

Historical Background of the Moro Problem

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Islam was fast spreading across the country when the Spaniards arrived. According to commonly-held beliefs and contemporary accounts, Islam was introduced for the first time in Sulu, some time in 1380 when an Arabian judge, Makdum, from Malaya landed in Simunol and spread his Islamic faith. He was followed by a Sumatran missionary, Rajah Baguinda, and a trader, Abu Bakar, who established and strengthened the first sultanate in Sulu. Another missionary, Kabungsuwan, with his army of Samals, peacefully conquered Cotabato by intermarriage with some Maguindanao princesses. Islamic missionary work was concentrated primarily in Sulu, Cotabato, Lanao and some other parts of Mindanao although, in the course of time, the religion appeared to have spread to Luzon, particularly in Manila where the Spaniards found a powerful Muslim kingdom.

By and large, Islam was just a veneer hurriedly superimposed on century-old institutions which were Malayan, Hindu-Buddhist, and Chinese in origin. Since the 5th century A.D., various islands in the archipelago, notably Cebu, Manila, Iloilo, and Sulu served as trading post for vessels coming from China, Malaya, Indonesia, India, and even as far as Arabia. Hinduism and Buddhism appeared to have been introduced in the Philippines during the height of the Srivijayan empire based on Sumatra 800 years before Islam arrived in Sulu.

These were the political and religious conditions of the islands when the Spaniards arrived in 1521.

Filipino resistance against the Spanish rule initially partook of the nature of refusal to accede to foreign rule. The issue of religion, particularly Islam against Christianity, was a side issue which eventually deepened and alienated the newly converted Filipino Christians from Filipino Muslims. The basic orientations of both Spaniards and Muslims clashed: the former, because of their zeal to spread the Christian faith, and the latter, who turned political resistance into a Muslim *jihad* or holy war.

Persistent efforts of the Spaniards to subjugate the Muslims of Mindanao and Sulu and their tendency to utilize Christian Filipinos in the struggle against the Muslims widened the split between the Muslim and Christian natives. The relative isolation of Sulu and Mindanao from the center of Spanish political power in Manila, permitted the Muslims to regroup and even retaliate against Christians in the Visayas and Luzon. It is therefore obvious that in the continuing wars of attrition, which pitted Filipinos against Filipinos, there should develop ugly images, the image of the ugly Muslim and that of the ugly Christian. And since the history of a nation is generally written by the conqueror, the ugly Moro assumed darker hues. From the standpoint of the Spanish historical writer, the war against the Christian Filipino was one of pacification; whereas Muslim retaliation was branded as piracy, brigandage, or savagery. To the Christians the word "Moro" eventually developed ugly connotations or shades of emotional outbursts, ranging from indifference to disgust, suspicion and fear. Saleeby, in his monograph, "The Moro Problem," claimed that Spaniards thought of the Muslim as "conceived in inequity and born in mischief, without a human characteristic, barbarous and savage to the extreme." Etymologically, however, the Spanish word "Moro" is simply equivalent to the English name *Moor* which referred to the Mediterranean Muslim conqueror when Spain fell under the control of the Ummayyad Caliphate during the so-called Dark Ages in Europe from the 8th to the 15th centuries.

The conflict between Christian and Muslim Filipinos deepened as the Spaniards went about pacifying the country and enlarging their sphere of authority. The first attempt of the Muslims to bring the war against the Spaniards took place in 1569 when they invaded the vicinity of Cebu in 20 vintas loaded with warriors from Jolo and even Borneo. They also ravaged the Spaniards and their Filipino Christian allies in Mindanao in 1570, although in the same year, the Spaniards retaliated by destroying the Muslim stronghold in Catanduanes. Fired by continuing Muslim attacks, the Spaniards launched the first full-scale attack against Sulu in 1578, when Governor-General Francisco de Sande sent Captain Rodriguez de Jolo who took it by force. The ruling Jolo Chieftain, Sultan Paguian, lost but vowed vengeance and the battle of Jolo was said to mark the beginning of the state of war between Sulu and Spain that lasted for over 300 years.

