

REVEALING THE ROLE OF SELAYAR IN THE EASTERN SHIPPING AND TRADE ROUTE; ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS FROM AN UNDERWATER EXCAVATION ON THE BONTO SIKUYU SITE

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Abstract

During the 16th-19th centuries, besides exporting copra and woven fabrics, Selayar Island was a part of the shipping route called the ‘eastern route’ used by ceramic traders. This is supported by archaeological evidence found on the Bonto Sikuyu underwater site, which has been under the threat of illegal excavation, in the forms of ceramics and Chinese coins. These archaeological finds, which are dominant in the site, may help us find out where they came from. This study used a survey method by carrying out excavation on the site. During the excavation, we found 1,718-coin pieces, 299-coin chunks, 190 porcelain pieces, 5 stoneware pieces, and one ironware piece. The ceramics came from China, Annam, and Thailand. The Chinese ceramics came from the Sung dynasty (the 9th-12th centuries) and the Yuan dynasty (the 12th-13th centuries). The Annamese and Thai ceramics came from the 14th-16th centuries. Some of the ceramics are bowls and plates, most of which came from Annam and Thailand.

Keywords: Selayar, Bonto Sikuyu, shipping, excavation, underwater archaeological finds, ceramics, coins

INTRODUCTION

The oldest source that mentioned Selayar is *Negara Kartagama*, a book written by Mpu Prapanca (Ahmadin, 2016). As one of the regions in Sulawesi Selatan conquered by

Majapahit, Selayar was also called “*Selaya*”, as shown by the quote from *Negara Kartagama* “... *muwah tanah i Bantayan pramuka len luwuk tentang Udamakatradyadhi nikanang sanusaspupullkangsakanusa Makassar Butun BanggawaiKuni Craliyao*

mwangi (ng) Selaya Sumba Soto Muar ...”, which in English is “... all the regions in Sulawesi Selatan have become the 6th conquered area of Majapahit kingdom. The regions include Bantayan (Bantaeng), Luwuk (Luwu), Udamakatraya (Talaud), Makassar (Makassar), Butun (Buton), Banggawai (Banggai), Kunir (Kunyt Island), Selaya (Selayar), and Solot (Solor) (Mattulada, 1982).

Anthony Reid also mentioned Selayar in his book *South-east Asia in the Age of Commerce*. He said that Selayar is a barren island where only sago plants grow. However, due to its strategic position, Selayar was successful in trading cotton and woven fabrics, which were two of the main commodities in the Makassar trade in 1660 (Anthony Reid, 1939). Cristiaan G. Heersink in his article *Selayar and the Green Gold: Development of the Coconut Trade on an Indonesian Island (1820-1950)* noted that Selayar exported its first export of copra to Europe in 1880 through Makassar, four years earlier than the first shipment of copra from Java. Heersink explained that Selayar was used as a warehouse by the Dutch on the Makassar-Maluku trade route (Heersink, 1999).

In the 17th-18th centuries, Selayar was also an exporter of cotton wadding and high-quality woven fabrics. Its woven fabrics had a smooth texture, were consistently of a high quality, and were in various colors, which caused them to be popular among Muslim communities (Rouffaer, 1904). The fame of Selayar woven fabrics could not be separated from the success of Makassar as a meeting place for merchants who were sailing to Maluku (Forrest, 1792). Besides exporting copra and woven fabrics, in the 16th-18th centuries Selayar Island also became a part of the eastern route, a shipping route used by ceramic traders. Muslimin A.R. Effendy, in the book *Kepingan Mozaik Sejarah Budaya Sulawesi Selatan* (2004), explained that the eastern route started from ceramic production centers, such as mainland China, Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines.

Cristian Pelras, in his book *Manusia Bugis* (1996), said that Selayar Island became

a stopover on the shipping route between the Strait of Malacca and the Maluku Islands. In 1511, Tome Pires often suggested that merchants take the route because it was shorter than the southern route, which they usually took (Pelras, 1996). Selayar woven fabrics were shipped through Makassar to the ports in Kalimantan, the Lesser Sunda Islands (Nusa Tenggara Islands), and Manila (Speelman, 1670). Ahmadin portrayed a quite comprehensive history of Selayar in his book *Nusa Selayar: Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Masyarakat di Kawasan Timur Nusantara* (2016). Ahmadin said that Selayar was mentioned as a commercial area and a part of a shipping and trade route in the Amanna Gappa shipping law. The law also stipulated that the shipping rate from Makassar to Selayar was 2.5 rials.

