

## SARIMANOK AND THE MARANAO SET OF FLAGS

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Though it is a common notion that the *sarimanok* is a symbol of wealth, social prestige and power among Maranaos, evidence validating such a notion is inadequate. Furthermore, confusion has arisen from the different versions<sup>1</sup> of the *sarimanok* myth.

A deeper inquiry into the problem will require the examination of both external and internal<sup>2</sup> evidences which may explain the origin of the *sarimanok*.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is deemed necessary to understand the origin of the *sarimanok* vis-a-vis Maranao society; its functions in art; its relation to Maranao rituals and other similar practices. My focus then will be on the *sarimanok* in relation to the Maranao set of flags, collectively called *isa ka labo-ai* (For photos and illustrations of the *sarimanok* and the Maranao set of flags, see Plates 1-8). My discussion is by no means exhaustive for it is only one of many possible explanations on the *sarimanok's* origin.

### Origin of the Maranao flags

Maranao informants gave two sources of the origin of the *isa ka labo-ai*: the epic Darangen and religious sources. The latter is traced back to Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) and may be considered newer than the Darangen. The Darangen contains many non-Islamic elements which antedated the coming of Islam in Lanao.

To date,<sup>4</sup> three Darangen episodes mention the set of flags. These episodes are: 1. Kapamandi, 2. Paramat a Selegen, and 3. Natangkopan a Ragat.

Kapamandi (literally, putting up the flags) tells of different flags displayed in the ship, Rinamentao Mapalao. *Pasandalan*, *payong* and *sambolayang a mera* were set up on the ship. On top of the *sambolayang* was a *mera bolawan* (golden peacock). This peacock, often mistaken for the *sarimanok*, is distinctly different from it, according to some informants. But other informants refer to both the peacock and the *sarimanok* to mean the same thing. They may err. Maranao *pandai* (artisan) when carving these birds distinguish one from the other. It is possible that in earlier texts the words *mera bolawan* was more prominent than the word, *sarimanok*, which in later Darangen texts was the word used. Assuming this is the case, the *sarimanok* may indeed be new in the Maranao Darangen texts which I have examined.

In Paramat a Selegan, Paramat a Bantugen and Madale distinguished themselves as Samar and Madem,<sup>5</sup> respectively, when they went to participate in a *sipa* game in a kingdom, Paramat a Selegan. On their way, multi-colored flags of various shapes were displayed.

On closer examination of the two episodes, it appears that these are later versions. Whereas older texts mention *mera bolawan* as a component of the *isa ka labo-ai*, later texts mention *sarimanok*.

Another episode, Natangkopan a Ragat – when Bantugen was enchanted in the kingdom of Natangkopan a Ragat – mentions of a bird, *Nori*,<sup>6</sup> that flew to tell Bantugen's people in Bembaran about the hero's having been enchanted. The people asked *Nori* to perch on the prow of the ship, Rinamentao Mapalao, and lead them to Natangkopan a Ragat. In this episode, it is not a *sarimanok* that perched on the ship's prow but a *Nori*. During a *gakit* (fluvial parade) I recently observed in Lanao, a horn-like structure known as *diongal* was at the prow. Next to it was a *sarimanok* atop a bamboo pole, then were other flags.

Religious sources are traceable to Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him). Informants revealed that Prophet Muhammad had four flags, namely: *Liah-ul-Khamdi*, *Liah-ul-Khabar*, *Liah-ul-Magfira* and *Liah-ul-Kharamat*. These flags were used by him when he warred with unbelievers or non-Muslims. In another account, all prophets of God, it is believed, would erect their respective flags in the day of judgment. Since the Prophet Muhammad is the last of all prophets, his flags would be the last ones to be displayed that day. Such flags are said to shelter

the believers or Muslims because the sun would be an inch closer to man's head.

### Isa ka labo-ai

*Isa ka labo-ai* literally means "a set of flags displayed as one drops anchor." These flags are displayed in such occasions as *gakit*, *galila* (parade), wedding, coronation, mourning, birth of a child, *lawi-an* (the ritual done when a couple moves to a new place). The set is composed of *sarimanok*, *pasandalan*, *sambolayang*, *payong*, *dopo*, *pamanai*, *shabandar*, *panangan*, *gada-gada* and *komentai*.

