

# Jar Burial on Botel Tobago Island

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IN AUGUST 1969 a school building for Yayu village, on the northwestern coast of Botel Tobago [Hungt'ou Yü], was being constructed. About 500 m from the village a broken jar was found not far from the shore, together with the following artifacts: a small grayish-white bowl of crackled porcelain in perfect condition, four armrings of translucent blue glass, and sixteen small yellow and blue glass beads. Judging from the sherds, the jar appears to have been of coarse brown earthenware, unglazed, with fine grit temper. A rim sherd indicates the diameter of the mouth of the vessel to have been roughly 25 cm, with the shoulder of the jar flaring outward to an undetermined circumference apparently considerably larger than that of the mouth. There appear to have been no traces of human remains. These artifacts are now kept by the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, National Taiwan University, Taipei.

In November 1969 the Garrison Command of Botel Tobago sent a number of artifacts from the same site to the Taitung Hsien administration. These consisted of the upper half of a large earthenware vat, two white porcelain bowls, an earthenware flask-shaped vessel, nine glass rings (two of them broken), nine strands of small glass beads, five small bronze bells, two fragments of what appear to have been iron knife blades, and two pieces of gold. Along with these objects, a number of other artifacts were sent to the Taitung Hsien administration. According to the accompanying documentation, the objects had been found south of the village of Imurud, the southernmost settlement on the west coast. Here the military headquarters are located, and while a pond for water supply was being made deeper, the following specimens were recovered: three gold armrings; 225 yellow beads; three blue glass beads, two of them of a large size; one small green bead; and 71 small brown beads. The report sent over from the island is limited to a mere enumeration of the artifacts and a brief indication of the locality, and makes no

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mention of any jar or jar fragments at the Imurud site. Investigations on the spot are planned for the near future.

As regards the locality, it can so far only be stated that both the Yayu site and the Imurud site are in the vicinity of the present-day burial grounds of the respective villages: the foot of the high rock in front of Yayu village, and a coral stone-lined jungle at the sea to the south of Imurud village.

Before the artifacts themselves and the history and diffusion of jar burial are discussed, some data concerning this custom on Botel Tobago should be noted. At present the Yami dispose of their dead by interment, for which purpose each of the six villages uses a special burial ground in the jungle close to the seashore. Those who have died by accident or who possess no close relatives to undertake the laborious task of digging the deep grave are placed between coral rocks; infants are wrapped in cloth and put into an earthenware bowl which is deposited in the vicinity of the burial ground (de Beauclair, field notes). The Yami remember that their ancestors practiced jar burial more generally in the past, but that this custom had been given up about eleven generations ago. The people of Ivarinu on the east coast commented to Kano (1941) that it was a cumbersome task to transport the large vat, and that it had required the strength of two men. Today the bundled corpse is carried with great speed on the back of one man to the burial ground. Carrying the corpse is a greatly dreaded duty, demanding purification and the observance of taboos (Liu 1959).

The Yami designation for the burial jar is the same as the term used on the Batanes Islands, *pada-padai* (de Beauclair, field notes). Kano (1941) describes and discusses a burial jar that had been disturbed but which still contained some human remains, which was found in Imurud village on the west coast. The jar, 60 cm high and with a diameter of 55 cm, was of crudely baked reddish clay, and was covered by an earthenware bowl (*vanga*) such as is still in use by the Yami today. Because of the small size of the jar, Kano speculated that it was a case of secondary burial. In the writer's opinion this is highly unlikely, considering the desire of the Yami to dispose of the deceased once and for all, as soon after death as possible. The jar in question in all probability resulted from a child burial.

While the present writer was staying on the island in 1959, excavations for the repair of the posts of a workhouse in Imurud brought to light another jar which, owing to superstitious fear, was immediately destroyed and the fragments thrown into the jungle. Judging from a sherd which was left, the jar was of brownish clay. It was explained that the northern part of Imurud was close to an ancient village that had had its burial ground at the lower northern corner of present-day Imurud, which, like all Yami settlements, is built on a slope above the sea. Imurud village was established about eleven generations ago, after the southern village of Imasik had been abandoned.