The historical records above show that Selayar, due to its strategic position, flourished well in trade and shipping. As is known, in 1615, trade between Tuban, Gresik, and Surabaya ports and foreign ports, including Indian ones, flourished. Selayar was involved in the trade (Ahmadin, 2016). The fact that Selayar Island was a part of a trade and shipping route is supported by land and underwater archaeological finds. One of the finds is an anchor that is now kept in Bontosunggu Village, Bontoharu Sub-district. According to a historical record, the anchor belonged to a Chinese merchant named Cowa Liong Hui, who sailed on a big ship and stopped at Padang Village at the end of the 17th century. Another anchor and a cannon were found on the underwater archaeological site of Takabajangan, in Bontoharu Village. A cannon made of bronze was found in Bontosunggu Village, Bontoharu Sub-district. Some ceramics were found in the waters of Kalaotoa island in Taka Lambaena. Some other ceramics and coins were found on the Bonto Sikuyu underwater site.

The archaeological finds above serve as a gateway for conducting research and diving activities on the waters of Bonto Sikuyu. The Bonto Sikuyu site was first reported by a local fisherman who found ceramics there in 2004.

In 2009, the report was followed up by the Government of Kabupaten Kepulauan Selayar by forming a survey team and excavating some ceramics. BPCB Sulsel (the Sulawesi Selatan Center for Cultural Heritage Preservation) also conducted surveys and salvage excavations on the site in 2005, 2009, 2010, and 2019. In doing the activities, BPCB Sulsel cooperated with the Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums, several technical implementation units in the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Department of Archaeology, Hasanuddin University. As shown in the 2019 BPCB Sulsel Report, the team on the site excavated 415 ceramic pieces, 5,041 Chinese coin pieces, and 601 coin chunks, one of which is 51 Kg. The preservation of these archaeological finds is directly under the management of Museum Nekara, a technical implementation unit in the Kabupaten Kepulauan Selayar Office of Education and culture.

The artifacts found on the Bonto Sikuyu site strengthen the existing historical evidence showing the role of Selayar in the ceramic trade and shipping in the past. The site, which is dominated by ceramic and coin finds, is under threat of illegal excavation. The artifacts found on the site are interesting to study. One interesting question regarding the artifacts is where they came from. This question will lead to the fact that Selayar had a very important role in the shipping and trade world in Nusantara.

METHODS

The potential benefit of the conduct of an underwater archaeological research on the Bonto Sikuyu site has been shown in the previous section. Underwater archaeological research has several survey methods, including the ones for recording data and conducting excavations. In such research, excavation is an effort - as a last resort - made to save archaeological artifacts on a site (Amanda Bowens, 2009). Underwater excavation methods are not far different from land excavation methods. However, due to its

environment, underwater excavation methods need more careful work planning and strategy, including the ones related to the use of diving equipment.

During underwater archaeological excavations, sediment that covers artifacts is removed by using three techniques, namely:

1. air-lift technique = removing sediment by sucking it with air power from a high-pressure (airlift) compressor;
2. water-jet technique = removing sediment by spraying it with water from a water pump; and
3. water-dredge technique = removing sediment by sucking it with hydropower from a water pump.

Considering the environment on the Bonto Sikuyu site, which was dominated by a mixture of mud and sand, and its surface condition, we used the water-dredge technique. We made three dig grids (grids A, B, and C) with the lot method. During the sediment scrapping, data on the found artifacts, such as descriptions of them and in which dig grids they were found, were recorded. Documentation of the artifacts and the grids where they were found was carried out by photographing them and making photo mosaics. The artifacts were put in special baskets and lifted to the ship with the help of a hot air balloon.

