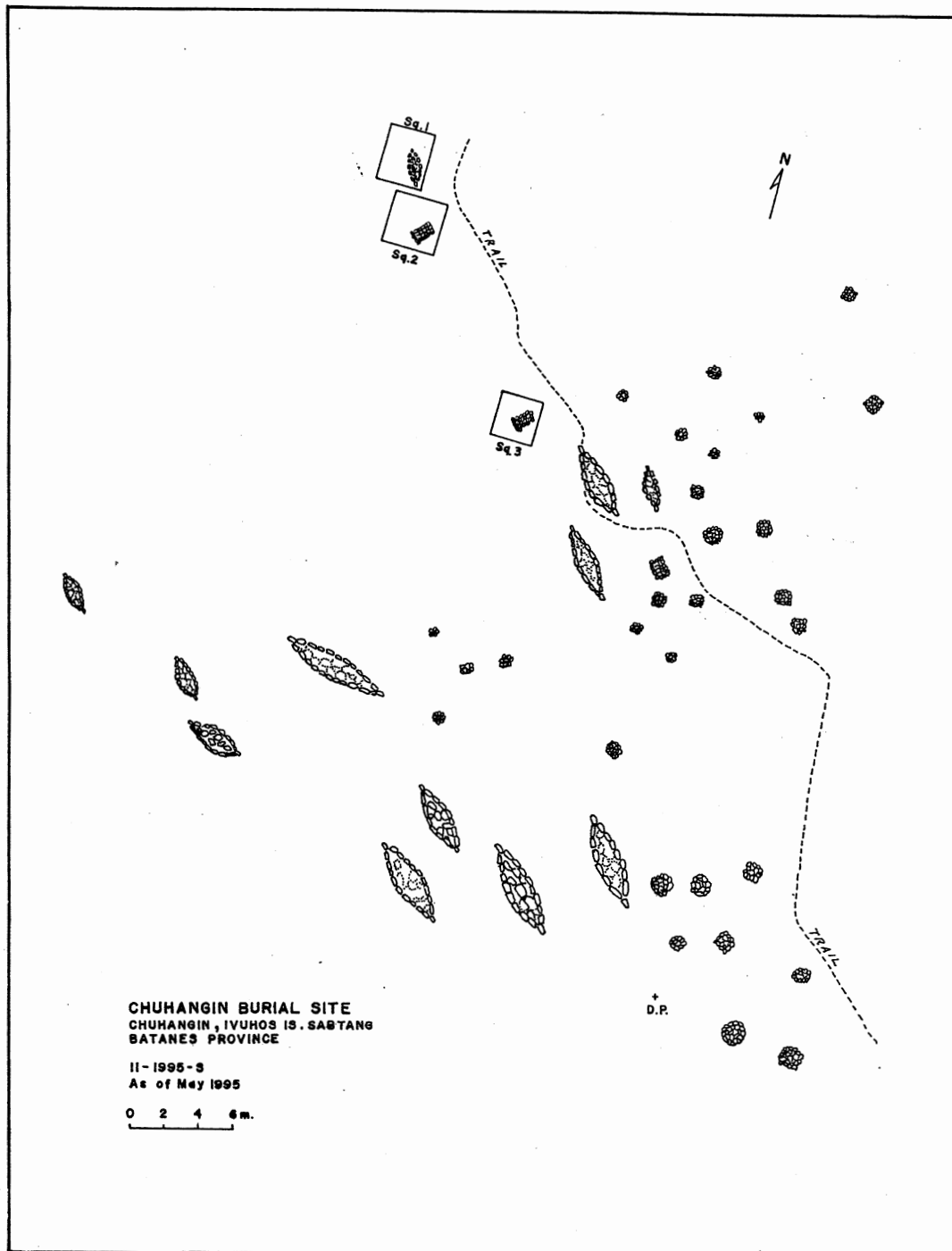


Figure 4: Distribution of boat-shaped grave markers at the Chuhangin burial site.

