

## **The Archaeological Study of the Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Burial Marker**

Eusebio Z. Dizon, Ph.D.  
Consultant, Provincial Government of Batanes  
Retired Scientist III, and Curator I, Archaeology Division  
National Museum of the Philippines,  
Professorial Lecturer 5, School of Archaeology  
University of the Philippines, Diliman, QC

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### **Introduction**

This is the second part, Part b) Archaeological Study of the Vatang Burial Site of the Contract of Service between the Provincial Governor of Batanes (PGB) and Dr. Eusebio Z. Dizon as Archaeologist Consultant to the PGB.

The archaeological observation and studies of the Stone Boat-Shaped Markers in Batanes started in 1994 by the team from the Archaeology Division, National Museum of the Philippines, headed by Dr. Eusebio Z. Dizon. Most of the archaeological excavations of the Stone Boat-Shaped markers were conducted in 1995 to 1996 in Ivuhos and Nakamaya, Diptan, Basco, and then in Itbayat in 2006. The Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Burial Marker was only documented by mapping in 1997 and a “Preliminary Exploration of the Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Marker and San Vicente Idyang, Ivana, Batan Island, Batanes Province” was published by Grace Barretto, Armand S.B. Mijares and Rey A. Santiago at the *Ivatan Studies Journal* (1998-2003) Volume V-X:39-46. The National Museum Accession Code assigned to the Vatang Boat was II-1997- F4. Since 1995, there was no archaeological activity at the Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Burial in Ivana. In 2019, there was a renewed interest to conduct an archaeological study at the Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Marker through the effort of the Office of the Governor of Batanes, with the initiative of Ms. Hagel Ruiz-Valones, head of the Batanes Provincial Tourism Office. Hence, a decision was made to conduct an archaeological excavation at the Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Marker.

Fortunately, a team from the Archaeology Division of the National Museum was formed under the leadership of Dr. Ame Garong Museum Curator I, Archaeology Division. Her team members were Ms. Hazel Bautista, Museum Researcher II and Mr. John Joseph Estrada Javier, Museum Technician II and through the leadership of Mr. Joey Russel Gecha of the Batanes Area Museum and Satellite Office (BAMSO) some members such as Mr. Juanito Velasco, Museum Technician and Mr. Dexter Ydel were allowed to help in the archaeological excavations. The PGB, Batanes Provincial Tourism Office also granted the participation of Architect Yumiko Mire H. Nino, Architect I, and Mr. Clifford C. Patricio, artist/ Tourism Operation Assistant and Mark M. Velayo, Information System Analyst I, to join in the

archaeological excavation. The Barangay Captain of San Vicente, Ivana, Mr. Roland B. Fidel was informed and some laborers who were also Kagawad were asked to participate in the archaeological activities. Courtesy calls were done with the Governor Marilou Cayco of Batanes and Mayor Celso B. Batallones of Ivana, and with the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) Provincial Officer Tom Ibarido.

## **Archaeological Activities**

The archaeological activities started from 20 May 2024 until 31 May 2024. The team failed to start on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2024 due to inclement weather.

The Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Marker in Barangay San Vicente, Ivana is located between two gullies at the coordinates of 20 degrees 23 minutes 42 seconds North and 121 degrees 55 minutes 47 seconds East in an elevation of about 100 meters above mean sea level (AMSL). However, from the National Road of Ivana, it is about 566 meters away and about 20 minutes' walk. Its elevation is about 85 meters above the present National Road. It is situated in an uplifted limestone mound. The Vatang boat-shape marker is consisted of two (2) boat shape markers and one (1) stone circular-shape marker. The two (2) stone boat-shape markers were numbered as #1 and #2 respectively wherein, #1 is the located on the eastern side or top most part of the site while #2 is the one located below #1 western side/sloping area of the site. The stone circular-shape marker is on top of the stone boat-shape marker #1, and this is the one that was archaeologically excavated.

The Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Marker No. 1, has the length of 5.9 meters, width of 2.40 meters and oriented towards the sea with S 85 degrees West compass reading. The drawing and documentation published by Barretto et al. (1998-2003) was referred to and the drawing of the Vatang Boat-Shaped Marker was reproduced as a guide for the actual planning of the excavation. This map was studied carefully and re-checked for the positioning and recording of the number of stones used in shaping the Stone Boat-Shaped No. 1 Marker. Aerial photographs including the use of drone photography used by Clifford and Mark were printed and compared to the illustration or drawing of the Stone Boat-Shaped No. 1 Marker.