DISCUSSION

An Overview of Selayar and the Bonto Sikuyu Site

Kabupaten Kepulauan Selayar (its previous name is Kabupaten Selayar; the change to the current name was based on Government Regulation No. 59 Year 2008) is a regency in Sulawesi Selatan Province. The capital of the regency is Benteng. The regency is separated from the mainland of Sulawesi Selatan. The region closest to the regency is Kabupaten Bulukumba. The regency can be reached by air, sea, and land. By air, the regency can be reached with an ATR plane

servicing the Makassar - Selayar route. By sea, the regency can be reached with a ferry servicing the Makassar - Benteng Selayar route. By land, the regency can be reached by taking the Makassar - Bulukumba - Selayar route, including the subroute of Tanjung Bira Bulukumba Ferry Port - Pamatata Selayar.

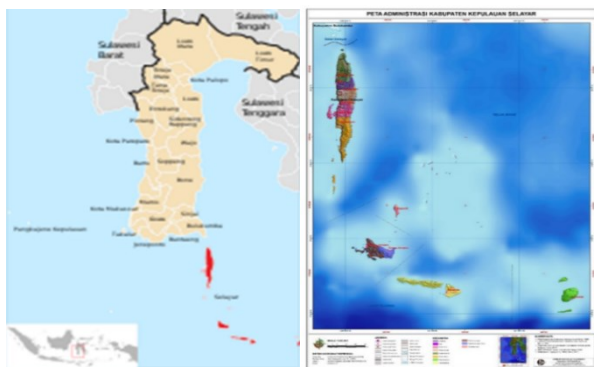


Figure 1. A map of the administrative area of Kabupaten Kepulauan Selayar

Based on the statistical data provided in the book *Kabupaten Kepulauan Selayar dalam Angka Tahun 2021*, Kabupaten Kepulauan Selayar has an area of 10,503.69 km², with the land area being 1,357.03 km² and the sea area being 9,146.66 km². Astronomically, the regency is situated between 5°42' - 7°35' south latitude and 120°15' - 122°30' east longitude. Geographically the regency has the following boundaries:

North	: Kabupaten Bulukumba
East	: The Flores Sea
West	: The Flores Sea and the Strait of Makassar
South	: Nusa Tenggara Timur Province

Kabupaten Kepulauan Selayar consists of 11 sub-districts. These sub-districts are grouped into two administrative sub-areas, namely the mainland area and the islands area. The mainland area covers Benteng, Bontoharu, Bontomanai, Buki, Bontomatene, and Bontosikuyu sub-districts. The islands area covers Pasimasunggu, Pasimasunggu Timur, Takabonerate, Pasimarannu, and Pasilambena sub-districts. Bontosikuyu sub-district has the

largest area and Benteng sub-district has the smallest area. Pasilambena sub-district is the area farthest from the regency's capital, with the distance being +193 km.

Kabupaten Kepulauan Selayar is situated on a shipping route connecting the eastern regions to the western ones. As described in *Selayar dalam Angka* (2017), geographically, the regency comprises archipelagos and clusters of coral atolls. One of its atolls, Taka Bonerate Atoll, is one of the most popular in the world. There are 130 archipelagos in the regency. Seven of them cannot be seen (submerged) when the tide is high. Ahmadin in his book *Nusa Selayar* (2016) explained that the regency consists of 126 big and small islands, with the coastline being 670 km. The regency's land area is 1,357.03 km² (12.91 %) and its sea area is 9,146.66 km² (87.09%). The big islands in the regency include Selayar, Bahuluang, Tambolongan, Polassi, Pasi, Kayuadi, Tanah Jamea, Tanah Malala, Bembe, Lambego, Bonerate, and Kalatoa. The small islands in the regency include Malimbu, Guang, Latondu Besar, Latondu Kecil, Tarupa Besar, Tarupa Kecil, Belang-Belang, Lantingiang, Jinato, Bungi Kamase, Pasitallu Bau, Pasitallu Tangga, Pasitallu Raja, Tambuna Caddi, Tambuna Lompo, Ampallasa, Bunginbit, Kalu Batang, Kauna, Nambolaki, Tanga, Sirange, Ketela, Nona, Bangge, Janggut, Batu, Tetarang, and Madu.

The Bonto Sikuyu underwater site is situated in the administrative area of Harapan Village and Patikariya Village, Bontosikuyu sub-district, Kabupaten Kepulauan Selayar, Sulawesi Selatan Province. Astronomically, the site is situated at the coordinates of S. 06° 11' 26,5" E. 120° 26' 44". The site is about a mile from the nearest beach and on an estuary. The site is bordered by waters and Pasi Island to the north, by waters to the south, by waters to the west, and by Patikarya Beach to the east.