Hostility of the conquered natives forced the Spaniards to abandon Jolo, and two attempts to subjugate the Muslims in 1579 and 1596 resulted in complete failures. In the meantime, the Muslims were regrouping, and solidified in a *jihad*, invaded Panay, Negros and Cebu under the leadership of Datu Silonga and Sali who, with 3,000 men transported in 30 caracoas, sacked several towns and massacred hun-

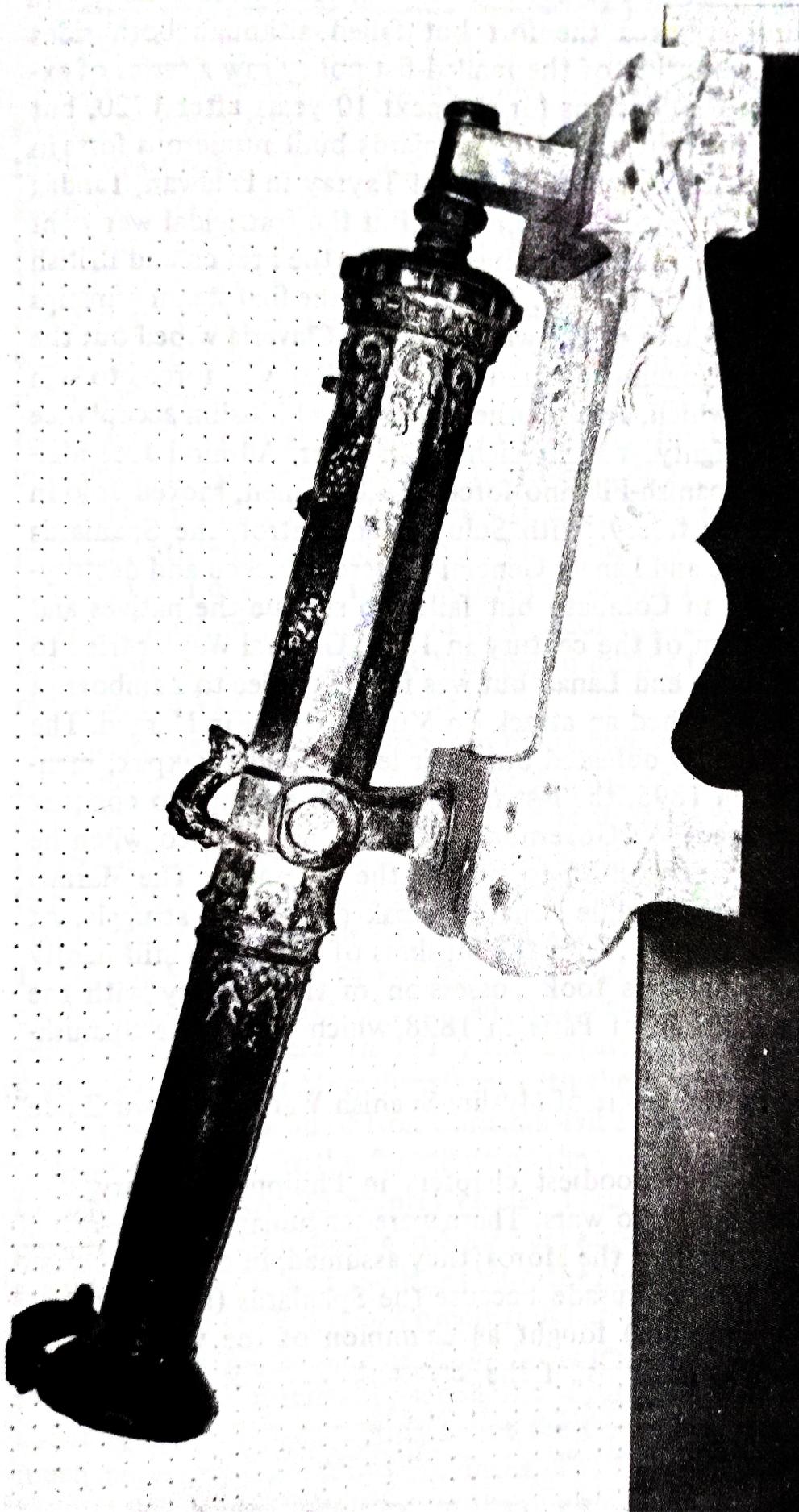
dreds of their Christian inhabitants. Fired with initial success, they collected an even stronger force of 4,000 warriors in 70 boats and invaded Arevalo, near the modern Iloilo City today, but suffered heavy losses. Captain Juan Garcia de Sierra and his 1,000 Visayan bowmen routed the invaders. Early in the 17th century, the Spaniards sent punitive expeditions to Mindanao, but failed to subdue the Muslims. Captain Juan Galinto, with the aid of his 200 musketeers and several hundred Christians, raided Jolo in 1602 but failed to capture it. A similar expedition of 1,000 Filipinos and 100 Spaniards in 1627 also ended in failure. The following year, a force of 2,500 Filipinos and 400 Spaniards led by Don Lorenzo Olaso was also routed. In the meantime, the Muslims sent retaliatory expeditions, raided the towns of Sogo, Cabalian, Canamucan, Ormoc, and Baybay in Eastern Visayas, razed them to the ground and killed or turned their inhabitants into slaves. One Muslim expedition had a force of 1,500 warriors in 18 boats.

