Quipayo Archaeological Project – Formerly the San Pablo Archaeological Project

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Introduction:

With the help of the QRC Steve Porter Student funds, I was able to complete the Quipayo Archaeological Pilot Project in the Bikol region of the Philippines. My goals for this pilot were to guide my future dissertation work through test excavations and in-person time with local collaborators. My research questions revolve around indigenous responses to colonialism, however the pilot itself did not seek to test any hypotheses related to them, only to test the suitability of the project area for this type of research.

Originally the San Pablo Archaeological Project, I switched locations due to unforeseeable conflicts with access to the proposed site. I changed focus from San Pablo de Cabagan church in Isabela Province (Northern Luzon) to Calabanga Quipayo church in Camarines Sur Province (Bikol region of Southern Luzon). The location change had no effect on the execution of the pilot project, and opened up access to more sites in Camarines Sur than were available in Isabela. The Archdiocese of Caceres and the Bicol Archaeological Project (UCLA) both assisted in the abrupt shift in study area.

The specific goal of excavating at Quipayo church was to test the archaeological potential of one of the oldest church sites in the region for the purposes of a larger research regime focused on indigenous responses to colonialism in and around the earliest churches. A positive outcome from the excavations would be indication that further archaeological excavation at these ‘first wave’ churches would produce archaeological material from pre-colonial, early-colonial, and late-colonial time periods.

The pilot project also provided a venue in which to reach out to potential collaborators, including the Archbishop of Caceres, several priests, local archaeologists, and community leaders.

Results:

We conducted a series of 1-meter by 1-meter test units around the Quipayo church grounds. Our test excavations resulted in some recovered materials and the identification of 3-4 buried individuals. As the project did not have the means to conduct analysis of human remains and out of respect for the congregation, they were left in situ for future excavations. The combination of ceramic materials and human remains at Quipayo church suggest that the first wave of churches in the Bikol region are promising sites for answering diachronic questions related to the effects of colonialism.

The burials uncovered were clustered behind the church or to the west. There are no historical or ethnographic indications of a cemetery in that location, official or otherwise. The burials were uncovered less than one meter below the surface and were over top each other, in different orientations. The location, state, and orientation of the burials suggest that they may be pre-Hispanic or at least unaffiliated with the Catholic church. Chinese trade-ware sherds roughly dating before the Spanish colonial period collected in association with one buried individual support this assertion.

I suggest that Quipayo, and likely other churches, were established on existing sites of importance to the indigenous people in the Bikol river basin. As such, it is likely that further excavation at these churches will produce assemblages suitable to an analysis of the impact of Spanish colonial policies on the indigenous population.
Implications for Quaternary Science:

The excavations at Quipayo and those conducted elsewhere by the Bicol Archaeological Project are promising avenues for developing data on the effects of colonialism in the Philippines and for examining larger patterns related to the global shift to capitalism; a consequence of the larger Western imperial project. With this and follow-up projects in Bikol, I hope to develop an archaeological data-set that is independent from the historical record and lower-resolution climate data regarding changes to the region resulting from Spanish colonialism.

The pilot project at Quipayo was also successful in cultivating promising partnerships. As a result of the proposal, excavations, and planning, I have built and maintained working relationships with Archbishop Tirona of the Archdiocese of Caceres, Father Eric Bobis, Dr. Zandro Villanueva, as well as graduate students and faculty at the University of the Philippines Diliman and Ateneo de Naga University. These relationships are vital to conducting a follow-up dissertation project that is fundamentally collaborative and ethical.