The Bonto Sikuyu site can be reached by taking one of two routes. The first route is by sea, starts from Benteng Port, and takes about two hours. The second route is by land and sea. By land, the route ends at Patikarya Village and it takes about one hour. From the village,

we can reach the site in about 15 minutes by taking a boat.

The Bonto Sikuyu site lies at a depth of 23 meters when the tide is high and the environment is dominated by a mixture of white sand and mud. Below the sand layer, there is a clay layer with medium density. The sedimentation level on the site is high because there is a river mouth on the east of it. During the rainy season, the river mouth sends a lot of materials to the site, causing low visibility.

There are not so many coral reefs on the site. An identification of the coral reefs on the site shows that most of them are hard corals, bivalves, and gastropods. Results of a data collection carried out in 2009 show that the distribution area is 60 x 60 meters. Furthermore, the diggers working on the site said that the artifacts they found were intact, lay at a depth of 60 cm under the ground surface, and were neat as if they were arranged on a plate rack.

Archaeological Finds

The excavation that we carried out on the Bonto Sikuyu site is a continuation of the salvage excavation carried out in 2019. Based on the results of the salvage excavation, we made three dig grids (grids A, B, and C), which were situated at the northwest of the site. The found artifacts were labeled by writing the site’s name, the grid’s position, the lot’s number, and the find’s number, each of which is separated from another one with a slash (/): Bonto Sikuyu is abbreviated to BSY. Barat laut (Northwest) is abbreviated to BL. The name of the grid is A/B/C, Lot.1/ 1. One example is BSY/ BL/ A/ Lot.1/ 1. Each find is marked with a numbering system that is differentiated by lot. Therefore, number 1 is assigned to each lot; the number is used to mark each find per lot. We excavated only the artifacts found in grid B lot.1 and grid C (BSY/BL/C) Lot.2 to Lot.3. A recapitulation of the finds in each grid is shown in Diagram 1.

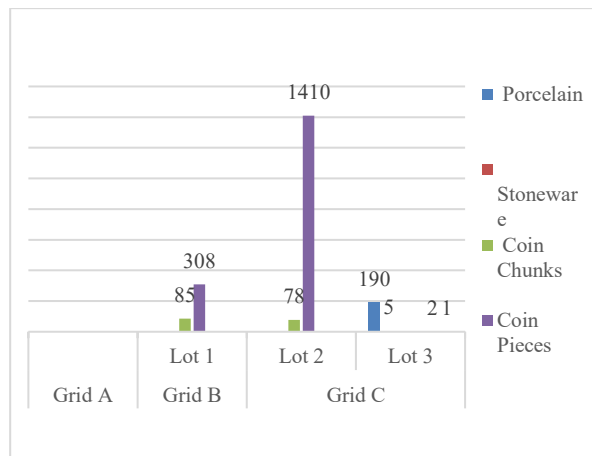


Diagram 1. Recapitulation of the Artifacts Salvaged from Grids A, B and C on the Bonto Sikuyu Site, Kabupaten Kepulauan Selayar, 2021

As shown in Diagram 1, the artifacts in grid A were not salvaged. Only the artifacts in grids B and C were salvaged. In grid B, the artifacts salvaged are those in Lot.1, and only 308 coin pieces and 85 coin chunks were salvaged. The artifacts salvaged from grid C are coins, ceramics, one iron chunk, and woodenware. From grid C Lot.2, only 1,410 coin pieces and 214 coin chunks were salvaged. The artifacts salvaged from grid C Lot.3 are ceramics (190 porcelain pieces and 5 stoneware pieces), one 820 gram iron chunk, and two 60 gram wooden fragments.

Table 1. Recapitulation of the Artifacts Salvaged from Grids A, B, and C

Grid	Lot	Coins		Ceramics		Woodenware	Iron Chunk
		Pieces	Chunks	Porcelain	Stoneware		
Grid A	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grid B	Lot.1	308	85	-	-	-	-
Grid C	Lot.2	1,410	214	-	-	-	-
	Lot.3	-	-	190	5	2	1
Total		1,718	299	190	5	2	1

Ceramic Finds

In grid C (BSY/BL/C), 195 ceramic pieces (in the forms of porcelain and stoneware) were found. Most of them have

geometric and floral motifs. The following is a classification of the ceramic finds and their descriptions.