Let us now turn to the artifacts found in 1969. The large jar segment at first sight presents a puzzle: is it the upper or the lower half of the vessel? However, the small orifice indicates that this is the upper half (Fig. 1). This small opening raises the question of whether the jar may not have been manufactured to serve other purposes, such as to hold water on a sea voyage, the small mouth preventing spillage. The two halves, as the edge at the large diameter shows, have been carefully cut apart to admit the corpse into the lower part (Pl. Ia). The same procedure was described by

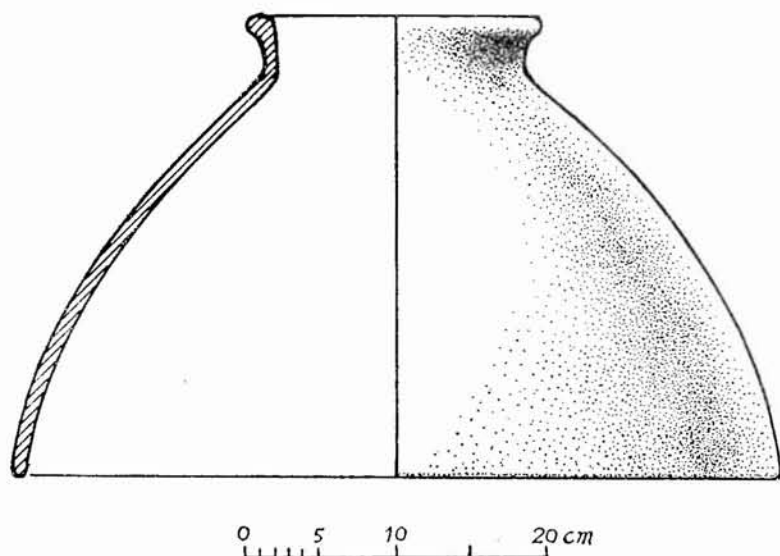


Fig. 1 Earthenware burial jar, height 30 cm, diameter at base 50 cm, diameter of mouth 19 cm.

Furness (1902: 139-140) for the Berawan of Borneo, who after having carefully cut the jar at its widest diameter, placed the corpse in the lower half; then the upper part was fitted on tightly and the crack sealed with resinous gum. It must be assumed that a similar technique was applied to the Botel Tobago vessel. There is no evidence of the lower part of the jar—probably it was smashed during the work in progress when it was unearthed.

We have no information regarding the location of the other artifacts which are said to have been found at the same site. It is unlikely that they were enclosed in the jar, but they may have been contained in a separate vessel. This would explain the sherds accompanying the items sent to National Taiwan University, among which was a rim sherd. Here again we may turn to other areas for possible light on this problem. A Spanish merchant and trader who stayed for five months on the Batanes Islands at the end of the eighteenth century witnessed the burial of a young man. In his report (see Manuel 1953), in which he likens the shape of the burial urn to an (overturned?) Spanish bread-oven, he remarks that the father removed the young man's (golden) earrings, but after the urn had been covered over, other belongings of the deceased, such as jars, plates, and oars, were placed in the grave. Here certainly an old custom was followed. In the Botel Tobago sites, it is hard to decide whether the precious artifacts of gold, glass, and porcelain were grave goods buried near the deceased, or whether they represent a hoard hidden in the ground by the owner during his lifetime. Such caches were not unusual in earlier times, according to what the writer was told while on Itbayat, the northernmost island of the Batanes. To keep the treasures out of reach, they were put into a jar which was lowered down the steep, rocky coast of the island to an inaccessible cleft or a sheltered platform. For the Babuyanes, Meddela (1953) reports that only superstitious fear keeps the people from unearthing hoards of Spanish gold which are firmly believed to be hidden in the ground.

