Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido

Volume 1

2nd Edition

Arvin L. Acosta

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Special thanks are also extended to the Canovas, Vasquez, and Rey families for providing inputs about their respective family histories.

MESSAGE FROM THE MUNICIPAL MAYOR



Dear residents and friends of El Nido,

It is with great pride and immense joy that I announce the release and publication of the first volume of the book on the Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido, Palawan. This groundbreaking work is a testament to our rich and diverse heritage, capturing the essence of our ethnolinguistic groups, immovable properties, movable properties, and intangible properties. It serves as a vital record of our cultural identity and a source of inspiration for generations to come.

The Ethnolinguistic Groups section delves into the traditions, languages, and unique cultural practices that each group contributes to our communal identity. The Immovable Properties segment highlights the significant landmarks, historical sites, and architectural marvels that are integral to our town's history and culture. These immovable properties are the silent witnesses to our past and the foundation of our community. Movable Properties depict the artifacts, artworks, and objects that are not only valuable for their historical significance but also for their cultural importance. These items tell stories of our ancestors and their way of life, offering a tangible connection to our heritage. Perhaps the most evocative section, the Intangible Properties section captures the unrivaled cultural heritage of El Nido. It includes our music, dances, rituals, oral traditions, and other practices that have been passed down through generations. These intangible properties are the living expressions of our culture, continually evolving yet deeply rooted in our history.

This publication is not just a book; it is a preservation of our identity and a beacon of our pride. It is a collective effort that involved the passion and dedication of many individuals, including local historians, scholars, artists,

and community members. Their contributions have been invaluable in bringing this project to fruition. I encourage every resident of El Nido, every Filipino, and all our international friends to immerse themselves in this book. Let it serve as an educational tool, a source of inspiration, and a reminder of the beauty and diversity of our cultural heritage.

This remarkable achievement would not have been possible without the unwavering dedication and scholarly expertise of Mr. Arvin Acosta, the esteemed author and head of our Heritage Tourism Division. Mr. Acosta's passion for preserving and promoting our cultural heritage shines through every page of this volume. His meticulous research and heartfelt commitment have brought our history and traditions to life, allowing us to appreciate the unique tapestry that makes El Nido truly special.

As we celebrate this significant milestone, let us take a moment to reflect on the importance of safeguarding our cultural properties. They are the living legacy of our ancestors, the foundation of our community, and the guiding light for our future. I encourage everyone to read this book, learn from it, and cherish the cultural treasures it so beautifully documents.

Congratulations to Mr. Arvin Acosta and the entire Heritage Tourism Division for this outstanding contribution to our municipality. Let us all take pride in our heritage and work together to ensure that it continues to thrive.

With heartfelt gratitude and warm regards,

HON. EDNA GACOT-LIM
Municipal Mayor

MESSAGE FROM THE OFFICE OF THE SANGGUNIANG BAYAN



Culture helps us define our identity. It plays a major part in our daily lives, shaping our values, determining our behavior and influencing our interaction with one another.

Culture is the lifeblood of a vibrant society, expressed in many ways by telling and celebrating stories, remembering the past, entertaining ourselves, and imagining the future. Our creative expressions define who we are and help us see the world through the eyes of others.

Preserving cultural practices, rituals and languages allows communities to maintain their connection with their roots, strengthen their sense of self and contribute to a positive and stable societal fabric. With this, a stronger sense of community and mental well-being is promoted.

Ipadayon tang guegman ig ambligan ateng kulturang ing subli sa ateng mga ninuno!

HON. CYRIL L. ZUMARRAGA
Committee on Education and Culture Chairperson
Office of the Sangguniang Bayan

MESSAGE FROM THE MUNICIPAL TOURISM OFFICER



As the Municipal Tourism Officer of El Nido, I am honored to share with you the **Book of Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido**. This treasure is more than just a collection of facts and dates—it's a celebration of the heart and soul of our beloved town. It reflects the rich history, vibrant traditions, and deep-rooted values that make El Nido not just a place of stunning beauty but a community with a profound cultural identity.

El Nido has long been known for its natural wonders, but behind every limestone cliff and pristine beach lies a story of our people. Our traditional crafts, festivals, historic landmarks, and even the everyday way of life tell a narrative that has been passed down through generations. This book is a way for us to honor those stories and ensure they are never forgotten.

As we move forward in promoting sustainable tourism, this book serves as a reminder that our culture is just as valuable as the landscapes we protect. By preserving our heritage, we allow future generations and visitors alike to experience the deeper spirit of El Nido—one that goes beyond the surface.

I want to sincerely thank everyone who has contributed to bringing this book to life—Sir Arvin Acosta and the entire Municipal Tourism Office- Heritage Division, the historians, artists, elders, and local communities who shared their knowledge and experiences. This is a living document that will continue to grow as we discover and protect more of what makes El Nido so special.

Together, let’s keep our cultural heritage alive, not just for ourselves but for the generations yet to come.

Warmly,

SHARMAINE DELA CRUZ-HADJI NUR
Municipal Tourism Officer
Municipality of El Nido, Palawan

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

El Nido is a 1st class municipality located at the northern tip of mainland Palawan, bounded by the municipality of Taytay to the south and the island municipality of Linapacan to the east. It is one of the island province's major tourist destinations known for its white beaches, clear waters, and towering 250-million-year-old limestone cliffs surrounding the town proper. Aside from its abundant natural attractions, however, El Nido is also rich in cultural treasures: from the oldest-known dwelling place in the Dewil Valley to the intangible traditions which have been passed on through generations. Heritage tourism products in the municipality have been emerging just as the tourism industry recovers from the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. By tapping into these new experiences, the local government aims to decongest island-hopping sites, mainstream cultural heritage sites for revenue generation, and ultimately preserve the town's cultural riches for posterity.

This book is written primarily to invite the people of El Nido to learn about our cultural treasures which have since been either unfamiliar or unknown to the newer generation. It introduces the readers to heritage sites, cultural objects, and other traditions while also discussing the preservation status of each cultural property: whether they are threatened by extinction or still thriving in the community. This book also contains measurements, lyrics, illustrations, and pictures to reconstruct lost cultural treasures in the future. This may also serve as reference for researchers on culture and history. Moreover, public and private school teachers might find this book useful in fulfilling the Department of Education's mandate to produce learning materials on local culture.

The ultimate goal of this endeavor is to compile valuable information about El Nido's cultural properties in an archive. The Heritage Tourism Division of the Municipal Tourism Office plans to publish

annual volumes featuring at least 24 cultural properties of the municipality.

The book contextualizes the featured cultural properties in relation to the relevant cultural objects and practices of indigenous peoples (IPs) and ethno-linguistic groups in the Province of Palawan. It also references Cuyonon religious traditions, most of which are Roman Catholic in nature.

Aside from discussing the threats to the existence of our municipality's cultural properties, this book also recommends ways to preserve them, such as: building infrastructure for museums and cultural centers, compiling and safeguarding archival materials, and incentivizing the continuous practice of cultural traditions through the help of the tourism and creative industries.

Finally, the terms used here were simplified to reach wider audiences in the municipality. Although some terminologies such as scientific names cannot be made simpler, additional information were provided to aid the readers.

Ethnolinguistic Groups

Aside from archaeological sites and features, for which ethnicity is more difficult to ascribe, the cultural properties presented in this book belong mostly to the Tagbanuas and the Cuyonons. The Tagbanuas are the earliest known settlers who passed down traditional practices, skills, and knowledge. Despite still thriving, however, they only comprise a small percentage of the current population of El Nido. The Cuyonons, on the other hand, are the majority ethno-linguistic group in the municipality. There were a few Cuyonons who probably migrated in the early 17th century AD to accompany the Spanish friars and administrators from Cuyo who supervised the construction of Fuerza Sta. Isabel, a fortification with a chapel in Taytay, Palawan. Cuyonon farmers probably migrated to Taytay, El Nido, and the rest

of Palawan in the 18th century AD onwards to explore more arable lands to support Cuyo's growing population.

There are other ethno-linguistic groups who came later: the Ilonggos in the early 1900s and the Aklanons or Akeanons in 1958. The Ilonggos were brought by the Canovas family as laborers in their logging business in Bgy. Mabini. Meanwhile, the Aklanons were farmers who settled in Bgy. New Ibajay and Barotuan. The said migrants contributed significantly to the present cultural landscape of the municipality. The Ilonggos gave Mabini its old name, "Oton," referring to Oton in Iloilo province, where they originated. Meanwhile, the Aklanons who came from Ibajay, Aklan renamed Dewil to New Ibajay. The Aklanons in Barotuan did not change the name of the place. Instead, they brought their way of celebrating the Ati-Atihan Festival in honor of the Holy Infant Jesus every 3rd Sunday of January. Their Ati-Atihan dance is still practiced at present and has become a tourist attraction.

Local statistics show that Cuyonons comprise a majority of the existing ethnolinguistic groups in the Municipality of El Nido at 47.8%, followed by the Tagalogs at 22.1%, then by the Akeanons[1] at 5.9%, and the Cebuanos at 2.7%. The Tagbanuas, although residing in El Nido earlier than the rest, comprise only 0.4% of the local population, with a head count of only 151. The cultures of other Palawan-based ethno-linguistic groups also residing in El Nido are not the subject of this book. There were 21 Pala'wans, 5 Molbogs, 3 Bataks, 71 Agutaynens and 58 Cagayanens who migrated probably because of inter-marriage or livelihood opportunities. Although these groups' cultures undoubtedly contributed to the rich diversity of Palawan's sense of identity, their traditions and practices are not widely practiced in El Nido.

[1] *Akeanons* and *Aklanons* are used interchangeably in this book to refer to the migrants from the Province of Aklan.

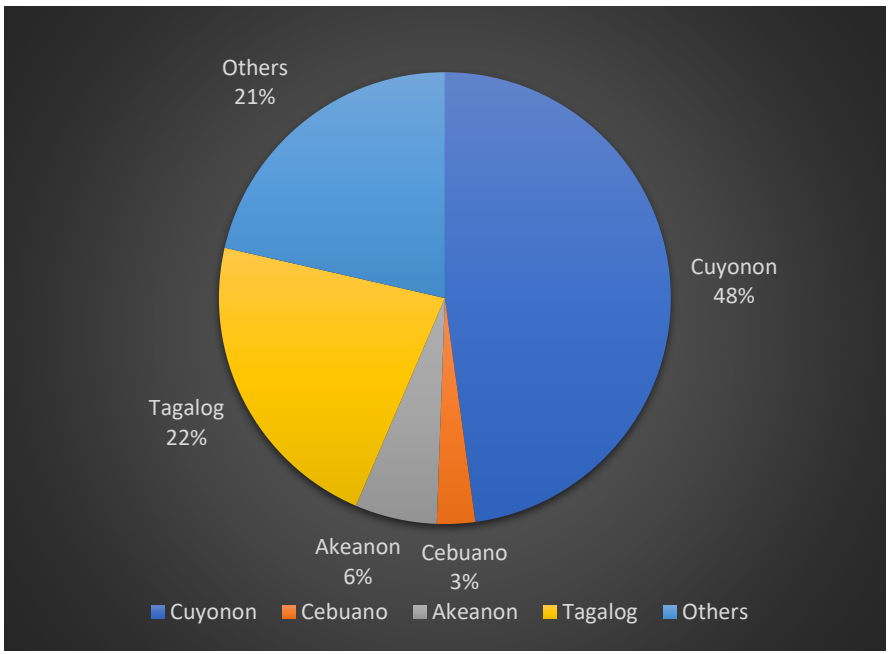


The culture and traditions practiced by the Tagbanuas and Cuyonons residing in El Nido are distinct from those who live outside the municipality. The culture of the Aklanons and the rest of the Bisayas will be mentioned in this volume in passing, and will be discussed further in the succeeding volumes to demonstrate how they gradually adapted to the natural environment and culture of the earlier settlers.

At present, a Tagbanua community exists at Sitio Catuldan in Bgy. Teneguiban. There are also some Tagbanua families who live at Sitio Bagong Sikat in Bgy. Bagong Bayan and Sitio Talesay in Bgy. New Ibajay. The Aklanons, on the other hand, dominate the population of New Ibajay and Barotuan. Most of the Aklanons in Barotuan engage in farming while the ones in New Ibajay live by farming, fishing, and bird's nest gathering.

Meanwhile, the Cuyonon population is concentrated in the villages of San Fernando, Sibaltan, Villa Paz, and Villa Libertad. Of these barangays, Villa Libertad is currently experiencing a wave of migration of other ethno-linguistic groups from the Poblacion barangays due to the rapid urbanization of these areas. El Nido's poblacion is currently being transformed into a tourism business hub, where investors convert residential areas for commercial use. Villa Libertad, though with the same rapidly increasing business potential, still offers residential spaces for residents of the Poblacion barangays.

Graph 1: Ethno-Linguistic Groups in El Nido[2]



The migration of ethno-linguistic groups has not only changed the cultural landscape of certain barangays, it also changed their names. For example, New Ibajay was once called Diuail by the Tagbanuas who settled there. When the Cuyonons arrived, Diuail evolved into

[2] Data from Community-Based monitoring System conducted in 2018 Courtesy of Municipal Planning and Development Office of El Nido.

Dewil. It was later officially named as New Ibajay when the place became predominantly inhabited by Aklanons. The same goes for Bagong Bayan, which was called Nami during the time it was dominated by the Tagbanuas.

Prior to the printing of the 2nd edition, the author learned that the Tagbanuas once had two sub-tribes: the Tandulanen and the Silanganen.[3] The Tandulanen are the Tagbanua we know today - they are shy, still live mostly in their traditional way of life, and continue to speak their language. In contrast, we no longer see traces of the Silanganen today because they eventually became the Cuyonons of mainland Palawan.

According to Spanish chronicles, the Silanganen were considered the "civilized" Tagbanuas. They engaged in trade, could write, and understood governance. The Tandulanen, on the other hand, were regarded as "uncivilized" Tagbanuas - hostile and unwilling to trade with Spanish authorities and the migrating Cuyonons. Their way of life remained largely primitive.

The Silanganen lived in town centers and barangay hubs, with some becoming part of the colonial government. Through intermarriage with the migrating Cuyonons, they gradually lost their language and traditional way of life, as the Cuyonons eventually outnumbered them. With the Cuyonons forming the majority and enjoying close ties with the Spanish, Cuyonon became the dominant language in administrative centers.

The Tandulanen, meanwhile, would often relocate whenever Spanish authorities and Cuyonons arrived in their areas. They settled in

[3] "Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections Volume XLVIII," Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 1907, p 558.

coastal zones and remote islands. Their habit of living on beaches with rock outcrops (*tandol*) may explain why they were called Tandulanen. This tendency to withdraw from "civilized" groups persisted up to the present, as the Tagbanuas we interviewed recounted how their ancestors kept moving to avoid living with new settlers. Ironically, this avoidance played a crucial role in preserving their language and traditions, including the epic of *Dumaracol*.

Terminologies

The are several mentions of the word "barangay" and its abbreviation 'Bgy" in this book. The abbreviation is usually placed before the name of the barangay. For the benefit of non-Filipino readers, a barangay is the smallest unit of government in the Philippines. This word originated from the word *balangay*, the boat used by the natives for transport and trade before the arrival of Spanish conquerors. The barangays were formed after families aboard a *balangay* settled in an "uninhabited area."