A Classification of the Ceramic Finds Based on Their Conditions and Materials

Based on their materials, the ceramic artifacts found in grid C can be classified into porcelain and stoneware. The ceramics in grid C Lot.3 were salvaged in two phases. In the first and second phases, 19 and 171 ceramic pieces respectively were salvaged. The total number of the ceramics salvaged is 195. 190 of them are porcelain and 5 of them are stoneware. Based on their conditions, the ceramic artifacts can be classified into ‘fragment’, ‘not intact’, and ‘intact’.

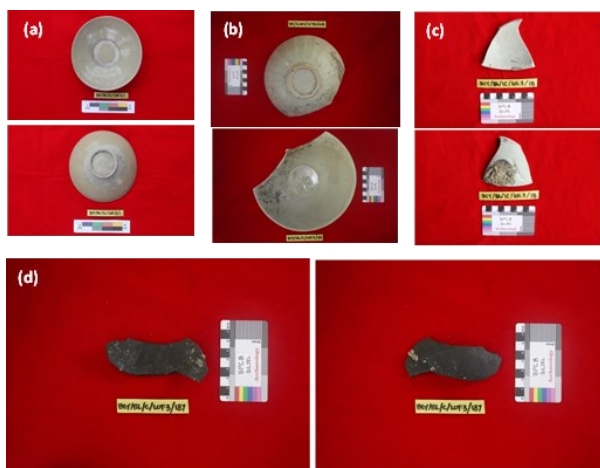


Photo 1. Classification of the Ceramic Finds Based on Their Conditions: (a) intact porcelain (BSY/BL/C/Lot.3/ 1), (b) porcelain that is not intact (BSY/BL/C/Lot.3/ 2) (c) porcelain fragment (BSY/BL/C/ Lot.3/ 18), and (d) stoneware fragment (BSY/BL/C/Lot.3/ 187)

As shown in Diagram 2 and Table 2, there are 22 ceramic fragments. 17 of them are porcelain and 5 of them are stoneware. There are 28 porcelain pieces that are not intact and 145 intact porcelain pieces.

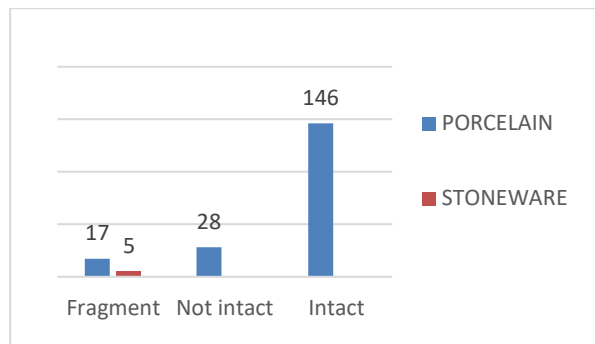


Diagram 2. Classification of the Ceramic Finds Based on Their Conditions and Materials – Underwater Excavation on the Bonto Sikuyu site, Selayar, 2021

Table 2. Classification of the Ceramic Finds Based on Their Conditions and Materials

Condition	Porcelain	Stoneware	Total
Fragment	17	5	22
Not intact	28	0	28
Intact	145	0	145
Total	190	5	195

A Classification of the Ceramic Finds Based on Their Motifs and Materials

Based on their motifs, the ceramic finds can be classified into the ones with a floral motif, with a geometric motif, with a swastika motif, and with no motif. The number of the ceramics that have a motif is 185. All of them are porcelain and most of them have a geometric motif. Meanwhile, the number of the ceramics that have not motif is only 11. Six of them are porcelain and five of them are stoneware. The following is a classification of the ceramic finds based on their motifs.

