

Identifying 'Islamic Motif' on Chinese blue and white Porcelain recovered from the 15th century shipwrecks in the Philippines

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Abstract

This research is based on the raw data of a Master's thesis that aims to identify Islamic motifs on Chinese blue-and-white porcelains recovered from the 15th century archaeological sites in the Philippines. A stylistic analysis of Chinese porcelains recovered from both underwater and terrestrial sites will be conducted so that the main aims of the thesis will be attained. The Master's thesis aims to answer questions that concern: a) the participation of the Philippines during the 15th century maritime trade; and b) determine the possible indications of the presence and/or absence of the porcelains. Large amounts of Chinese ceramics have been found in Philippine sites dating from the late 9th to the early 12th centuries, and the 14th-18th centuries. Some Chinese blue-and-white porcelains recovered from Philippine archaeological sites were preliminarily identified to have Islamic motifs, however these were only initial descriptions. The Master's thesis aims to verify the preliminary analyses. The main objective of this paper is analysis the blueandwhite porcelains recovered from following shipwrecks of the 15th century: Lena Shoal shipwreck, Española underwater site, and Pandanan shipwreck in Palawan, Philippines as well as Santa Cruz shipwreck in Zambales, Philippines. Using the collated motifs from already established 'Islamic' art a criteria and checklist was formulated to illustrate the presence of the motifs in Chinese blueandwhite porcelain from the abovementioned underwater sites. The initial results of this research will reveal that porcelains recovered in the Philippines are comparable to those found in West Asia, contrary to some past studies.

Key words: Maritime Silk Road, Maritime trade, Islamic, Porcelain, Shipwreck

Introduction

The Philippines is an archipelago located near the South China Sea, suitable for ancient and present maritime trade. In consequence, the region is home to noteworthy underwater cultural heritage (Orillaneda, 2011). Evidenced by historical and archaeological data, such as the discovery of plank-built and edge-pegged wooden boats and shipwrecks dated from the 14th to the 18th century (Dizon and Ronquillo,

2010; Orillaneda, 2013), the Philippine islands is known to have been involved in the Southeast Asian maritime trade and shipping network beginning the 9th century throughout the following centuries (Goddio, 2002; Guy, 1980). Chinese annals documented during the Song period (950-1279), that the Philippines engaged in long distance trade of porcelain and other goods (Beyer, 1947; Wu, 1959), where the South China Sea and Malacca Straits played a big role in this maritime interaction (Guy, 1980; Junker, 2000; Wu, 1959). Trade route diversion occurred due to the 'inoperable' state of the Silk Road caused by the "disintegration of overland commercial networks" (Orillaneda, 2013: 1). From then, a Maritime Silk Road was born, which connected the Mediterranean and South China seas (Hall, 2011; Orillaneda, 2013). Centers of Southeast Asian complex societies which progressed during the 12th-15th centuries became the heart and core of trade in the Maritime Silk Road (Hall, 1992; Orillaneda, 2013; Wade and Sun, 2010). Scholars claim that the Philippine Islands were merely a crossroad and only acted as a peripheral destination between Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific (Dizon and Ronquillo, 2010; Guy, 1980; Medley, 1976). With recent archaeological research, it may be argued that the Philippines participated more closely to this Maritime Silk Road than past studies would allow. In the most recent research on this matter, Orillaneda (2013) presented that Philippine society during the 15th-17th centuries utilized traded items and in turn played roles in their cultural fabric. The maritime polities in Manila, Maguindanao, Sulu, and Cebu, for example (Junker, 2000), were competitive when it came to raiding and trading internally, and the goods of this interisland trade also came from overseas or maritime trading elsewhere (Junker, 2000; Orillaneda, 2013).

One of the major components of this trade is Chinese porcelain. However, Medley (1976) and Macintosh (1994) observed that porcelains bound to Southeast Asia and the Philippines, during the 13th-15th centuries, were simpler compared to those sent to bigger kingdoms (so to speak) or what they would call Islamic nations in West Asia. Medley (1976) pointed out that pieces in the Philippines were more modest in design and smaller - jarlets or small plates - based on her research on the Topkapi Saray and Ardebil Shrine museum collections. Macintosh (1994: 18) stated that when the inhabitants of the Philippines came to like the blue-and-white porcelain, "they therefore

ordered a quantity of small, sturdily potted wares that could be used in the export trade to the southern seas". Such pieces were produced without care and decorated only in "a sketchily drawn style" as compared to those found in West Asia or Islamic sultanates (Macintosh, 1994: 18). This paper investigates Chinese blue and white porcelains recovered from selected underwater sites in the Philippines as it is possible that those ceramics also depict the same designs seen on porcelains brought to West Asia or Islamic lands. Contrary to accounts of Macintosh (1994) and Medley (1976), the Philippines served more than just an area for cheap trade materials and porcelains recovered from the shipwrecks bare comparable motifs to those found in the Islamic Sultanates of the West Asia.