In his book "Barangay, Sixteenth Century Philippine Culture and Society," distinguished historian and eminent scholar William Henry Scott wrote, "When the Spaniards reached Luzon, they found this word for boat also being used for the smallest political unit of Tagalog society. Franciscan friar Juan de Plasencia (1589a, 23v) described it as follows: 'These [datus] were chiefs of but few people, as many as a hundred houses and even less than thirty; and this they call in Tagalog, barangay.'"[4] The Spanish word "barrio" is another term for barangay. They are often used interchangeably. During the Spanish and American colonizations, the head of the barangay was called *Teniente del Barrio*. It later evolved into "Barangay Captain" and/or "Barangay Chairman," the terms which are still used at present.

[4] William Henry Scott. Barangay, Sixteenth Century Philippine Culture and Society, Ateneo de Manila University Press, Manila, 1994, p. 4.

The Spanish term "Poblacion" refers to El Nido's four urban barangays Masagana, Buena Suerte, Maligaya, and Corong-Corong. Villa Libertad, however, is now considered urban due to the rapid development of commercial and tourist establishments in the area. Moreover, the Poblacion area is being rebranded as the municipality's "Central Business District," instead of "Old Town."

This book also uses several Cuyonon words. There are slight differences in pronouncing Cuyonon from Tagalog and other languages in the country. In Cuyonon, the word "e" is pronounced as "ə," as in the English word "water" (wot-ər) unlike the "e" in Tagalog which is pronounced as "eh" in education (eh-juh-kay-shn). In the case of words borrowed from Spanish, like *Virgen* and *virtudes*, the letter "e" is pronounced as the letter "i" in the English word "bit." The letter "i" in Cuyonon has the same sound as the Tagalog pronunciation. It is also equivalent to the sound of "i" in the English word "bit." Meanwhile, the letter "u" in Cuyonon sounds like the "u" in the English word "through" and 'bush." The letters *u* and *o* in the Cuyonon alphabet have the same sound and are used interchangeably. For example, korot is sometimes spelled as "kurut" in other research works. The sound, however, is the same in both spellings.

Cuyonon words also have glottal stops, symbolized by the single open quotation mark (') after the vowel like in the word "ba'nit" (nibble). The *i'* in Cuyonon, which means "and" in English, has a glottal stop too. It is used interchangeably with the *y* that was used during the Spanish and American periods. Currently, *y* is used in official documents and publications.

Categories

In the Philippine Registry of Cultural Properties (PRECUP), the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) categorizes

such cultural properties as follows: a.) tangible (movable and immovable) and b.) intangible. The NCCA is the primary government agency tasked by Republic Act No. 10066 or the National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 to preserve the country's cultural properties. The institutionalization of the PRECUP is the first step in these preservation efforts.

Structures, places, and geological monuments fall under immovable tangible cultural properties while artifacts, ethnographic materials, and flora and fauna belong to movable tangible cultural properties. Intangible cultural properties, on the other hand, include traditions, songs, dances, skills and processes, knowledge and designs, and oral history.

This book features five immovable tangible cultural properties such as the Ille Cave, Canovas Ruins, Mendoza's Handwriting, Makangit Cave, and the Idelet Cave. On the other hand, there are ten movable cultural properties featured: Dalan sa Langit, Katesismo, gold earrings, manto, prensa, tagad, tugda, korot, karusa and lunday. Finally, the book features the following intangible cultural properties: pareng-pareng, tambura, tedlak, Gusos ni Sta. Putenciana, Novena para ki Sta. Putenciana, palapak, Cuyonon Ati-Atihan, the panalad, and soalao.

Data Gathering Process

The bulk of information used in this book came from cultural mapping workshops conducted in barangays Manlag, Mabini, Sibaltan, New Ibajay, Bucana, Villa Paz, San Fernando, and Teneguiban. The first cultural mapping was conducted in 2012 in Bgy. Sibaltan by Lace Thornberg, an American museologist. Thornberg used the format introduced by her mentor, Dr. Cecilia dela Paz, who was the director of the Office of the Initiatives for Culture and Arts at the University of the Philippines. Dela Paz's format gathers cultural information

about five categories, namely, people, practices, places, structures, and objects. From then on, this format was used for the rest of the barangays. In 2020, the Municipal Tourism Office added to the workshops a module on the formulation of "Destination Symbols." In 2022, another module on the filling out of the NCCA's PRECUP Forms was introduced. Information in the PRECUP covers the site's location and the cultural property's owner. It contains categories, descriptions, pictures, maps, status, and official declarations protecting the property. Related cultural objects and practices as well as related flora and fauna are also declared. The PRECUP Forms also contain excerpts of the words said or written by persons knowledgeable about a specific cultural property.

Table 1: Destination Symbols of each Barangay.

Barangay	Destination Symbol	Category	Brief Description
Sibaltan	Balay Cuyonon	Intangible & tangible	The design of the traditional Cuyonon house or *Balay Cuyonon* was the most notable cultural symbol that appeared during the 2012 cultural mapping. It depicted the Cuyonon culture in Sibaltan. The United States Embassy funded the construction of a Balay Cuyonon replica that same year and the replicated structure served as an ethnographic museum until its

			destruction in 2022. In spite of this setback, the house's design vividly remains in the minds and imaginations of some carpenters in Sibaltan.
New Ibajay	Dewil Valley	Immovable	Although Ille Cave is the most popular among the caves found in New Ibajay, the cultural mapping participants there chose as their destination symbol the caves of the Dewil Valley because of their archaeological, paleontological, geological, and cultural value.
Manlag	Manla	Movable	Manla is a type of crayfish that lives in muddy mangrove areas. It has a historical value for Bgy. Manlag which derives its name after it.
Mabini	Canovas Ruins	Immovable	These are the ruins of a sawmill and the port built by the Canovas family on April 3, 1923. It is located at Barriong Lagi (Old Bgy. Site), along the beach and

			beside the mangrove.
Teneguiban	Bell of Nuestra Seňora del Salvacion	Movable	The more-than-a-century-old bell of Nuestra Seňora del Salvacion is Teneguiban's most prized artifact.
Villa Paz	Puting Bato	Immovable	Puting Bato, which was chosen to symbolize Villa Paz for its unique features, is a cave made of quartz. Local hunters used it as a landmark while navigating the forest.
Villa Libertad	Inigtan Cave	Immovable	Inigtan Cave symbolizes the struggle of Cuyonons during World War II as it served as their hiding place at that time.
San Fernando	San Fernando Marine Protected Area	Immovable	The San Fernando Marine Protected Area, established in 2004, was the first Community-Managed Marine Area in El Nido.
Bagong Bayan	Nami (Korot)	Movable	Nami was the old name of Bagong Bayan. It is a Tagbanua word for *korot,* which is also the common term used by both the

			Cuyonons and Tagbanuas referring to a type of root crop found in the hilly and mountainous areas of El Nido.
Barotuan	Mangongoma	Intangible	Mangongoma is an Aklanon word for "farmer." The destination symbol represents the intangible skill of the farmers of Barotuan, particulary the tradition of teaching their carabaos (water buffalos) various tricks.
Bucana	8 Beaches	Immovable	Bucana has the best mainland beaches in El Nido. The participants for the cultural mapping in Bucana categorized as a destination symbol for their barangay all of its prized beaches. Aside from the popular Nacpan and Duli beaches, the list also included Patuyo, Baras na Mataged, Lalutaya, Calitang, Zone 3 Beach, and Yucuton. These beaches' cultural significance is tied to the early villagers' fishing

			traditions and food processing practices, which incorporates the use of *tanubong*, a type of root crop that grows by the beach, as an ingredient.
Maligaya	Taraw	Immovable	Taraw is the Filipino word for "limestone cliffs." This destination symbol refers particularly to the limestone cliffs near Maligaya Tree Park which are frequented by tourists.
Corong-Corong	Mt. Putok-Putukan	Immovable	Mt. Putok-Putukan is historically significant for the people of Corong-Corong. Locals make a steep short cut through this mountain when traveling to the Poblacion area.
Aberawan	Talindak	Immovable	Talindak is the oldest recorded name of El Nido. It was a Tagbanua community located in present-day Langeb-Langeban in Bgy. Aberawan. The people of Aberawan chose this as their destination symbol to emphasize the

			name's role in the history of this municipality.
Pasadeňa	Karawkaw	Movable	Karawkaw is a type of small seashell that thrives on the beach or a mudflat with pebble-like sands. This seashell may also be found in San Fernando and in some parts of El Nido but Pasadeňa has a vast area for karawkaw gathering that attracts gatherers coming from its neighboring barangays. This abundance made sitios Lamuro and Cagbatang in Pasadeňa synonymous with karawkaw.
Bebeladan	Cudugnon Cave	Immoveable	Cudugnon Cave, located on the east coast, is a burial site used by early inhabitants around 2,000 years ago. It holds both historical and natural value, as it also features a rich coral cover.
Masagana	Katumbal	Moveable	*Katumbal* is the Cuyonon word for wild chili. It is the former name of Masagana. Locals

			believe that the area once had an abundance of wild chili.
Buena Suerte	Cadlao Island	Immoveable	Cadlao is the largest island in El Nido. It serves as a weather barometer for local fishermen. *Cadlao* is a Cuyonon word meaning "laughter."

Field validations were conducted after the cultural mapping activities. The field researchers interviewed people who were knowledgeable about the identified cultural properties. This book contains excerpts from those interviews. Supplemental information was also extracted from the filled-out PRECUP forms. The respondents' accounts were validated by comparing them with the accounts of other practitioners from other barangays. The validators identified some conflicting use of terminologies and sometimes varying practices in different barangays of the intangible cultural properties listed in this volume.

Texts from books, reports, and research published by scientists, cultural researchers, and theologians were quoted to support or contextualize some statements made in this material. Archival data from both the government and the Catholic church, including official declarations and promulgations, were also consulted to confirm the correctness of historical accounts mentioned in the book. Official declarations and promulgations were used to support the historical correctness of the accounts. Artifacts such as old books also served as sources of data.

The Municipal Planning and Development Office (MPDO) of the Municipal Government of El Nido, on the other hand, also provided data from official documents such as the Comprehensive

Development Plan (CDP), Comprehensive Land and Water Use Plan (CLWUP), and the Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS).

Adoption

As a requirement of the Philippine Registry of Cultural Properties (PRECUP), each cultural property to be registered must be adopted by the Office of the Sangguniang Bayan (OSB). The Heritage Tourism Division submitted 12 PRECUP forms and the Local Cultural Inventory to the OSB. On June 14, 2023, the OSB passed Resolution No. 23-145 adopting 24 out of the 24 cultural properties submitted.

On June 16, 2025, the OSB passed Resolution No. 25-151 adopting the following cultural properties: *Cuyonon Ati-Atihan, Gusos ni Sta. Puntenciana, Idelet Cave, Karosa, Linday, Makangit, Palapak, Panalad, Swalawan, Tugda,* and *Novena para ki Sta. Puntenciana.* Of the 12 cultural properties submitted, only 11 were adopted; *Korot* was the only one not included in the latest resolution.

The 24 cultural properties featured in this book were selected because they were among those planned for submission to the OSB. In the succeeding volumes, the cultural properties will be chosen according to the theme of each book.

2nd Edition

The 2nd Edition was published primarily to standardize the book size across all volumes of the series *Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido*. Since Volume 2 was released in 15.3 cm x 23 cm, Volume 1 has been resized to match, reduced from its original 21 cm x 29.7 cm format. This uniformity ensures that all volumes can be arranged neatly on the same shelf, in preparation for the Heritage Tourism Division's plan to establish a municipal library.

Only minor updates have been added to the 2nd Edition, namely:

1. The complete list of destination symbols in all 18 barangays, following the Heritage Tourism Division's mapping completed on July 17, 2025.
2. Additional information on *lunday*.
3. The updated location of the Tagbanua community in Bagong Bayan.
4. The addition of Tagbanua Silanganen as a sub-tribe aside from Tandulanen.
5. Sangguniang Bayan resolutions adopting 23 cultural properties of El Nido.

The book's index was also included to make it easier to search for the cultural properties contained in the book.

CHAPTER 2: IMMOVABLE CULTURAL PROPERTIES

1. Ille Cave

The Ille Cave and Rock Shelter found in the Dewil Valley, which is comprised of several karsts, farmlands, and brooks, is considered the most important archaeological site in this municipality. It is located at Purok Sampaguita, Bgy. New Ibajay, El Nido, Palawan with coordinates 11°195466 longitude and 119°507597 latitude. Ille lies just 22 kilometers from the town center of El Nido and may be reached by land. A small forest covers the entrance to the cave's mouth. The PRECUP classifies Ille as a natural site and sub-classifies it as a geological formation.

The outputs of an archaeological research in the Dewil Valley proved valuable in understanding Philippine and Southeast Asian prehistory. It was a joint project among the University of the Philippines in Diliman, the University College Dublin in Ireland, and the National Museum of the Philippines. The project, which covers food gathering and burial practices, pottery, and changes in the environment, also contributed significantly to the world's understanding of early humans. Various experts and students from universities in the Philippines, Ireland, United Kingdom, United States, France, Australia, and other parts of the world visit and explore the site annually and share their significant learnings and discoveries.

The Ille Cave is also an emerging tourist destination. The Palawan Council for Sustainable Development Staff (PCSDS) assessed the site as tourist-ready and upgraded its cave classification from Class 1 to Class 2. Although the PCSDS also assessed the other Dewil Valley caves like Istar, Makangit, and Idelet, only the reclassification of Ille Cave was released. The classification system for caves is provided for in the National Cave Act of 2001, which according to the 2008 handbook on cave classification for the Philippines published by the

Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau (PAWB) of the DENR "mandated the [department] to formulate, develop and implement a national program for the management, protection, and conservation of caves and cave resources."[5]

The handbook outlines the DENR guidelines on the following cave classifications and their allowable uses:

> **Class I.** Caves with delicate and fragile geological formations, threatened species, archeological and paleontological values, and extremely hazardous conditions. Allowable use may include mapping, photography, educational, and scientific purposes.
>
> **Class II.** Caves with areas or portions which have sections that have hazardous conditions and contain sensitive geological, biological, archeological, cultural, historical, and biological values or high-quality ecosystem. It may be necessary to close sections of these caves seasonally or permanently. They are open to experienced cavers or guided educational tours/visits.
>
> **Class III.** Caves generally safe to the inexperienced visitor with no known threatened species, archeological, geological, natural history, cultural and historical values. These caves may also be utilized for economic purposes such as guano extraction and edible birds nest collection.[6]

Ille Cave's reclassification as a Class II cave pursuant to the DENR guidelines opened it for guided tours. These tours seek to promote among residents, students, and tourists the importance of the site, while keeping portions of the cave with delicate wildlife off-limits to

[5] Caves: A Handbook on Cave Classification for the Philippines. DENR-PAWB, 2008, p. 4.
[6] Ibid, p. 10.

human activities. This development provided livelihood opportunities for the residents to be trained as tour guides.

In Palawan, the primary government agency tasked to classify caves in place of the DENR is the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD). The PSCD was created by virtue of Republic Act No. 7611 or the Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP) for Palawan Act. The said law provides:

> *Palawan Council for Sustainable Development.* – The governance, implementation, and policy direction of the Strategic Environmental Plan shall be exercised by the herein created Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD), hereinafter referred to as the Council, which shall be under the Office of the President.[7]

Ille Cave was virtually unknown before Dr. Robert Fox visited the site in 1965, the same year he discovered the Yawning Jar inside the Leta-Leta Cave at Lagen Island. In the late 1960s, "the cave was recorded as an ancient site by the National Museum of the Philippines."[8] The cave subsequently caught the attention of Dr. Wilhelm Solheim II, who in 1998 described it as "a beautiful, huge

[7] Republic Act No. 7611, Chapter V, Section 16.