DATING AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

We observed evidence that the *ijang* had primarily been used as habitations and fortifications. We have reason to believe that the *ijang* functioned as castles, similar to the *gusuku* found in Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands, Japan (Pearson 1991). Although the term castle is often restricted in meaning to the

fortified residences of European history, structures with the same dual function were also built in the rest of the ancient world, and formed a major part of the architectural heritage of Japan's Monoyama Period in the 16th century AD. If we compare our preliminary maps and findings with Pearson's (1994) paper, particularly the figures he used from the

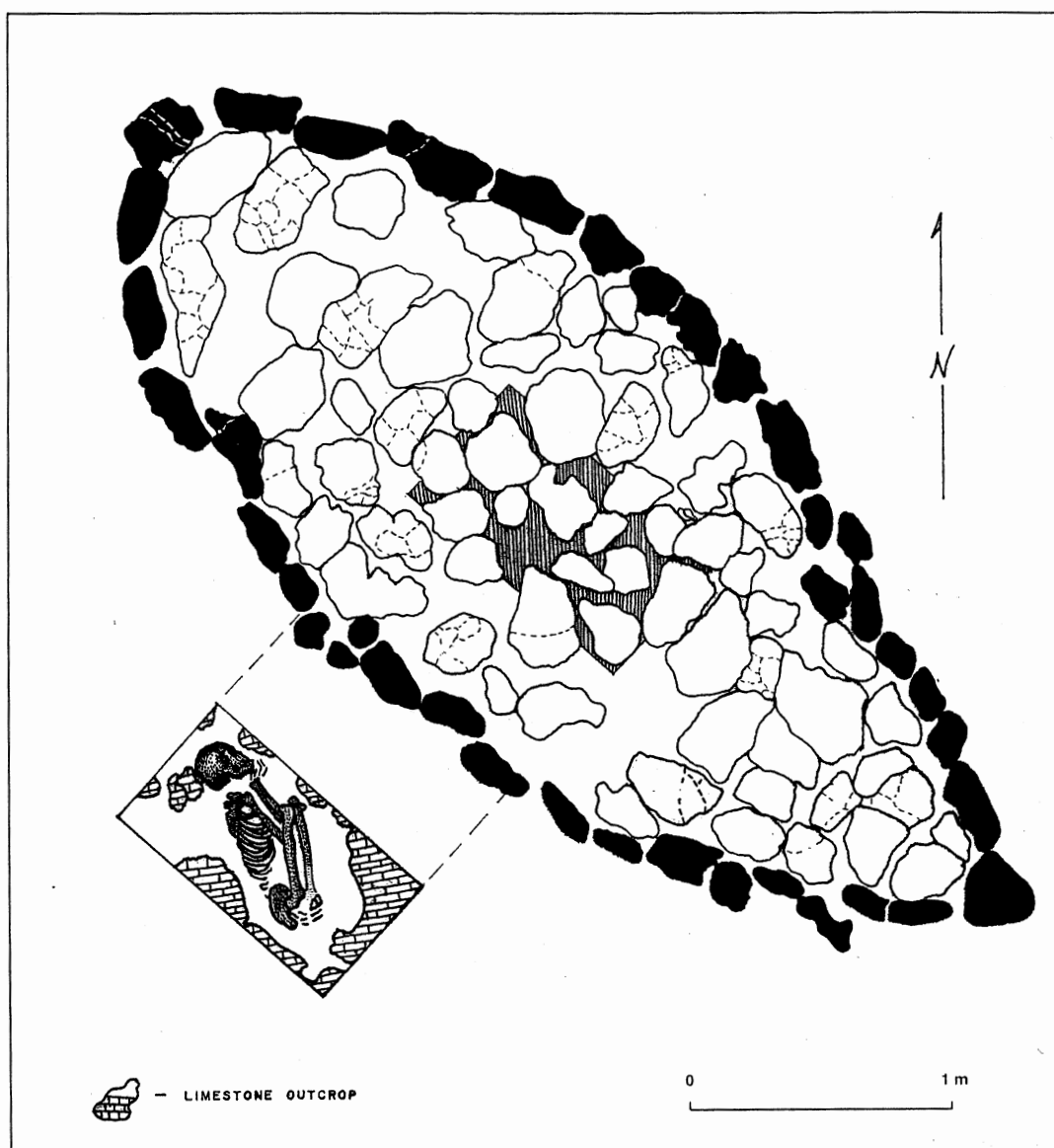


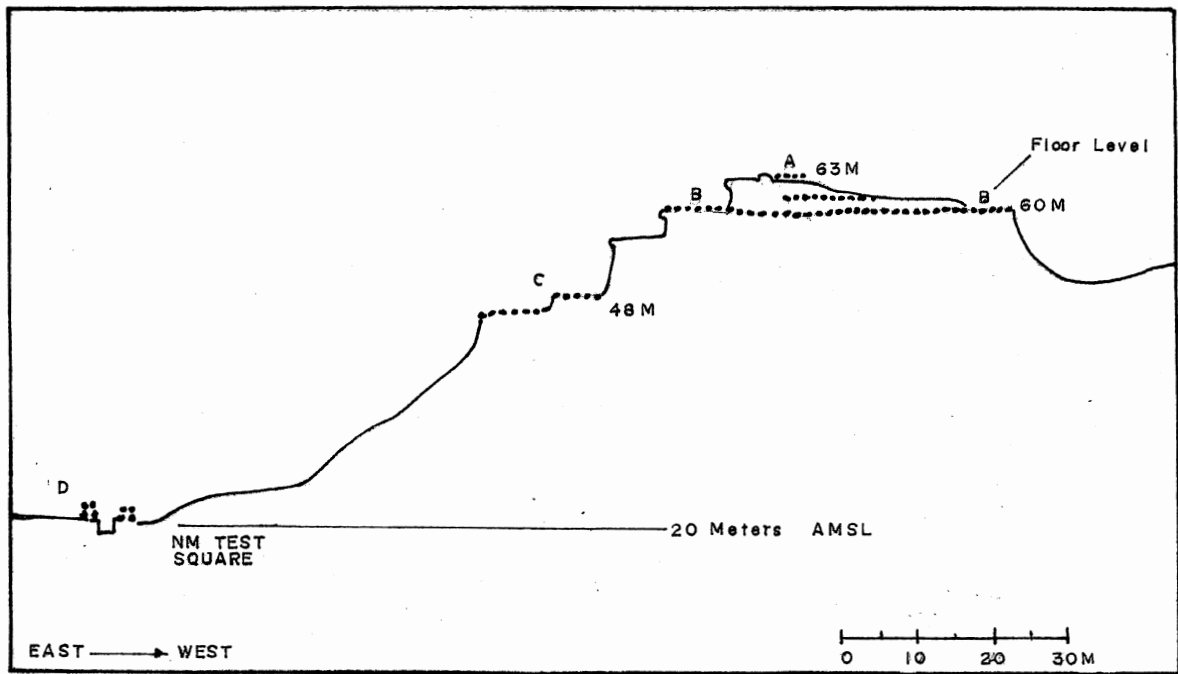
Figure 5: Chuhangin boat shaped burial No. 10 (coral limestone uprights shown black, blocks laid flat shown white).

Japanese literature, we note a remarkable similarity between the Savidug Ijang (located on Figure 1) and the Okinawan castles, especially the plan of Zakimi Gusuku (Pearson 1994:Figure 24).