Excavation of a stone boat-shape marker is a bit different from the normal excavation in any archaeological digging. There are many preparations prior to the actual excavation. The following methodology was employed:

1. Cleaning of the site/exposed the boat-shape marker  
Since the site is one of the tourist destinations in Ivana, there was a concrete step going to the marker. The site was maintained in terms of its cleanliness and the stones looks undisturbed.
2. Performance of ritual and offering of prayers to appease the spirit was done prior to any activity.
3. The Vatang Stone Boat Shaped Marker which was oriented to Southwest, was dissected at the center from North to South and East to West with the use of a nylon cord that was laid down the bisecting lines, forming four sections. Then an almost 2x2 meter square was laid at the center section of the Stone Boat-Shaped Marker.

4. Application of paint or white marker on the visible stones using a water-based paint. This was done for the written number that will be given on each stone, so that they will be readable and visible.
5. Assigning number to every stone composing/inside the boat-marker #1.
6. Tracing of the actual distribution of stones using acetate and pen marker; The tracing was divided into North and South sections.
7. Plotting of the actual stone distribution using the previous map made in 1997 and improving it by adding some of the stones that were not plotted in initially in 1997.
8. Defining the area intended for excavation to expose the possible burial (2 x 2-meter square). The center portion of the boat-shape marker was selected, based from the previous experience of Dr. Dizon in digging such, the remains were usually put in the middle of the boat-shape marker.
9. Systematic removal of stone within the 2 x 2-meter square that will be impacted by the excavation or exposure of the burial. The stones were transferred systematically beside the marker.
10. Systematic excavation and scientific plotting of the features and finds. The excavation and/or removal of soil was done by layer. All the removed soil were screened and put into sacks for the easy back filling the excavated area. Since the site is within a limestone mound, after removing at about 40 cms of soil, limestone layer appeared on the eastern side of the square. While on the eastern side, the burial pit started to appear. The limestone was carved to lay down the body/bones?  
Prior to the exposure of the human remains, there were two stone markers observed. At -30 cms from the surface, the 1<sup>st</sup> stone marker appeared and at about -75 cms from the Local datum point, two big (2) andesite stones appeared as cover to the burial.
11. Retrieval (simultaneous with the excavation) and recording of finds were done if specimens were found *in situ*. While soil removed were screened and materials recovered were labelled based on the soil layer.
12. Backfill of soil and limestone removed were returned. The stone markers were also place back in their original position. As if nothing happened at the Stone Boat-Shaped Burial No. 1 Marker.
13. Laboratory Works (cleaning, accessioning, and recording). Total of 368 pieces of specimens were recovered, cleaned, and accessioned. All the specimens were stored at the BAMSO office/storage facility except for the human remains and teeth that were brought to NMP main office for further analysis and carbon-14 dating.

Significant finds included a semi restorable stoneware jar with ears or handle (Vietnamese stoneware jar, 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century AD), pestle and the human remains with 17 molars (2 individuals) and tibia and femur fragments. Earthenware sherds were also recovered mostly on the surface.

### **Analysis of the Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Burial Marker No.1**

The Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Burial Marker No. 1 is a unique secondary multiple burial so far that is archaeologically excavated in Batanes. Secondary and Multiple burial meaning that only selected fragments of the human skeletal remains were interred and two (2) individuals were encountered in

this burial. It is so far, the only documented case among all the stone boat-shape burial markers in Batanes.

Comparing it with those archaeologically excavated in Ivuhos Island, the two recorded Stone Boat-Shaped Burial Markers were Boat 10 in Chuhangin, the largest and contained an adult male about 50-60 years old, about 170 cm in height and in flex position. The burial was primary, meaning to say that the whole individual was buried alone at the time of death. The limestone bedrock was carved to fit the individual who may have been tied tightly with his arms in the neck and the legs and feet flexed also tightly. The second burial Boat No. 1 was from a child that was about 3-5 years old and hydro-cephalic. This burial was also primary buried alone in flexed position. The limestone bedrock was also carved or prepared for the individual burial. The chronological date of the Chuhangin Boat-Shaped Burial No. 10 is 355 +/- 70 BP or roughly 1595 AD. (Dizon, Santiago and Bolunia 1997; Dizon and Barretto 1995-1997).

It is significant to find restorable fragment of a Vietnamese stoneware jar recovered at the Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Burial Marker No.1 which is associated with the burial. This Vietnamese ceramic is dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> Century CE, according to a Vietnamese archaeologist colleague Dr. Giang Hai Nguyen. This is a very new information and development. First, this is the very first Vietnamese ceramics archaeologically excavated in Batanes, second if the date of the Vietnamese ceramic is right, then, this Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Burial Marker No. 1 is quite early for Batanes. It can be earlier than the Chuhangin Stone Boat Shape Burial Marker No. 10. However, it can happen also that even the Vietnamese ceramic is 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century CE, it can be used late in the 16<sup>th</sup> century CE. The best solution to this problematic situation of the Vatang Stone Boat-Shape Burial Marker date is to supplement it with a Radiocarbon 14 date with the human skeletal fragments recovered from the burial pit. It is also significant to find a stone pestle associated with the Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Burial Marker No. 1.