[8] Helen Lewis, Victor Paz, Jonathan Kress, Myra G. Lara, Jack G. L. Medrana, A. Jane Carlos, Phil Piper, Vito Hernandez, Huw Barton, Emil Robles, Timothy J. Vitales, Andrea Ragragio, Wilhelm Solheim II, Wilfredo Ronquillo: "Early Occupation at Ille Cave, New Ibajay, El Nido, Palawan, Philippines: report on the 2005 excavation season," p. 5.



Figure 1: Stone adze found in Ille Cave.

rock shelter which appeared to me to be but the potential Pleistocene archaeological site I have ever seen either pictured or in person."[9] In that same year, archaeologists from the National Museum conducted annual excavations at the Ille Cave. A team led by archaeologists and field researchers from the University of the Philippines and composed of various professors and students from universities in Europe, Australia, North America, and other Asian countries has been spearheading this project since 2004. The project, dubbed as the Palawan Island Paleo-History Project, is co-directed by Dr. Victor Paz, founding and long-time director of the Archaeological Studies Program (now the School of Archaeology) of the University of the Philippines in Diliman, and Dr. Helen Lewis of the University College Dublin's School of Archaeology in Ireland.

[9] Dr. Wilhelm G. Solheim II, as quoted by Dr. Alfred Pawlik from SEAICE 1999:90; "Analysis of Two Polished Stone Adzes from Ille Cave at El Nido, Palawan Island, Philippines," Hukay, Vol. 10:38, pp. 38-39.

Through the years, the project's operations expanded to the karsts of Istar, Sinalakan, and Makangit. The project may also include the Idelet Cave in the future. In 2013, a *daga* (a wand used by babaylans) and other notable artifacts were accidentally discovered in a large spoil heap from a looter's pit inside the cave. The project went on a two-year hiatus from 2020-2022 because of the COVID-19 pandemic but annual archeological excavations still led by the team of Dr. Paz and Dr. Lewis resumed in 2023.

The traces of human habitation from the late Pleistocene period unearthed from the Ille Cave include stone tools such as adzes and a dolomite hand axe.[10] The stone tools offer proof of human existence and activity during this period. Although the actual dating of "the charcoal samples (2004) from the oldest deposits revealed dates ranging between 9400–11,300 cal. BP (Lewis at. al. 2005),"[11] it is estimated that the site was already inhabited by humans at least 12,000 to 14,000 years ago.

[10] Elise Patole-Edoumba, Alfred F. Pawlik, Armand S. Mijares: "Evolution of Pre-Historic Lithic Industries of the Philippines during the Pleistocene," Comptes Rendus Palevol, Vol. II, Issues 2-3, pp. 213-230.

[11] Helen A. Lewis, Victor Paz, Michael I. Bird, Ella M. Boobyer, Charlotte Bryant & W. Edryd Stephens: "A long record of environmental change from bat guano deposits in Makangit Cave, Palawan, Philippines;" Earth and Environmental Science Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2007, p. 28.



Figure 2: Replica of the Metatarsal bones of Pantera Tigris (L.) displayed at Dewil Valley Museum in New Ibajay, El Nido, Palawan.

Remains of the tiger species *Panthera tigris* or the modern-day Asian tiger were excavated inside the Ille Cave. "The discovery of [the] tiger was made during the analysis of thousands of small and large mammals and reptile bones recovered from archaeological excavation at Ille Cave."[12] This discovery likewise supported the theory that Palawan and Borneo were connected by a land bridge during the ice ages. Other extinct local animals which were hunted by early inhabitants included different species of deer.

Cremation sites have also been found in the Dewil Valley, particularly at the Ille and Pasimbahan Magsanib Caves. The practice of cremation discovered in the caves of the Dewil Valley is currently the oldest known in Southeast Asia. Evidence suggests that such was a practice of secondary burial, where after the primary burial, the remains of the dead person were exhumed and de-fleshed. Dr. Paz and Dr. Lewis' team on their 2005 excavation reported that "preliminary observations reveal that at least six long bones and one clavicle show cut marks, indicating definite de-fleshing or

[12] Philip J. Piper, Janine Ochoa, Helen Anne Lewis, Victor Paz, Wilfredo P. Ronquillo: "The first evidence for the past presence of tiger Pantera Tigris (L.) on the island of Palawan, Philippines: Extinction in a island population," pp. 123.

butchery."[13] The remains were then burned, ground, and put in a biodegradable receptacle. Furthermore, the 2005 excavation team found "no traces of any material suggestive of a receptacle was found, but the pile was cylindrical in shape, and fragments of long bones were arranged horizontally along the sides, both suggesting that the cremation was originally placed within some sort of case."[14]

Aside from the reasons already mentioned, the Ille Cave is also considered significant for the vast number of Permian fossils found on its walls. A team of geologists from Nido Petroleum recorded the existence of these fossils in 2014. Nido Petroleum is an oil and gas exploration and production company which sponsors the archaeological excavations in the Dewil Valley and constructed the Dewil Valley Museum in 2014;'. The Permian is a geological period from 252 to 299 million years ago. A significant number of Permian fossil evidence also exists in the Diribungan Cave, where the geologists have discovered an astonishing cave section filled with such fossils.

These discoveries contributed additional knowledge to Philippine paleontological studies. The first mention of the Permian period in Philippine paleontological discussions happened 58 years ago. Wolfgang Kiessling and Erik Flügel wrote in their 2000 manuscript on limestone formations in El Nido that "Permian fossils have first been described from the Philippines only some 35 years ago (ANDAL 1966). Fusulinids and algae were reported from Permian limestone pebbles in a Jurassic conglomerate on Mindoro (Endo 1968, Kome et al. 1968, Hanzawa & Hashimoto 1970)."[15] They added, "Permian

[13] Helen Lewis, Victor Paz, Jonathan Kress, Myra G. Lara, Jack G. L. Medrana, A. Jane Carlos, Phil Piper, Vito Hernandez, Huw Barton, Emil Robles, Timothy J. Vitales, Andrea Ragragio, Wilhelm Solheim II, Wilfredo Ronquillo: "Early Occupation at Ille Cave, New Ibajay, El Nido, Palawan, Philippines: report on the 2005 excavation season," p. 21.
[14] Ibid, p. 20.
[15] Wofgang Kiessling and Erik Flügel, "Late Paleozoic and Late Triassic Limestones from North Palawan Block (Philippines): Microfacies and Paleogeographical Implications," Erlangen, 2000, p. 64.

foraminifera are also known from Carabao Island north of Panay (FONTA1NE et al. 1983) and a small group of islands northeast of Busuanga (Fontaine et al. in Fontaine 1986). However, the outcrops in Bacuit Bay form by far the largest continuous exposure of Permian limestones in the Philippines."[16]

The Japanese paleontology community also benefitted from the said discovery. An intact type of Shikamaia was one of the fossils found inside the Ille Cave. Shikamaia is a type of bivalve that thrived in the Permian Period. It was named after the renowned Japanese paleontologist Shikama Tokio.

The Ille Cave is placed under blue alert status. Its threat level indicates that a possible degradation is imminent. Proactive action is expected of the government agencies primarily tasked to preserve site. In response, the Municipal Tourism Office's Heritage Tourism Division and the Palawan Island Paleohistory Research Project are working together in assisting policymakers in the barangay and municipal level enact local pieces of legislation to protect Ille. Along with the National Commission for Culture and the Arts' (NCCA) declaration of Ille Cave as a National Cultural Treasure on February 2, 2022, the enactment of local ordinances may facilitate the effective mobilization of law enforcers and prompt litigation of violators. Local government action such as the imposition of stricter building regulations, entry requirements, and a code of conduct for visitors will ensure the protection of the: a.) visual corridors, b.) wildlife, and c.) geological formations in the area. Such efforts may also guide the government and potential investors to temper their aggressive development of vulnerable and cultural sites in El Nido.

The importance of the Ille Cave goes beyond its significance in the fields of archaeology, paleontology, and geology. The continuous

[16] Ibid.

development and human activities at the site also contribute to the community's educational and economic landscape. There are currently five active local tour guides under the Dewil Valley Eco-Adventure Association (DEVEAA) whose livelihoods depend on the little income derived from eco-tourism activities within the vicinity of Ille.

A concrete outcome of the preservation and promotion efforts in Ille is the construction of the Dewil Valley Museum in 2014. It was built inside a land property of the Municipality of El Nido and situated just 40 meters east of the entrance to the cave. The museum is open to both tourists and residents and contains replicas of tiger bones, various jars found in the Dewil Valley, and a wooden coffin from Imorigue Island, one of the two islands in New Ibajay, located south of its east coastline. The Dewil Valley Museum likewise showcases a replica of the Shikamaia fossil.

2. Makangit Cave

Makangit is the karst closest to the Ille Cave, located just 1.2 kilometers west of Ille Cave with coordinates 11.1988890° latitude and 119.4988586° longitude. Inside Makangit are several tourist attractions like the Mini-Underground River, Eskinita Cave, and the Bat Cave. The Mini-Underground River, while measuring only 30 meters long, offers a picturesque scenery perfect for travelers who want to explore new and underrated tourist spots in El Nido. At the end of the river lies a natural environment with free-flowing water where visitors are treated to a relaxing "fish spa" experience. The Eskinita Cave is a tunnel with walls seemingly arranged in a perfect line. The locals call it *eskinita* because of its resemblance to a narrow street or passage.

The Bat Cave and the rest of Makangit's features have been the subject of a collaboration research between the team of

archaeologists led by Dr. Helen Lewis and Dr. Victor Paz and climate and dating scientist Michael Bird. Their research, titled "A long record of environmental change from bat guano deposits in Makangit Cave, Palawan, Philippines," describes the caves of Makangit as "an isolated graphitic marble karst massif about 500 m. in diameter. The local vegetation consists of carbonate-adapted forest species on karst areas, with the intervening alluvial plains of the Dewil River covered with a mix of open paddy fields, lowland semi-deciduous forest and bamboo thicket."[17]

The study of bat guano deposits enabled scientists to determine changes in the environment of the Dewil Valley and compare it with other Southeast Asian sites. The research concluded that "the preservation of stratigraphic features and coherent trends in the elemental, isotopic and mineralogical composition in the guano sequence at Makangit Cave suggests that the material is suitable for use in the generation of proxy records of palaeo-environmental change."[18]

Tourists already visit Makangit albeit infrequently. The same tour guides of DEVEAA accompany them at the site. Unfortunately, the Municipal Tourism Office has yet to track the Visitor Attraction Record (VAR) of Makingit on its online database called *TourLista*.[19]

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[17] Michael I. Bird, Ella M. Boobyer, Charlotte Bryant, Helen A. Lewis, Victor Paz & W. Edryd Stephens "A long record of environmental change from bat guano deposits in Makangit Cave, Palawan, Philippines," Edinburgh, 2007, p. 62.

[18] Ibid, p. 67.

[19] TourLista refers to **Tour**ism **L**ive-**I**nventory and **S**tatistics of **T**ourist **A**rrivals. It is a system embedded in the website of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) – Regoin 4B (MIMAROPA) that gathers, analyzes, and visualizes tourism data from the different destinations in the region. Tourism offices, accommodation establishments, and the destination's management bodies input data on the website

3. Idelet Cave

Idelet Cave is one of the karsts located in the Dewil Valley. Unlike Ille Cave and Pasimbahan Magsanib Cave at Sitio Istar, it is not part of the annual regular excavation. The Cuyonons call the place *Idelet*; the Aklanons, *Idulot*. Archaeologists working for the Palawan Island Paleo-History Project described the site in their 2011 report: "The site has a nice platform and cave system. The treasure hunters dug up a circular pit of about 3 meters in diameter and about 3.5 meters deep. The stratigraphic profile of the pit was recorded and reveals natural cave deposits of inter-lain gravels and clays. Numerous shells, animal remains, and pottery are found scattered throughout the platform suggesting that the site has been used as habitation site. Inside the cave are clusters of human remains and pottery sherds suggesting the use of the cave as a depository for secondary jar burials."[20]

In 2013, while filling in the pit made by treasure hunters, archaeologists discovered a broken *daga* from the Idelet Cave. Daga is a type of wand used by the Babaylans. Dr. Victor Paz estimated that the daga was already 80 years old at the time of discovery. The *daga* at Idelet Cave is proof that *babaylans* once performed rituals at the site. "Baybaylan" is the Filipino version of shaman. "The babaylan held vital tasks in barangay or the local community, such as in the field of religion, astronomy, medicine, and agriculture."[21]

https://www.tourlista.dost.mimaropa.ph. This is a partnership between DOT and DOST.

[20] Victor Paz, Wilfredo Ronquillo, Helen Lewis, Emil Robles, Vito Hernandez, Jane Carlos, Andrea Malaya Ragragio, Myra Lara, Noel Amano, Shawn O'Donnell, Caterine Manalo, Michael Herera, Janine Ochoa, Darko Stojanovski, Wilhelm Solheim II: "Palawan Island Paleohistoric Research Project Report on the 2011 El Nido Field Season;" University of the Philippines, p. 45.

[21] Tracy Mae Ildefonso: From Asog to Bakla: "Genealogical Analysis of the Philippine History to Diagnose the Roots of Homophobia," Humanities Bulletin, Volume 5, Number 2, 2022, p. 214.

Both the Tagbanuas and Aklanons had babaylans who performed the important rituals for healing the sick and appeasing the spirits of nature. The Cuyonons did not have *babaylans* to perform such rituals in their healing traditions. Instead, they only practiced *tapa* and *pamasma* while attending to the sick. Although Cuyonon healers recited prayers or chants, they did not transcend to the spirit world to heal the sick. On the other hand, the *babaylans* "communicate with spirits as a ritual for various reasons such as fertility of crops, victory in battles, recovery from illness, or blessings for newlyweds."[22]

4. Canovas Site

The Canovas Site features the remains of the sawmill and port built by the family of Ramon Canovas at Barriong Lagi in Bgy. Mabini southwest of El Nido, on April 3, 1923. It is officially listed as the "Ruins of the Canovas' Sawmill" and is categorized as a "Structure" and classified as historically significant. The site is bounded by Barriong Lagi Beach to the northeast, the mangrove cover to the southeast, an agricultural area to the southwest, and a barangay access road to the northwest. Its exact GPS location is 11°07'21" N 119°30'14" E. Considered as a public area with no declared claimants, the residents of Mabini and New

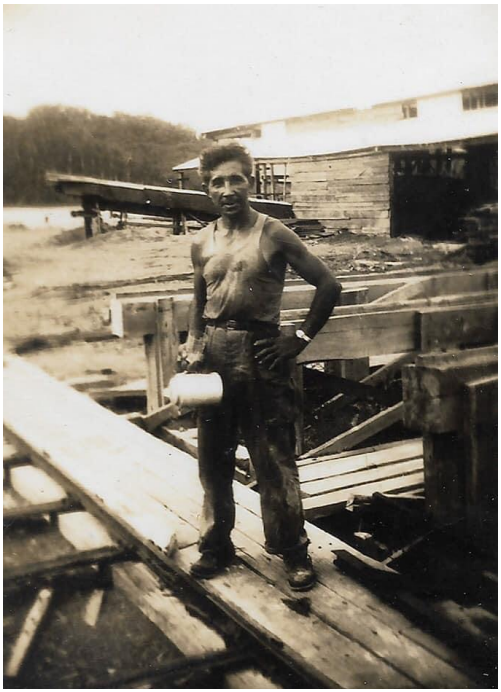


Figure 3: Another sawmill constructed by the Vazquez family in New Guinlo, Taytay, Palawan. Photo: courtesy of Monroe Casado.