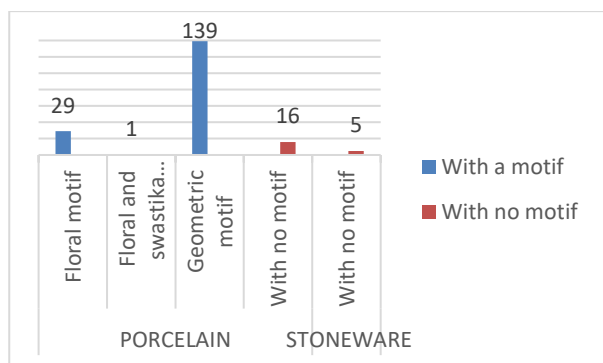


Diagram 3. Classification of the Ceramic Finds Based on Their Motifs and Materials – Underwater Excavation on the Bonto Sikuyu Site, Selayar, 2021

As shown in the above diagram, there are 29 porcelain ceramics with floral motifs, 1 ceramic with floral and swastika motifs, 139 ceramics with geometric motifs, 16 ceramics with geometric and floral motifs, and 5 ceramics with no motif. Meanwhile, there are 5 stoneware ceramics with no motif.

Table 3. Classification of the Ceramic Finds Based on Their Motifs

Motif and Material	With Motifs	With No Motif	Total
Porcelain	185	6	190
Floral motif	29		29
Floral and swastika motifs	1		1
Geometric motif	139		139
Geometric and floral motifs	16		16
No motif		5	6
Stoneware		5	5
No motif		5	5
Grand Total	185	10	195

Coin Finds

The salvage of the coin finds on the site was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, the coin finds in grid C Lot.2 were salvaged. In the second phase, the coin finds in grid B Lot.1 were salvaged. The coins were in the forms of pieces and chunks, and some of them were buried under sediment.



Photo 2. Coin Finds in Grid B Lot.1 and Grid C Lot.2: (a) piece (BSY/BL/C/Lot.2/1-c), (b) chunk (BSY/BL/C/Lot.2/1.-q), (c) piece (BSY/BL/B/Lot.1/1-C), and (d) chunk (BSY/BL/B/Lot.1-e)

As shown in Diagram 4, 1,718 coin pieces and 299 coin chunks were salvaged. In grid B (BSY/BL/C/LOT.2 M-R), 308 coin pieces and 85 coin chunks were found. In grid (BSY/BL/C/LOT.2 A-L), 1,410 coin pieces and 214 coin chunks were found.

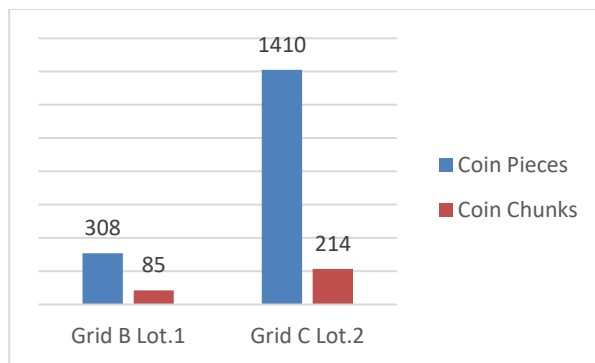


Diagram 4. Coin Finds in Grids B and C – Underwater Excavation on the Bonto Sikuyu Site, Selayar, 2021



Photo 3. Wooden Fragment Finds (BSY/BL/C/Lot.3/191) and (b) an Iron Chunk (BSY/BL/C/Lot.3/192)

Wooden fragment and iron chunk finds

Two wooden fragments were found in grid C Lot.3 (BSY/BL/C/LOT.3/ 191). Their total wet weight is 60 grams. Their iron parts are covered with coral sediment. Meanwhile, an iron chunk was found in C Lot.3 (BSY/BL/C/LOT.3/ 192) with a wet weight of 0.82 kg.

An Identification of the Finds

Ceramics and coins are the dominant finds on the Bonto Sikuyu site. They might have come from China due to their attributes. A detailed identification of the ceramic and coin finds is provided in the following.

Ceramics

Most of the ceramic finds – both plates and bowls – are celadon green. This color was widely used during the Song and Yuan dynasties. The color is also known to be used for ceramics from Thailand and Annam. The difference between Chinese celadon wares and those from other countries lies in the glaze thickness. Chinese celadon wares are dense. The surface layer sticks strongly to the ceramic core part and the color is toska green while the surface layer of celadon wares from other countries tends to be dark or bluish green.

The ceramic finds seem to have been manufactured with modest ways. This can be seen from their rough surface, with grains protruding from it. The motifs are modest and show rough patterns.