The Spaniards eventually realized the need for establishing a fort in Mindanao to serve as a base of their operations. In 1635, Captain Juan de Chaves with 1,000 Visayans and 300 Spaniards, captured Zamboanga, set up a fort and, for a time, minimized Muslim depredations in the north. From this fort, the Spaniards, routed Tagal, the admiral of the great Cotabato Sultan, Qudrat, whose fleet suffered serious damage from the Spaniards after eight months of plunder in the north. About 300 Muslims were killed, 120 Christian captives released, and the enormous Muslim booty confiscated. In 1637 Qudrat's stronghold in Lamitan fell, as Governor-General Hurtado de Corcuera personally led the campaign and annihilated the Muslim leader's forces in Ilihan.

In 1639, Corcuera sent the first Spanish expedition to Lake Lanao under the joint command of Captain Francisco de Atienza and Recollect Father Agustin de San Pedro in the first attempt to control the Maranaos by entering into alliance with their datu.

Fresh from this triumph, Corcuera, the following year, assaulted Jolo and, after three months of continuous warfare, finally subdued the city and rebuilt the Spanish fort there. In another fierce action, Don Pedro Bermudez de Castro led a force of about 500 Filipinos from Bohol and some 50 Spaniards who attempted again to establish Spanish rule over the Lake Lanao area but was beaten back by the Maranaos.

Increasing Muslim resistance, and threats from the Dutch and the Chinese, forced the Spaniards to withdraw their forces from Zamboanga and some strategic ports in the south. During this impasse, the Muslims continued their raids on the Visayas and Luzon, Zambo-



A large cannon (*laila*) imported from Borneo and used during the wars against the Spaniards and Americans. (Photo courtesy of the Aga Khan Museum)