The *pasandalan* is a long rectangular flag inserted in a long bamboo pole. At its foot are two smaller triangular flags called *gada-gada* erected in an X-position. The *sambolayang* is a three – or five – jointed rectangular flag. Its joints are tapered sawlike, with the middle joint usually longer than the others. The *sambolayang* is sometimes called "octopus" by M. Säber<sup>7</sup>, because it resembles an octopus. In some instances, a smaller flag called *kilala* (sapling) is placed on the *sambolayang* pole.

Next comes the *payong*, an umbrella-like flag. It is multi-tiered, usually in odd numbers – one, three, five, or nine layers. On its rim are sometimes hung tassel-like tapered pieces of cloth called *padiontay*. This flag is associated with women.

A *dopo* is a rectangular flag. When placed at the prow, it means the boat user is with the *pegawidan* (those supported). When placed at the stern, the boat user is a *kadakelan sa tao* (common man). It comes in various colors. The *komentai* is triangular and is the smallest of the flags. A number of *komentai* are attached or sewn to strings that in turn are attached to both ends of *sambolayang* or to houses. These strings of *komentai* are strung across the street or house where the festivity takes place.

Two other flags, now seldom used, have striking Chinese features. These are the *panangan* and the *shabandar*.

The *panangan* is a pair of wooden pieces carved with *okir* (designs) motifs, predominantly that of the *naga* (dragon). These are set parallel to each other by a piece of wood, that in turn, is pierced

through by a bamboo pole that serves as the flag stand. The *panangan* looks like a dragon. On one end, the head, hangs a piece of cloth resembling a dragon's tongue. Another piece of cloth dangles like a dragon's tail at the other end. The *panangan* is usually placed at the stern with the "dragon's head" towards the prow, during fluvial parades.

The *shabandar* is an oblong, four-sided flag. Its sides are wrapped in plain red cloth (*lombos a mariga*). A bamboo pole with a *kilala* on top is inserted at the middle of this flag. It may be noted that a flag without a *kilala* is not considered complete. At a distance, the *shabandar* would look like a lantern.

Since by tradition only the *pegawidan* can exclusively use and display the *isa ka labo-ai*, whose components include the *sarimanok*, this may partly explain why the *sarimanok* is considered a symbol of Maranao royalty.

The placement of flags is dictated by the occasion. In the coronation of a sultanness,<sup>8</sup> flags were arranged in this sequence: big *pamanai*, *payong* with *padiontay*, *palagawad a ringkem*, *pasandalan*, *obor-obor* (symbolic of the *bailabi* or sultanness) with four-streamer-like flags in red and blue colors attached to it, and a small *pamanai* on both sides of the road. The emphasis was in the placement of the *obor-obor*, a huge umbrella-like flag which represented the *bailabi* to be installed. The four streamer-like flags represent the four *pengampong* of Lanao. Their being attached to the *obor-obor* signify the support of the *pengampong* for the sultanness.

The *palagawad a ringkem* is a squarish flag about 11 feet long, with a *kilala* atop it. Informants revealed that it is symbolic of guards in their lookouts.

During deaths, especially a sultan's, white flags are displayed. An *osonan*, an onion-shaped flag wrapped in white cloth, is also displayed. On each of its four corners are small *pamanai*. The flags are not removed after the burial. To signify the period of mourning, they are displayed until they rot. The dead person's rank is identifiable through the type of flags displayed. If the dead is a *bailabi*, the *obor-obor* will be displayed.

