

Historical – Anthropology of Masao (place of the 1st Mass) based on Antonio Pigafetta's Account

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Abstract: *The account on Magellan's voyage by a Venetian chronicler Antonio Pigafetta has provided material for the reckoning of Christianity in the country. The study presents some points regarding Masao in Butuan, Mindanao as the location of the First Eucharistic celebration in the Philippines with the presence of Raja Calambu and Raja Siani on Easter Sunday, March 31, 1521 officiated by Fray Pedro de Valderama and in a hilly place of Masao stood the Wooden Cross which Magellan has planted.*

Key Words: Keywords: *Mazaua, Masao, Butuan, Limasawa, Balanghais, Agusan river, First Mass.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The history of the islands called-the Philippines did not begin with the coming of Ferdinand Magellan in 1521 nor by the coming of the 10 Bornean Datus who landed in Panay island-in the so called Western Visayas, rather, it started in the Mindanao. We believe, there was no Philippines yet but there was Butuan and Masao already.

The account on Magellan's voyage by a Venetian chronicler Antonio Pigafetta provided us many events which included the spread of Christianity in the Philippines. It is same account, however, that divided the people instead of being in unity among believers for which Catholicism signifies for and that is what Christ desires. As the sacred book of the Christians, it says, "*that they may be one, as We are one.*" (John 17; 22, NIV).

However, it is not easy to call for unity and correct the historical records especially when two interested yet opposing claimants are involved. It may be difficult to rewrite the history, much more, it is very difficult to remove in the minds of the people the pride and honour they enjoyed having their ancestors hosted the First Mass in the country.

As we used to say, *hindi madaling burahin sa isipan ng mga tao ang karangalan na kanilang kinagisnan subalit hindi maisasaayos ang pagkakamali at mailahad ang katotohanan kung walang masaktan at mawawalan* (it is not easy to change the minds of the people who had known the glory since childhood, however, mistakes will not be corrected and the truth will come out when no one feel the pains and let go of the glory).

Nonetheless, the *truth has to set us free* (John 8:32, NIV) and confusion created from the truth in oblivion will now shed its light for the people who have been dreaming so long to find the answer where is the First Mass in the Philippines, in Masao? or in Limasawa?

The main objective of the paper is to shed lights about the controversy on the First Mass in the Philippines. The study explores some points in the chronicles of Antonio Pigafetta regarding Masao which satisfies the description of the place for the 1st Mass in the country officiated by Fray Pedro de Valderama on Easter Sunday, March 31, 1521.

2. METHODS:

The study is a critical-analytical reading of Antonio Pigafetta's account on Magellan's voyage in the Philippines as translated by Lord Stanley of Alderley.

Critical reading is a technique of discovering information and ideas within a text. It involves a careful, active, reflective, analytic reading which at the same time evaluating information and ideas, for deciding what to accept and believe. This critical reading involves critical analysis which is to evaluate the text in its significance, validity, truth and importance. In an academic sense, critical reading is advancing your understanding, not dismissing and therefore closing off learning (<http://www.criticalreading.com> [4/12/2018]).

The researchers also accommodated the book edited by Philip F. Alexander, *The Earliest Voyages Round the World (1519-1617)*, published in 1916 by Cambridge University Press, as other source in order to provide a wider perspective in looking into the details of Pigafetta's account on the First Mass in the island of Mazaua.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

Let us have some few points regarding these scientific re-reading of the accounts presented by Antonio Pigafetta on the Voyage of Ferdinand Magellan as translated Lord Stanley of Alderley.

3.1. Mazzaua (Masao) Island. Antonio Pigafetta wrote, *in this island, there is a great quantity of dogs, cats, pigs, fowls, and goats, rice, ginger, cocos, figs, oranges, lemons, millet, wax, and gold mines.*

Moreover, the island was also having good timber because as Pigafetta noticed *their houses especially the palace, he described, was built on GREAT TIMBERS high above the ground, and it was necessary to go up steps and ladders to it.*

Furthermore, the island is mountainous which is good for hunting. Besides, Magellan would not ask the Kings that the wooden CROSS should be placed on the summit of the highest MOUNTAIN in their country, if he didn't see any mountain at all.