[22] Ibid, pp. 214-215.

Ibajay utilize the ruins as a picnic area. The public may freely enter the area. The barangay road leading to it can be accessed by motorbikes and cars.

The Canovas family was one of the first Spanish families who settled in El Nido. The Vazquez and Fernandez families settled in the town of Bacuit while the Canovas operated a logging business in Mabini. *Barriong Lagi* was the old barangay site. Barriong Lagi was a Cuyonon term for "Old Barrio." Oton was the old name of the barangay since most of the workers employed by the Canovas family came from Oton, Iloilo.

The ruins include the pillars of the port and a concrete drinking pond for cattles. The water for the drinking pond and for the entire structure came from Sitio Tubo. The remains of a pipe at Sitio Tubo that used to connect the sawmill to the water source there still exist. Barges carrying lumber to Manila used to dock at the said port. There was also a wooden house in the mangrove area. The original house or even its remnants are no longer there. Its existence, however, may be proved by the mere existence of the descendants of the Canovas family.

The Municipal Tourism Office previously believed that the ruins could be the oldest sawmill in Palawan. However, they discovered that a similar, or even bigger, sawmill was also constructed inside the Malampaya Sound in New Guinlo, Taytay, Palawan. The sawmill was owned by the Vazquez family, another Spanish family who are also related of the Canovases. With this information, the location of the oldest sawmill in the province cannot be determined yet.

The Canovas family eventually left Mabini and gave their belongings to the Rey family, their relatives who opted to stay in the barangay. The kitchen utensils, a baul, and a jar remain intact. The family also

donated to the local church a statue of St. Vincent Ferrer, the patron saint of Mabini. It is kept by the faithful there.



Figure 4: Ruins of the Canovas Sawmill in Mabini.

Up to this day, the devotees of St. Vincent Ferrer from other barangays in El Nido and Taytay frequent the Mabini Chapel during the celebration of his feast day every April 5. There are accounts of miraculous healings among devotees. They call the tradition of placing the feet of the patron saint's statue on the head of devotees as "palapak." *Palapak,* categorized as intangible, is another cultural property discussed in the succeeding chapters of this book.

Ramon Canovas' son Antonio continued the family's logging business in San Miguel, Bulacan while most of his other descendants now reside in the United States. On March 3, 2020, the Barangay Council of Mabini, headed by Hon. Ruel G. Igam, passed Bgy. Resolution No. 17 series of 2020 declaring the Canovas Ruins, Barriong Lagi Beach, and Pinagkulitan Cave as Barangay Tourism Sites. Mabini was the first to barangay to designate Barangay Tourism Sites or 'BTS." The

declaration intended to protect the sites from private developers and regulate visitor activities there. This declaration also served as the initial step in transferring ownership and control of the said sites to the Barangay Local Government Unit (BLGU). The government owns these sites owing to their classification either as a marine zone or timberland. As owner, the national government can directly manage the areas through the DENR. This transfer of ownership allowed the BLGU to proactively address threats to the preservation of the areas because business permit applications must first get the barangay's endorsement before getting the green light from the Mayor's office. The Canovas family, through their representative Dr. Lemuel Del Rosario, thanked the Barangay Council of Mabini for its actions. The PRECUP categorizes the Canovas Ruins as "unmoved" in terms of its integrity, "not occupied" in terms of occupancy, and as "ruins" in terms of its condition. The site is presently under the care of the BLGU which maintains it by conducting regular cleanups and clearing of weeds. The site was also put on blue alert to facilitate further preservation efforts.

On April 3, 2023, the barangay council solemnly celebrated the centennial of the structure's construction. Ms. Marilou Sabroso, the remaining member of the Rey family who stayed in Mabini, narrated the Canovas family's story as told to her by her parents, from the start of their logging business in Dumaran to their eventual migration to El Nido. She also mentioned that in her possession are the items left by the Canovas family to the Rey family.

5. Mendoza's Handwriting on the Wall

Dr. Higinio A. Mendoza, Sr., Palawan's foremost World War II hero and governor of the province in the 1930s, wrote on the still-wet concrete wall of a newly constructed port in Cabigsing, El Nido,



Figure 5: Mendoza's Handwriting on the wall beside the entrance of El Nido Port.

Palawan. This happened in 1934 during the administration of El Nido's Municipal President (*now called Municipal Mayor*) Rosalio Castro. The wall is located near the Philippine Coast Guard Station and just beside the entrance arc of the present-day pier of the Philippine Ports

Authority at Calle Real, Bgy. Buena Suerte. Its GPS coordinates are 11°10'48" N 119°23'12" E.

The old wall may be completely destroyed by rapid development in the port area, negligence in preserving this historical feature, and lack of public knowledge about its existence. Only a section of the said wall remains visible as the other parts were replaced by new ones because of continuing port development by the Philippine Port Authority. Only a few residents of El Nido remember that Mendoza's handwritten remarks on the said wall exist.

What remains readable out of the late former governor's remarks are as follows:

"Remembrance from the pas (letter deleted),

Best wishes for the p (letters deleted),

A bright hope for the future."

The ineligible and incomplete word "pas" from the first line could mean "past" while the remaining letter "p" of the incomplete word from the second line could mean "present" because the last word from the third line is "future." This is the logical assumption if Mendoza was using a classic way of relaying his message through the progression of the three basic verb tenses. Andrei Acosta, a resident of El Nido and relative of Dr. Mendoza who is knowledgeable on the site's history, however, believes that the incomplete word "pas" could have meant "pass." He argues that the late former governor could have been playing with words, and that "pass" could have meant both the word "past" and his brief stopover in El Nido that time.

Dr. Mendoza's short biography was mentioned in Stephen L. Moore's 2016 book titled "As Good as Dead: The Daring Escape of American POWs from a Japanese Death Camp." Moore wrote, "Dr. Higinio Acosta Mendoza was one of the earliest leaders of the island's guerilla network. Born in Puerto Princesa in 1898, Mendoza traveled to the United States during the 1920s for his schooling and attended the University of Iowa. He returned to the Philippines with the degree of Doctor of Medicine and ran a successful practice until 1931, when he was persuaded to run for Governor of Palawan. After he was reelected in 1934, his governorship was marked by civic improvement projects such as extending roads, installing a water system in Puerto Princesa, planting trees along the road, and establishing a botanical garden."[23]

[23] Stephen L. Moore; "As Good as Dead: The Daring Escape of American POWs from a Japanese Death Camp," 2016, New York, p. 62.

The PRECUP categorized the property as a "structure," sub-categorized as "others," and specified as a "wall." It is owned by the government since it was constructed by the government at the Road Right of Way (RROW) and is accessible to the public. Its status is "altered" in terms of integrity since new walls were constructed next to it. In terms of its condition, Mendoza's handwritings on the wall are categorized as "deteriorated" since some words are missing, and Castro's reply was no longer there.

There are currently no concrete measures to preserve the wall. It is placed under "Red Alert" in the PRECUP. It means that there is a direct and severe threat to the cultural property and immediate action is needed to prevent its complete destruction.

1. Dalan sa Langit

This prayerbook written in the Cuyonon language probably circulated all over Palawan during the latter part of the Spanish and American colonizations, or sometime between the 1890s and 1940s. The prayerbook's title, "Dalan sa Langit," means "Pathway to Heaven." It contains 542 pages and has a dimension of 7 cm. x 11 cm.

Some copies of Dalan sa Langit survived up to this day. There is a verified existence of a copy owned by Feliciana Lagrada in Bgy. Teneguiban, El Nido. Another copy, owned by Anghelita Basca in Bgy. Mabini, was given to her by a priest in exchange for a chicken in 1950. Another one owned by the late Teoducia Alcantara still exists in Bgy. Sibaltan.

The first page of the book is about fasting. It says:

> Ayuno
>
> na makakaen y maite kung temprano ig hasta sa gabi, sa pakpapamao ig pagyapon; sa odto nga adlao parejora sa iba nga adlao.
>
> (Fasting)
>
> (Be able to eat a small amount in the morning until evening, during breakfast and dinner; at noon, same during the other days).

On pages 70-72 of the book, the meaning of the title "Dalan sa Langit" is explained in the following 3 parts:

> Ang Dalan sa Langit
>
> *(Selengen ang Parangadien sa Pag. 66)*
>
> Ang dalan sa langit, darua lamang; ang dalan sa inocencia mi ang dalan sa penitencia. Ano akeng ing buhat et ang akeng inocencia? Pobreng inocencia, nadura sa madali; napierde sa mataged na horas, napierde sa ara katapusan, giapon.
>
> Nagbuhat ako penitencia para sa akeng mga sala? Ingconfesar ko tedek sa akeng tagiposon? Maski maiteng penitencia nga ingtao kanaken, ing kakabig ko nga mabuegat para kanaken ig indi ko madara. Ako ara enged et penitencia o makabuhata ko sa akeng sadiling kaliagan. En vez nga magsimba, magcolacion, magpangadi o maghinelsel akeng mga sala nagpadaeg ako sa kalipayan mi sa mga vicio. Ig dadi maliag ako magdangat sa langit. Sa among dalan? Akeng osoyon, pili lamang sa darua; kung beken dalan sa Inocencia, ang dalan sa penitencia. Indi mahimo ang dalan sa Inocencia; tulada, indi ako ra maliag magosoy ang dalan sa penitencia. Mauro dadi ang pagbawi akeng kalag?
>
> Kamenesteran tingoaen ko sa pag-oman akeng pangabuhi; kung ako ara kabuhat et penitencia, magbuhat ako ra dadi. Dapat magosoy ako ron dadi ang dalan sa langit mientras mi tiempo pa. Sino ang nakelam kung mauro labueg akeng kabuhi nga asasala? Magkaisan, maite ren lamang ig sa dan nga maiteng tiempo nga pagkabuhi mi pagpenitencia, madadangat ko ang langit. Ayamo indi ko y buhatenden nga lagui dadi?

The first part explains that the way to heaven concerns two things only: innocence and penance. It invites the reader to self-examine

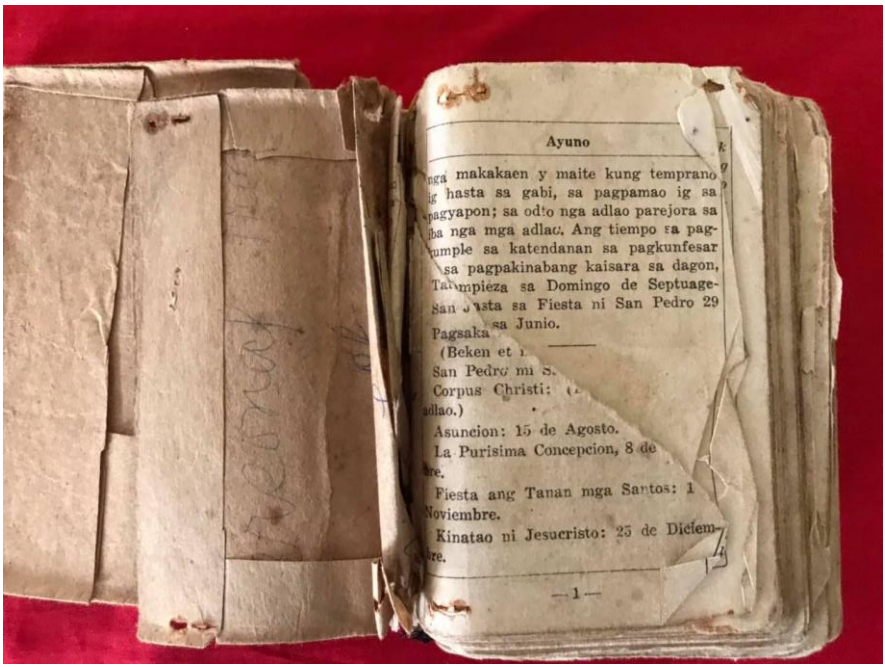
on the loss of his innocence due to easy ways and fleeting time. Meanwhile, the second part invites one to wholeheartedly confess his sins and carry out a given penance. It also talks about virtues and vices and the destination of the soul. Finally, the third part implores the faithful for a self-examination of their actions here on earth. It challenges the reader to start doing good things while he still can because time is fleeting and is uncertain how much time is left for a person to do penance for his sins and eventually pave the way for his acceptance to heaven after his death.

Most Cuyonon Catholics no longer practice the spirituality taught in this old prayerbook. Although innocence is still valued, fasting and penance are no longer popular among the faithful. The fasting instructions in the prayer book reflect the difference between religious practices during the Spanish and American colonization, and the Cuyonon spiritual life today. They also reflect the shift in fasting regulations after the Second Vatican Council. The old instructions are reflected in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which states that "the law of abstinence together with fast must be observed every Ash [Wednesday], every [Friday and Saturday] of Lent, each of the [Ember] Days, and the vigils of the Pentecost, the Assumption of the God-bearer into heaven, All the Saints, and the Nativity of the Lord. The law of fast only is to be observed on all the other days of Lent."[24]

The Church now requires only two days of fasting every year: during Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Only devout Cuyonon Catholics follow this religious obligation. The new Code of Canon Law states that "abstinence from meat, or from some other food as determined by the Episcopal Conference, is to be observed on all Fridays, unless

[24] The 1917 or Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law, Ignatius Press San Francisco, Title 14, Canon 1252, § 2-3.

a solemnity should fall on a Friday. Abstinence and fasting are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday."[25]


Ayuno

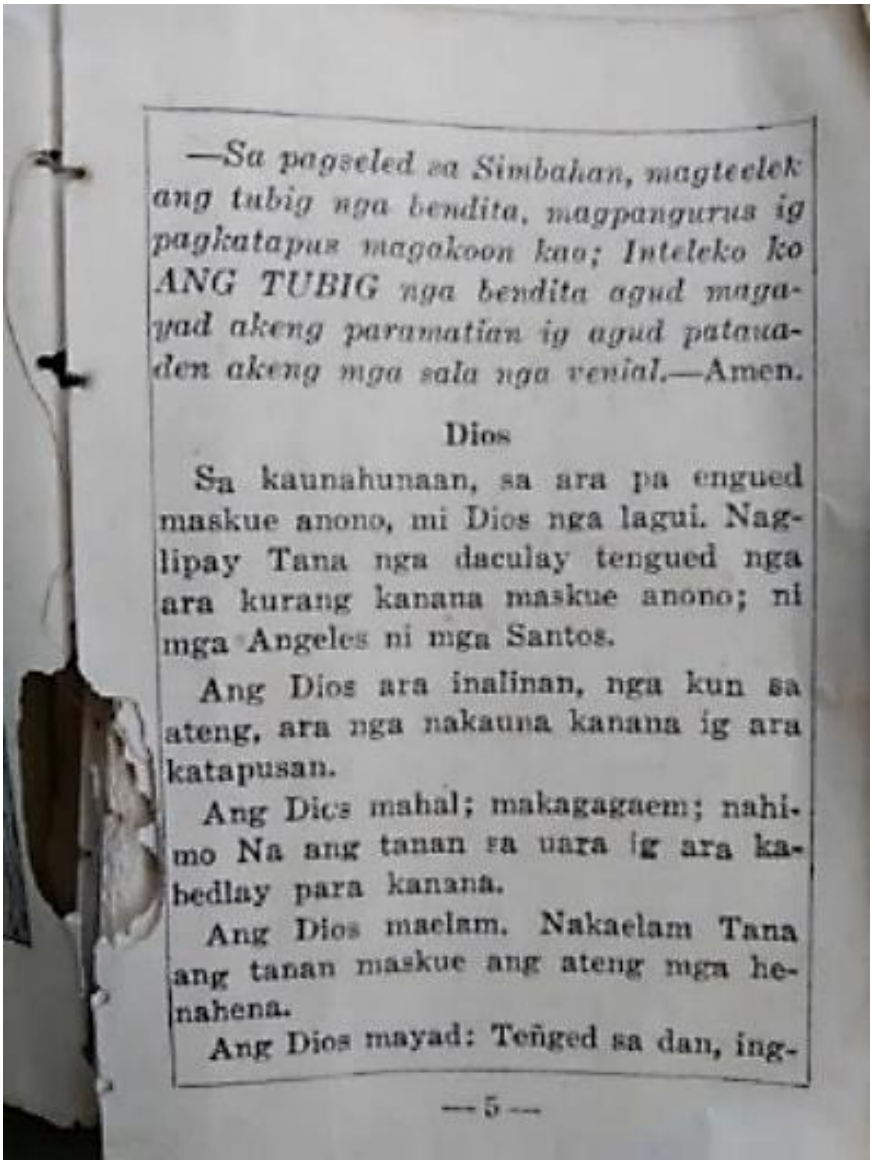
nga makakaen y maite kung temprano
ig hasta sa gabi, sa pagpamao ig sa
pagyapon; sa odto nga adlao parejora sa
iha nga mga adlao. Ang tiempo sa pag-
umple sa katendanan sa pagkunfesar
sa pagpakinabang kaisara sa dagon,
Tampieza sa Domingo de Septuage-
San sta sa Fiesta ni San Pedro 29
Pagsaka sa Junio.
(Beken et
San Pedro mi S.
Corpus Christi:
adlao.)
Asuncion: 15 de Agosto.
La Purisima Concepcion, 8 de
re.
Fiesta ang Tanan nga Santos: 1
Noviembre.
Kinatao ni Jesucristo: 25 de Diciem-
re.

