A NOTE ON ANCIENT TERRACOTTA FIGURINES DISCOVERED IN BANTAENG, SOUTH SULAWESI

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In 1995, while conducting historical research in Bantaeng along the south coast of South Sulawesi, I came into possession of a number of ancient terracotta fragments and complete figurines. I though these terracotta pieces might be pre-Islamic in origin and believed them to be extremely important, since similarities between these fragments and figurines and Majapahit terracotta suggested possible early Javanese contacts along the south coast of South Sulawesi (Bougas, 1998: 97-98, Fig. 101)[1]. Before departing South Sulawesi in 1996, I turned the Bantaeng terracotta pieces over to *Suaka Peninggalan Sejarah dan Purbakala Sulawesi Selatan dan Tenggara* [the South Sulawesi Chapter of the National Service for the Protection of Prehistorical and Historical Remains], Ujung Pandang. Recent and subsequent research has convinced me, however, that some of the terracotta pieces obtained in Ban-taeng, specifically the complete figurines, may possibly be forgeries. The terracotta fragments, however, are still thought to be authentic. The reasons and evidence supporting these subsequent conclusions are presented in this document.

In the course of conducting my research on the history of pre-Islamic Bantaeng, graves robbers there informed me that ancient terracotta pieces had been discoverd at Kiling-Kiling and Patta-lassang in eastern Bantaeng in the late 1970's. They explained that two types of terracotta had been discovered there:

1. Pegged figures in association with terracotta support tables or boards and,
2. Unpegged, freestanding figures placed in terracotta boxes.

Upon meeting Haji Toding [Red: Dodding] had made these discoveries and that he was alive and living in Kiling-Kiling. If I were still interested in the terracotta, they recommended I contact him.

Upon meeting Haji Toding I and several archaeological students from Hasanuddin University found him quite open and willing to share a wealth of information concerning his terracotta discoveries. he soon led us to the site where he said he had made some of his terracotta discoveries twenty years earlier. The site was located on a ridge planted with clove trees about two kilometers from the village. The site, covering an area 30-40 square meters was littered with terracotta fragments. We collected heads, the bottoms of pegged figures, and a large number of terracotta shards decorated with geometric designs. A beautiful image of a small terracotta bird approximately five centimeters in length was also found partially submerged in the mud.

When was asked if Haji Toding had any complete, unbroken, free standing terracotta images, he replied that he did not have any, but that given two to three weeks, he might be able to unearth some. A month later upon returning to Kiling-Kiling, true to his word, he provided five complete terracotta figures which were purchased for *Rp.* 200.000,- and subsquently turned over to *Suaka.* There were male and female figures, some standing and others in a kneeling position. The most striking feature of the images was the variety in the positioning of their arms. In some figures the arms were crossed over the chest; in other images the arms extended straight down along the torso of the body. Haji Toding adamantly refused to reveal the site(s) where he had recently discovered these images.

Three years later after additional research I now believe that the unbroken, terracotta images provided by Haji Toding are fake. The fragments disco-vered in the clove orchard, however, are probably genuine. The basis of these conclusions is summarized as follows.

A number of well known grave robbers have subsequently and independently of one another informed me that Haji Toding was a notorius forger of terracotta pieces in the late 1970's and that he had profited handsomely from these finds. It seems, however, that once this terracotta source was exhausted, Haji Toding and his associates began producing forgeries on their own for sale. Once found out and hence without a market he ceased production. Years later upon our arrival and request for complete images, he seems for a brief moment to have reverted again to forging figures. One wonders if these potential forgeries are in any way based on originals discovered in the late 1970's.

I belief that the fragments that we collected in the clove orchard, however, are real. Haji Toding did not know that we were coming to visit him. For what purpose would he have spread hundreds of terracotta fragments throughout the orchard. It seems highly likely that the 30-40 square mater area covered with terracotta shards marks the site where Haji Toding and his friends had originally discovered his terracotta trove twenty years ago. I also belief these fragments to be genuine because they resemble in style and execution pegged terracotta figures later discovered in nearby Jeneponto district.

In conclusion, given the suspicion regarding the authenticity of the free-standing, terracotta figurines recently discovered in Bantaeng, it is recommended that some of the figures and fragments undergo thermo-luminescence testing to confirm their antiquity.❑

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[1] See Wayne A. Bougas, « Bantayan: An *Early Makassarese Kingdom 1200-1600 A.D.* », *Archipel*, 55, Paris, 1998, pp. 83-123.