In the study of Ecoben (2002) the Manobo, the inhabitants of Agusan valley (including Butuan – Masao) were engaged in logging. They were loggers. This will point us back that there once a good forest in Butuan and Masao which became a materials for their houses and boats (Baloto – Baroto). The impression on Agusan (including Butuan & Masao) being a producer of good timber was affirmed when in 1940, the City of Butuan got the named 'Timber City of the South'.

Having these descriptions about the Mazzaua (Masao), one can say that, Masao was a place rich in natural resources, like timber, gold with fertile land for crops, rice, and animals.

3.2. Masao and Butuan were ruled by a Manobo Chieftains - Rajah Siago and Raja Calambu (Raia Calambu and Raia Siani).

In the notes of Pigafetta, he wrote: *The Captain asked if he would be pleased that two of his people should go with him to the place where they lived and the king granted and Pigafetta with another one went. Then the king ordered to be brought a dish of pig's flesh and wine... We banqueted and afterwards supped with him (the King).* This was a celebration of their friendship.

Moreover, *Pigafetta wrote, I ate flesh on Good Friday, not being able to do otherwise. When the hour for supper had come, they brought two large china dishes of which one was full of rice and the other of pig's flesh, with its broth. My companion enjoyed the food and drink so much that he got drunk.*

The Manobo man, to provide himself with meat, he goes to the forest or marshland with his hunting dog to hunt boar (pig), deer, etc (Ecoben, 2002, p.39). While John Garvan, (1931) in his book 'The Manobos of Mindanao' wrote: *It is not essential that the meat or fish should be fresh. I have seen pig meat eaten after three days' decomposition (p. 74).*

King Siago and King Calambu are Manabo kings not of Waray descendants. Sonia M. Zaide (1999) wrote, the Manobos of the Agusan Valley were the earliest settlers of Mindanao, whose descendants later spread out to Sulu and Jolo (p.82).

The food that was served to the guests explicitly identifies that the Masao and Butuan rulers were eating (pig flesh) or pork. And since, during this time, there was no proof of Christianity, it would be certain that the people in Masao and Butuan were believers but not of Islam.

3.3. Masao community was in Festive gathering.

In the account of Pigafetta, he stated that on *Thursday, the 28th of March, having seen the night before FIRE upon an island, at the morning we came to anchor at this island.*

Though, it was not clear what kind of festival the Masao had, there are cross references that can tell us that it can be a harvest festival. For the Manobos, as Gravan noted, *the harvest time is the merriest of all the year. It ends, in most cases, the long period of abstinence from rice, and many times terminates a period of actual hunger. It is the season for the celebration ...p.90).*

Besides, it was also stated in the account of Pigafetta that when they were about to go to Zzubu (Cebu), they had to wait for the king to pilot them. The king had his rice gathered in and the king even asked help to lend some men (of Magellan) so as to get the work done.

"The first king said that he would go himself and conduct him to this port (Zzubu) but he (Magellan) should wait two days, until he (the king) had his rice gathered in and done other things which he had to do, begging him (Magellan) to lend some of his men so as to get done sooner", Pigafetta wrote.

It can be said that the Masao community was having a harvest festival – rice harvest – the night when Magellan came to the island. Even today, amidst the rapid urbanization of Masao and Butuan, it is still observable that there are vast rice fields and the people are still engaged in planting rice which is nowhere to find in the islet of Limasawa.

3.4. The presence of the Balanghais in the arrival of Magellan.

In the account of Pigafetta, there was a mention about Boloto (boat) with 8 men on board and there was also mention about the Ballanghais (Balanghais) being full of men with the king sitting under an awning of mats.

Let us get into the text: *in the morning, we came to anchor at this island, we saw a small boat which they call Boloto.... Two hours afterwards, we saw coming two long boats, which they call Ballanghais, full of men.*

The excavation of Balanghai in Brgy. Libertad, part of Masao tells that ‘the largest sailing vessel of its kind yet discovered is being unearthed. It is estimated to be around 800 years old, the plank vessel may be centuries older than the ships used by European explorers in the 16th century when they first came upon the archipelago (Dimacali, GMA News, 2013).

Reports even said that boat # 9, as assigned by the Archeologists who undertook the excavation of Balanghai in Butuan, has been considered for now to be the largest boat. They even called it, the ‘mother boat’ which measured to be more or less 25 meters long.