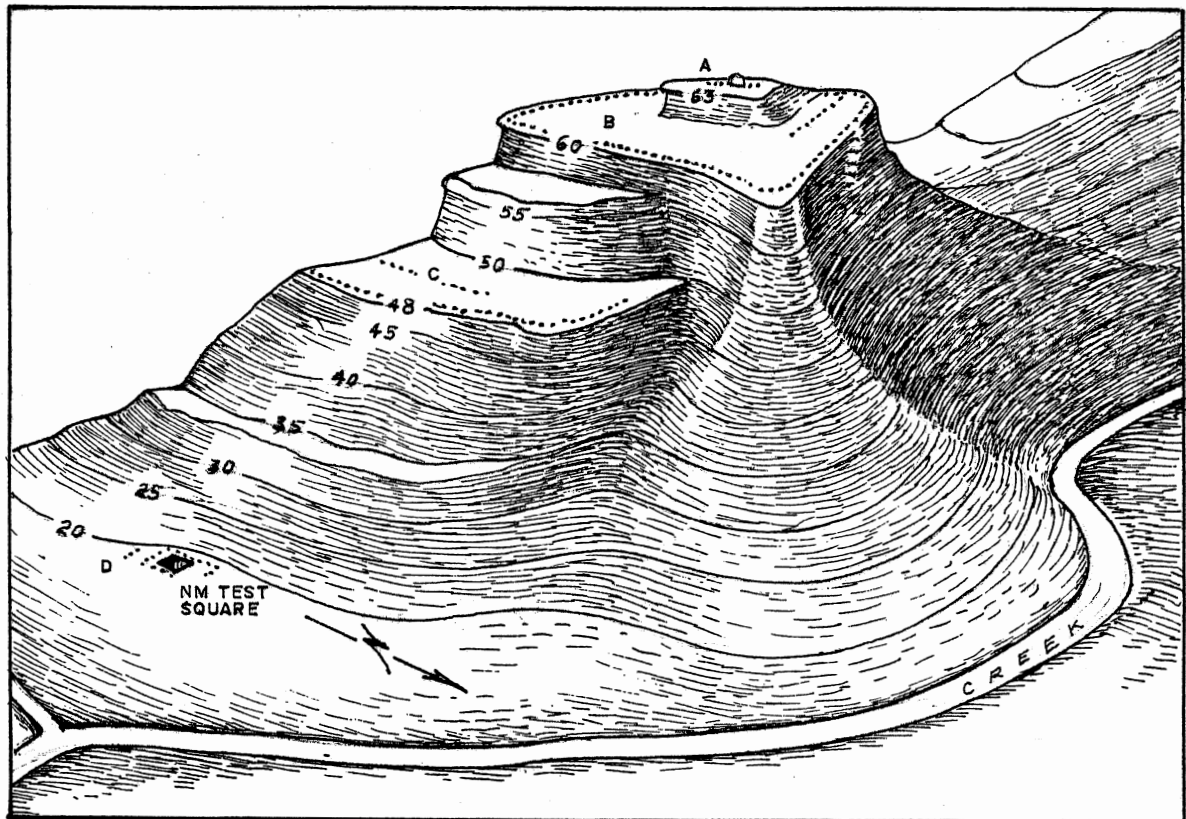
First, the builders of the *ijang* and the Okinawan *gusuku* castles were selective in choosing the natural topography to be utilized and made remarkable human modifications to the locality. The strategic location of the *ijang* and the *gusuku* in high places illustrates an interplay between culture and nature. Second, the artefactual materials recovered from the Savidug Ijang (Figure 6), such as the Sung-type ceramics and Chinese beads of the 12th century AD, fit perfectly well with the timing of the foundations of the Okinawan castles, beginning from c.AD 1200. In fact, there are indications

that the local potters imitated certain Sung-type ceramics, as evidenced among the earthenware sherds we retrieved (Figure 7). Some of the examined sherds are similar to those published by Koomoto (1983: Figures 8, 9, 11, 13; Plates 6-8, 27-30, 37). The significance of the *ijang* in the development of socio-political complexity in the Philippines is a topic that should be investigated in our future research.

Another archaeological finding in the Batanes area is the utilization of burial jars, of various forms and sizes, for both primary and secondary burials. Some have been methodically excavated by archaeologists, while others have been exposed by natural erosion or through human intervention such as road construction, building sea walls, and other forms of earth-moving activities. Some burial jars



Cross-section of Savidug Ijang showing major floor levels of different elevations



Savidug Ijang in perspective view as seen from its northeastern border

Figure 6: Savidug Ijang: cross-section and reconstruction.