—1—

Figure 6: First page of "Dalan sa langit."

The last time the tradition of penitents was practiced in Sibaltan was in the early 1980s, 15 years before it became a parish. It was in the form of *palapak*. In this tradition, the penitents wrap themselves in clothing such that nobody recognizes them and then lie in front of the Church during the Holy Week. The penitents believed that when churchgoers step on them, their sins would be reduced. Some even believed that their sins were transferred to whomever stepped on the penitent.

[25] Code of Canon Law, Can. 1251.



—*Sa pagseled sa Simbahan, magteelek ang tubig nga bendita, magpangurus ig pagkatapus magakoon kao; Inteleko ko ANG TUBIG nga bendita agud magayad akeng paramatian ig agud patauaden akeng mga sala nga venial.*—Amen.

Dios

Sa kaunahunaan, sa ara pa engued maskue anono, mi Dios nga lagui. Naglipay Tana nga daculay tengued nga ara kurang kanana maskue anono; ni mga Angeles ni mga Santos.

Ang Dios ara inalinan, nga kun sa ateng, ara nga nakauna kanana ig ara katapusan.

Ang Dios mahal; makagagaem; nahimo Na ang tanan sa uara ig ara kabedlay para kanana.

Ang Dios maelam. Nakaelam Tana ang tanan maskue ang ateng mga henahena.

Ang Dios mayad: Teñged sa dan, ing-

— 5 —

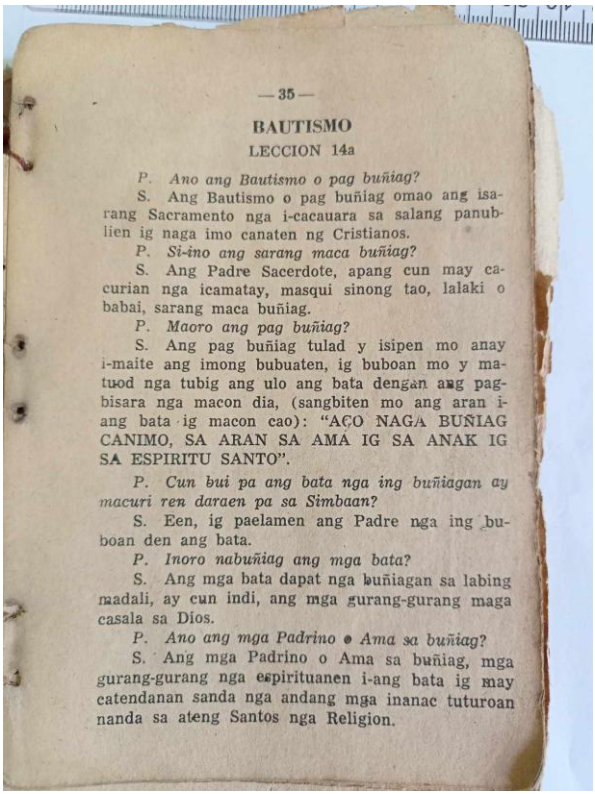
Figure 7: Instructions and prayer upon entering a church. Photographed by Kristel Abian.

There was a move to preserve the contents of the prayerbook in the Municipality of Cuyo by re-printing it. Printed copies are already circulated all over Palawan. The printing was aimed at popularizing the Cuyonon way of worship. Meanwhile, in El Nido, the search continues for the old, original copies of the book which will be added in the inventory of cultural properties. Aside from the content, the

old prayer books must be preserved as the tangible traces of history, displayed in museums, or featured in heritage tours.

2. Katekismo

Katesismo is a basic faith guide for Cuyonon Catholics. Aside from being a source of information about the Catholic faith, however, it is also used as a prayer guide by the faithful in Sibaltan and Mabini.



—35—

BAUTISMO

LECCION 14a

P. Ano ang Bautismo o pag buñiag?

S. Ang Bautismo o pag buñiag omao ang isarang Sacramento nga i-cacauara sa salang panublien ig naga imo canaten ng Cristianos.

P. Si-ino ang sarang maca buñiag?

S. Ang Padre Sacerdote, apang cun may cacurian nga icamatay, masqui sinong tao, lalaki o babai, sarang maca buñiag.

P. Maoro ang pag buñiag?

S. Ang pag buñiag tulad y isipen mo anay i-maite ang imong bubuaten, ig buboan mo y matuod nga tubig ang ulo ang bata dengan ang pagbisara nga macon dia, (sangbiten mo ang aran i-ang bata ig macon cao): "AÇO NAGA BUÑIAG CANIMO, SA ARAN SA AMA IG SA ANAK IG SA ESPIRITU SANTO".

P. Cun bui pa ang bata nga ing buñiagan ay macuri ren daraen pa sa Simbaan?

S. Een, ig paelamen ang Padre nga ing buboan den ang bata.

P. Inoro nabuñiag ang mga bata?

S. Ang mga bata dapat nga buñiagan sa labing madali, ay cun indi, ang mga gurang-gurang maga casala sa Dios.

P. Ano ang mga Padrino o Ama sa buñiag?

S. Ang mga Padrino o Ama sa buñiag, mga gurang-gurang nga espirituanen i-ang bata ig may catendanan sanda nga andang mga inanac tuturoan nanda sa ateng Santos nga Religion.

Figure 8: Old "Katesismo" book owned by Marilou Sabroso; photographed by Justin Mark Condesa.

There is a confirmed existence in Bgy. Sibaltan of a copy owned by Crescencia M. Gacot. Its previous owner was identified as Maria Macawili Melchor. The book's size is estimated at 3 in. x 5 in. and at least 70% of the copy is in good condition. Sibaltan's residents estimate that it was published during the American colonial period, or between 1899 to 1941. Another confirmed existence of the book is in Bgy. Mabini, under the care of Mrs. Marilou Sabroso. Her copy measured 4 in. x 6 in. Unfortunately, 40% of the pages are already missing.

The old book, like the other books on catechism, contains basic Catholic teachings such as the 7 sacraments. Baptism is discussed in page 35 and follows a question-and-answer format.

In the example below, the letter "P" represents the Cuyonon word *pakiman,* meaning "question," and the letter "S" represents the Cuyonon word *sabat* which means "answer:"

> P. Ano ang Bautismo o pag buňiag? (*What is Baptism or pag buňiag in Cuyonon?*)
>
> S. Ang Bautismo o pag buňiag omao and isarang Sacramento nga i-cacauara sa salang panublien ig naga imo canaten ng Cristianos. *(Baptism or pag buňiag in Cuyonon is a Sacrament that removes our original sin and makes us Christians.)*
>
> P. Si-ino ang may sarang maka buňiag? *(Who can administer Baptism?)*
>
> S. Ang Padre Sacerdote, apang cun nga may cacurian nga icamatay, masqui sinong tao, lalaki o babai, sarang maca buňiag. *(The Father priest[26], and if not available in time of death, anyone, male or female, can baptize.)*
>
> P. Mauro ang pa buňiag? *(How to baptize?)*
>
> S. Ang pag buňiag tulad y isipen mo anay i-maite ang imong bubuaten, ig buboan mo y matuod nga tubig ang ulo ang bata dengan ang pag bisara nga macon dia (sangbiten mo ang ara i-ang bata ig macon cao): ACO NAGA BUŇIAG CANIMO, SA ARAN SA AMA IG SA ANAK IG SA ESPIRITU SANTU." (*Baptizing is like this: think a little of what to do, and pour real water on the head of the child while saying these words (say the name*

[26] The context of the use of "Padre Sacerdote" in this book is still unknown. Both words would mean "priest," however, padre could also mean "father." It is also unknown if these two terms were commonly used together that time or only during the publication of this book.

of the child and say this): I BAPTIZE YOU IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.")

The question-and-answer type of teaching continues extends to the lesson on prayers. Here is an excerpt from page 67, wherein every phrase from the Lord's prayer is explained:

> P. Ano ang icapito? (What is the seventh?)
>
> S. Ang icapito omao dia: "Bauien mo cami sa mga caraetan." (The seventh is this: "Deliver us from evil).
>
> P. Ano ateng ing papaquitao sa mga bisara nga dia? (What do we ask with these words?)
>
> S. Nga ilibre kita sa Diyos sa tanan nga mga caraetan sa calag ig sa lauas. (That the Lord deliver us from all spiritual and physical evil).

That the style of teaching in the Katekismo applies the question-and-answer approach leads us to think that it is perhaps one of the most effective methods at that time. Furthermore, the use of the old way of writing in Cuyonon in both the books of "Katesismo" and "Dalan sa Langit" indicates that they were published in the same era.

Present-day catechists no longer use this version since the Catholic Church uses a new and updated one. The two differ in the method of the delivering the message. However, they have similar contents when it comes to the sacraments and basic prayers. While using the new manual conforms with the present needs of the Church, the old version must be preserved so that both the Church and the government can look at the context of religious culture and local Church history in El Nido.

3. Gold Earring



Figure 9: Gold earring in Sibaltan.

A gold earring was found by local looters in Sibaltan in the 1980s. This is just one, along with hundreds, of the artifacts from the Ming Dynasty era which were unearthed by looters in the 70s and 80s. Only a few of these artifacts remain in Sibaltan since most were looted by persons who introduced themselves as personnel of the National Museum and sold to antique collectors outside El Nido.

In 2010, archaeologists and archaeology students coming from the Philippines, other Southeast Asia countries, and the United States participated in the field school led by the University of the Philippines and University College Dublin. The team excavated the Sibaltan Elementary School and the Acosta site beside the cemetery. "The primary purpose for investigating the Sibaltan sites was to look for evidence of occupation that can be linked to the burial sites in the

Dewil Valley."[27] Their "finds included many Indo-Pacific beads, shell beads, carnelian stone beads, earthenware pottery, a few trade-ware ceramics and further down, postholes."[28] These discoveries presume the existence of a trading community that dates to 500 AD.

The gold earring's shape is like the pre-Hispanic gold earrings believed to be made in the 10th to 15th Century AD and preserved in other parts of the Philippines. Whether crafted in Palawan Island or acquired through trade across and beyond the Philippines, this discovery shows a common pattern of existence of gold earrings in the country. This also shows that gold is abundant in the country. According to Victor Strella, "In fact, it is quite an abundant resource in the whole country. Recent assessment reveals that the Philippines is second to South Africa in gold production per square kilometers (Villegas 2004). Particularly in the islands of the Visayas, its coastal and riverine areas were historically documented to be one of the places where gold can be abundantly found (Morga 1609; Santiago 2005). Several of the gold artefacts were deemed to be sourced from placer gold-rich rivers of the islands, from where the early inhabitants patiently panned dusts and nuggets."[29]

4. Prensa

Prensa is the oldest known version of flat iron in El Nido. There are confirmed preserved artifacts at Manlag, Bagong Bayan, and Masagana. In Manlag, an artifact is currently under the care of Victor Daquer while another one in Bagong Bayan is owned by Norma Mabaquiao. The artifact in Masagana is one of the collections of the late Gloria Fernandez.

[27] Ian Ostericher, Test Pit: Chronicles of the University of the Philippines Archaeological Studies Program, No. 16, June 2010, p. 4.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Victor Strella, Hukay, Volume 20, p. 22.

According to Maria Christine Garcia, one of the members of the Daquer-Garcia family, they had a smaller *prensa* for small clothing and a bigger *prensa* for heavier clothing but lost them as time went by. The remaining *prensa* was left by their great grandfather to their grandfather, Victor Daquer.

Prensa is a Spanish word for "press." Filipinos during the Spanish colonization until the early American colonization adopted the word "prensa" for flat iron. The term evolved into "prensa de corona," to 'plantsa de korona," and finally into the present-day "plantsa."



Figure 10: Prensa with the wooden handle.

This artifact's existence was unknown to almost all residents of El Nido until a cultural mapping was conducted in Bgy. Manlag in 2020, and in Bagong Bayan in 2022. During the said culturing mapping, a picture of prensa was presented by then barangay councilor Maria Fe Sacay, another member of the

Daquer-Garcia family. The Daquer-Garcia family agreed to let their prensa be used for viewing or display during heritage tours in the barangay. This is a way of simultaneously preserving the artifact and earning from the tours.

5. Manto

Manto is the old black headscarf of the statue of the Sorrowful Virgin Mary (*Mater Dolorosa)* that is half-of-a-yard long. It is still preserved by the owner Ms. Meliya Fabregas of Bgy. Sibaltan, El Nido, Palawan.

Manto is put on the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Black Friday until the Easter Vigil. At 4 AM on Easter Sunday, the Cuyonon Catholics will have a procession, divided into two group: one all-female and one all-male. The women's procession brings the statue of the Sorrowful Virgin Mary wearing the manto, while the men's procession carries the statue of the resurrected Christ.

The two processions meet in a platform where *Soalao* (Easter Vigil) is held. Children wearing angel costumes sing joyful praises of resurrection while showering the statue of the Blessed Virgin with flowers and confetti. At the end of the singing, the "angels," young children dressed in white and wearing make-shift angel wings, pull the *manto* and reveal the white clothes of the Virgin Mary underneath. This activity symbolizes the transformation of the Blessed Virgin from the sorrowful mother or "Mater Dolorosa" to the joyful mother reuniting with her son, the resurrected Christ.



Figure 11: The sorrowful Virgin Mary wearing the black manto; Illustrated by Justin Mark Condesa.