anga and some strategic ports in the south which forced the Spaniards to rebuild Fort Pilar in 1719. The following year, Datu Dulasi, with 5,000 warriors, attacked the fort but failed although both sides suffered. The resumption of the mailed-fist policy saw a series of expeditions against the Muslims for the next 10 years after 1720, but all these failed. In frustration, the Spaniards built numerous forts in strategic places, such as Cuyo, Labo and Taytay in Palawan, Tandag and Dapitan in Mindanao and Romblon. But the fratricidal war went on between Filipinos even as the Muslims drove the French and British from some pockets in Mindanao. The arrival of the first steam warships in 1848 turned the tide of the war. Governor Claveria wiped out the Muslim fort in Balanguingue island and the Sultan was forced to sign a treaty of peace which, among others, compelled Muslim acceptance of Spanish sovereignty. Twenty-eight years after, Admiral Jose Malcampo with his Spanish-Filipino force of 9,000 men, sacked Jolo in spite of the peace treaty. With Sulu under control, the Spaniards turned to Cotabato and Lanao; General Terrero attacked and destroyed Muslim *cottas* in Cotabato but failed to subdue the natives and just before the turn of the century in 1891, General Weyler tried to reconquer Cotabato and Lanao but was forced to flee to Zamboanga from where he launched an attack on Muslim *cottas* in Marawi. The Maranaos were badly defeated but their leader, Amai Pakpak, managed to escape. In 1895, the last major Spanish attempt to conquer Mindanao was made by Governor-General Ramon Blanco when he personally led an expedition to subdue the Maranaos. The Marawi *cotta* was demolished while Amai Pakpak died in the struggle. At the close of the century, with the Muslims of Mindanao still hardly subdued, the Americans took possession of the country with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1898 which ended the Spanish-American War.

In assessing the result of Muslim-Spanish Wars, Professor Zaide said:¹

One of the bloodiest chapters in Philippine history deals with the Moro wars. These were sanguinary struggles between Spain and the Moros; they assumed, in a way, the character of the crusade because the Spaniards (aided by Christian Filipinos) fought as champion of the war and the Moros as Paladins of the crescent For all their

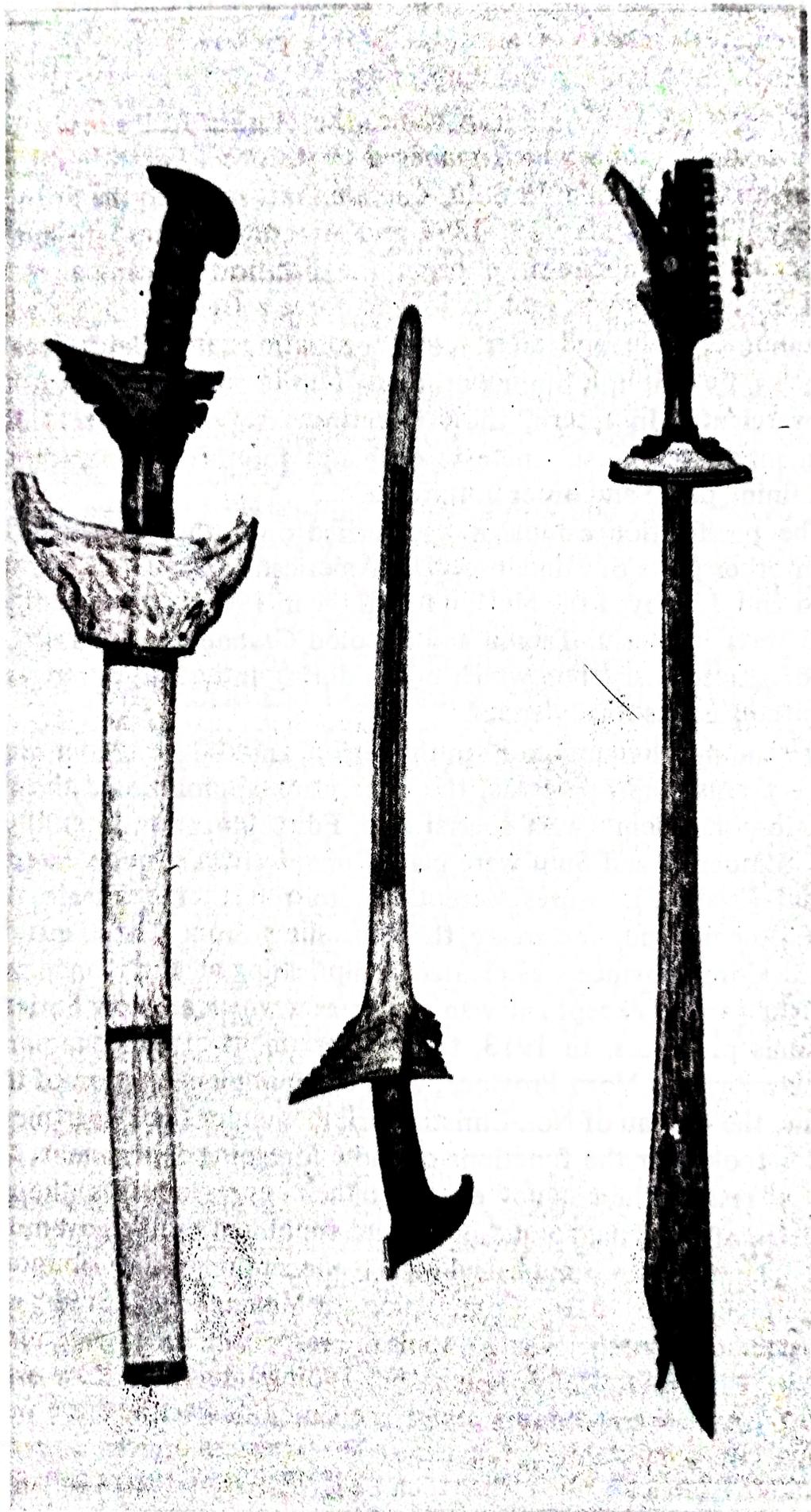
¹ G.F. Zaide, *The Philippines Since Pre-Spanish Time*, p. 360. Quoted by I. A. Zaide, "Muslim in the Philippines: A Study of Their Attitudes and Their Effects on Philippine Policies," U.P.M.A. Thesis (1956), p. 66.