The distribution of probably intentionally broken earthenware sherds observed at the Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Burial Marker No. 1, is a common practice observed among all the stone boat-shaped markers in Batanes, from Itbayat, Ivuhos, and Batan Islands.

In another area of the Ivuhos Stone Boat-Shaped Burial Marker, at Chuhangin Stone Boat-Shaped Burial II, it was observed that the construction of the stone boat-shaped marker was like an inverted *Tataya* boat. This one at its center has a jar burial buried in it. It was not clear if it was secondary or primary, there were few skeletal remains found but was heavily disturbed by cows walking on top of the stone boat-shaped burial marker.

At the Nakamaya Site in Diptan, Basco, the Stone Boat-Shaped Burial Marker that was archaeologically excavated in 1996 have been already disturbed or previously excavated by pot hunters before the National Museum team. Hence, no good archaeological information was extracted from this one archaeological excavation in the Nakamaya Site.

The 2006 archaeological excavation of two Stone Boat-Shaped Marker in Itbayat, have no burials at all. They were just stone boat shaped markers. They were excavated by Dr. Eusebio Z. Dizon as the team leader with Armand Salvador Mijares, Museum Researcher II, Archaeology Division, Antonio Penalosa, Scientific Illustrator, Archaeology Division and two graduate students at the Archaeological Studies Program (ASP) at that time, University of the Philippines, Diliman, and we come up of the idea that they may not necessarily burials at all but only markers for people's memories. Hence, we have the publication:

Valientes, Edwin; Andrea Malaya M. Ragrario, **Eusebio Z. Dizon** and Armand Salvador B. Mijares  
2007-2008 Burial or Not: The Case of Pamayugan 2 Stone Boat-Shaped Markers. Hukay (Journal of Archaeological Research in Asia and the Pacific) 12:1-12.

I had once a discussion with Dr. Peter Bellwood about the possible age of these stone boat-shaped markers. Bellwood thinks that they were young meaning to say after the 1450 BP eruptions of Mt. Iraya volcano. He argued that if these stone boat-shaped markers were old, they could have been buried as well with the volcanic sediments of Mt. Iraya volcano.

The phenomenon of Stone Boat-Shaped Markers and Burials practice is not confined to Batanes alone, although there are no observable other sites in the Philippines. There are no other sites in the Philippines where stone boat-shaped burial markers are used. There are some documentations of Stone Boat-Shaped Burial Markers in the Scandinavia, northern Europe such as Sweeden, Denmark, and then more recently, I saw some in Israel, at the site near the Qumran Caves. The stone boat-shaped burial markers may symbolize the maritime culture of the people who made them.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The uniqueness of the stone boat-shaped burial/marker practice in Batanes is a major consideration to continue the archaeological research. This initial attempt to understand the context of stone boat-shaped marker led to a more research questions.

It is recommended that:

1. More stone boat-shape burial marker must be identified and excavated to understand the technology behind the burial;
2. Conduct exploration and survey not only in Batan island but also in another island in Batanes to identify burial sites and compare it with the boat-shape marker/burial;
3. Generate carbon -14 dates to understand the period or time when this boat-shape marker was built and utilized;
4. Understand its relationship with the social status of the dead individual; and
5. Future prospecting of ancient DNA to confirm the identity of the individual and relate it to the present community of Ivatan

This culture of having Stone Boat Shape Markers whether used for actual burials or just a marker is so important for maritime oriented people. Among the people in the world who practiced such a culture of making Stone Boat Shape Markers are the Vikings of Scandinavian countries like Denmark, Norway, Sweeden, etc., Batanes in the Philippines and Israel. It is very important to relate this cultural phenomena in order to understand the real meaning of this cultural practice of humans in various places which may not have any physical relationship at all.