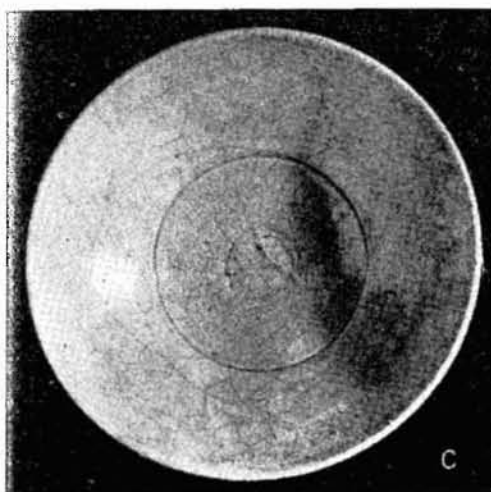
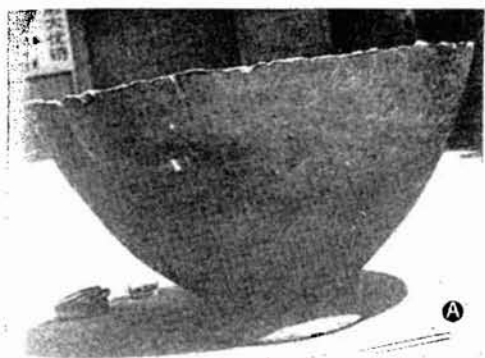
The small, bottle-shaped earthenware vessel from the Yayu site could well be of local manufacture, though the Yami, who are skilled potters, produce none at the present time. The flask, which is provided with two ears beneath the neck, shows a design of small dots around the neck (Pl. Ib). The three porcelain bowls also derive from the Yayu site. It has already been remarked that the one sent to Taiwan University is of shiny glazed crackled porcelain (Pl. Ic), while the two others are of a slightly inferior quality, the glaze appearing dull. The smaller one of these is a flat bowl, almost a plate, its rim showing four shallow folds, reminding one of lotus-shaped vessels (Pl. IIa). The rim of the larger bowl has suffered some damage. While these ceramics originated in China, the gold ornaments, such as the three armrings from Imurud and the two pieces from Yayu, were no doubt manufactured on the Batanes. They are useful in deriving a tentative date for the objects found, as will be discussed below.

Not only do the Yami traditions tell of the important part gold played in their dealings with the Southern Islands (de Beauclair 1959a), but the simple gold ornaments still in possession of the men, the small gold scale and the goat-horn shaped receptacles, confirm the stories and legends of former wealth (de Beauclair 1969). Rumors of the "barbarians' " wealth in gold spread to Formosa, reports the Chinese chronicle, and an expedition in search of gold arrow tips and spearheads was sent to the island at the beginning of the eighteenth century. This venture, which was unsuccessful, ended with a massacre of the natives (de Beauclair 1959b).

Communication between Botel Tobago and the Batanes may have a long history of which only the last chapter is known: that it came to an end during the middle of the seventeenth century (de Beauclair 1959a). On the Batanes the technique of working the placer gold must have reached an early perfection. William Dampier (1715), who was shipwrecked in 1687 opposite, as the writer assumes, the island Sabtang of the southern Batanes, relates how members of his crew exchanged iron for golden trinkets. He describes the gold as being a very light yellow, matching the pale yellow of the Botel Tobago objects. On Itbayat the present writer was shown a single earring of solid gold, shaped like a hook, kept by the owner as an heirloom. Goldsmiths were at work during the writer's stay in the Batanes; on Itbayat it was a woman who had chosen this delicate profession.

