Pottery may also be fired with no alterations on the surface. Later on, a solution of clay is applied on the surface, or dipped into the solution, such that a thin film of clay, sometimes of a different color, forms on the surface serving as a slip. More invasive treatments were done with the addition of simple decorations such as incised lines using a stylus, or more complex, using a comb-like instrument. Lines, zigzags, circles, squares, dots, running scrolls and other designs were common. These were executed when the vessel is in the leather-hard stage of drying. Appliqués were also done with anthropomorphic faces, ropes and other shapes to beautify the pots. Handles, spouts, ears, foot-rings, foot-stands and pedestals were very popular ornaments.

The wares are initially air-dried in the shade, making sure there are no drafts, so that the vessels dry evenly. When completely dried, these are piled on top of a platform of firing materials like wood, palm fronds, bovine dung, or rice husks, then covered all over with the same materials, then fired in the open. No kilns were used until modern times. Upon completion, the pieces were cooled in an oxidizing atmosphere to produce red pottery, or in a reducing atmosphere to result in blackened pottery.

The modern times saw the advent of potters’ wheels, even mechanized ones, and kilns burning wood or fuels like petroleum or butane gas. Electric kilns have become common. Production has become more mechanical and less personal, with the loss of traditional touch and the patina of a long-gone culture.

JTP

Traditional Boatbuilding and Philippine Maritime Culture

COUNTRYWIDE. In an archipelago with some 36,000 kilometers of coastline and more than 7,000 islands, with mountainous interiors, it is not a wonder that the people should take to water as the most facile mode of travel. This was apparent even during the ancient times when the waterways were the much used highways.
THE ARCHIPELAGIC configuration of our country, comprising more than 7,000 islands and its location on the western edge of the Asian continent facing the vast Pacific Ocean, have shaped our maritime culture. So important is the sea that some of our first social-political organizations are called barangay, meaning social groups, which is also a type of boat. The organizational structure of the barangay, even though permanently settled on land, is patterned after the strictures imposed on the ship crew. For instance, everyone on board must work together efficiently as one, performing one’s task according to the orders of the nakada, the ship captain.

Maritime knowledge and skills as boat builders, navigators, acumen in the conduct of trade and commerce, apart from personal qualities of bravery and leadership, were indispensable for acquiring high social-political status. Indeed, seafaring groups along the coastal areas like the Tausug of Mindanao, the Sugbu of Cebu, the Tagalogs dominated the course of socio-historical developments compared to the slower development of upland interior dwellers. The seafarers were better organized socially and politically due to their exposure overseas notably to the more advanced civilizations of Asia. Political power derived more from the possession of large fleet of boats, notably fighting vessels (parau, prau, or karo-karo), warriors, and trade goods. “Raja Buisan, father of Sultan Kudarat, had 20,000 vessels from the village of Suaco in Burney. People from Butuan, Bohol, Basilan, Jolo thought of themselves as one people with the Borneans.”

A variety of boats and ships were ubiquitous all over the archipelago and were the indispensable mechanical devices of seafaring people in trade and conquests. Francisco Alcina (1668) and Francisco Combes (1667) gave vivid descriptions of boatbuilding and sea faring capabilities of Filipinos. They built a variety of water craft from rafts, to dugouts (bulutu), to large vessels with double outriggers called parau, prahu, or bulangbai. Combes admired the way the Orang Lutao (literally, people who float) built their boats that were designed for speed, maneuverability even in reefs and shoals, and mangrove swamps. They were streamlined and lightweight that they could be carried off on land. These boats sail “like birds while ours are like lead. The boats had wooden planks set horizontally on succeeding tiers upon a long keel forming the hull. All the planks and keel were joined together with pegs, but were lashed together inside the hull. Above the hull was a platform for the quarters of the crew and roofed by awning made of palm. On each side were two quarter runners and outriggers.”

Like water-walking insects, these large fishing crafts are called basnig. It was not unusual to encounter hundreds of boats of all types and sizes in the different harbors of the Philippine archipelago all the way to other ports of Southeast Asia. Pigafetta (1521-1522) witnessed fleets from Mindanao anchored in the Ternate harbor when the Spaniards met King of Gialolo. Colin has this to say about the maritime orientation of early Filipinos. “They are really a maritime people for they are great fishermen using net, line and corral. The people who live inland are excellent farmers and hunters.” So important was the sea to their lives that in death many preferred to be buried in boat-shaped coffins set on high cliffs overlooking the sea. The remains of some chiefs were placed in a boat then set out to the sea as if going on an ocean journey.

Types of boats and ships may be classified according to functions such as hana or vinta meaning any watercraft in Luzon and the Visayas. There are houseboats usually 5-6 meters long by 1.5 meters wide with roofs like the lupa-lupa of the Bajau-Sama in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. Meanwhile, fishing boats are like the armadahan in Laguna de Bay, or the sailboats with double outriggers, the parahai in Ilocos which is similar to the Bicol, reben. Passenger, cargo vessels, or trading boats (aranau or hiruo) can be the small sailboat called sakayan in Sulu and Zamboanga. Larger boats are usually called cora-cora, aranau, sometimes prahu, prao or parahu.

Boats are also classified according to level of technology. The best shipwrights are usually from the Tawi-Tawi archipelago. They are also the most active and innovative boat builders. Crews are usually mixed, mostly composed of Bajau-Sama tukang (craftsmen from the Mindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Sabah), Tausug and Ilanun. Tukang from Bohol and Samar can sometimes be encountered. They are the ones who fabricate the larger ocean-going bris, prahu or basnig, most of which are motorized and equipped with navigational gears like compass, radio and Global Positioning System (GPS). Capital for fabricating these large ocean-going vessels called basnig were often provided by ethnic Chinese. At the time of field research, the total cost could reach up to 2-3 million pesos. These basnig ply the inland seas of Southeast Asia exporting copra, sugar and other agricultural and marine products from the Philippines to ports in Indonesia, Malaysia up to Singapore and the Pacific Islands. On the return trip, these cargo vessels import timber and fuel...
Traditional Boats in Batanes

IVATAN AND ITBAYAT, BATANES ISLAND GROUP PROVINCE, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES. “Tataya” is generally used to refer to Ivatan and Itbayat-made boats. However, the term specifically refers to fishing boats manned by three or less boatmen, powered by oars or sails. Ivatan and Itbayat boats are the only “traditional” boats in the Philippines that are not paddled but rowed.

A traditional Ivatan fishing boat retrofitted with a roof and motor, plying the Ivana-Sabtang island route when ferrying people.

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Traditional Craftsmanship

A large raft to ferry farm animals and light vehicles across the Bacarra River.

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A traditional Ivatan fishing boat retrofitted with a roof and motor, plying the Ivana-Sabtang island route when ferrying people.