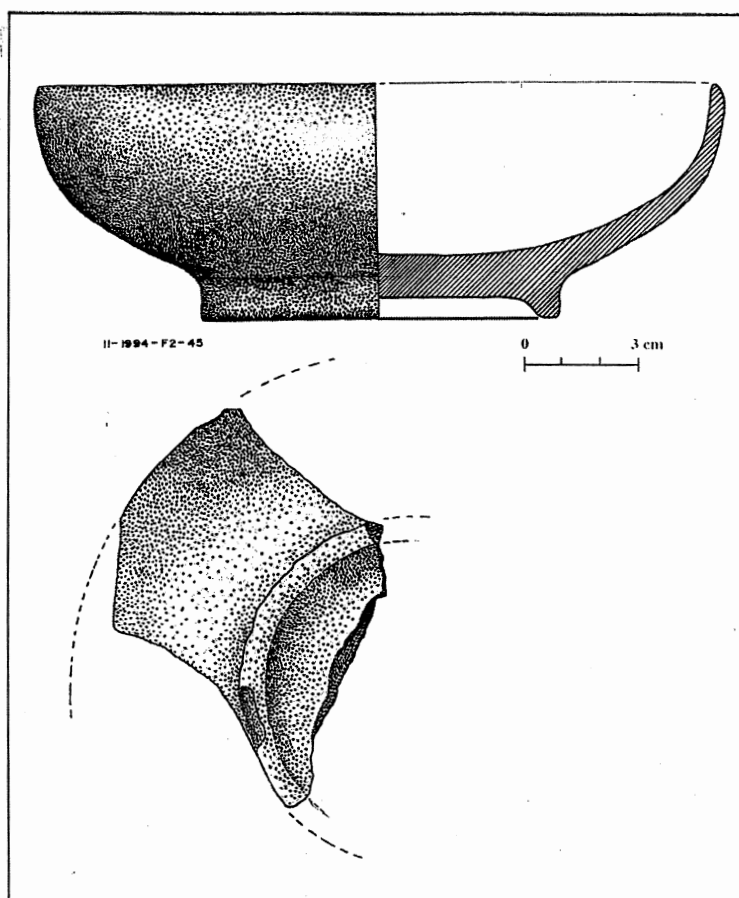


Figure 7: Earthenware bowl with footring, Chuhangin.

have covers or lids while others do not. There is one recorded case where a primary burial in a jar was excavated from inside an inverted boat-shaped stone burial marker (Figure 8). The Batanes burial jars are similar to those found in the Babuyan and other parts of the Philippines. In southern Taiwan, similar burial jars are also found and have been dated to AD 800-900.

In this case, there must have been an interaction sphere involving Batanes, Taiwan and Okinawa, where patterns of material culture were seemingly shared. This would be an adaptation to an island environment, where the limited available resources were maximized to their full potential. For instance, terraces using country stone as the construction material are observed. Reshaping the landscape for cultural, economic and other functions is also perceived.

In 1995, the excavation of Grave No. 1, Chuhangin, Iuhos Island, produced the skeletal remains of a child. We were able to send some samples to the Beta Analytic Laboratory, Miami, for radiocarbon dating. The radiocarbon determination gave the age as little more than a hundred years before the present. The possibility that the submitted sample may have been contaminated made us decide to delay

publication of the date. This is also one reason why we needed to excavate more burials in the site. In 1996, the right femur of the skeleton excavated in Grave 10 of the stone boat-shaped burial marker in Chuhangin Site I (Figure 8) was subjected to radiocarbon dating. As noted earlier, the test gave the age of 355 ± 70 BP or approximately AD 1600. It would now seem that a time span of some 300 years of burials at the site is documented as a result of the Batanes Archaeological Project.

There is no historical or written documentation among the present inhabitants of the area on the practice of building stone boat-shaped burial markers. Even among the Ivatans, there are no recollections that their ancestors had buried their dead with these markers. This phenomenon suggests a problem with ethno-history. Was there or wasn't there a cultural continuity between the present Ivatans and the archaeological population who constructed stone boat-shaped burial markers? If the dates of about AD 1600 to the early 20th century are right, then why was the practice of building these markers not noticed and documented at all? Perhaps, there was a cultural break between the archaeological population and the present settlers of Batanes today.