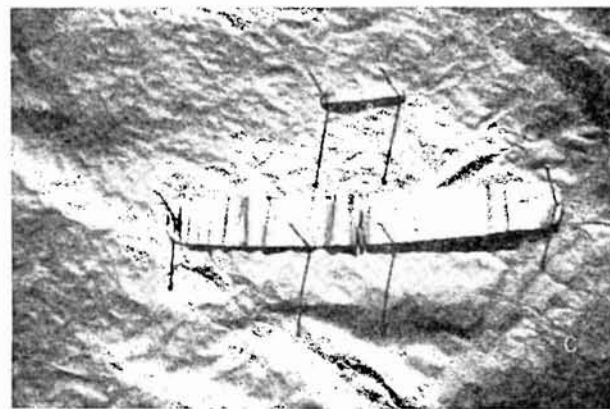
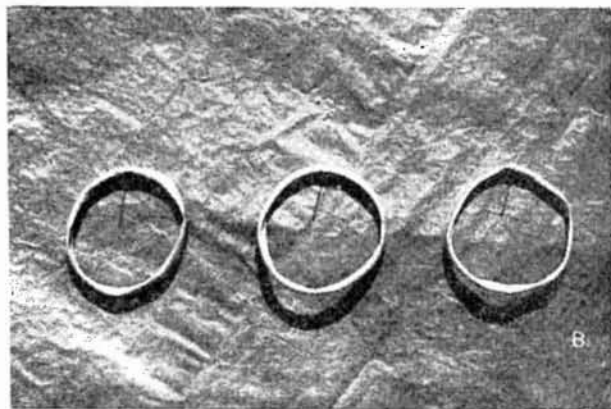
Each of the three armrings from the Imurud site is simply a strip of gold foil bent to a circle, the ends joined by soldering (Pl. IIb), the edges folded inward. The appearance of the two pieces from Yayu is different and their use somewhat uncertain. Their surfaces are not smooth but are bent into waves (Pl. IIc). Each of the small gold bands shows a small perforation on one end, and single or joined, they must have served as an ornament. Other metal objects deriving from the Yayu site are two thickly rusted pieces of iron, which may have been dagger or knife blades, and five small bronze bells covered by green patina (Pl. IIIa). Similar but somewhat larger bells are in the possession of the Ami tribe along the east coast of Formosa, where they are used during magic performances. Their origin is unknown, but it may be assumed that they are a Chinese product. [Bronze bells similar to these are cast today for ceremonial use by Land Dayaks of the First Division in Sarawak. Ed.]

The wealth of glass rings, twelve in number and all from Yayu, lends weight to the probability of a hoard. The rings are of translucent blue glass, varying in



Pl. I *a*, upper half of large earthenware burial jar from the Yayu site, kept in Taitung;  
*b*, earthenware bottle-shaped vessel from the Yayu site;  
*c*, grayish white glazed bowl of crackled porcelain (Taiwan University).





Pl. II *a*, slightly damaged porcelain bowl from the Yayu site;  
*b*, three gold armrings from the Imurud site;  
*c*, gold ornament consisting of two identical pieces, here joined, and a small gold bar. From the Yayu site.

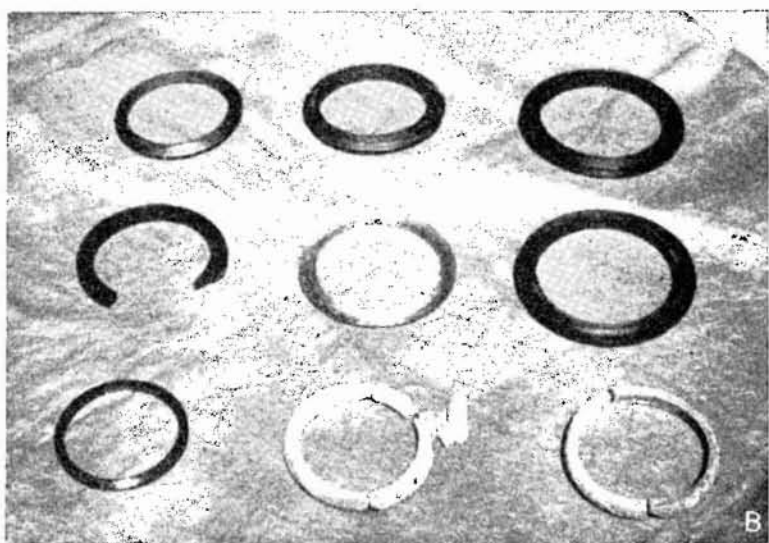
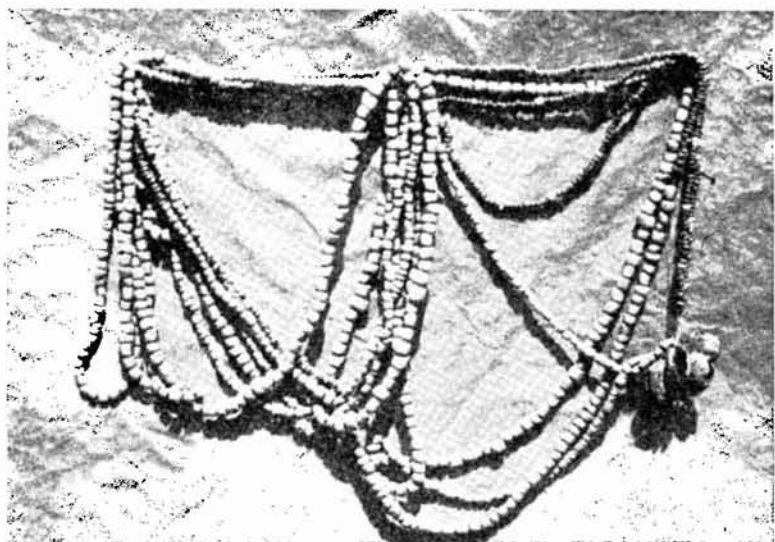