Objectives

This paper is the raw data of the author's thesis. It discusses the initial results gathered from artifact analysis of four underwater sites in the Philippines. The main objective of this paper is to conduct a stylistic analysis on the blue and white porcelains recovered from the following 15th century underwater sites (Fig. 1): Lena Shoal shipwreck, Española underwater site, Pandanan shipwreck, and the Santa Cruz shipwreck, Philippines. Using the collated motifs from already established 'Islamic' art (e. g. ceramics, bronze wares, and architecture), this paper illustrates the presence of the motifs on Chinese blue-and-white porcelains from the abovementioned sites. To concretize the analysis, the author formulated a criteria based on earlier studies done on

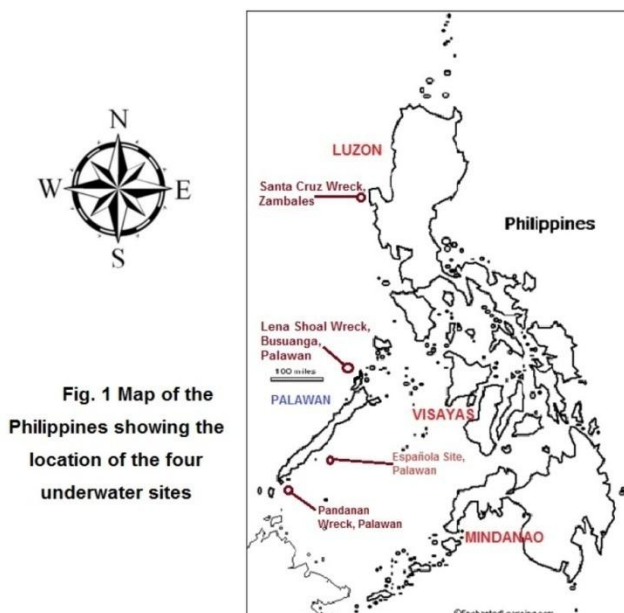


Fig. 1 Map of the Philippines showing the location of the four underwater sites

Islamic motifs and Chinese porcelains. The four underwater sites were selected for their time period, i.e. the 15th century. This is a relevant period related to the proposed 'Age of Commerce' by Reid (1990) and part of the time when new maritime patterns and ship

technology was being developed in Southeast Asia (Hall, 2011). Sites in the Philippines were mentioned by scholars to have been part of the maritime trade network during the 15th century CE (Junker, 2000; Hall, 2011). Stylistic analysis of Chinese blue and white porcelains will enlighten us on this maritime trade. Exploring the presence of 'Islamic' motifs on the recovered Chinese blue and white porcelains will also give an explanation of the term

that scholars used in the past for describing decorations found in porcelain which were



Fig. 2a Large dishes with Arabesque Scroll, Lena Shoal Shipwreck. (A. N. Kintanar)

Fig. 2b Large dishes with Cloud Collar, Lena Shoal Shipwreck. (A. N. Kintanar)

from the 15th century (Aga-Oglu, 1951; Crick, 2002; Krahl, 1986; Medley, 1973-1976; Orillaneda, 2008). The Master's thesis of the researcher will answer more inferences.

Discussion of method and criteria

The criteria formulated serves as a checklist (Fig. 1) to inspect for indicative design elements considered as 'Islamic'. This is based on features Medley (1975), Krahl (1986) and other art historians identified as Islamic. Two major characteristics being studied specifically are design elements and forms. When dissected, these may be divided to: a) arabesque; b) cloud collar; c) symmetry or pattern; d) heavy or dense decorations on space; and e.) form or size of wares.

Design Elements

Islamic decoration had a keenness to elaborate surfaces, where there were layers of decoration, as opposed to the adherence of Chinese potters to simplicity (Bloom and