Furthermore, the significance of the stone boat-shaped grave markers, which could be the archaeological evidence of a true *barangay* community in the Philippines, should be pursued in the consideration of the evolution of Philippine societies. It is only by examining the whole range of linked phenomena that a reliable explanation of the *barangay* paradigm will be revealed. Of critical significance here, various communities in Island Southeast indeed produce statements establishing complex correlations between boats, houses and/or larger social groups, as illustrated through the research by Pierre-Yves Manguin on the region's "boat communities".

Manguin (1986:190) notes that in eastern Indonesia, where people identify with small political groups, the boat and the house are the main structural units. They are felt to be the best modes available to define and regulate relations between members of the individual units, between these units and the small political system represented by the village community, and between all these social units and the material world of economic production. The boat and the house provide models for encompassing various orders of social, political, economic and cosmological classification, including expression through myth and ritual.

For example, in Sawu, Kei and Tanimbar, houses are perceived in clear connection with the boat, with their parts named after the keel, the sail, the rudder or the mast. The inhabitants of the same village see themselves as belonging

to the same large communal "village boat", jointly possessed by the whole community and used only on special occasions, such as marriages, alliance renewals, warfare, or death, when the social order needs to be revalidated. The community leader and the dignitaries all have their appointed seats in this village boat, and their places are replicated in the boat-shaped meeting place inside the village. Ritual dances are performed around the symbolic boat whose form, thus mapped on the ground, is explicitly described in the songs. The village, or even the whole island at times, is spatially organized as a boat with its crew, thought of as a reflection of the journey of the original founding ancestors. The deceased, too, are sent on their final journey in boat burials.

How can we relate the archaeological findings in Batanes with the Vikings? First, referring to Capelle (1995:74), let us consider who the Vikings were. The term is used broadly to describe a Scandinavian people who, between AD 800 and 1100, voyaged in pursuit of trading and raiding along the shores of the adjacent seas (Baltic, North and Irish), and up the major rivers draining into these seas. During the Viking Age, these Scandinavians traded with states as far away as Byzantium and the Muslim Middle East, served as mercenaries at Constantinople, and explored the islands of the North Atlantic. The Vikings had swift and highly seaworthy ships, as well as an abundance of iron weapons. In Scandinavia their economy was based primarily on farming and animal husbandry, supplemented by fishing and

trapping in present-day Norway and Sweden. Of particular interest here, the Vikings buried their deceased either in actual ships or in stone boat-shaped graves, signifying that seafarers were interred underneath. These are the expression of a people adapted to the sea, as is also documented in the rock carvings of southern Scandinavia.

Perhaps the early inhabitants of Batanes were quite similar in their cultural practices to the Vikings. This is not to suggest that the Vikings visited the Batanes or exerted their influence on the local residents. There may have been a parallel socio-cultural development between the Vikings and the early inhabitants of Batanes in their adaptation to their environment as well as in their cultural evolution.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BATANES ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

Since our preliminary archaeological visit to Batanes in 1994 and the subsequent publication of reports on these visits, the area has gained popularity both locally and internationally. Aside from the public lectures delivered in some local schools and academic fora, international lectures on the Batanes Archaeological Project have also been presented in Paris, Hong Kong, Hawaii and the Netherlands.

Archaeologists, prehistorians, anthropologists and historians undoubtedly recognize the significance of the Batanes Archaeological Project. First, it shows that there indeed were stone structural formations in the Philippines