The ceramic finds came from China, Annam, and Thailand. The Chinese ceramics

were made during the Sung dynasty around the 9th-12th centuries and the Yuan dynasty in the 12th-13th centuries. The Annamese and Thai ceramics were made during the 14th-16th centuries. Most of the ceramic finds are bowls and plates, which came from Annam and Thailand.

Coins

During the excavation, many coins were found scattered and some of them were concentrated in the dig grids. The coin finds were salvaged. Then they were desalinated, classified, and identified. They are round in shape and there is a square hole in the middle of each of them. There are four letters on the front side. The identification of the coins was started by collecting coins that are still intact and of which the letters on their front side are still clear. One of the ways to find out where the coins came from is identifying the letters on them.

Chinese coins can be identified by reading the letters on them in two ways. The first way is reading them in a circle. By following a clockwise direction, the reading starts from the letter on the upper side to the one on the right, and then to the one below, and finally to the one on the left. The second way is reading the letters vertically-horizontally. This reading starts from the upper side to the lower side and then from the right side to the left side.



Chih Tao Yuan Pao
North Sung Dynasty (960-
1127 a.d)



Chih Tao Yuan Pao
North Sung Dynasty
(960-1127 a.d)

The third letter, which is the “tung”, “yuan”, or “chung” letter, is on the right side

or the lower side. The fourth letter, which is the “pao” letter, is on the left side. After the arrangement of the letters is identified, the dynasty or the emperor that issued the coins can be determined. A guidebook is needed to read Chinese coins.

Results of the identification of some coin finds show that they came from the North Sung Dynasty (960 – 1127 a.d.) and the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 a.d.). Those finds from the North Sung Dynasty are dominant.

CONCLUSION

Some of the historical records that have been discussed earlier prove that Selayar, due to its strategic position, flourished well in trade and shipping. As is known, in 1615, trade between Tuban, Gresik, and Surabaya and foreign countries including India flourished. Selayar was involved in the trade (Ahmadin, 2016). The fact that Selayar Island was a part of a trade and shipping route is supported by land and underwater archaeological finds. One of the finds is an anchor that is now kept in Bontosunggu Village, Bontoharu Sub-district. According to a historical record, the anchor belonged to a Chinese merchant named Cowa Liong Hui, who sailed on a big ship and stopped at Padang Village at the end of the 17th century. Another anchor and a cannon were found on the underwater archaeological site of Takabajangan, in Bontoharu Village. A cannon made of bronze was found in Bontosunggu Village, Bontoharu Sub-district. Some ceramics were found on the waters of Kalaotoa island in Taka Lambaena. Some other ceramics and coins were found on the Bonto Sikuyu underwater site, Selayar.

The excavation on the Bonto Sikuyu site was carried out by applying the water-dredge method to remove sand and silt sediment. Three dig grids – grids A, B, and C – were made. The artifacts found during the excavation are ceramics, coins, ironware, and woodenware, which are thought to have come from a ship. 308-coin pieces and 85 coin chunks were salvaged from grid B Lot.1. The artifacts found in grid C are coins, ceramics,

one iron chunk, and woodenware. 1,410 coin pieces and 214 coin chunks were salvaged from grid C Lot.2. Some ceramics (190 porcelain pieces and 5 stoneware pieces), one 820 gram iron chunk, and two 60 gram wooden fragments were salvaged from grid C Lot.3. Overall, the artifacts salvaged during the excavation are 1,718 coin pieces, 299 coin chunks, 190 porcelain ceramics, 5 stoneware pieces, and 1 iron chunk.

Results of the identification of the coin finds show that they came from the North Sung Dynasty (960 – 1,127 a.d.) and the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 a.d.). The coin finds from the North Sung Dynasty are dominant. The Chinese ceramic finds came from the Sung Dynasty around the 9th-12th centuries and the Yuan Dynasty in the 12th-13th centuries. The Annamese and Thai ceramic finds came from the 14th-16th centuries. Most of the ceramic finds are bowls and plates, which came from Annam dan Thailand.

It has been shown that the artifacts found on the Bonto Sukuyu site were made in the 9th-16th centuries. Furthermore, it has been explained that Selayar Island was a part of an important shipping and trade route around the 16th-19th centuries. Further studies need to be conducted to investigate other aspects related to the artifacts found on the Bonto Sikuyu site and some data on them that have been collected.

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