Blair, 1997; Medley, 1975). The main design elements considered as Islamic are the arabesque (Burckhardt, 1976) and cloud collar (which is still questionable). The arabesque (Fig. 2a) is “an ornament in stylized plant forms, strictly geometrical”, like a vine with leaf-scrolls and branches (Burckhardt, 1976: 56). The arabesque began as a sprawling plant ornament which was characteristic of Sassanian art forms strictly calibrated into lines of grapevine shoots with stylized images of fruits, animals, or people (Piotrvskii, 2006). After the 11th century, the arabesque became a stable characteristic of Islamic art (Piotrovskii, 2006). It became “integral in every Islamic work of art, which evolved to different patterns. In later periods it came to dominate decorative arts around the world”, including some blue and white porcelains (Bloom and Blair, 1997: 283). The cloud collar (Fig. 2b) is considered questionable because opposing sources say its origin is either Mongol or Persian (Orogo¹, 2011; Orinllaneda, 2006; Esguerra, 2004). The cloud collar is “a decorative form possibly derived from the Fungus or Ling Chih as the ‘Plate of Long Life and Immortality’ [But], this decorative motif may also have a Persian or Mongolian origin” (Orogo, 2011). However, Gray (1963) mentioned that the cloud collar could be Mongolian since the same design can be seen in both Persian and Chinese clothing about the same period the Mongols were in control of Central Asia. This design was literally used as a collar in most royal clothing in the Mongolian court and then adapted by the Chinese and the Persian in most of their art (Gray, 1963). Nevertheless, this design was rendered in Persian, Mongolian and Chinese art; ceramics included. It seemed to be more prevalent in ceramics that were produced during the Yuan (1279-1368 AD) and Ming (1368-1644 AD) Dynasties, as seen in the porcelains recovered from underwater sites in the Philippines.

Other features under design are pattern and heavy decoration. Scholars like Carswell (2000), Macintosh (1994), and Medley (1973-1976) pointed out that the most obvious Islamic influence seen in Yuan and Ming wares

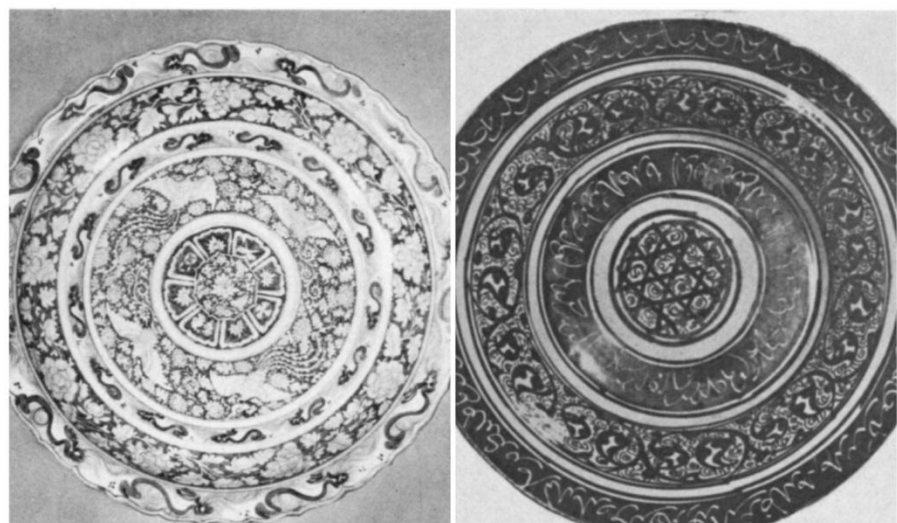


Fig. 3 Collated photographs of ‘Concentric Bands’. (Medley, 1975)

is the heavy and elaborate way the white porcelain was painted. Medley (1975-1976) discovered a pattern most Islamic ceramics display in Yuan and Ming wares. Since scholars mentioned that numerous ceramics found in Islamic nations portray geometric designs (Curatola, 2006; Philon, 1980), it should follow that even the pattern of decorations is geometric, a.k.a. 'concentric pattern' (Medley, 1975). Chinese potters made sure there was harmony in porcelain decoration (e.g. bigger feasting plates had to be decorated with organized balanced). Early Islamic metalwork was brought to China as reference for new forms of porcelain (Bennett, 2005; Carswell, 2000; Crick, 2002; Curatola, 2006; Gray, 1963; Medley, 1973-1976; Soucek, 1999). In these references the Chinese potters discovered a systematic way to decorate wares that were new to them. The solution to the Chinese potters' problem was to render the same concentric pattern in bands or strips (Fig. 3) which Medley (1975) pointed out by showing a picture of one of the collections from the Ardabil Shrine.