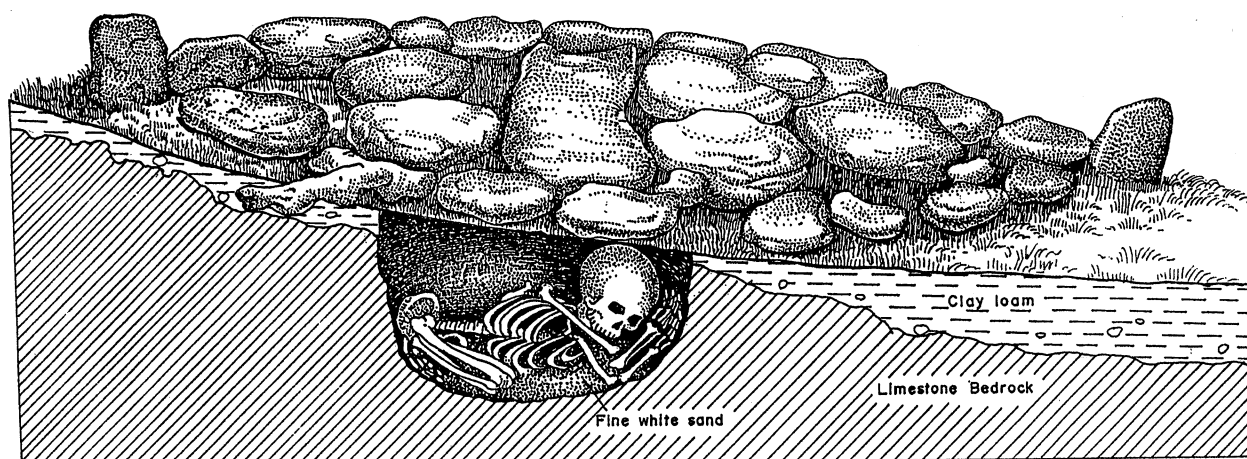


Figure 8: Boat-shaped stone grave marker Grave No. 1, Chuhangin Burial site, Ibuhos Island.

during the Prehispanic period, in particular, the use of erected columns of stone for house structures. Second, there were *ijang* settlements in prominent locations with substantial human modifications to the natural topography in order to accommodate stone architecture and engineering. The *ijang* are comparable to the *gusuku* or castles of Okinawa in the Ryukyus, while the stone terracing technique is comparable to the archaeological features of southeastern Taiwan. Third, the stone boat-shaped burial markers are significant to the study of the maritime orientation of the people buried in these graves. These, along with the stone boat-shaped burial markers of the Vikings of northern Europe, may be considered among the world's most solid and convincing cultural remains and heritage left by people with deep maritime connections.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We should like to thank the people of Batanes for their gracious support, and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts as well as Congressman Sonny Belmonte for their financial assistance to the Batanes Archaeological Project. Further acknowledgments are noted in the text.

REFERENCES

- Capelle, T. 1995. Bronze Age stone ships. In O.C. Pendersen and B.M. Tyre (eds), *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia*, pp. 71-5. Copenhagen: Publications from the National Museum Studies in Archaeology and History Volume 1.
- Dizon, E.Z. and R.A. Santiago. 1994. Preliminary report on the archaeological explorations in Batan, Sabtang and Ivohus Islands, Batanes Province, northern Philippines. *Ivatan Studies Journal* 1:7-48.
- Dizon, E.Z. and R.A. Santiago. 1995. Preliminary report on the archaeological explorations in Batan, Sabtang and Ivohus Islands, Batanes Province, northern Philippines. In Yeung Chung-tong and Li Wailing Brenda (eds), *Archaeology in Southeast Asia*, pp. 123-44. Hong Kong: University Museum and Art Gallery, University of Hong Kong.
- Koomoto, M. 1983. General survey in Batan Island. In Kasumi Sharikahara (ed.), *Batan Island and Northern Luzon: Archaeological, Ethnographical and Linguistic Survey*, pp. 17-67. Japan: University of Kumamoto.
- Manguin, P.-Y. 1986. Shipshape societies: boat symbolism and political systems in Insular Southeast Asia. In D.G. Marr and A.C. Milner (eds), *Southeast in the 9th to 14th Centuries*, pp. 187-213. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Pearson, R. 1991. Trade and the rise of the Okinawan state. *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association* 10:263-81.
- Pearson, R. 1994. Development of social complexity in Okinawa: contending lineages, site occupation histories, and site area. Paper presented at the 15th Congress of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association, Chiang Mai.