The Cuyonon practice of soalao evolved from or is related to the practice of *salubong* all over the country. As in all parts of the Philippines, the faithful believe that it was the Blessed Virgin Mary, not Mary Magdalene, who first met Jesus after his resurrection. This was contrary to the biblical narratives that it was Mary Magdalene who met the risen Christ first. The Gospel of John clearly narrates the following:

> "Meanwhile Mary stayed outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, still weeping, she stooped to look inside, ·and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. ·They said, "Woman, why are you weeping?" "They have taken my Lord away," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him." ·As she said this she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognize him. ·Jesus said, "Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him." ·Jesus said, "Mary!" She knew him then and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbuni!"- which means Master."[30]

Even Luke mentions Mary of Magdala, not Mary the mother of Jesus, in his Gospel:

> "When the women returned from the tomb, they told all this to the Eleven and 10 to all the others. The women were Mary of Magdala, Joanna and Mary the mother of James."[31]

According to Bonnadelbert A. Antonio and Fides Del Castillo, "it may possibly have originated from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in the 16th century through the Jesuit missionaries of the Spanish

[30] John 20: 11-17: "The Jerusalem Bible, Reader's Edition," Doubleday & Company, Inc., New York, 1966, pp. 150-151.
[31] Luke 24: 9-10, Ibid, p. 110.

colonial period. It might have possibly originated from the Filipino popular interpretation of the resurrection, i.e., the resurrected Jesus would have appeared first to his lamenting mother. This interpretation is indeed, to some degree, suitable to the Filipino who regards it as usual and even humanly customary for anyone to be emotionally attached to his or her mother."[32]

The tradition of the *manto* during salubong on Easter Sundays is still practiced today. However, existing *mantos* need to be replaced due to wear and tear. Once the new mantos appear in the future, the old one under the care of Ms. Fabregas must be preserved in a museum.

6. Tagad

Tagad is an upgraded version of the traditional planting stick of the Cuyonons called "tugda." Usually, there are three planters involved in the process of using the traditional tugda: one who uses the tugda, the other one who puts the seeds inside the holes, and the last one who covers the holes using leaves. This upgrade now requires only two planters because tagad is basically a tugda with a magazine, dispensing rice automatically upon piercing holes on the ground. Another difference is the shape of the hole created. Tudga creates a round hole, while tagad creates a flat hole. This is because tagad has a flat metal tip.

Tagad is used by both the Tagbanuas and Cuyonons, as attested by the cultural mapping participants in Bgy. Bagong Bayan, El Nido. Informants added that they are frequently used by the Tagbanuas in Sitio Talugon of the same barangay.

[32] Bonnadelbert A. Antonio and Fides Del Castillo, 'The Role of Mary Magdalene in Easter "Salubong:" A Religious Exploration," Asia Pacific Journal for Management and Sustainable Development, Vol. 9, No. 1, March 2021, p. 74.



Figure 12: Cesar Fenix shows the seed dispenser of his tagad.

Tagad is also used by the Batak in Puerto Princesa as they "have been exposed to technologies introduced by migrants, including



Figure 13: Tagad with PVC pipe seed dispenser.

charcoal making and use of tagad."[33] According to Dario Novellino, a researcher of Batak farming practices, "several Batak have begun claiming that the flat blade of the *tagad* not only facilitates the

[33] Dario Novellino: Rice-Related Knowledge, Farming Strategies and the Transformation of Swiddens Amongst the Batak of the Palawan Island, the Philippines; p. 910.

planting process, but ensures better harvests."[34] Novellino added that the Batak observed that the flat holes created by the *tagad* prevents birds from eating the seeds.[35]

The Cuyonons of El Nido, on the other hand, still considers what the Batak of Puerto Princesa calls *tagad* as *tugda.* For the former, *tugda* only becomes *tagad* if it has a container which automatically dispenses seeds. However, Cuyonon farmers from Mabini and Manlag and other parts of the municipality use the terms *tugda* and *tagad* interchangeably.

Although *tagad* is still used in El Nido, only a few residents use it because most of the workforce, which is concentrated in the Poblacion area, is now primarily engaged in the tourism industry. Most *tagad* users that work in El Nido's upland rice fields come from the neighboring municipality, Taytay. Hermogenes Daquer, a farm owner in Bgy. Manlag, recalls hiring *tagad* users from Bgy. Calawag, Taytay who planted efficiently, saving him time and resources.

The practice of using *tagad* is confirmed in barangays Bagong Bayan, Manlag, Mabini, New Ibajay and Sibaltan. Cesar Fenix, a retired professor from the Western Philippines University, is one of the owners and users of *tagad* in Bgy. Sibaltan. Since most of the upland rice planters in Sibaltan are Cuyonons, majority of them prefer using *tugda* in farming. Fenix's tagad is 2.5 meters long and has a diameter of 3.8 centimeters. Its metal tip is 5.1 cm. In Bagong Bayan, farmers use cola bottles as the seed container while Mr. Fenix uses an empty can attached to a PVC pipe.

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

While *tagad* is a testament to the ingenuity of Palawan's indigenous people it is still unknown who invented it, and whether it was first used by the Tagbanuas or the Cuyonons. The inventor of the metal tip and the automatic seed dispenser remain unidentified.

The primary threats to the existence of *tagad* are the rapid development of tourism and the introduction of modern farming equipment in rural areas. Several farmers in El Nido are now shifting from planting in upland area to planting in rice paddies. Many of them are already using *kuliglig*, a cheap hand tractor which is easy to use and can be used to transport people and farm outputs. Among the ways to preserve *tagad* despite the changes include the construction of a Farm Museum and the introduction of traditional farming tours.

7. Tugda

Tugda is the planting stick of the Cuyonons living in El Nido. Tugda has two versions, the normal wooden planting stick and one made of bamboo with a flat metal tip like *tagad*. The wooden version is 2-2.5 meters feet long while the improved version is longer and reaches up to 4 meters in length. Ignacio Gacot, a farmer in Sibaltan, has a 2-meter long tugda. It has a diameter of 3.8 cm., and it is quite different from the normal *tugda*, which is normally all-wood. His *tugda* has a round metal tip.

The improved version is often made of bamboo and its upper portion is sliced by 50-70 cm. so it ''claps'' while punching holes on the ground. This process produces a "takatak, tak-a-tak, tak-a-tak" sound. They call this technique *palagupak*.



Figure 14: Tugda with a round metal tip.

In the traditional Cuyonon way of planting, several farmers use *tugda* simultaneously, and when the clapping sound is in unison, they enjoy rhythm while planting. Camila Lucero, a resident of Sibaltan, recalls

singing songs while planting with tugda while they were in Cuyo Island. Here are the lyrics of the song as Ms. Lucero recalled:

Paspas, Alidongdong,

Alidongdong, Alidondong.

Tagay! Tagay! Tagay!

Paspas in Cuyunon means "hurry," while *tagay* means "cheers." According to her, *tagay* was an invitation to drink *tuba*, the Cuyonon coconut wine, after planting. There is no confirmation yet if farmers in El Nido also used to or still sing this song.

The culture of using *tugda* is just part of the traditional way of planting called *panggas* which has the three different parts, namely, *tugda, pukayao,* and *gibo. The tudga* team is composed mostly of men, with women sometimes joining them. The *pokayao* team then places seeds on the holes. Finally, the *gibo* team, composed mostly of women and children, covers the holes using twigs with leaves.

At the end of the planting activity, participants will perform the tradition of *purungitan*. Purungitan is a Cuyonon word for putting blemish on another's face. Since planting using *tugda* is done in *kaingin* areas, there are lots of burnt twigs and tree trunks. Planters use charcoal from burnt trees in performing *purungitan*. The Municipality of Cuyo, from where *tugda* and the whole Cuyonon culture originated, celebrates the Purungitan Festival annually, with *purungitan* as the festival's highlight.

Nowadays, most Cuyonons have already shifted from upland rice planting to using rice paddies, which are irrigated or rain-fed fields. Those who still practice the traditional *panggas* do the planting only

in flat lands and titled properties, since kaingin in lands classified as timberland is prohibited in El Nido.

8. Korot

Korot (*Dioscorea hispida*) is a type of root crop eaten by the Tagbanuas and later, by the Cuyonons in El Nido. This type of food undergoes a tedious process of preparation before it can be eaten since it is poisonous in its raw form. Korot, however, tastes good once cooked right. It is part of the diet of Tagbanua living in the highlands, beach areas or islands. The Cuyonons settlers later learned to eat it.

The Tagbanuas consider *korot* as culturally significant. It is, in fact, Bagong Bayan's cultural symbol since the barangay's old name, *Nami,* is a Tagbanua term for *korot*. Korot is a movable cultural object with very important intangible values, including its recipe and the knowledge of the complicated way of processing it.

Process of preparing *korot* according to Melly Batocabe:

1. Peel the korot, slice it into small parts, and soak it in salt.
2. Wash the small pieces and soak them in salt water for 24 hours.
3. Drain and wash them with clean water.
4. Soak them in running water for 3 days.
5. Sun-dry them for a day.

After the complicated and tedious process, *korot* can now be cooked into the following Filipino recipes:

1. *Ginataan* – cooked with coconut milk.
2. *Sinanlag* – Cuyonon version of fried rice.
3. *Puto* – rice cake.

This root crop is abundant in Bagong Bayan. In Manlag, it can only be found on Mt. Inantagem, another historically significant mountain. Korot may also be found in Sibaltan, Teneguiban, New Ibajay, and Mabini. The consumption of kurot, however, is dwindling due to the abundance of rice products in the said barangays. Nowadays, cooked korot is only available when settlers from the islands of Pical, Ilog, Binulbulan, or Batas bring it to the barangays of eastern El Nido. Pical and Ilog are islands of the Municipality of Linapacan, which is situated northeast of El Nido. Binulbulan and Batas, on the other hand, are islands of the Municipality of Taytay located southwest of El Nido.



Figure 15: Korot.

Though eating *korot* is no longer popular among the local population, it is still used as an ingredient in the illegal fishing method called *lagtang*. Lagtang is composed mostly of *makasla*, the local term for "Jathropa." It is used to poison the fish, including its fingerlings. Aside from *lagtang*, another traditional way of poisoning the fish is called *lamnek*. Lamnek is a type of vine growing in the forests and agricultural lands. The locals gather its roots and grind them to extract what is known as liquid poison. Though its use is part of the

local fisher folks' culture, the authorities dissuade the locals from practicing this destructive tradition.

While *korot's* existence *per se* is not threatened, the knowledge of its cooking process is. This knowledge will be lost if the new generation will discontinue its practice. Moreover, access to some sites where locals gather it is threatened by development. Mr. Armando L. Zumarraga, a farmer in Manlag, used to gather the *balinsasayaw*s[36] edible nests from the caves of Cauayan Island in Buena Suerte. He would gather korot in the hilly areas on the way. Now that a resort is there, he says that he is no longer allowed to access the area and gather *balinsasayaw* or *korot*.

9. Karusa



Figure 16: Karusa. Phographed by Kristel Abian.

[36] Balinsayaw is type of swiflet (*Aerodramus Fuciphagus*) that thrive in the limestone cliffs of El Nido. Its nest is made of its own saliva and is edible. Balinsasayaw nest is the main ingredient of "Nido Soup."

Karusa is a carabao-drawn sled. It is commonly used to transport harvested rice, cashew, and copra, and sometimes to pull small logs or cut lumber in El Nido's rural areas. The Cuyonon word *karusa* evolved from the Spanish word carroza, which means "carriage."

The *karusa's* body, called *papag,* is between 0.8 to 1.2 meters wide and between 1 to 1.5 meters long. Two wooden shafts on both sides of the carabao which are 2.2 to 2.5 meters long are called *bangon-bangon,* and are tied to the beam, called *singkaw*, which is placed on the carabao's neck.

A wheeled version of the *karusa* is called *caro (*or *karo)*. It is slightly bigger than *karusa* since the wheels enable the carabao to carry more weight and move at a slightly higher speed. Unfortunately, karo is more difficult and expensive to build than karusa. Only farmers earning higher incomes can afford to purchase or build karo. Older versions of karo are made with wooden wheels; the newer version often use discarded jeepney wheels.

The growing popularity of kuliglig, a type of hand tractor, not only threatens the use of traditional farming materials, but also that of the traditional modes of farm products transportation.

10. Lunday

Lunday (canoe) is a Tagalog term for a small paddle boat without outriggers. The Cuyonon equivalent of this is *bandong*. Normally, El Nido fishermen use the normal bangka, a small paddle boat with outriggers, in the open sea. Lunday is often used in rivers and estuaries. A bangka with outriggers is often used in the open sea because it is more stable against the waves. Meanwhile, lunday is popular among crab fishermen in mangrove rivers and estuaries because it can penetrate even the narrowest brooks.

In the mangroves of El Nido, lunday is used to transport *bubo, panac* and other crab-trapping devices. "*Bubo* means fish pot. They are generic terms for fish traps in many places in the Philippines, Indonesia, and all the way to Madagascar."[37] In the past, *lunday* was also used to transport illegal mangrove charcoal (*uling na bakaw)*. The strict environmental enforcement and massive information, education, and communication resulted in the gradual decline of charcoal-making in mangrove areas. Lunday is just one of the traditional boats used by the Cuyonons in El Nido. The others are called *layag, baruto,* and the big merchant ship *pangko*.

Prior to the publication of the 2nd Edition, more info were gathered from Bagong Bayan. According to respondents, *lunday* is still in use, though it has been adapted with motors. According to Adoracion Castillo-Iga, a *lunday* owner from the area, they grew tired of paddling and thus introduced this innovation. Another modification was the application of paint; traditionally, *lunday* boats were left unpainted, retaining their natural brown color.

A heavier version of the *lunday* features a box-shaped hull and is typically used to transport bulky cargo such as sacks of charcoal or lumber, while the smaller versions are primarily designed for fishing gear. At present, the confirmed existence of these larger *lunday* boats has only been documented in New Ibajay and Corong-Corong.

[37] Persistence of Bubo, Fish Trap in the Philippine Artisanal Fishery. Cynthia Neri Zayas, Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology, 2022.



Figure 17: Painted lunday. Photographed by Allyssa Dairo

1. Pareng-Pareng

Pareng-Pareng is a ritual of Cuyonon Catholics during Holy Wednesday. It is confirmed to still being practiced in Sibaltan and Bucana. The practice of this ritual has been discontinued in the Church of Sta. Putenciana in Sibaltan when it formally became a parish because of the introduction of the Catholic Church's newly-approved liturgical rites. It was, however, practiced again in 2013 under the leadership of Rev. Fr. Eduardo Pariño, their parish priest from 2008 to 2013.

