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Master's Thesis

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TITLE	Form, function, and meaning: an approach in understanding Melo shell artifacts in Philippine sites.
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ABSTRACT	<p>Shell 'scoop' forms manufactured from Melo spp. constitute an essential part in worked shell assemblage in Philippine archaeological sites. This is especially demonstrated in Palawan archaeology, around the conventionally accepted Neolithic and Metal Period. Its conspicuous presence would seem to make this artifact an essential component in Philippine archaeology. However, despite the recognition of its occurrence in archaeological sites since the 1920s, not much study has been done on these materials. Failure as well to understand their role and relevance in the past has resulted to loosely-defined utilitarian interpretations. This study attempts to address this paucity by exploring the nature of Melo artifacts in the past in terms of their form, function, and meaning. In doing this the author initially constructed a formal artifact classification primarily based on the materials excavated from Ille site in El Nido, Palawan, wherein considerable number of Mela shell remains were recovered. Physical analysis (surface alterations and human-modified breakage patterns) and contextual analysis within the site and across sites were integrated in the study, supported by Philippine ethnographic and ethnohistorical data and data from other culturally related groups within Southeast Asia and Pacific.</p> <p>Analysis revealed at least three general forms of Melo artifacts found in Ille and in other sites. Contextual analysis revealed that these classes varied according to time depth in which they were used and deposited. Function and meaning of the artifacts on the other hand were inferred from their physical</p>

	<p>characteristics, their manner of discard, their relationship with other artifacts, and the way they were placed in in situ features, i.e. burials. They were used for mortuary purposes in the site and seemed to have ritual roles as well (from the meanings associated with it). Their significance and deliberate selection for burials were interpreted in as either due to the value of the raw material, the personal associations with the deceased individual, or probably even the perceived sacred motif on the shell. A possible continuity of at least two class forms was also postulated from the artifact classification study, which was reinforced by contextual assessment of sites and taking into account on the inferred meanings and their manner of disposal. Such ethnographic understanding can contribute to the interpretation of houses in archaeology and the archaeology of Batanes. This includes the importance of the kitchen house and the main house in representing key domestic activities that defines a “house society” and the effect of their cosmological beliefs in shaping the material composition, structural dimension, and spatial organization of the house. Archaeological documentation of ancient houses in Batanes illustrates the importance of the house both as a physical space and as a social unit among the early Ivatans. The density of objects such as pottery and other domestic tools, and the prominence of the hearth suggest that the house is central to their daily life. The house was also used to express social status; wealthy and powerful households built their houses on the higher part of the settlement and used stone posts, while ordinary households built their house on the lower part of the settlement and used wooden post. Their orientation, associated objects, and their location in relation to ancient burial grounds, particularly sites with boat-shaped stone settings indicate their cosmological significance.</p>
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