The word balangahi as mentioned in the chronicle of Pigafetta had been affirmed that there existed a long boat, balanghai, through the discovery of buried balanghais in Brgy. Libertad, near Masao, Butuan City which has not been found in Limasawa.

3.5. Raia Calambu and Raia Siani were habitually chewing areca nut

The Monobos, like any indigenous people, are people who like chewing a betel nut with betel leaf and lime.

The observation of Pigafetta states; ‘*These people chew most of their time a fruit which they call areca, which is something of the shape of a pear; they cut it in four quarters, and after they have chewed it for a long time they spit it out, from which afterwards they have their mouths very red. They find themselves the better from the use of this fruit because it refreshes them much... that they could not live without it.*

Garvan said; the betel nut is to the Manóbo more than a cigarette, cigar, or pipe. By day and by night, in the house and on the trail, in health and in sickness, he turns for stimulation to the quid of betel nut, betel leaf, and lime. A visitor comes to his house and the first act of hospitality is the offering of the betel–nut quid. He meets an acquaintance upon the trail, and he sits down and offers the soothing chew (p. 84).

The betel nut (in Pigafetta’s account, Areca betel) is obtained from the palms found in the forest. ‘These palms were planted either by the Manóbos themselves or by their ancestors. The nuts are found in scarcely sufficient quantity to supply the demand’, Garvan added.

In the writing of Pigafetta, there was no mention about the Areca betel nut and about the people who were chewing while they were in *Ladron islands, Zamal and Humunu*. This implies that no one in the previous islands had been seen by Pigafetta chewing and only in these new islands, Masao and Butuan where Raia Calambu and Raia Siani were found habitually chewing areca nut or locally called at present “mam-on”. This mam-on is very significant to the culture of the Manobo. They have this saying, “*tam-nan ta ka nan mam-on; ug akong bugnoton ang mam-on kong magka-uli na ta sa maayong kaboboto-on*” (you have greatly offended me, I will plant Mam-on and as long as it is alive I will keep my vengeance till the end of time and I will only uproot it when peace agreement is reached between us).

3.6. The Houses

Masao and Butuan have at least three rivers; Masao River, Agusan Pequeno River and the great Agusan river. When the rivers overflow, it floods the place and the houses are affected. To avoid the inconveniences during rainy days, the house has to consider the flood. It has to be raised higher from the ground. Thus, the observation of Pigafetta was true. The houses, even the king’s palace, *was built on great timbers high above the ground, and it was necessary to go up steps and ladders to it.*

This was affirmed by Garvan, in his observation, he wrote, *the Manobo house has a space that vary from 1.50 to 8 meters high above the ground* (p. 55).

It a common experience for the Filipinos that ‘storms most frequently make landfall on the islands of Eastern Visayas, Bicol Region, and Northern Luzon whereas the southern island and region of Mindanao is largely free of typhoons’ (wikipedia.org). Eastern Visayas consists of three main islands Samar, Leyte and Biliran.

To build a house from 1 meter to 8 meters above the ground is appropriate to flood prone areas, like Masao and Butuan and this is not needed in Limasawa, since there is no river that may cause flood when it overflows, instead the houses there are built low due to the typhoons that visit the place.

3.7. Gold/Gold mines

Several times that Pigafetta got noticed about gold which the natives were wearing. Pigafetta described it beautifully how the other king looked putting emphasis on adornment. He wrote ‘*There came with us a brother of his, the king of another island... he was the handsomest man that we saw among these nations. He has a very black hair coming down his shoulders, with a silk on his head, and two large gold rings hanging from his ears...at his side he wore a dagger, with a long handle which was all of gold. He was tawny and painted all over. He is the king of Zuluan and Calagan. The painted king is Raia Calambu.* Pigafetta further described, *in the island belonging to the king, there are mines of gold.*

Rajah Calambu is the king of Zuluan and Calagan. Philip Alexander, editor of the book, *The Earliest Voyages round the World (1519-1617)*, published by Cambridge, University Press in 1916 has this notes; Zuluan and Calagan represent Butuan and Caraga in north-east of Mindanao (p. 204).