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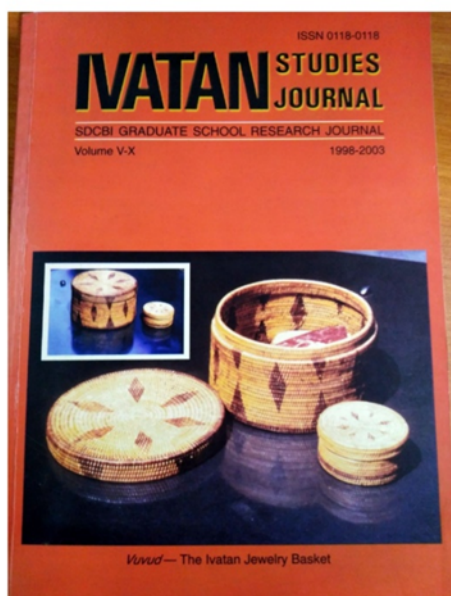
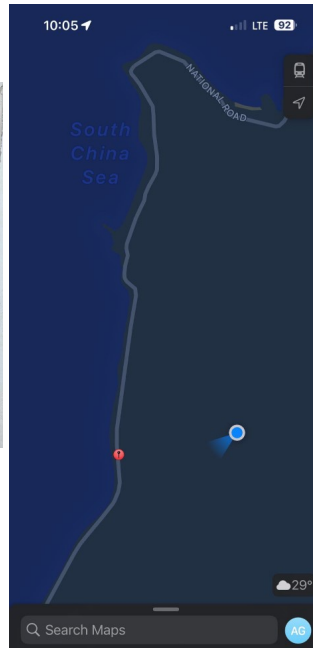
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2007-2008 Burial or Not: The Case of Pamayugan 2 Stone Boat-Shaped Markers. Hukay (Journal of Archaeological Research in Asia and the Pacific) 12:1-12.

## Figures

### Location of Vatang Stone Boat-Shape Marker



### Preliminary Exploration of the Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Marker and San Vicente Idyang, Ivana, Batan Island, Batanes Province

*Ivatan Studies Journal*  
Vol. V-X, 1998-2003

Grace Barretto  
Graduate Student Volunteer  
UP Archaeological Studies Program

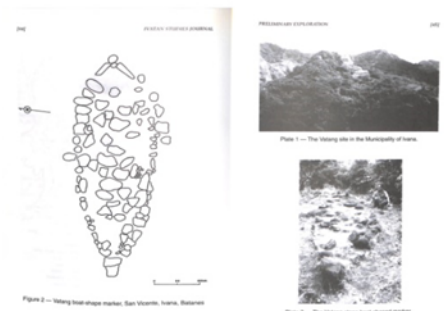
Armand Salvador B. Mijares, M.A. Anthro.  
Museum Researcher I

Rey Santiago  
Museum Researcher II

#### Introduction

Since 1994, the Archaeology Division of the National Museum of the Philippines has been conducting archaeological explorations and excavations in several sites in the Batanes Province (Dizon and Santiago 1994 and 1995; Dizon 1996). The major archaeological features that were recorded include micro-megalithic structures such as stone columnar blocks and idyangs, and stone boat-shaped markers. These features are unique and nothing similar to them have been found elsewhere in the Philippines. These features are mostly located on hilltops and the stones were quarried from along beaches and creeks (de Ocampo 1994). The idyangs were probably used as ancient habitations and/or fortresses by the early inhabitants of the islands. They are similar to the gusbas or castle found in Okinawa, Japan. The stone boat-shaped markers were used as burial or grave markers, similar to those used by the Vikings in the Scandinavian countries.

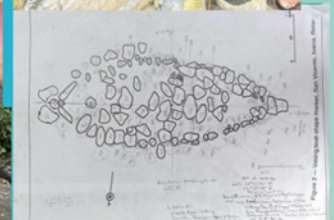
During the recent field work in Batan Island, Batanes, held from September 15 to October 13, 1997, several archaeological sites were discovered by the team including two new reported sites in Ivana. These