thickness, with a triangular cross section (Pl. IIIb). Two are fragmented, but appear to be of an inferior quality, the glass being opaque. However, they do not belong to the category of opaque bracelets mentioned by Beyer (1947) and described by Force (1959).

While the majority of the rings are of identical color and quality and rather thin, there is among them a pair of massive glass, reminiscent of the glass bracelets possessed by the Paiwan, the southernmost of the Formosan aborigine groups. Their origin has not been determined yet; the Paiwan state that they obtained the rings from the Dutch in the seventeenth century. Harrison (1962) deals with translucent glass rings from secondary burial sites in northern Sarawak and Brunei. They are always associated with Chinese porcelain dating from Tang to Ming. The Sarawak Museum possesses fifteen whole pieces of these rings and hundreds of fragments. Chinese burial grounds at the Sarawak River delta, where numerous fragments are found, tell of the flourishing trade in ceramics and glassware that had been going on since the seventh century. Probably the glass rings are a Chinese product, while Beyer (1947) assumes Philippine (Cebu) origin for opaque bracelets (Force 1959). The grave-goods brought to light by Fox (1959) at the Calatagan burial sites, Batangas, are similar to the Botel Tobago findings, though the glass rings are translucent green rather than translucent blue or opaque. Fox dates the sites between the late fourteenth and the early sixteenth centuries. As regards the origin of the bracelets he follows Beyer, who assumes that the opaque rings may have originated in Cambodia or elsewhere in Southeast Asia as well as in the Philippines. It may be added here that in historical times the actual use of these fragile ornaments was limited to the Paiwan on Formosa and to the Moluccas, where certain tribal chiefs wore them at festivals. In other regions they were replaced by rings of less breakable material such as shell, iron, or bone. The glass bracelets were hoarded as treasures and as such functioned as grave-goods (de Beauclair 1957).

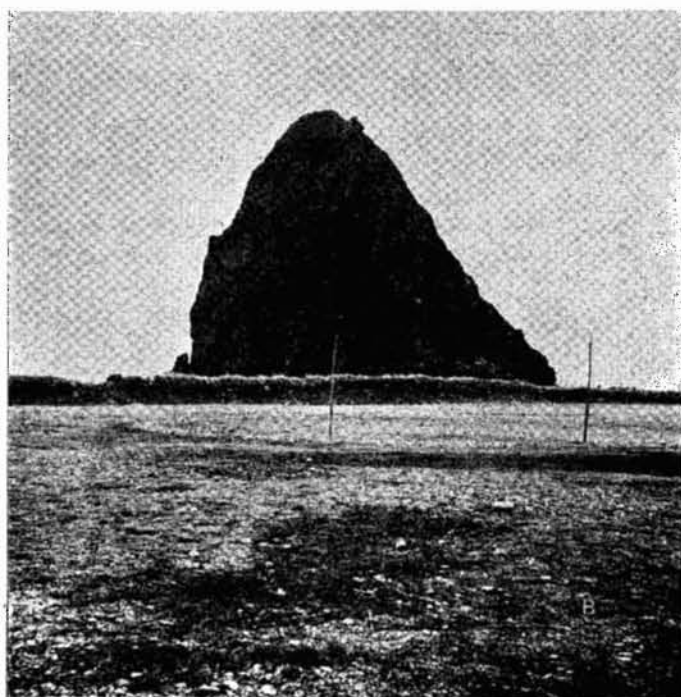
Both the Yayu and Imurud sites yielded a wealth of beads. With the exception of four translucent dark blue glass beads, two of them of large size, the beads are all of the small yellow or brown opaque kind (Pl. IIIa). Together with the fine glazed porcelain bowl delivered to Taiwan University were sixteen very small beads some of irregular form, reminding one of those on Fox's color plate illustrating rings, beads, and gold from the Calatagan sites. Fox states that these particular beads were always associated with porcelain.