The birth of a child is heralded by a display of flags. The child's



Fig. 1. Pasandalan, with kilala

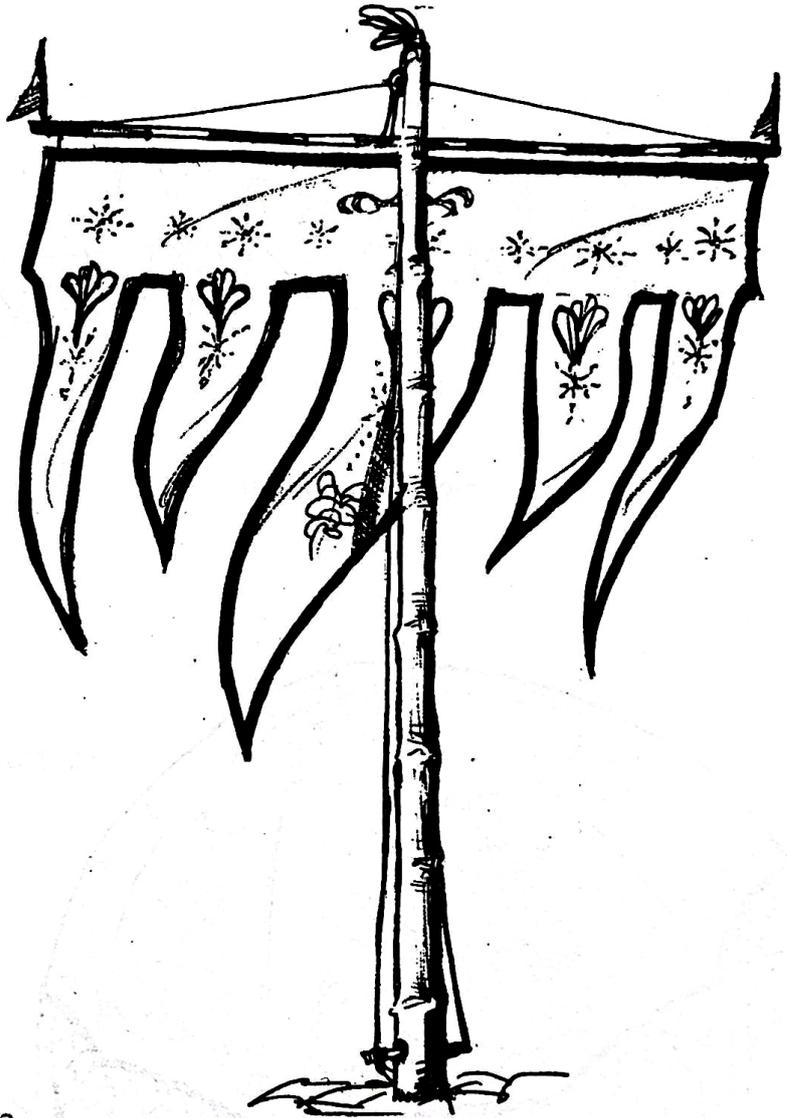


Fig. 2. Sambolayang

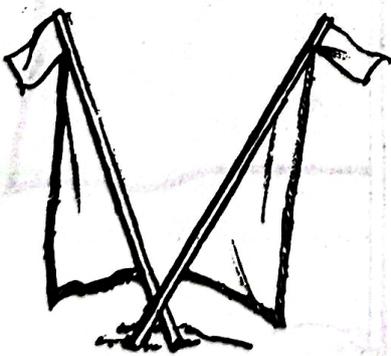


Fig. 3. Gada-Gada



Fig. 4. Komentai

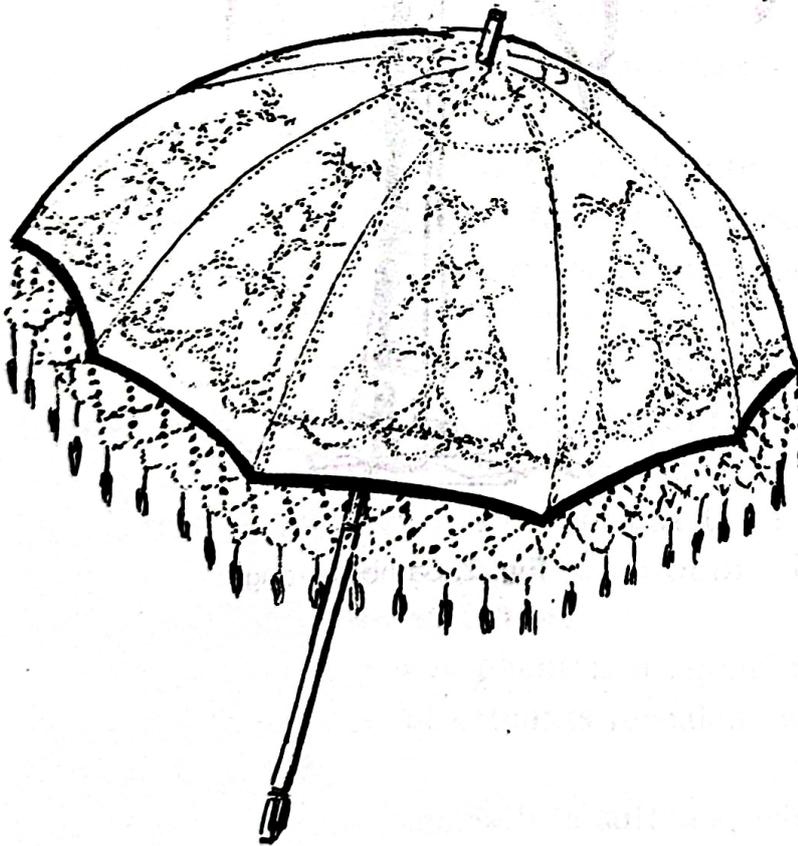


Fig. 5. Payong

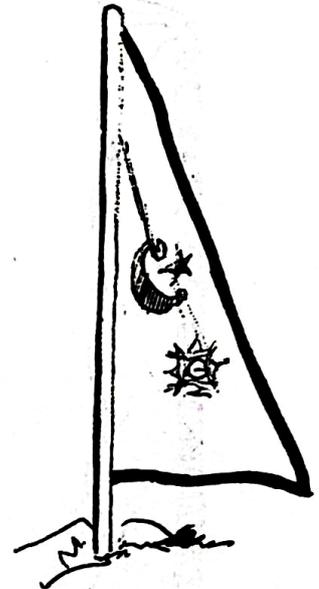


Fig. 6. Pamanai

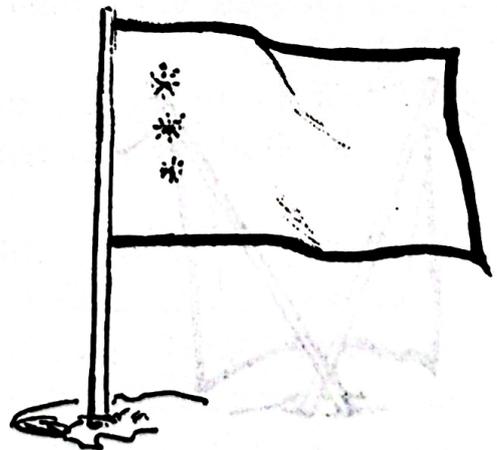


Fig. 7. Dopo

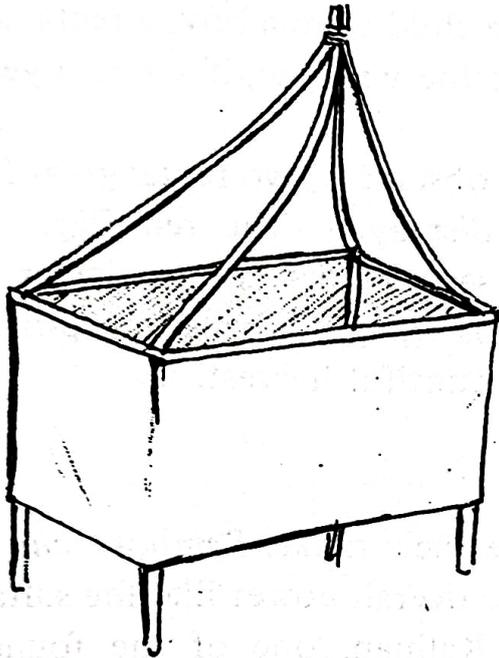


Fig. 8. An usunan without its top

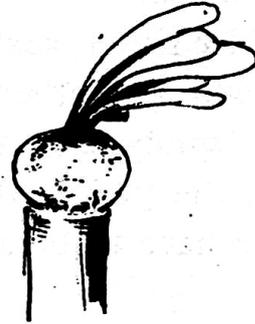


Fig. 9. Kilala

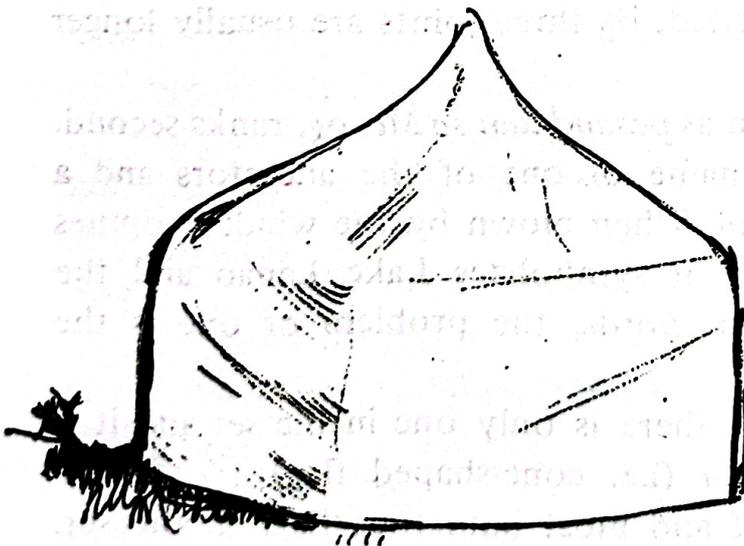


Fig. 10. Usunan

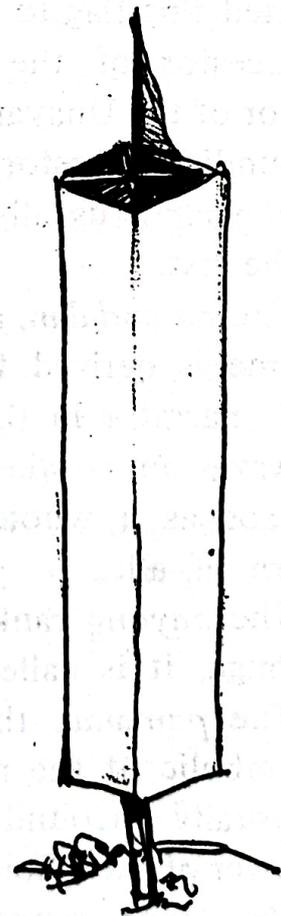


Fig. 11. Shabandar with a kilala

sex is indicated by the flag's color. If the child were a boy, a rectangular red flag (*dopo a mariga*) is displayed at the window; if a girl, a yellow flag is displayed.

