

Visit to Philippine Museums

Before visiting and observing museums abroad, we needed background information on Philippine museums. Between March 30 and April 1, 1971, we visited the museums of the University of San Carlos in Cebu City, Silliman University in Dumaguete City, and Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro City. We were also hosts to two of our colleagues, Mrs Ramas and Mrs. Cabel who came to our Aga Kham Museum.

The museums of San Carlos and Silliman have good archeological collections excavated by their archeologists from old sites in the Visayas and Mindanao. Their potteries have come from both diggings and collections from the surface, especially from traders of antiques often desired by collectors. San Carlos has an orderly display of its collection, despite the limited space allotted to museum needs. Silliman seems to have a bigger collection but is in need of a suitable space for proper and orderly display.

Both museums need to increase their ethnological collections especially from the Visayan area among Christian and non-Christian groups. Household articles, carpentry, farm and fishing equipment, clothing styles and materials, native medicine and magical articles, etc., for which the Visayans are noted, such as those sold in a Cebuano or Boholano store, could be collected and described for the ethnological exhibit of any museum in the Visayas.

The Xavier University Museum has a varied interest. It has collected articles of significance to archeology, ethnology, history, folk art and folk life, and religion, plus a good reference library. It has extensive folklore studies and publication under Father Demetrio's direction. It has the best and largest collection of antique santoses in the Visayas and Mindanao. As in the other university museums, its collection needs display equipment and adequate space in a building of its own.

The Aga Khan Museum is lacking in archeological exhibits, but tends to be strong in Muslim ethnological collection, with a plan to gather exhibits from the non-Christian and non-Muslim ethnic groups throughout the Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan area. It has a large collection of imported and locally-made brasswork used by Muslim

Filipinos who are fast losing their antiques to the tourist trade.

Housed in the same two-storey concrete building, erected from an endowment by Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, is the Natural Science Museum being directed and developed for the university by Prof. Dioscoro S. Rabor, eminent Filipino ornithologist and ecologist. Its collection of Philippine birds is second to none in the country.

Although it has a building of its own, the Aga Khan Museum still needs to be funded for the purchase and/or construction of display equipment for its varied and valuable collections in the exhibition gallery and stored in its stockroom.

Most of the Museum's Muslim ethnological collections could compare with those of the museums in Muslim Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. The museum's development from under the administration of President Isidro is assured continued support by Dr. Mauyag M. Tamano, the present MSU President, who is seeking more assistance for the museum.

The Philippine Museum of History and Econography of the Filipinas Foundation, Inc., at Makati, Rizal, is perhaps the best in its area of specialization in museum development and service. On the second floor of the flashy Inter-Continental Hotel building, it exhibits impressive and expensive dioramas of historical subjects depicting among others the Battle of Mactan, the Battle of Tirad Pass, the British Occupation of Manila, the First Mass at Limasawa, the Cannonmaking Foundry of Panday Pira, the Ifugao Rice Terraces, the Tabon Cave, the Execution of Dr. Jose Rizal, etc. The dioramas were made by a team of sculptors, painters, engineers, and carpenters under the supervision of Carlos Quirino, eminent Filipino historian, as director.

The econographic files which are properly captioned consist of photographic reproductions of original drawings, paintings and photographs from Spanish, other European, Filipinc, American, and other sources. The Econographic Section on the fifth floor of the Insular Life Building has a team of researchers and photographers who often go out to the field in selected places in the country to photograph objects and events of cultural and historical values. All these are systematically filed.

The Locsin Ceramics Collection of surface and digging artifacts is the richest of its kind in the Philippines. Architect Locsin displays

his collection attractively with proper classification. Mr. Locsin has also published books about his collection. This is where a rich and scholarly ceramics enthusiast contributes to the preservation of a class of valuable historical artifacts.

The museum part of the Lopez Memorial Collection is mostly composed of the paintings of Felix R. Hidalgo and Antonio Luna in proper display along with the rich Filipiniana reference library at Pasay City. This is a case of combining a library with an art museum which specializes on the works of a few favorite painters.

The Ateneo de Manila, University of the Philippines, and University of Santo Tomas each maintains a museum; Ateneo, a museum of modern Filipino art; U.P., an Anthropology Museum; and U.S.T., a general museum. The first two, although having a qualified staff of curators, have small collections. Both have good displays, but need adequate space for expansion. U.P. offers a course on museology.

The U.S.T. Museum has the oldest, richest and most varied general collection in the country. But the space allotted to the collection is more of a congested stockroom. It needs display equipment, more trained staff and perhaps a large building in order to develop into a potential modern museum more than any other similar public or private institution in the Philippines.

The last but not the least in this report is the National Museum at Herran, Manila. The museum's Division of Natural Science is less known for lack of special public exhibitions and publicity despite its scientific importance. The Anthropology Division is more widely known for archeological and ethnological activities and exhibitions which attract wide publicity.

Public interest in the development of the National Museum has been boosted by the finds of the archeological excavation team headed by Dr. Robert B. Fox, especially at Calatagan, Tabon Cave, Cagayan Valley, and Santa Ana in the heart of Manila. Also the craze for Philippine Muslim folk art and artifacts by museum and non-museum collectors and decorators helped develop museum consciousness so much so that a Muslim Section has been created in the National Museum.

With regard to these "Muslim Collections" the Aga Khan Museum, the Notre Dame of Jolo College Museum, the Folk Arts

Center of Philippine Women's College at Davao City, as well as the few exhibits in other museums taken altogether speak loudly of the historical and contemporary cultural similarity and connection between the Philippines and its southern neighbors in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei.

Despite the gradual growth of Philippine Museums taken altogether, most museums, except those owned or privately funded by rich individuals and business corporations, laments the lack of funds for the general strengthening of these institutions. Indonesia and Malaysia have national organizations or alliances of their metropolitan and regional museums. But in the Philippines, the activities and expansion of the National Museum are confined in its old building and site in Manila.

While we have adequate buildings for the Cultural Center, the National Library, and the state universities and colleges, and the National Museum is not provided with suitable quarters for its speedy expansion.

While the Philippines is advanced in the sizes and number of public and private universities among Southeast Asian countries, it is behind in general museum development despite the post-war growth of cultural nationalism among the people. This problem calls for organized public and private action. We have the potentials for regional and national museum development if our resources were fully exploited.