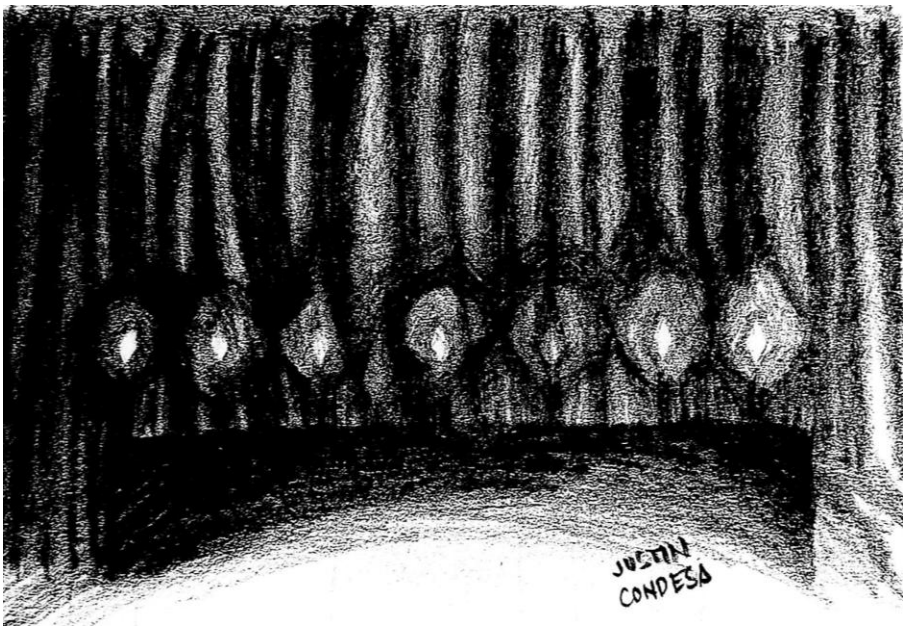


Figure 18: The 7 candles behind the black curtain during pareng-pareng. Illustrated by Justin Mark Condesa.

During the ritual, seven candles are covered by a black veil at the altar. A prayer leader leads the faithful in reciting prayers while kneeling at the pews, with the glow of the candles inside the veil in sight. As the prayer leader finishes reciting a prayer segment, a candle is extinguished. The clapping of two wooden planks signals

the extinguishing of each candle. The prayer leader repeats this process until all the candles are extinguished. The prayer recited is the Holy Rosary, according to Mary Ann Arevalo, member of the Apostleship of Prayer or Apostolado ng Panalangin. The first segment is the Apostle's Creed, Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, and Glory Be; the 2nd to 6th segments are the 5 sorrowful mysteries of the rosary; the 7th segment includes the final prayers and the Litany of the Virgin Mary.

2. Tambora

Tambora (or tambura) is the traditional Christmas caroling of Cuyonons. The carol singers portray Joseph traveling with his pregnant wife Mary, pleading from one house to another for a place to spend the night. Tambura is related to or an evolved version of *Panunuluyan* in the Tagalog culture. The tradition's original name is *panagbalay*, which means "going house to house to ask for shelter." This word is more related to *panunuluyan* in meaning than tambora is. In the past, any performance involving drums is called *Tambora* because the Cuyonon word for drums is tambor. Since *panagbalay* is performed with drums, people use the term panagbalay interchangeably with tambora. The term tambora eventually became more popular when referring to Cuyonon caroling.

Tambora was mentioned by Rosana L. Divinagracia in her article in the American International Journal of Social Science. "In [the] Southwest part of the Philippine island chain, Cuyonon (formerly Cuyo) is known for the Tambora performances, a similar version of the pastores. It is a depiction of the nativity, traditionally performed by Christmas carolers in Cuyunon or Spanish."[38]

[38] Rosana L. Divinagracia, Continuity and Change: Hispanic Musical Influence in the Philippines, American International Journal of Social Science, 2019, p. 50.

The tambora's existence is threatened by the shift in the carolers' preference of songs: from the traditional to modern and foreign Christmas carols. This same trend is happening in the entire country according to Divinagracia. "Native Yuletide songs such as the "Pinagbalay," "Pastores," and "Tambora" are being replaced by modern Christmas carols."[39]

The lyrics of the Cuyonon *Tambora* are as follows*:*

O Senyor, tagbalay, takes na dengegan;

Maski maanek ingan indong katurog diyan.

Magmata kamo anay, magbangon, maglingay

Pobring mag-asawa nga digi isa ibaba.

Ako si Jose nga taga Galilia,

Ang akeng kaiban ang akeng asawa.

Ang anang aran omao si Maria.

Sa raye ameng ing panaw kapilay nga sobra.

Lugar na Nazareth, duto kami agalin.

Ang lugar nga Belen, ameng papakunan.

Kami aga pakiloy sameng kalisedan,

Sa raye ameng ing panaw, akami ay nagabian.

Ig labi pa enged ameng pagkabetang,

[39] Ibid.

Sa ameng pag aguanta, aga turo ameng lua

Ay daging si Maria madali magbata

Ig kung maka sarang, kami maga saka.

In the first stanza, Joseph addresses the homeowners using the traditional Cuyonon word "Tagbalay," an equivalent of the Tagalog's "Tao po!" In contrast to *Tao po,* which is telling the homeowners that "there are people outside," *Tagbalay,* a shortened form of the word ''taga-balay'' (home dwellers), is a greeting to the homeowners visited by the guests. Joseph continues by begging the homeowners, even if they are already sleeping soundly, to wake up and see the poor situation of his wife.

In the second stanza, Joseph introduces himself and his wife. He mentions their fatigue after traveling a long distance. In the subsequent stanzas, Joseph reveals their place of origin (Nazareth) and where they are heading to (Bethlehem). He then asks for mercy since it's already nightfall. In the last stanza, Joseph continues to plea that they be allowed temporary shelter as his wife Mary is about to give birth. In the last line, Joseph ends with, "If you allow, we will enter your house."

Tambora, panunuluyan, and other similar traditions aim replicate Jesus Christ's nativity in Betlehem in a way that would relate to modern households. These traditions implore Filipinos to make a symbolic show of mercy to Mary and Joseph, represented by the carolers, by welcoming them inside their house. While inside the house some carolers are given snacks or money, or both.

Tambora is still practiced in El Nido's barangays. Its practice is not yet threatened by complete discontinuity but efforts to preserve it must start already. The popularity of modern Christmas carols,

especially the western ones, is already pushing tambora to the sidelines that only a few residents and even tourists notice it.

3. Tedlak

Tedlak is a ritual before planting rice which is performed by Cuyonons and Tagbanuas. It is also called *panedlak* which means "the act of doing *tedlak*." Ms. Frieda B. Buragay and Ms. Romelyn L. Lavelas, participants of the Cultural Mapping in Bagong Bayan, wrote in the Philippine Registry of Cultutal Property (PRECUP) Form: "*Bago magsimula ang paghahasik, kaugalian nila ang maglaan ng araw para sa tinatawag na tedlak na kung saan inihahanda ng mga katutubong Cuyonon at Tagbanua ang mga sumusunod: luya, tanglad, at bunga. Naniniwala sila na nakakatulong ito sa pagtaas ng kanilang ani. Kasabay nito ang pagtanim sa gilid ng kanilang unang hinasikan na tinatawag nilang tedlak.*" (Before sowing, it is customary for them to set a day for what they call "tedlak" wherein indigenous Cuyonons and Tagbanuas prepare the following: ginger, lemongrass, and betel nut. They believe that it helps increase their harvest. This is done simultaneously with planting at the side of their first-sown area, the process of which they call *tedlak*).

Ignacio Gacot demonstrated how the first seeds are sown after the Sibaltan farmers perform their ritual. According to him, they start by drawing a cross and then creating 7 holes, one at the end of the line facing north, one at the line facing west, one at the end of the line facing south and 3 holes before the end of the line facing east.

L Acero mentioned "tedlak" in his research titled "Towards Environmental Sustainability: Beliefs and Livelihood Practices of Tagbanuas in Buong, Narra, Palawan, Philippines." His research says that the "planting structure is not random, but varieties are arranged and marked by various rites, and rituals. This includes *tedlak* or an altar-like structure erected in the agricultural land as medium of

blessing the rice seeds and appeasing the —*panyaen* or forest spirits to render good harvest and avoid sickness."[40]

L. Acero further characterized *tedlak* as an altar-like structure erected by the Tagbanuas in Narra, Palawan. For the farmers of Bgy. Bagong Bayan in El Nido, on the other hand, *tedlak* is not an altar-like structure but a pre-planting ritual performed prior by both the Cuyonons and Tagbanuas.

Renowned scholar, anthropologist, and academic Felipe Landa Jocano mentioned the farming ritual of Malitbog farmers in Central Luzon in his article titled "Agricultural Rituals In A Philippine Barrio" in 1967. He observes:

> The pre-planting ritual is called panadlok. This is done by consulting the *alamanki* (almanac) in order to check on the day and the time when the tide is supposedly high. This is performed in accordance with the belief that planting rice during high tide brings better production. Then the farmer observes the sky: If during the night prior to the day of planting the sky is clear, and there are many stars, and, if in the morning of the designated day for planting the, eastern horizon is studded, with blocks of white, fleecy clouds which partly veil the rays of the rising sun, that day is most suitable to start planting. These favorable signs must also be reinforced by a favorable dream; otherwise, it would be advisable for the farmer to wait another day, because this means that the "spirits

[40] L. Acero: "Towards Environmental Sustainability: Beliefs and Livelihood Practices of Tagbanuas in Buong Narra Palawan, Philippines," 6th International Conference on Environment and Renewable Energy 2020, p. 6.

of the fields have not made up their minds as to whether or not they would leave the field."[41]

There is a similarity between *panedlak* and *panadlok*. The mention of *almanaki*, probably mispelled as *alamanki*, leads to a possibility that tedlak was also based on the *almanaki.* The almanaki is a book containing step-by-step procedures of building a house, performing farming rituals, and carrying out other ways of living. It is equivalent to the Chinese *Feng Shui*, except that the latter is about bringing good luck while adhering to the Taoist principle of harmony while the *almanaki* is about pleasing the spirits of nature. While the Tagbanuas aim to appease *panyaen* or the forest spririts, "the farmers in Malitbog believe that whatever produce they derive from, their fields is gift from the spirits and, therefore, before partaking of anything from 'this present' they must first express their *kabaraslan* or 'depth of gratitude' to these benevolent givers by offering them part of what has been received from them."[42]

During cultural mapping workshops in the barangays, the book of *Almanaki* always appears. Some participants called it *Impacta*. They say that the books of *Almanaki* used by Cuyonons in El Nido were written in Hiligaynon or Cebuano. The book probably circulated throughout the Philippine archipelago during the American period and was translated to different Filipino languages. Although the instructions in the book are similar, it is applied distinctly depending on the different cultures and environments throughout the country.

[41] Felipe Landa Jocano: Agricultural Rituals In A Philippine Barrio, Fifth Visayas-Mindanao Convention of the Philippine Sociological Society, Negros Occidental, 1967, pp. 49-50.

[42] Ibid, p. 52.

Local adaptation might be the reason why the materials used by Malitbog farmers in their rituals are different from their Cuyonon counterparts.

> The panadlok paraphernalia consists of knotted tigbaw (Saccharum spontaneum Linneaus, spp), a bunch of ripe areca nuts (Areca catechu L. [Brown] spp), a bunch of bognay fruit, a wooden comb; an egg, a spool of red thread and a bamboo or wooden cross. These objects are placed inside a big bamboo basket containing the seeds.[43]

The probable reasons behind the variations are the following:

1. Availability of raw materials and the traditional paraphernalia of each particular place.
2. The context of the Almanaki's contents evolves as it is translated into different Filipino languages.
3. The community merges concepts of Alamanaki with their pre-existing rituals and beliefs.

4. Gusos ni Sta. Putencia

Gusos ni Sta. Puntenciana is the Cuyonon hymn honoring St. Putenciana, the patron saint of Sta. Putenciana Parish in Sibaltan. Gusos is a Cuyonon word which is rarely used. According to Mary Ann B. Arevalo, gusos means a "hymn," while Filomena D. Gabo adds that it is a hymn and a story about the saint at the same time. Ms. Arevalo and Ms. Gabo are two of the remaining singers of the *gusos* in Sibaltan.

The lyrics of *Gusos ni Sta. Putenciana* go as follows:

> O Virgen, Ulay nga pinili;

[43] Ibid, p. 50.

Didi sa langit nga inadian.
Pamati ang ameng pagampo,
Paladan si Putenciana.

Maghimaya kaw, Virgen nga ulay
Sa imong mahal nga kabuhi.
Epagigen sa imong degan
Ang tana nga mga virtudes.

O Virgen…

Ing limos mo imong manggad
Tenged sa ameng kalisedan.
Mag tulad kaw kay Kristo
Tuyo sa imong paghiguegma.

O Virgen…

Tenged sa imong paghiguegma
Sa dios nga ateng manunubos,
Ang buat kaw it simban
Sa seled sa imong balay.

O Virgen…

Ang paghiguegma nga bugos
Nga amay kaw ki Kristo
Na imo sangkabilog lamang
Indong mga tagipuson.

O Virgen…

Ang Dios nga makagagaem
Nag tugot kanimo ang grasia
Nga si San Pio Santo Papa
Nag Simba sa imong balay.

O Virgen…

Ig dadi, O Virgen nga ulay,
Ateng mal nga patrona,
Bantayan mo ang ameng banwa
Ig ameng mga uroman.

The hymn is sung by the Catholic group *Apostolado ng Panalangin* (Apostleship of Prayer) which is composed of the middle-aged and senior citizens, according to Mary Anne Arevalo. She laments the youth's lack of interest in joining the Apostleship of Prayer and fears that there will be no more singers of the *gusos* in the future.

Training younger people to sing the *gusos* and perform it regularly, especially during the feast of St. Putenciana or during cultural presentations, is an immediate way to preserve the practice of singing this song. These trainings are recommended to be conducted every five years. Another way of preserving it is recording the remaining singers of *gusos* while they perform the song. This is an excellent example of utilizing modern technology to make and reproduce digital copies of some of the most important cultural properties. Another viable option is writing the song's musical notes and preserving it both in a physical or digital archive. This way, even if the government or the parish might fail to recruit new singers, and sound or video recordings can be corrupted, the song's musical notes may be interpreted by musicians and the sound may therefore be reproduced.

5. Novena para ki Sta. Putenciana

The faithful of the Sta. Putenciana Parish in Bgy. Sibaltan preserved the contents of the novena in honor of St. Putenciana and written in Cuyonon. The original booklet no longer exists there but the locals copied it on their notebooks, thanks to the efforts of Ms. Mary Ann Arevalo and the members of the Apostleship of Prayer. However, Ms. Arevalo claims that some spellings and the grammar changed as these copies passed from one notebook to another.

Since the movable property, which is the actual copy of the booklet, is already inexistent, what was left of the contents of the prayer then becomes an intangible property which must also be preserved. Preservation efforts include a thorough study of the content and format.

The novena prayer starts with an act of contrition:

> Ginoo kong Hesukristo, Dios ig tao nga matuod, nga akeng ing totoan, akeng ing sasarigan ig akeng ing gegegman labi sa

tanan, masakit ingan ang akeng leba tengued nga nagkasala ako kanimo, ig naga tapat ako it marigen, nga indi ako ren magpakasala y oman kanimo. Kung matabangan mo ako sa imong santos nga gracia ig sa mga pagpakiloy it ang imong santos nga ina si Maria nga Virgen, ay liag ko magdayao ig maggatang kanana sa adlao nga tanan sa akeng kabuhi. Amen.

An excerpt from *Oracion sa Naunang Adlaw* or Prayer for the First Day:

> O Dios ko ig ginoo, sa akeng taguipuson nga sa imong mahal nga kabuhi dadi sa lugta magpasaylo cao sa mayad nga leba, ang tanan nga mga pagpasipala agud mag tuman cao kanamen ang santa nga vertud sa pag paebes nga pag adal it mayad sa santa Potenciana ig pag hina-hina sa santa nga sugo sa pag pasakit it kamatayan, Guino ko sa andang mga kalag nga sa pag seleng mo ang daculay nga pag paebes ni Santa Potenciana ig mag adal kita man it diang santos nga virtud ig mag pasaylo kami sa mayad nga leba ig ang tanan nga mga pagpasipala may ang tanan mga mga pag ampo agud magtulad kami kanimo sata sa kamatayen ig pag sirbi canana, Amen.