In a rice ritual (*kashawing*)<sup>9</sup> I have observed, two rectangular flags, one red and the other yellow, were displayed. The red flag, *dopo a mariga*, symbolizes the living and seen beings, in particular, the Maranaos; the yellow flag, *dopo a binaning*, symbolizes the spirit (*tonong*) who have to be appeased for a bountiful harvest.

### Ranks of flags

The flags in the *isa ka labo-ai* have their ranks. *Sambolayang*, the tallest flag, ranks first. It symbolizes the overall power like the sultan's. Informants claimed that Makaampao Kalinan, one of the founding ancestors of the four sultanates of Lanao (*pat a pengampong ko Ranao*), was believed to have been the first to design and display the flag. He dedicated this flag to his three sons — Popawan sa Bayabao, the founding ancestor of the *pengampong* of Bayabao; Paskan sa Unayan, ancestor of the Unayan *pengampong*; and Amialongan Simban sa Masiu, the founding ancestor of the Masiu *pengampong*. This explains why the *sambolayang* is usually three-jointed, its three joints are usually longer than the rest.

The *pasandalan*, also known as *pasandalan sa Morog*, ranks second. Its name is derived from the name of one of the ancestors and a famous narrator in the Darangen. When blown by the wind, it ripples like waves in a lake. As such, it symbolizes Lake Lanao and the Maranaos as a whole. In other words, the problem of one is the concern of all.

The *payong* ranks third. If there is only one in the set and it is very huge, it is called *obor-obor* (i.e. cone-shaped flag).

The *pamanai*, the smallest and most numerous flags in the set, are symbolic of the multitude under the sultan. Whenever displayed, they usually surround the bigger flags to symbolize the multitude under the power of the sultan and the datu.

The *dopo* ranks fifth. It is either red or yellow. In battle, a red *dopo* is used. In a *gakit*, a red *dopo* at the prow signifies that the people on board are *pegawidan*.

A *gada-gada* is bigger than a *pamanai*. *Gada-gada* are usually erected in an X-position, with a *pasandalan* in between them. They rank sixth but are seldom displayed nowadays.