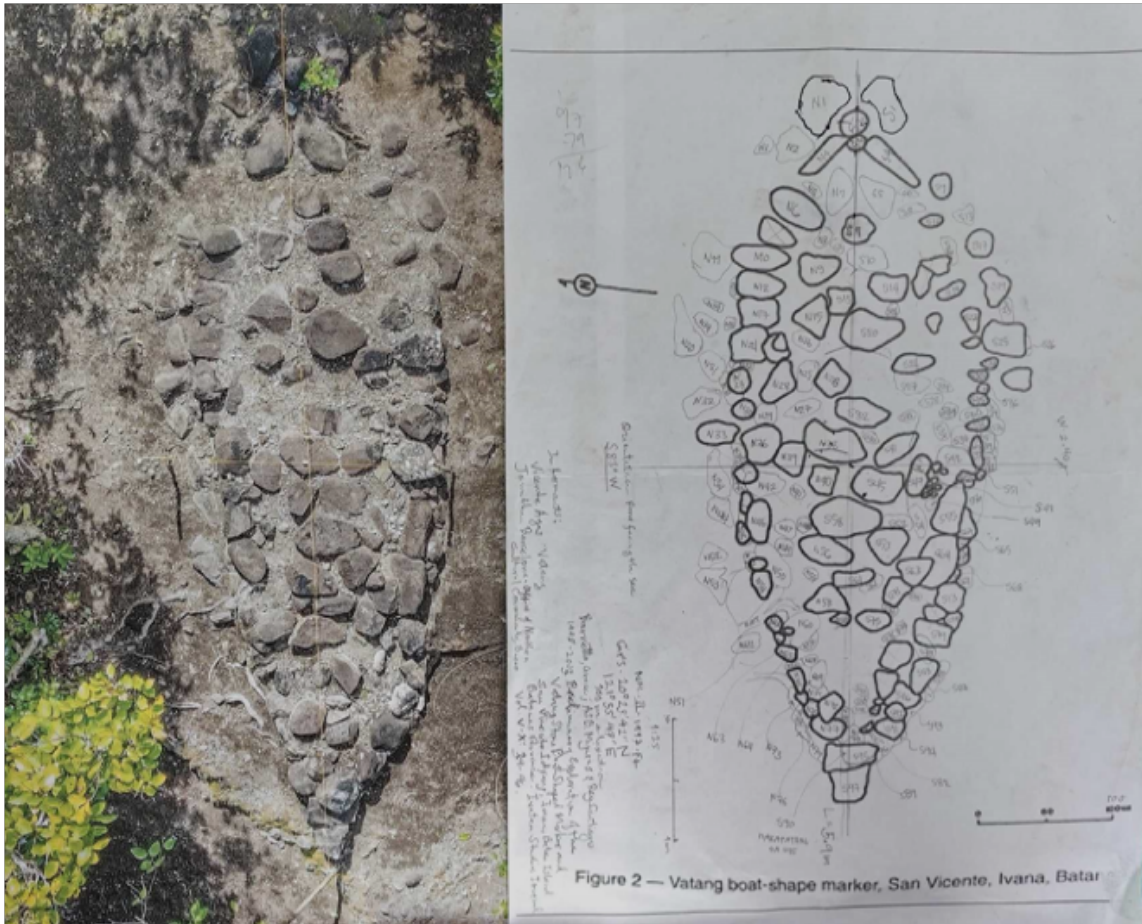


**Vatang Stone Boat Shape, Ivana  
in 2019 visit**



**Archaeological Excavation, Stone-Boat Shape Marker, Vatang, Ivana**





Comparison between the aerial picture improved Scientific Illustration of the Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Marker No. 1.



Archaeological activities at the Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Marker No. 1., San Vicente, Ivana, Batanes.

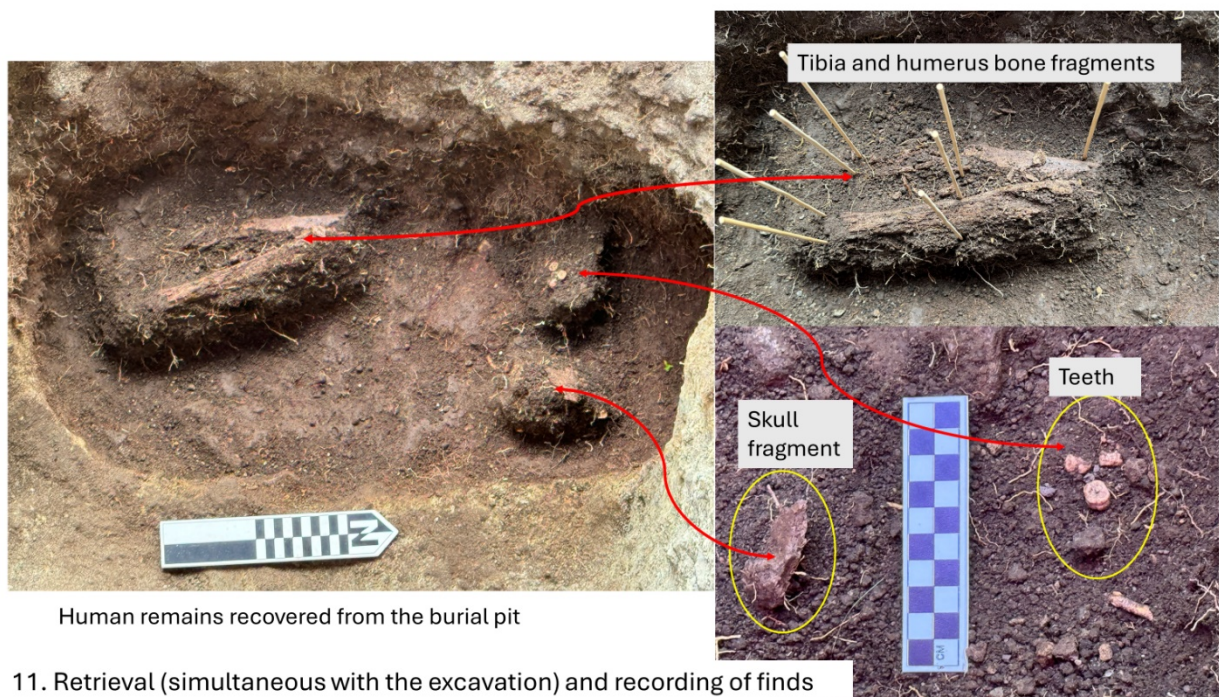
Archaeological Excavation of Boat-Shaped Marker # 1, Vatang, Ivana, Batanes, May 2024