Form

Examples of forms copied from early Islamic metal work are the ewer or crescent-shaped kendi (Bennett, 2005). Different forms are dishes, kendis, ewers, and boxes. Large dishes "appear to be derived from a metal prototype possibly of Islamic origin," (Macintosh, 1994: 13) since West Asians normally used large dishes (diameter 30-46 cm) for feasting or communal eating (Bennett, 2005; Casrwell, 2000; Medley, 1975; Park, 2012). The introduction of large saucers was in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) marked by a better relationship between China and the West being the "largest continuous land empire ever existed" (Park, 2012: 91). Before this, Chinese dining style was to serve in individual plates. The crescent-shaped kendi's form is obviously Islamic. "The elegant shape of this pouring vessel imitates the bronze water containers of Persia and Mughal India, Indian metal versions originally derived from animal hide drinking flasks" (National Art Gallery of Australia website, 2010). The purpose of the kendi in Islamic rituals is for ablution - the ritual washing of a priest's hands or of sacred vessels (Foo and Teo, 2007). Another form is the pen/covered box. Muslim metalworkers are known to have produced large numbers of pen boxes decorated with inlays of gold and silver (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011). In the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), numerous pen boxes similar to a typical medieval Islamic calligrapher's pen box were created.

Site information and Presentation of Data

Pandanan Shipwreck

Pandanan shipwreck is in the southernmost tip of the mainland of Palawan, 250 m from shore, with a depth of 40-42 m (Alba, 1996; Dizon, 1996). It is a Chinese junk due to the use of iron nails connecting the keel to the hull (Dizon, 1996). Total artifacts count is 4,722, consisted of metals, beads, and ceramics. One of the Chinese coins showed that it was from the reign of Yongle Emperor of the Ming Dynasty (1402-1424) and 70% of ceramics is Vietnamese (Dizon, 1996). In this site, 21 blueandwhite porcelains were examined as these were the ones available for research. Only one could be considered as Definitely Islamic, but 9 pieces have Islamic design elements. A summary of the findings of all the four sites will be seen at the end of this section.

Española Site

This site is located in Sofronio, Española, southeast Palawan, about 166 km south of the capital, Puerto Princesa. Although there were fragments of wood found in the site, this was not enough to qualify for a keel (Dizon et al., 2000). No parts of a ship were found. The total number of artifacts is 652, majority identified as Thai stoneware jars with only 7 blue and white porcelains detailed in Table 2 (Dizon et al., 2000).

Lena Shoal Shipwreck

Located off the island of Busuanga, northwest Palawan, the shipwreck at Lena Shoal was found 48 m deep, where excavations revealed a part of the bottom of the ship's hull (Goddio, 2002). The total number of artifacts is 4,789, where 2,084 are blue and white porcelains, the rest are celadon, earthenware, and Sawankhalok wares (National Museum of the Philippines, 1997). Analysis of the ceramics places the shipwreck during the reign of the Hongzhi Emperor (1488-1505) (Crick, 2002). Contrary to the Pandanan shipwreck, the Lena Shoal shipwreck was identified as part of the South China Sea shipbuilding tradition - fusion of Southeast Asian and Chinese shipbuilding techniques (Orillaneda, 2013). With the time and availability of the wares, 62 pieces were closely examined.

Santa Cruz Shipwreck

The shipwreck was 32 m below sea level, in Santa Cruz, Zambales, North Luzon. The artifact count in this shipwreck is marginally larger with 14,965 pieces, 97% high-fired

ceramics (Orillaneda, 2008). Most numbered ceramics are celadon with 2,512, followed by 1,769 blue and white porcelains (Orillaneda, 2008). The ship is estimated to be from the South China Sea shipbuilding tradition, most probably from Thailand (Orillaneda, 2008).

Discussion

The Española Report dates the site to 15th century; however, Brown (2004) suggested it could be 16th century. Given that there was no sign of a ship, the artifacts are assumed to be jettisoned cargo (Brown, 2004; Dizon et al., 2000). The bulk of this is large stoneware jars,



proposed to be Sawankhalok (National Museum of the Philippines, 2000). Both Pandanan and Española sites offer us with more brown glazed wares and Southeast Asian ceramics, while more blue and white wares or Chinese ceramics were recovered from Lena Shoal and Santa Cruz. This may be approached with the factor of time since the Pandanan site is dated mid-15th century (Brown, 2004; Diem, 1996; Dizon, 1996), while both the Santa Cruz and Lena Shoal junks are proposed to have sunk late 15th century (Brown, 2004; Goddio et al., 2002). No other interpretations of Española will be made since the whole assemblage is not present and it is possible that the period is outside the paper's scope. But it is interesting to note that there are two pieces decorated with an Islamic design element (Fig. 4), however the form and other decoration of these two wares do not make it 'Definitely' nor 'Quasi Islamic' since the pieces look more Sawankhalok than Chinese. Pandanan reveals that only one ware can be considered as 'Definitely Islamic', with 9 pieces with Islamic motifs. Since Lena Shoal and Santa Cruz have more blue-and-white porcelain, more samples were studied. Both wrecks from the late 15th century, tell us of change in traded goods, or a new trend of Chinese ceramic production - a change in how Chinese ceramics

Fig. 4 Two pieces from the Española site with Arabesque Scrolls. (National Museum of the Philippines)

were decorated over time - since 50% of Lena Shoal porcelains can be considered as 'Definitely Islamic' while Santa Cruz has almost 40%. Examples of these are heavily decorated, large dishes (Fig. 2a and 2b), crescent-shaped kendi (Fig. 5a), ewer (Fig. 5b), and covered boxes (Figs. 5c and 5d).

