

AGA KHAN MUSEUM: REPOSITORY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

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The Charter of Mindanao State University (Rep. Act 1893, under Sec. 2) enjoins that institution to undertake studies of "Filipino Native Culture" along with the sciences and the humanities. The direction to study "native" culture quite confuses implementors of the Charter who may not focus on a primitive cultural level like that of the Tasaday or any isolated native tribe. The university goes beyond studying pre-literate peoples and cultures. Like any other university, broadly it deals with knowledge of complex civilization.

If suggestion be permitted, the direction should have been to study "Philippine Culture" instead of "Filipino Native Culture" as the latter term sounds too ethnocentric or nativistic against our broader cultural and historical background as a people of mixed influence. The term "Philippine Culture" is all-embracing. It is a conglomeration of native and foreign traits as well as ancient and recent traits in our cultural heritage.

At any rate, the University tries to implement the Charter. Besides establishing an inter-disciplinary Research Center, it founded a museum for the preservation, conservation, and study of Filipino cultural tradition. Starting in 1962 as a simple Folk Art Center, it is today called the Aga Khan Museum after the Muslim Prince Karim Aga Khan IV who donated a Moorish-style, 2-floor building as a repository of art, cultural, and historical collections, especially from the immediate Mindanao culture area.

Now seventeen (17) years as old as its mother university, the Aga Khan Museum is frequented by local and foreign visitors as well as scholars seeking information on regional history, art and culture from the growing records and material holdings of the museum. With its gallery exhibit classified as Maranao Art, the museum merited an 8-page feature article by an American art-writer, Loren Fessler, in the *Arts of Asia Magazine* published in Hongkong for October, 1977.

With such unsolicited publicity, museum tourists, who are uninformed about the location of the museum bearing a foreign name, Aga Khan, could not mistakenly think of this museum to be found in

Pakistan, France or Switzerland, but in Marawi City, where it is hoped to become a trademark for tourism and cultural visitations.

As envisioned, the museum has both short- and long-range programs for development. Museum development, however, is an endless process. It continues to accumulate records and relics from different generations having distinct contributions to the collection of pertinent materials for the galleries, stockrooms, and documentary records.

Due to limited resources of technical personnel, equipment, and funds, our project development is up to this stage, focussed on three types of main museum holding — namely, collection of materials on 1) material culture, 2) non-material culture, and 3) regional history records or documents, especially "Mindanawenia," a suggested section of Filipiniana.

For these holdings, our short range project is focussed on the Muslim area in view of the physical location of the university and its museum in the Lanao region. Our long-range project is envisioned to cover the non-Muslim geographic section or culture in the rest of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan claimed to be the service areas of the State University. At any rate, we have modestly started the coverage of both our short and long range projects.

When in 1962 the university first started its academic program, we were witness to the general process of change affecting the Maranao cultural setting. Introduction of modern institutions and technology has been, and still is, changing the older cultural patterns in the region. For instance, the Maranao older house-style and furnishings, clothing habits, transportations, art and handicrafts, and native industries are affected by obvious changes. In place of these, the Maranao go for new and foreign things like new-style houses, vehicles, Japanese radio or TV sets and motorcycles, Hollywood clothes and ornaments, plastic kitchenwares, etc. Of course, some have developed a craze to own Armalites, instead of old *kris*es, *kampilans*, and out-of-use *lantakas*.

Conscious of these changes, it is one of the concerns of university and the museum in the area to collect fast-discarded relics or artifacts for the cultural heritage and historical reference of the present and future generations. It is, therefore, no surprise that during the last seventeen (17) years the Aga Khan Museum has kept in its stockroom and exhibited in its galleries a sizeable quantity of antique brassworks, weaponry, jewelry, clothing, tools, etc. before everything is sold out by souvenir dealers to foreign collectors. Due to lack of adequate funds,

museum collectors lose out in the buying competition to the giftshop businessmen exporting our cultural treasures to foreign countries for their interest in "Marco Polo" souvenirs.

Besides material culture, the Aga Khan Museum, in collaboration with the University Research Center, attempts to collect written materials on the non-material aspects of the local or regional culture. In fact, every object in the stockroom and gallery is meaningless unless scholars produce literature about its history and cultural or artistic significance. Simple labelling of an exhibit is not enough, especially for the curious youth who needs to know, for instance, a discarded antique cannon in exhibit. Thus, a lot of questions may be asked by museum visitors which a trained museologists or guide should answer from his knowledge or studies/records. Here are some sample questions:

Is the subject cannon of any historical import? Historically, how is it related to the type of cannon which the Italian voyager, Antonio Pigafetta, in 1521 A.D., saw in the Malay sultan's fortress in Brunei? Does it belong to the tradition of Southeast Asian cannons which the Illanun Moro pirates or sea traders brought home to Mindanao centuries ago to match the cannons of Spanish invaders? Isn't this type of heirloom cannon similar to the guns used in defense by Sultan Kudarat against General Corcuera (1637) or by Datu Amai Pakpak against General Weyler and Blanco in 1891 and 1895, respectively? Didn't the past Moro possession of strong fire-power halt complete Spanish victories over Moroland?