In social festivities like weddings and coronations, the *dopo* is erected first, followed by the *payong*, *pasandalan*, *sambolayang*, *gada-gada* and *pamanai* in that order. The *sambolayang* is usually erected at the center with a *payong* on its left and a *pasandalan* on its right. This arrangement is symbolic of a sultan in his chair (*tangkongan a bolawan*) with the *bailabi* on his left and his council on his right.

The *pamanai* are scattered all over the place (Some are erected near the *payong*). They represent the guards in the sultanate and the multitude supporting the sultan, the datus and the *bailabi*.

### Changes in the Maranao flags' use

The display of flags was in the past the *pegawidan*'s monopoly. It is no longer true today. Even the *okir* on the flags reflect contemporary things. An older type of *sambolayang* has geometric designs; the newer type has the crescent-and-moon motif.

The *sarimanok* today is seldom used with the other flags. In most cases, it is placed on top of the *payong* of the *bailabi*, sultan, and even of visiting dignitaries to Lanao.

Mindanao State University in its graduation exercises traditionally uses the *sarimanok* in the procession, an innovation. Moreover, when dignitaries visit Lanao, the Philippine flag is added to the *isa ka labo-ai*. Along the road, buntings bearing the Philippine colors, are hung on the wall of houses. It can then be said that the *isa ka labo-ai* has endured time because it is utilized beyond its traditional use — strictly for the *pegawidan*.

### Conclusion

The *sarimanok* is only one of the many components of the *isa ka labo-ai*, the Maranao set of flags which is associated with rank, prestige and power in the Maranao social structure. The *pasandalan*, *sambolayang* with a *pamanai*, and a *payong* can symbolize social rank, prestige and honor. Whereas other flags can be displayed without the

*sarimanok*, the *sarimanok* is never displayed by itself. When the *sarimanok* is displayed with the other flags, informants believed that the occasion would be *miapened*, meaning "dignified," "complete." It is because the *sarimanok* is considered a *paraboat*, an elaboration of the set of flags.

Whatever is its original myth, the *sarimanok* is still an interesting subject for inquiry. Its being the most "elusive" cock in Philippine art is controversial and I shall not delve into that aspect for the time being.

However differently one looks at it, the *sarimanok* is obviously art, a product of a creative mind; it is a legacy that Filipinos can be proud of. Until such time a deeper study of Maranao society is undertaken, the *sarimanok* would remain elusive to students of Philippine art.

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#### NOTES

1. Hartendorp (1972:23-7) and Villanueva (1963a:50, 1963b:4) have three versions each; A. Madale (1962a:39, 1962b:18) has two versions; Linsangan (1970:8) and Montilla (1974:14) have one version each. Casiño (1966-67:237-56), Saber and Orellana (1963), Imao (1970:20), Baradas (1968:136) and Peralta (1971:28-30) share more or less the same view on the *sarimanok*.

2. Internal evidences refer to Maranao oral literature, the source greatly used by writers mentioned in this article. Other aspects are dealt with in the author's article, "Sarimanok in Myths and Tradition" which will be published in *Filipino Heritage*.

3. This article is part of a monograph on the *sarimanok*'s origin I am now preparing for publication.

4. This is based on data I have gathered in the field.

5. Madem and Samar are the assumed identities of Bantugen and Madale, respectively.

6. Nori is a bird often mentioned in most episodes of Darangen. The hero has a Nori ever ready to help him. This bird is also utilized as a messenger. It is an unusual bird in the sense that it can talk like a human being.

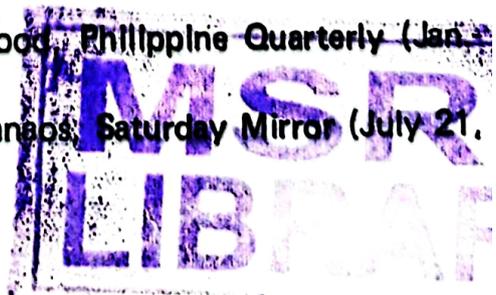
7. Dr. Mamitua Saber, dean of research, Mindanao State University. Dr. Saber is a Maranao sociologist (M.A., Ph.D., Kansas University).

8. This is based on data I gathered during a coronation I have attended in Bansayan, Bayabao on the eastern side of Lake Lanao, Lanao del Sur.

9. Cf. Nagasura T. Madale, "Kashawing: Rice Ritual of the Maranaos," *Mindanao Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (July-Sept. 1974), pp. 74-79.

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