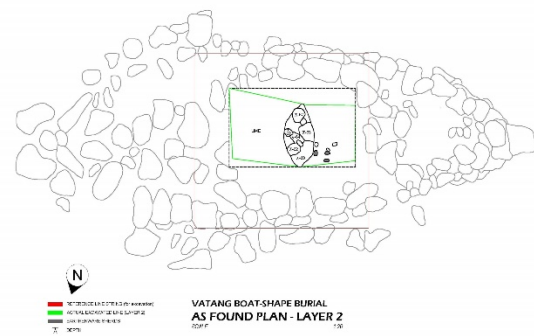
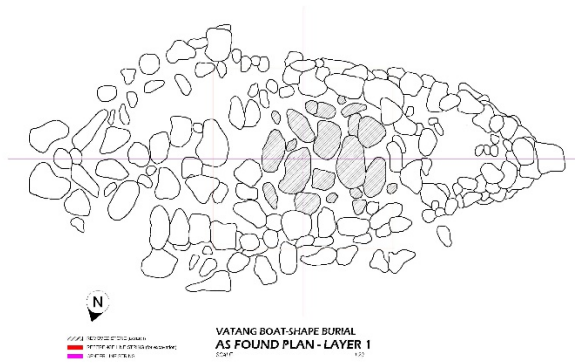
Artifacts from Vatang Boat Shape Burial Marker; Stone pestle; Vietnamese stoneware jar 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Cent.



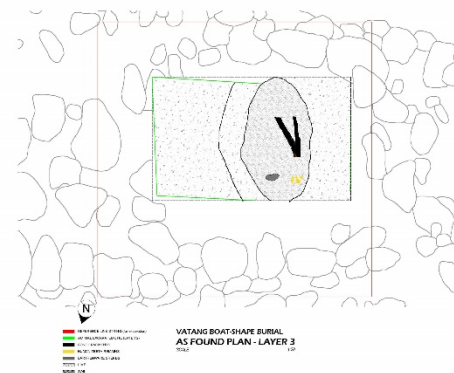
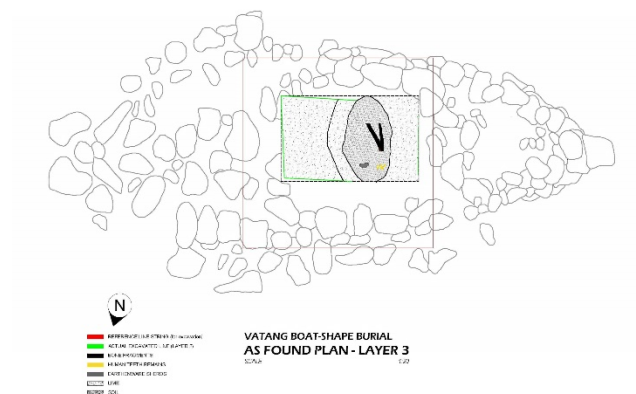
Vatang Boat Shape Burial Marker is a Secondary Multiple Burial with human teeth and cranial fragments



Excavated fragmented human remains at the Vatang Stone Boat-Shaped Burial Marker No.1.



Scientific Illustrations by Arch. Yumiko Mire Nino, of the various stage of archaeological excavation of the Vatang Stone Boat Shape Burial No. 1, San Vicente, Ivana, Batanes.



Human remains were found at the very bottom of the limestone pit, covering the Vatang Stone Boat Shape Burial No. 1. In San Vicente, Ivana, Batanes.

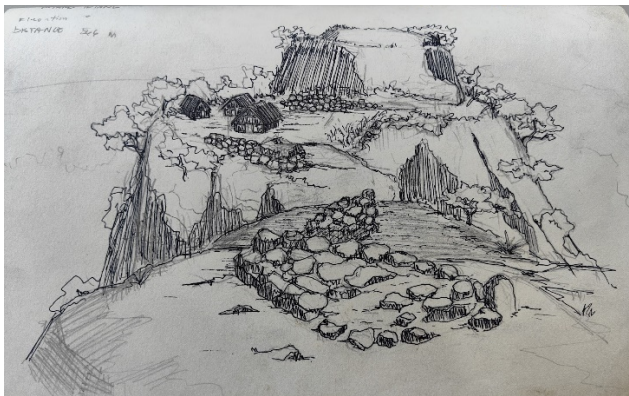


After cleaning and analysis of the human teeth remains from Vatang Boat Shaped Burial Marker No.1. Suggesting two (2) individuals were found because there are more than one set of molars found.