The absence of any carnelian or agate beads from the Botel Tobago sites is surprising. These are worn today by the Yami women in multiple long strands reaching to the knee, and are common among the Ami tribe along the east coast of Formosa. Also not represented are the multicolored opaque specimens, which form the wealth of the Paiwan, or the yellow translucent kind, the so-called *pango* beads, known for the Batanes and the northern Philippines. On Formosa *pango* beads were limited to the plains tribes along the northwestern coast. As to the large dark blue translucent beads, they seem rare in the rich inventory of Southeast Asia. Harrison (1964) briefly refers to them in dealing with Kelabit beads. The writer remembers dark blue beads from Itbayat, Batanes, as forming the largest part of a lustration belt worn by women after childbirth. There are only two light blue opaque specimens among the small beads found associated with the high quality porcelain bowl from



Pl. III    *a*, opaque yellow beads and bronze bells from the Yayu site;  
             *b*, translucent blue glass rings from the Imurud site.





Pl. IV *a*, Yayu site, showing millet field in 1960;  
*b*, Yayu site, showing athletic field in 1970.

the Yaya site. Though somewhat smaller, they seem identical with the *marupnai*, highly valued by the present-day Yami, which are believed to possess magic power (de Beauclair 1959).

The insufficient documentation throws no light on the original condition of the yellow and brown beads that were sent over from the island, which form nine strands, giving the impression of a necklace. These yellow and brown opaque beads are worn by the present-day Yami women interspersed among their long chains of carnelian beads. The latter are called *molag* and play a part in the folklore of Botel Tobago (de Beauclair 1959a). Such beads are known as *multi sala* in Indonesia, where traders buy them in Sumatra to sell them with profit in Celebes—an example of the migration of beads.

Recent researches concerning the localities of bead manufacture have added to the complexity of determining their origin. Although a detailed summary is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be mentioned that Malleret (1962), Lamb (1965), and van der Sleen (1965) report bead manufacture centers in Indochina, the Malay Peninsula, and Holland respectively.

To date the Botel Tobago sites we have to rely on the artifacts, and we need to determine the way by which they reached the island. It should be noted that Botel Tobago, which lies along the trade route from China to the Philippines and Indonesia, is situated within the course of violent typhoons. Yami legends tell of shipwrecks and precious loot (de Beauclair 1969). The report of Chao Ju-kua (see Hirth and Rockhill 1911), a customs official at the Fukien ports in the Sung dynasty, tells of the barter-trade with the Southern Islands, to which the Chinese vessels brought a variety of goods, among them porcelain and beads. This trade continued until the Ming dynasty, at which time European powers appeared on the scene, political unrest broke out in China, and piracy increased.

Awaiting investigations and possibly systematic excavations on the island, it may be assumed, on the basis of the artifacts and their similarity with those of dated sites from Borneo and the Philippines, that the Botel Tobago sites date from the sixteenth or seventeenth century. The absence of stone adzes and the presence of glass and metal speak against an early date. The porcelain bowls, perhaps the best time markers, seem typologically Sung, but may be as well a later imitation.

In the first place, the jar burial on Botel Tobago permits an insight into the culture history of the island. Furthermore, a link is established in the chain of jar burials reaching from Indonesia over the Philippines, the Babuyan and Batan archipelagoes, to Formosa, Japan, and Korea. These jar burials extend in time from the beginning of the Christian era (van Heekeren 1958) to the eighteenth century (Manuel 1953).

