

Six Pots from South Sulawesi

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ABSTRACT. The Australian Museum holds six earthenware pots, bought in Watampone (South Sulawesi, Indonesia) in 1937. They are terracotta in colour and decorated with deeply carved plant and geometrical motifs. This highly distinctive local style was developed by 1910 at the latest, and cannot be traced past 1937. A photograph and description published in 1921 suggest the prominent role of one woman. Several pots in this style, now held in European museums, bear inscriptions naming the potter responsible and giving the place of manufacture. A possible reading is suggested for the inscription on one of the Sydney pots. Taken as a whole, the pots represent the combination of an indigenous technique with a long history, Islamic decorative motifs and forms influenced by European models. This in turn reflects the historical and cultural circumstances in which they were made.

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In 1937, F.D. McCarthy was in South Sulawesi, then known as South Celebes. It was an exciting time to visit this part, seemingly of growing importance, of the Netherlands East Indies. Although Dutch contact with the area went back to the early 17th century and reasonably extensive territorial control, won through conquest, had begun later in that century, the full opening up of the interior had to wait until the first decade of the 20th century when a combination of ethical aspiration and increasing technological superiority led the colonial power into a policy of definitive conquest. Another element in Dutch policy was research into all aspects of the natural and human world of the Indies, as much for the purposes of enlightened colonial administration as for the sake of pure knowledge. Along with much else, this led to the foundation of an Archaeological Service which, in due course, came to investigate prehistoric sites in South

Sulawesi. The results of those investigations and the reasons which led McCarthy to be involved in them have been set out elsewhere (van Heekeren, 1958, 1972; McCarthy, 1984), and we need only note that it was this interest which brought him to South Sulawesi where he could purchase the pots with which this paper is concerned.

Acquisition

The Australian Museum was prepared to grant McCarthy leave from his normal duties for an overseas trip, but did not provide any funds to acquire items for its collections. Despite this, the opportunity to obtain examples of material culture was too good to discourage an anthropologist who had always had a strong interest in artefacts. McCarthy's diary of his

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