Artist's Reconstruction by Clifford C. Patricio, of the Vatang Stone Boat Shaped Burial Marker and the Idyang, San Vicente, Ivana.





Basco Idyang and Jar Burials in Diptan Rolling Hills, Basco, Batanes and comparative Taiwanese Jar Burials



## Ivuhos Stone Boat-Shape Burial Marker



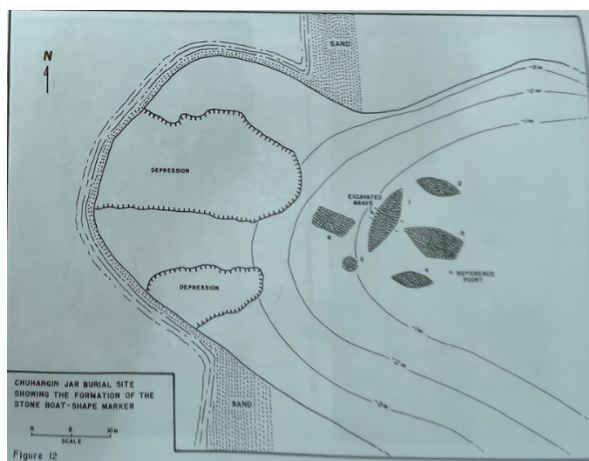
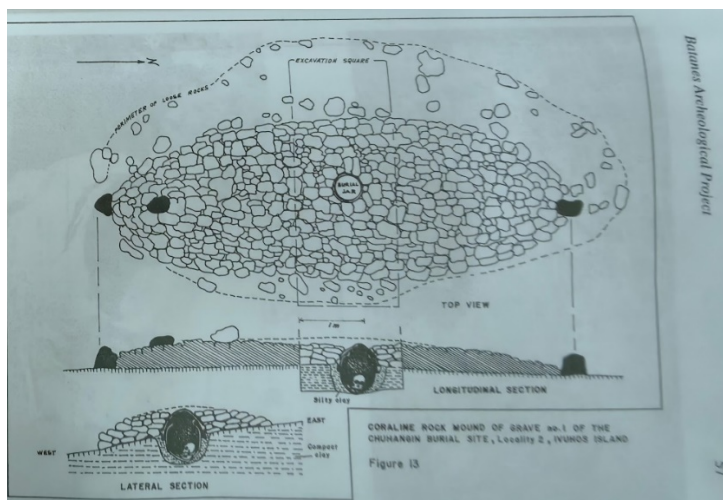
Stone Boat Shape Burial Marker of a Juvenile about 5-7-year-old child, probably female.