Also, a cultural question may be asked about the design of the subject cannon: Isn't its shape and *okir* decorations imitated from Moro crafts including houses and furniture, textiles, woodworks and ornaments?

Regarding antique kris in exhibit: Isn't the Moro kris of deadly beauty with serpentine blade, sheath, and hilt decorations reminiscent of Madjapahit military weaponry, which came to the Philippines to challenge later the Spanish Toledo sword and guns of past invasions?

The meaningful question and description of articles in the Aga Khan Museum inventory cannot be exhausted in the present paper. Suffice to say, the foregoing sample descriptions can give a fascinating knowledge of stories and history of local, regional or national culture area, in related connections among these areas and perhaps with foreign culture-areas.

Lanao and the larger Mindanao region are rich in folk tradition,

oral literature and history, not yet fully affected by the introduction of modern written novels, short stories, scientific literatures, and even comics in school, on the street-corner book and periodical stand, and the mass media. But will not a systematic recording of the region's oral literary treasures be integrated with the modern? Because of relatively recent contacts with western influence the "floating" literatures of Lanao are still intact in the lips and memories of the oldsters there.

The urban youth in Lanao, like others in the country, read comics of Tarzan, Kulafu, Batman, Captain America, and Mickey Mouse. Their rural counterparts still listen to the fables and folktales of the Monkey and the Crocodile, myths of Bantogan and Radia Indarapatra, and the stories of the tricky Pilandok. On the higher literary levels, the adults sing and listen to the Odyssey-like *darangen* epic of culture heroes and the *bayok* songs and poetry.

These little known literary gems of Old Lanao is a project for recording and study by our faculty, museum staff, and researchers. This job is long and continuous and we have barely started. We hope to gradually publish these materials in our projected publication of the *Mindanao Art and Culture* series, if not in future volumes for whatever value to the schools which at present teach the youth Aesop's Fables, Grimm's Fairytales, and other imported stuffs.

Regarding oral history, which is indivisible or related with folklore studies, we also have it as a sub-project for local/regional history. But we have not yet availed of the developing method in oral history study. We heard that Singapore, the Malaysian area, and Hawaii are developing methods of oral history. Researchers along this line record interviews of living oldsters who are knowledgeable of important events, persons, places, and dates of which they were witnesses. Our project has also just started and can not yet hope to publish in the near future our meager collection for use by historians for their teaching and writing.

A word of comment is perhaps in order. Current Philippine History textbooks, for many decades or almost a century, are not adequately national in scope. The treatment is a proliferation of historical events in Luzon during the periods of the Philippine reform movements and the Revolution during the time of Rizal, Mabini, Bonifacio, and Aguinaldo; the American and Commonwealth regimes; the Japanese Occupation, and finally the Republic. Why not also include a conscious study of Visayas and Mindanao regional histories for integration with a truly na-

tional history in scope? Should not historians develop a body of historical data from rare documents and oral histories in these southern regions?

The cultural heritage repository in the Aga Khan Museum easily invites local/regional interest if only it is ordinarily viewed on display cases with attractive techniques. But the exhibits are better appreciated for their meaningful values to knowledge of cultural history which link one people to another, past and present, by comparing their cultural materials.

The incentive of comparative studies is embodied in one of the annual reports of MSU which says:

The University (and its Museum) must be a research center, - - - In the field of social sciences and humanities, the Universtiy has an equally important task to perform. Firstly, undertake research on the roots of Filipino Culture, its enrichment with the pre-western or Spanish-American influences. The University's goal is to delve into that synthesis of culture that comprises our national culture, probe into its alien origins (traits) and trace the roots that are distinctly Filipino.

This suggestion to dig into the possible roots of Filipino Culture requires finding where those roots are. One logical approach is to visit the Malay lands where Filipino ancestors came from during periods of antiquity.

Thus, some of our museum staff have been provided opportunity at least to survey comparative museum holdings in Southeast Asia.

In 1971, the Ford Foundation sponsored the trip of leaders from small museums of Visayas and Mindanao. They visited the museums of Singapore, West Malaysia, Sumatra, Java, Bali, Sarawak, Brunei, Sabah, and Macao and saw what were there. We also visited common market places and villages for there you see persisting cultures.

The party of observers including our staff was so much amazed with the similarity of many museum holdings there with those of the Philippines which we recorded in sketches, photographs, and field notes. When we returned, my esteemed colleague in the flying-carpet travel, Father Francisco Demetrio of the XU Folklore and Folklife Stu-

dies, wrote an interesting report, with synopses, of Sumatran epics and folktales bearing some similarities with ours in the Philippines.

The stories we heard included a fabulous fighting carabao of Ancient Sumatra which defeated the carabao of the Javanese Army. That was symbolic of Sumatra's resistance against Madjapahit military domination. Thus, Minangkabau in Sumatra got its name from the legendary carabao whose broad horns looked like the curved roof of a *Rumah Adat* (Royal House).