vaunted strength, the conquistadores of Spain met their match in Islam's warriors of Mindanao and Sulu because after 300 years of fighting the Moros preserved their independence, religion and culture.

At the time the American came, the Muslim had already become a distinct group which managed to resist colonization during the years of Spanish rule. In Sulu, Captain Pratt replaced the Spanish garrison in Jolo on May 19, 1899 and American forces late in the year occupied Zamboanga to begin the pacification campaign. In 1899 General Bates was sent to Jolo to forge a treaty of peace with the Sultan of Sulu and after some negotiations, the Bates Treaty was signed providing for, among others, Muslim acceptance of American sovereignty. In return, the Americans gave pensions to the ruling members of the sultanate in exchange for their cooperation in maintaining peace and order in the area.

The pacification campaign was carried on with a mailed-fist policy in other parts of Mindanao. The Americans assaulted Bayang in Lanao and destroyed the Muslim fort there in 1902; in succession, Maranao forts in Masiu, Taraka and Bacolod Grande fell. By 1916, Muslim-organized resistance which began during the earliest engagements in the Visayas finally ended.

With the peculiar situations in the region, and the experience of resistance against the Spaniards, the Americans approached the so-called "Moro Problem" with special care. For ten years from 1903 to 1913, Mindanao and Sulu were placed under civilian rule. Executive and legislative measures were taken to further delineate the "Moro Problem" and demarcate the Muslims from Christians. In 1903, the Moro Province was created comprising all the islands out of the eight parallel except Palawan and areas which are now Surigao and Misamis provinces. In 1913, the Department of Mindanao and Sulu superseded the Moro Province; with the implementation of the Jones Law, the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes under the Department of Interior took over the functions of the foregoing department. Although the rest of the country elected their representatives, the representatives of Mindanao and Sulu were appointed by the governor-general. The bureau was abolished with the inception of the Commonwealth era and in 1936 the Commission for Mindanao and Sulu with headquarters in Dansalan, Lanao, took the responsibility of governing the region. Parenthetically, when the Tydings-McDuffie Law was about to be passed and bring about the Commonwealth, there was much unrest in some Moro Provinces. The Muslims preferred to remain under American rule rather than be governed by their Christian brothers to the north. The reason was understandable: there was much hot blood between Muslims and Christians, but the Americans decided to integrate the two groups into a single nation.



Some of the more popular locally-made swords were the kris (top and middle) and the heavy *kampilan* used in battle. (Photo courtesy of Aga Khan Museum)