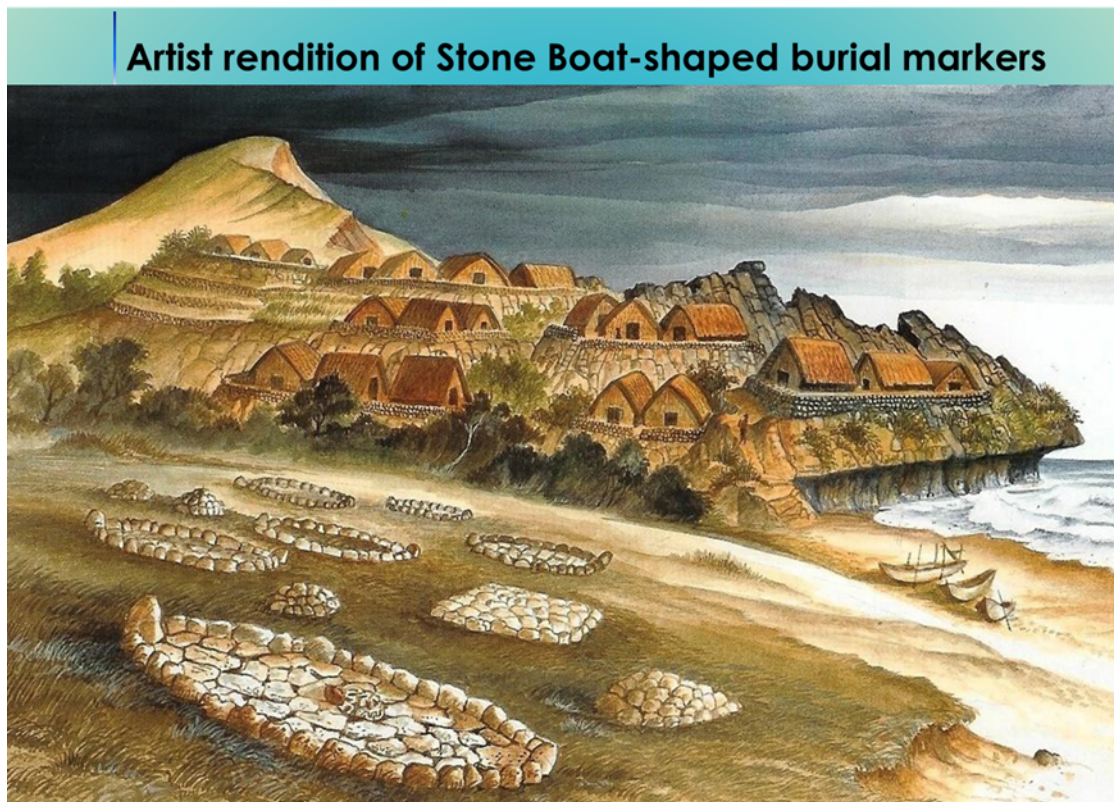
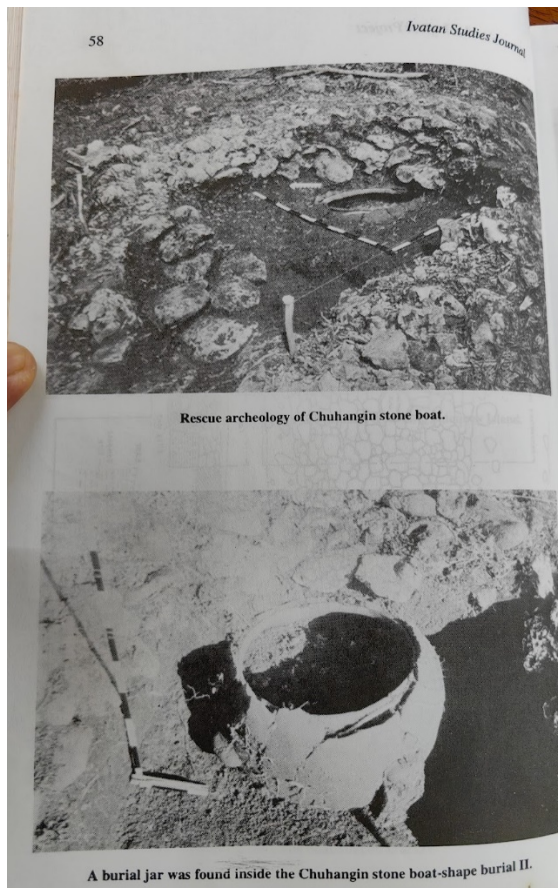
## Excavation of Stone Boat-Shaped Burial Markers



Adult primary burial, male about 50-60 years old, about 170 cm in height.

## Stone Boat-Shape Burial Markers, Ivuhos Is., Batanes







thick growth of *pandan* plants. The head stones had bow- and stern-shaped posts. The smallest grave stone marker measured 2.3 meters in length and 90 centimeters in width, while the largest was about 5 meters in length and 3.5 meters wide. The smallest marker



sample was taken directly from the skeletal remains of the buried child, which was estimated to have been between five and ten years old, on the basis of its teeth and bone growth. The child may have been hydrocephalic, judging from the size of its skull.



**Far left:** A scale reveals a stone boat-shaped burial marker in Nakamaya, Basco, Batanes to measure some 3 to 4 meters in length. **Left:** This stone boat-shaped burial marker on Batan Island measures 2 meters wide.



The Nakamaya Camp site with Mt. Iraya in the background.



Dr. Hornedo with the Nakamaya team: Dr. Dizon, A. Peñalosa, and Ms. G. Barretto.

## Stone Boat Shape Burial Markers in Other Countries



Tjelvar's grave, located near the eastern coast of Gotland, Sweden, is a significant Bronze Age archaeological site. This stone ship burial site, measuring 18 meters in length and 5 meters in width, is one of the best-preserved of its kind in Gotland. The grave is named after Tjelvar, a legendary figure who, according to the 13th-century Gutasaga, was the first man to live on Gotland. Tjelvar is said to have tamed the island, which was previously a living creature that would sink underwater during the day. After his death, Tjelvar was reportedly buried in this ship-shaped grave. Archaeologists have dated the monument to the Late Bronze Age, between 1100 and 500 BC. Excavations in the 1930s uncovered a plundered stone-slab coffin inside the ship, containing cremated bones and a few potsherds.

Image Credit: [paganplaces.com](http://paganplaces.com)

Stone Boat-Shaped Burial in Gotland, Sweden.



Viking burial stone ships, Lindholm Høje, Denmark. 1000-1200 AD



Stone Boat-Shaped Burials in Israel, near the site of the Qumran Caves (Photo by E. Dizon 15 March 2024)