Back in Lanao we have a close version of the carabao story, though funny and vulgar as Father Frank, our party, and myself remarked with laughters, partly because of that observed similarity.

For my part and our official artist-illustrator, we produced a modest volume entitled, *Comparative Notes on Museum Exhibits in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Macao and the Philippines*. Let me pick up only a few comparative topics from the report:

We observed that the pagoda-like mosque styles in the Islamic areas were similar to those in Mindanao: both are distinct from the domical and minaretted Arabic style recently transported to Mindanao and now, in Quiapo, Manila. The pagoda-like style is related to the Balinese Hindu *meru* temple. These architectural evidence tell the history of the religious transition from Malay-Hindu-Buddhist religious tradition to Islam in Southeast Asia including the Philippine South.

The indigenous mood of clothings, gold and silver jewelries, brasswork, musical instruments, the art of *okir* decorations, etc., indicate a common cultural matrix among Filipino Muslims and their Southeast Asian neighbors. Our *patajong* or *malong* is not much different from the Indonesian-Maya *sarong*, except in sizes, colors, and designs. The weaving and wearing of *ikat* materials in Java and Bali are fairly similar with the *malong* garments in Mindanao and Sulu.

The brassworks in those areas were fairly similar with those of Cotabato and Lanao. In fact, imported brasswares from Singapore and Borneo are used by Muslims and other ethnic groups in Sulu, Basilan, Zamboanga, Davao, and Cotabato. The foundry techniques and tools in Bali and Brunei from where we picked up few samples were no different from those of Datu Piang (Cotabato) and Tugaya (Lanao del Sur). Oral tradition or folklore has it that past Moro sea-voyages learned brass foundry techniques and article designs from Tampasuk in Sabah, near Brunei town. Brunei was, and still is, a center of cannon-making since Pigafetta visited there after the Mactan debacle.

Related to the brasswork complex is our comparison of musical instruments used by Muslims and other culture-groups in the Malay and Philippine archipelagos, even from a linguistic comparison. The Malay and Indonesian *gamelan* orchestra has member instruments identical with those of the Mindanao *kolintang* or *kulintangan*.

The word *kolintang* sounds like the Malay *cholempong*, Sumatran *talimpong*, and Javanese *kenong*, *perong* or *ponong*. All these terms refer to the series of graduated small gongs played as a principal instrument on a horizontal frame stand.

The Malays play big, deep gongs called *tetawak* (Malaya) or *tawa-tawa* (Brunei) which are identical with the agongs in Sulu and Mindanao. A wide shallow gong in Malaysia and Indonesia is called *gandingan* by Muslim Filipinos. A medium gong found in Sabah is called *babendir* in Lanao; a small one for parade music in Cotabato and Lanao called *pong* is imported from Borneo, although Muslims here manufacture their own through brasscasting or hammering.

Our two-headed cylindrical drum called *gandingan* is variably pronounced by Malays and Balinese as *gandang*, *kendang*, and *gedong*. The last but not the least is the Sulu *gabbang*, equivalent to Malay-Indonesian *gambang*. Both names refer to the small xylophone mounted on a boat-like frame for a stand. We also had comparative survey of wind and string instruments in forms, functions, and terminologies, but we have enough for this paper.

Along art, we have an Aga Khan Museum articles bearing decorative designs generally called *okir* equivalent to the Malay *ukiran*, easily mistaken for arts of Arabesque or Chinese influence, but closer to Sumatran and other art styles. Hasty periodical reporters term this as "Muslim Art," a misnomer for an art which may not prove to be of Arabic or Islamic influence. They also call it "sarimanok art" because of a cock-like figurine bearing *okir* lines and colors which attract viewers of representational figures of non-Islamic origin.

A visiting governor from Thailand saw our decorative bird in exhibit with the graceful shape and color. He pointed and remarked, "Why, do you have this here? We have a similar one in Thailand."

The museum guide answered, "Sir, why do you have it there? Who borrowed from whom?"

The incident should not be taken as an evidence of cross-cultural borrowing. The cock or rooster is a universal inspiration for artists and decorators in every clime. Besides in any magical function of spirit-

offerings, cock-like figurines are found in the arts of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Thailand, Russia, and Japan. One is perched atop western weather vanes to point to the direction of the wind. We do not know the origin and introduction of the rooster decoration in any art system, but we know its distribution. In the Philippines, it is a trademark, *marca gallo*, on a kerosene can.

For Aga Khan Museum, this paper should not serve as an advertisement. Despite its exhibits, our museum lacks adequate facilities, especially space, to accommodate frequent and large tourist groups and curious scholars interested in viewing and writing about our growing collection of cultural heritage.

We hope, as a suggestion, to see the founding and development of other museums in Mindanao. Here the museologist and the historian could perhaps jointly contribute to the knowledge of our local, regional, and national history through the collection and studies of historical and cultural repositories — an endless, but enjoyable, task.