Shape and size of the jar vary from region to region, the size depending upon whether it is used for secondary or primary burial. Small jars were also used for child burial. The lid may be another jar, a sherd, a pot or an inverted flask. The site of the burial may be marked by an earth mound of varying height, a cairn, or placement of the jar under a dolmen or menhir (Kaneko 1966).

If the Botel Tobago sites had ever been marked by mounds or cairns, these would long have been overgrown and forgotten. Superstitious fear prevents persons from approaching the burial grounds, and all matters concerning death tend to be eliminated from the oral traditions (de Beauclair 1969).

Solheim (1960), in his paper on the jar burials of the Babuyan and Batan Islands, includes Formosa on the basis of reports by Japanese scholars (Kano 1941; Kokubu 1956, Mabuchi 1956) on jars found on the east coast of Formosa and on the small island of Sanasay, situated to the north of Botel Tobago. The three jars from a hill in Hualien city were 50 cm high and wide, with a ring foot, and as such are of a different type than those known from the south. They contained neither bones nor artifacts.

The finding on Sanasay is not well documented, but the jar is said to have contained a few beads. Near the southern tip of Formosa, Kokubu excavated a red, polished pottery jar with impressed designs. He also encountered this type of jar on the southwestern coast. Mabuchi connects the jar burials on the east coast with the Kuvalan (Karivan or Kavalan), a tribe of the northeastern plain. This may, however, only hold good for a small subgroup of the Kuvalan which Mabuchi calls Turubiwan. The Kuvalan, having moved southward along the coast, are by now highly sinicized, but preserve their language. The present writer visited Karivan settlements in 1969. As to the kind of burial still practiced about two generations ago, the people remembered exposure burial only (suspending the corpses on trees). This recollection is in accord with statements in Chinese records from the Ching dynasty dealing with the customs of the plains tribes in northeastern Formosa. There are no reports as to the original inhabitants of the island of Sanasay other than that they perished when the Chinese invaded the island at the beginning of the last century. At the present state of our knowledge of jar burial on Formosa, which is based upon a few sporadic findings, it seems premature to draw any conclusions regarding migrations and affiliations with the south. It can only be hoped that further archaeological research will provide clues to these questions.

The cultural and linguistic affiliations of Botel Tobago with the Batanes, well documented (Asai 1936) in spite of the insufficient material presented here, leave little doubt that on the former island also the practice of jar burial was followed, at least for a certain period in the past.

#### PRESENT-DAY JAR BURIAL ON TAIWAN

From the seventeenth century to the present day on Taiwan, settlers who migrated to the island from Fukien and Kwangtung provinces have practiced a secondary burial in jars. The coffin of the primary burial is exhumed after a certain period of years, and the bones are cleaned and arranged in a jar after the teeth have been filed or removed. The jar is deposited in a temple or at a place sheltered by trees until there is an auspicious day to bury it in the ground. The jars are especially manufactured for the purpose, and, together with a cover, are sold by a local craftsman.

The Paiwan, the southernmost group of the Formosan aborigines, used to bury their dead beneath the floor of the dwellings, a custom followed by the majority of the tribes. Walls and houseposts of the Paiwan house are of stone, and the floor is paved with stone slabs. During construction a pit was excavated in the center of the floor into which the corpses were lowered arranged in a sitting position. Japanese rule interfered with this custom as being unsanitary. In consequence, certain families constructed a stone-lined pit outside the village into which the corpses were placed. Or the corpse is squeezed into the wide Chinese vat that serves for the

storage of water and buried in the ground. Vat burial also takes place in the Christian cemeteries introduced by missions. Catholic fathers do not deny a Christian burial to the corpse in the water jar.

The writer was informed that this mode of burial was already practiced prior to the time of the Japanese but was then considered a privilege of the higher class, who could afford to purchase and transport the Chinese product. Since then a number of Paiwan villages have moved to lower areas, facilitating contact with the plain and transportation of Chinese goods. Jar burial prevents the contamination of the body with earth and avoids the unfamiliar extended position required by a coffin.