In the history of Surigao, it acknowledges, that once it belongs to the rule of the chieftain of Zuluan (now Butuan). Surigao had been a territory ruled under the Rajahnate of Butuan. The history further discusses that Surigao derives from Caraga which earlier referred to as calagan meaning "land of the brave" or "fierce people". "The Kalagans have a long history of being brave and fearless. The region was called by early chroniclers as the "Land of the Brave and Fierce People" (www.caraga.dentr.gov.ph/index.php/about-us/history).

Caraga Region is now hosting several mining projects producing various mineral commodities particularly but not limited to gold, copper, chrome, nickel, iron and limestone for concrete cement production (wikipedia.org/wiki/Mines).

The Rajahnate of Butuan (also called as Kingdom of Butuan was known for its mining of gold, its gold products and its extensive trade network (wikipedia.org/wiki/RajahnateofButuan).

The above discussion implies that the king of Zuluan (Butuan) and Calagan (Surigao) has a gold mines and the people possess gold which they made for their adornment. Pigafetta was indeed right in his observation. There was no mention of gold in Limasawa, much more about gold mining activities in the island.

4. CONCLUSION:

From the re-reading of Antonio Pigafetta's account, with the considerations of some cross references, the landing and the First Eucharistic celebration being witnessed by Raja Calambu and Raja Siani, implied that this was held in Masao, Butuan, Mindanao, Easter Sunday, March 31, 1521 officiated by Fray Pedro de Valderama and in a hilly place of Masao, Magellan planted a wooden cross.

It was clearly established that (1) the **Spaniards arrived and landed in the island of Mazzaua** (Masao), Mindanao having described with *a great quantity of dogs, cats, pigs, fowls, and goats, rice, ginger, cocos, figs, oranges, lemons, millet, wax, and gold mines. There were mountains and on it a good timbers and other forest products.*

2) **Mazzaua (Masao) and Butuan were ruled by a Manobo Chieftains - Rajah Siago and Raja Calambu (Raia Calambu and Raia Siani).** The food that was served to the guests explicitly identifies that the Masao and Butuan rulers were eating (pig flesh) or pork. And since, during this time, there was no proof of Christianity, it would be certain that the people in Masao and Butuan were believers but not of Islam.

3) **Masao community was in Festive gathering.** The fire could have been a bonfire to light the people's celebration. It could have been a rice harvest festival. Even today, amidst the rapid urbanization of Masao and Butuan, it is still observable that there are vast rice fields and the people are still engaged in planting rice which is nowhere to find in the islet of Limasawa.

4) **The presence of the Balanghai in the arrival of Magellan.** The excavation of Balanghai in as mentioned in the chronicle of Pigafetta had been affirmed that there existed a long boat, balanghai, through the discovery of buried balanghais in Brgy. Libertad, near Masao, Butuan City which has not been found in Limasawa.

5) **Raia Calambu and Raia Siani were habitually chewing areca nut.** The betel nut (in Pigafetta's account, Areca betel) is obtained from the palms found in the forest. In the writing of Pigafetta, there was no mention about the Areca betel nut and about the people who were chewing while they were in *Ladrone islands, Zamal and Humunu.* This implies that no one in the previous islands had been seen by Pigafetta chewing and only in the new islands, Masao and Butuan.

6) **The Houses.** The houses in Masao has a 1 meter to 8 meters distance above the ground. This is very common to a flood prone areas. Masao and Butuan have at least three rivers; Masao River, Agusan Pequeno River and the great Agusan river. To elevate the flooring of the house is not needed in Limasawa since has no river that may cause flood when it overflows instead the houses there are built low due to the frequent typhoon.

7) **Gold/Gold mines.** The king of Zuluan (Butuan) and Calagan (Surigao) have gold mines in their place and the people possesses gold which they made for their adornment. There was no mention of gold in Limasawa, much more about gold mining activities in the island.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS:

From the findings of study, the following are the recommendations.

1. To invoke the policy makers to re-study the findings and resolve the issue once and for all.
2. To initiate study from the Ecclesiastical perspectives and sources regarding the First Mass in the Philippines.
3. To involve multi-agencies studies on geology, politics & governance, archaeology and ethnology in order to provide wider views and gather more scientific opinions.

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