The growing polities in the Philippine archipelago during the 15th century were most probably the intended market of these shipwrecks; however this could be proven more surely with a comparative analysis of underwater and terrestrial artifacts. These underwater sites were excavated more recently than studies by Medley (1973-1976) and Macintosh (1994), examples of scholars who wrote that Chinese ceramics recovered in Southeast Asia were scantily designed and lower in quality compared to those sent to West Asia. Naturally, earlier claims of scholars could be updated with more recent research. As evidenced by the cargo of Lena Shoal and Santa Cruz, these are comparable to export porcelain described by Medley (1975) West Asia. The area or population does not necessarily have to be a marginally Islamic kingdom for wares with Islamic motifs to be sent or sold. It would be well to update initial claims that the Philippines was not a recipient of elaborately designed export porcelains (Macintosh, 1994; Medley, 1976).



Fig. 5a Crescent-shaped Kendi, Santa Cruz Shipwreck. (National Museum of the Philippines)

Fig. 5b Ewer, Santa Cruz Shipwreck. (National Museum of the Philippines)

Fig. 5c Pen box, Santa Cruz Shipwreck. (National Museum of the Philippines)

Fig. 5d Covered Box, Santa Cruz Shipwreck. (National Museum of the Philippines)

Conclusion

Since the data is raw, examining more specimens will definitely allow more interpretation. But so far, the objectives of this paper have been met. The different cargoes of the shipwrecks reveal the different time when these sailed and got wrecked. They also reveal a change in supply and demand of trade goods. The Philippine archipelago was also a recipient of porcelains decorated with Islamic motifs and it did not have to be a largely Islamic population. The Lena Shoal and Santa Cruz sites are effective for testing the checklist formulated, which can explore more closely what others reported regarding the ceramics found in these shipwrecks (Crick, 2002; Orillaneda, 2008). Research is in session for the main thesis where a comparison of porcelain from underwater and terrestrial site is being conducted to further prove that wares with Islamic motifs indeed reached Philippine shores.

Definitely Islamic	Quasi Islamic (Possible overlap/mix)	Not Islamic at all
Style	Style	Style
Pattern	Pattern	No symmetric pattern
Design Element	Design Element	No Islamic design element
(Very) Heavily decorated	Heavily decorated	Designs are Chinese or Buddhist
*At least 2	*At least 1	Not heavily decorated (plain)
*With form	Form and size	Form and size
Form and size	Large sized dishes	Small
Large sized dishes		Tea cups
Crescent shaped Kendi	*Combination of form and style	For individual dining
*Or all of the above		

Table 1. Criteria/Checklist of characteristics formulated for the purpose of identifying Islamic designs motifs on porcelain. (A.N. Kintanar)

Summary of findings based on the checklist									
Name of Archaeological Site	Total no. of pieces examined	No. of wares with 'Concentric Bands' or Symmetrical Pattern	No. of wares with Islamic Design Elements	No. of wares heavily decorated	No. of wares with Islamic forms (in terms of shape--Kendi/Ewer/Box)	No. of wares with Islamic forms (in terms of size of dish or bowl)	No. of wares 'Definitely Islamic'	No. of wares 'Quasi Islamic'	No. of wares 'Not Islamic at all'
Pandanan Wreck (Site code: IV-1993-V)	21	4	9	4	0	2	1	4	16
Española (Site code: IV-1999-V)	7	2	2	2	0	0	0	2	5
Lena Shoal Wreck (Site code: IV-1997-H)	62	30	62	48	0	30	31	31	0
Santa Cruz Wreck (Site code: III-2001-Z)	51	12	44	33	5	15	20	16	15

Table 2. Summary of findings based on the checklist. (A.N. Kintanar)

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Endnote

¹A diagram and list of symbols on Chinese porcelain was presented to me by Mr. Fred Orogo from the Archaeology Division of the National Museum of the Philippines. It is a photocopy of an index of terms from a book which Mr.Orogo has forgotten, for this reason, I am citing him as my source.

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Biography

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