#### ADDENDUM

During October 1970 I visited the Botel Tobago jar burial sites. A word about the situation on the island must be inserted here. Several years ago the Chinese government established prisoner colonies on the offshore islands. On Botel Tobago the prisoners, kept under military guard, amount to about eight hundred. They are distributed around the island in two large centers and in small stations. Besides herding an ever-growing number of cattle and laying out terraced rice fields for their own use, they are employed in all kinds of construction work, such as road-, bridge-, and house-building, and erecting watch towers along the seashore. It is superfluous to say that certain parts of the island have lost a great deal of their natural beauty because of construction. The prisoners were summoned to build a school at Yuyu village which was to include not only classroom buildings and dormitories for students and teachers, but also a spacious athletic field. A site was chosen not far from the seashore, in front of the gigantic rock (de Beauclair 1957: Pl. V). For the 200 m-long athletic field, a large millet field belonging to one of the villagers was destroyed and the surface leveled by deepening it 2 m (Pl. IVa-b). About one hundred prisoners were engaged in this work. Using shovels, they threw up an earth wall along the side. It took them several months to complete the task. Here they came on the jars, which apparently were placed in a row of about ten, not directly facing the sea, but in a more northerly direction. The workers smashed the jars and the earth wall was littered with sherds. The artifacts were delivered to the military guard. I obtained the following information from the guard and the prisoners:

The jars were of different sizes, and were covered by one of the white porcelain bowls or one of ordinary pottery. Human remains that were found inside were carried to the seashore and buried. From this spot I removed a tibia, parts of a mandible with teeth, and other fragments for possible dating. My assumption was confirmed that the large jar, of which the upper half was delivered to Taitung, was carefully separated from its lower part. It had contained the gold pieces and some of the glass rings as well as beads. No information concerning the other artifacts could be gained. It was said only that most of the jars contained beads, which were strewn all over the place, so that some of the Yami came to collect them. It follows that all the artifacts described above were grave goods and did not derive from a hoard, a possibility I had formerly taken into consideration.

At the Imurud site the situation was similar. Here, close to the sea, a wide and long 2 m-deep ditch had been dug to serve as a lotus flower lake behind an already completed fish pond. At the time of my visit the ditch had not yet been filled with

water, the bottom just being covered with a layer of clay. While the ditch was being excavated some jars had been found. The exact number was not known, but was given as two or three. They had been smashed during the work, the sherds thrown aside, and the artifacts handed out to the guard. This site was originally sandy grassland, bordering the coral rocks that line the shore. Neither at Yayu nor in Imurud did the Yami have any knowledge of the ancient graves, though they were adjoining their present burial grounds. As was already stated, the fact that their ancestors buried in jars is well known. In Imurud a detail referring to a former custom was remembered: when a large pot cracked while being fired, this meant a long life for the potter. Grave goods were not unusual; especially old childless men could wish to be buried with their treasures. There is a long story dealing with the friendship between a man from Ivatan (Batan Island) and a Yami from Imasik, the former settlement of the people of Imurud. The friends exchanged visits and when the man from Ivatan learned upon his arrival that his friend had died during his absence, he demanded to be led to the grave, had it opened, and deposited some gold.

When color photographs of the artifacts were shown to the Yami, the objects were alien to them. Even the gold, so highly esteemed, seemed strange in the form of bracelets and bars. For the two-eared earthenware flask, any affinity to local pottery products was denied. How, then, did the porcelain bowls, gold and beads, glass rings and bronze bells come into the possession of the islanders? We have to return to the assumption that these treasures represent spoils from a shipwreck that must have occurred before the Ming period. Memories of stranded ships and their treasures survive in the Yami's folklore (see the story related earlier).

Whether the burials are contemporary with the artifacts is another question. The possibility must be taken into consideration that they were preserved by the finders for some length of time before they were used as funeral gifts. Among the west coast villages, it is only for Imurud and perhaps Iratai that the genealogies permit conclusions as to when they were founded. Both were in existence in the seventeenth century. The Imurud site may be of an earlier date as it may have been the burial ground of the abandoned settlement of Imasik, south of Imurud, from where the people moved to settle at the present-day Imurud. Yayu genealogies are lacking, and the population of the village of Iwatas, which still appears on Japanese maps a short distance south of Yayu, has been wiped out by a landslide. There is a possibility that the Yayu site belonged to the burial ground of Iwatas.

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