On the fifth day, the novena mentions one of the acts of St. Putenciana when she converted her house into a Church so Pope Pius I could celebrate the mass there. Here is the excerpt of the prayer for the fifth day:

> Magtaw kanimo y guegma sa ateng mga taguipuson ig mag debosyon sa mga kalag tulad ang ing buat ang ateng mahal nga patron nga si Santa Potenciana nag pabuat sa ameng balay isarang singban agud ang santo papa si san Pio sarang mag simba duto sa anang balay tugutan mo kami nga tulad sa ateng patrona mag buat kami isarang altar para kanimo sa tedek sa ameng taguipuson agud sa tanan nga huras mga simba kami kanimo hasta sa ameng kamatayen, Amen Jesus.

The *Pag Ampo sa Tanan nga Adlao* or "Prayer for all the Days (of the Novena)" mentions Barrio Sibaltan.

> O paladan ni Santa Potenciana virgen nga pinili, nga ing pasaka kaw sa Dios nga inadian sa langit agud maga agum kaw duto sa katamisan nga langitnon nga ing simpan it ang ateng guinoong Dios sa andang mga virgenes nga ing iguegman sa dia nga Barrio sa Sibaltan, pamati among mga pag ampo ki Santa Potenciana sa diang amang mga pag desisyon nga naga pangadi, naga sarig kami kanimo ig bauien mo kami sa kakurian ig kalisedan nga tanan ameng mga kaaway sa ameng kalag agud sarang kami katulad kanimo digui sa lugta magsaka kami kanimo duto sa langit Amen.

The prayer may be preserved and continuously used in the Sta. Putenciana Parish but could be re-structured or reworded depending on the understanding of the present generation while maintaining its essence and the lessons learned from the saint's life.

Although the *gusos* and the novena tell the story of the life and virtues of St. Putenciana, it mentions nothing about her father, St. Pudens, and her sister St. Praxedes. Inocent-Mária Vladimir Szaniszló, OP, member of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Angelicum Pontifical University in Rome cited in his thesis, "As the ecumenical lexicon of saints reminds us, Pudens, the husband (or son) of Priscilla, who named the Catacombs of Priscilla, was a senator in Rome. Together with his daughters Pudentiana[44] and Praexede, he is said to have hosted the Apostle Peter in Rome and also founded a

[44] The name Putenciana, as adapted by the Cuyonon Catholics, is a Spanish version of her name. There other versions such as Pudenciana, Pudentiana or Pudenziana.

church, which was later consecrated to Pudentiana."[45] It is also a fact that St. Timothy, whom the Apostle Paul made mention to in his letters, is the brother of St. Putenciana. Vladimir Szaniszló also mentioned in his thesis that "Aquila (Pudens) and Priscilla had five children: Novatus, Praexedes, Pudentiana, Timotheus and (to whom Paul addressed his letter) Rufus Pudente."[46]

Though both the gusos and the novena lack some facts about the patron saint, the intangible value of the content of the prayer and hymn is worth preserving. It is also worth studying how the Cuyonon language and its words evolved from some references in the Spanish language, influenced by Roman Catholicism to references in the English language, which remains to be the most influential language in contemporary times.

6. Palapak

The term "palapak" has two meanings in Cuyonon Catholic traditions. One refers to a penitent who wraps himself with a cloth and lies in front of the chapel during the Holy Week. The penitent lets himself be stepped on by churchgoers as described in page 15 of this book. The *palapak* we will discuss here now is the tradition of putting the feet of the small statue of St. Vincent Ferrer on the head of devotees during his annual April 5 feast day celebration in the local chapel of Bgy. Mabini. The word "palapak" in both traditions means "letting someone to step on you." The tradition also involves *pasirong*, the act of going under the shade of the platform of the statue of St. Vincent Ferrer while it is being carried during a procession.

[45] Innocent-Mária Vladimir Szaniszló, OP, "Sisters in Roman Antiquity: St. Pudentiana and St. Praxede, Daughter of Senator Pudens;" ASTRA Salvensis, Year X, No. 1, 2022 pp. 783-784.
[46] Ibid, p. 782.

While *palapak* is about direct contact with a sacred tangible, or in this case the statue of St. Vincent Ferrer, *pasirong* is an outward act of faith. Both, however are strong expressions of faith. These types of religious practices are common in the Philippines. Some brand these as "idolatry," while others call them "folk religiosity," and even "superstitious." In fact, these practices date back to the Gospel accounts. A scene in the Gospel of Luke wherein faith was expressed by touching a sacred object, the cloak of Christ:

> Now there was a woman suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, whom no one had been able to cure. ·She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak; and the hemorrhage stopped at that instant. ·Jesus said, "Who touched me?" When they all denied that they had, Peter and his companions said, "Master, it is the crowds around you, pushing." ·But Jesus said, "Somebody touched me. I felt that



Figure 19: The tradition of Palapak in Bgy. Mabini.

power had gone out from me." ·Seeing herself discovered, the woman came forward trembling, and falling at his feet explained in front of all the people why she had touched him and how she had been cured at that very moment. "My

daughter," he said, 'your faith has restored you to health; go in peace."[47]

Here, the outward act of touching was an expression of faith and in return, Christ healed the lady, recognized her act of faith, and refrained from condemning her for idolatry. This same outward act of devotion is practiced all over the country. Some devotees report that their devotion is sometimes rewarded by healing or by the granting of their prayers. The best example of this practice is the *paghalik* and *paghawak* during the annual traslacion of the statue of the Black Nazarene every January 9 in Quiapo, Manila. According to Mark Joseph T. Calano, ''*Paghalik* and *paghawak* are literally translated as to kiss and to touch the sacred statue (*poón*). The entire devotion to the Black Nazarene is rooted on the desire to touch this statue of Christ, and in return to be touched by God."[48]

Touching a tangible thing plays a big role in Filipino culture, especially when it comes to spirituality and healing. Calano added, "Touching grounds the devotion to what is real and in what is tactile. It draws the divine close, into something 'touchable' and reachable. This explains why lowland Filipino sensibility expresses intimacy as *haplós* (gentle touch) especially in moments of sickness and/or difficulty."[49]

Even if critics view these practices as superstitious or idolatrous, there is no denying that they have become an indelible part of our culture and identity. Beliefs are interesting cultural treasures that identify us as people and affect the way we live. They are also tourism products. In fact, many tourists flock to regional festivals and

[47] Luke 8:43-48; "The Jerusalem Bible, Reader's Edition," Doubleday & Company, Inc., New York, 1966, pp. 84-85.
[48] Mark Joseph T. Calano: "Ginhawa as Ethic of Panatà: Body Politics and the Devotion to the Black Nazarene;" Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture XXII.2; 2018, p. 48.
[49] Ibid, p.49.

witness religious traditions, take the Moriones Festival for example. What piques the tourists' interest is not so much their own personal faith, but their appreciation of our local cultures, tradition, and other practices. We must, however, be cautious so as not to turn profit-oriented as we delve into heritage tourism. We must remain heavily invested in searching for our own identity as a nation or a group of people. Tourism should always become secondary to cultural preservation.

Pahalik is a common belief of the faithful of Quiapo Church that goes beyond the jurisdiction of their parish and attracts devotees all over the country. On a smaller scale, *palapak* started in the small chapel of St. Vincent Ferrer in Bgy. Mabini and goes beyond the jurisdiction of the barangay and even the municipal boundaries of El Nido. This tradition attracts devotees not only from barangays Manlag and New Ibajay in El Nido but also from barangays Sandoval and Busy Bees of the Municipality of Taytay.

During the Festival Designing Workshop conducted in Mabini in 2022, the participants voted *palapak* as the most fitting cultural property to represent Mabini in a festival. They decided to name their Festival "Pagampo," a Cuyonon word for prayer. The Pagampo Festival was launched 2 years late, or only from April 3-5, 2024. The festival not only – focuses on *palapak* and other religious traditions, but also celebrates history and the fishing and farming culture of Mabini.

The faithful in Mabini claim that individuals have been healed though the tradition of *palapak*. Ofelia Gabuco, a resident of Bgy. Mabini recalled how her son, Cairo Gabuco recovered from having convulsions through the tradition of *palapak*. Jenifer Factor, a resident of Bgy. Manlag, is a devotee of St. Vincent Ferrer. She used to annually travel to Mabini on foot just to attend the feast day of St. Vincent Ferrer.

7. Cuyonon Ati-Atihan

The Cuyonon *Ati-Atihan* evolved from the *Ati-Atihan* in the Province of Aklan. "Ati-Athihan is believed by many locals to be the oldest festival in the Philippines and one that predates the arrival of Christianity,"[50] William Peterson wrote in his journal 'The Ati-Atihan Festival: Dancing with the Santo Niño at the "Filipino Mardi Gras"' in the Asian Theater Journal. "'The mother of all festivals' in the Philippines is believed by its organizers and many locals to date back to 1212, when, according to some folklore, ten datus (nobles) and their families fleeing the tyranny of Sultan Makatunaw (said to be a ruler of Sulewesi/Borneo during the Sriwijaya period) arrived on the island of Panay, located centrally in the Philippine archipelago,"[51] Peterson added. The first festivity was a celebration of sealing the negotiation known as the "Barter of Panay" between the migrating Borneans and the native *Itas*. In the alleged negotiation, the indigenous *Ati* agreed to permanently vacate their traditional settlements in the low-lying areas near the coast and transfer to the highlands in exchange for a piece of golden salakot (hat), a necklace from the wife of one of the datus, and a promise of shares in fishery harvest.

Though the accounts about the origin of Ati-Atihan are not supported by written records, it was part of local oral traditions in the island of Panay, as Peterson cited the observation made by anthropologist F. Landa Jocano in 1968 while conducting fieldwork among the highland-dwelling Sulod peoples of central Panay.[52]

The Cuyonon Ati-Atihan evolved differently from Panay's version of the festival. Among the notable differences between the Cuyonon and Panay versions are a.) the use of bluing powder instead of black charcoal on the skin of the dancers, b.) the introduction of *alakayo,*

[50] William Peterson: "The Ati-Atihan Festival: Dancing with the Santo Niño at the "Filipino Mardi Gras;"" Asian Theatre Journal, vol. 28, no. 2; University of Hawai'i Press; 2011, p. 507.
[51] Ibid, pp. 507-508.
[52] Ibid, p. 526



Figure 20: The Alakayo with Cuyonon Ati-Atihan dancers in the background.

the clown dancer, and c.) the dance steps. The introduction of *alakayo* infused the fun side of the Cuyonon culture to the festive tradition. The *alakayo* wears a mask made of coconut fibers and interacts with the audience by clowning with them. The crowd traditionally throws coins on the ground and the *alakayo* gets them

with his mouth while humping the ground. The dance steps differentiate Cuyonon Ati-Atihan from the Aklan ati-Atihan. *Sambali*, a dance signature found in most Cuyonon dances, is sometimes incorporated to the Cuyonon version, although it is not an essential element of the street dance.

Furthermore, the Cuyonon Ati-Atihan is practiced by Cuyonons who migrated to mainland Palawan. Residents of Villa Libertad, Maligaya, and Masagana participate in the Cuyonon Ati-Atihan in El Nido. For a while, however, the Drum and Lyre team of the schools gradually replaced this annual tradition. On May 19, 2024, during the 6th Pamaragua Festival, the Cuyonon Ati-Atihan competition was held to revive the practice in the Municipality of El Nido. The organizers included in the event a competition for "Best Alakayo" With positive response from the crowd, the Cuyonon Ati-Atihan is set to become an integral part of Pamaragua Festival as it symbolizes the migration of culture to mainland Palawan.

8. Panalad

Panalad, also a ritual prior to planting, is different from *tedlak*. While tedlak is a ritual prior to planting rice, *panalad* is performed prior to planting *kamote* or sweet potato. They also differ in purpose, tedlak is performed to yield a good harvest while panalad is performed to sweeten the *kamote*.

Leah A. Boncales, a farmer from Bgy. Mabini, wrote in the PRECUP Form, *"Gagawa ng pitong hukay para pagtaniman ng kamoteng kahoy. Pagkatapos, lalagyan ito ng kinudkod na niyog at asukal para tumamis at maging malinamnam ang bunga. Ginagawa ito tuwing buwan ng Abril o bago magtag-ulan."* (Seven holes for the purpose of planting sweet potato will be created. Then, it will be filled with ground coconut and sugar so that that the fruit will become sweet).



Figure 21: Illustrated panalad ritual by Justin mark Condesa.

9. Soalao

Soalao is a Cuyonon Catholic tradition observed during the Easter Vigil. After the Holy Mass, the faithful gather around a platform for merrymaking in anticipation of the resurrection of Christ, also known as the traditional *salubong.* People gather at a bamboo platform where the salubong rites will be held. The base of the bamboo platform is approximately 9 sq. m. and the deck where the "angels" sing is 4 sq. m. This structure, called *Soalaoan*, is bigger than the *kapia*, a small hut where the *pasyon*[53] is being read and sung by the faithful. Cuyonon Catholics perform dances while any song is played during Soalao. They call this dance as *panulod*. The dancers of *panulod* wrap themselves in cloth or leaves.

[53] "Pasyon" is the Filipino narrative of the "Passion of Christ." It is sung by the faithful in different version of tunes during Holy Week.

In other parts of the Philippines, dances are also performed during the Easter Triduum.[54] An example of this is the *sayaw ng bati* (dance for greetings) in Boac, Marinduque and Angono, Rizal. "This dance ritual is characterized by the waving of a flag, which symbolizes the triumph of Jesus through his resurrection."[55] Sayaw ng bati is performed during the salubong at dawn of the Easter Sunday while panulod is sung during the easter vigil or on the eve of the Easter Sunday. Both, however, are performed in honor of the resurrected Christ.

[54] Easter Triduum is the highest feast of the Catholic Church which starts on the eve of Holy Thursday and ends on Easter Sunday.

[55] Jose Antonio Lorenzo L. Tamayo: Lent And Easter In The Philippines: Catholic Religious Practices In The Discourse Of Gender Performativity, Special Treatment Interdisciplinary Journal [Különleges Bánásmód Interdiszciplináris folyóirat], Hungary, 2024, p. 131.

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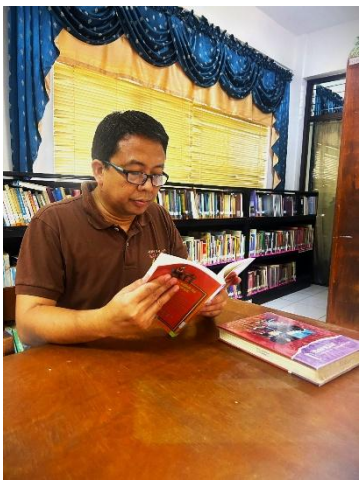
About the Author



Arvin L. Acosta, born on August 18, 1974, in Puerto Princesa, grew up in the picturesque coastal village of Sibaltan, El Nido, Palawan. His early life in this serene environment instilled in him a deep appreciation for nature and culture. This foundational experience fueled his academic pursuits, leading him to graduate cum laude with a degree in A.B. Philosophy from Seminario de San Jose in Puerto Princesa City. His education not only sharpened his analytical skills but also inspired him to explore the intricate relationship between philosophy and the cultural identity of his community.

In 2012, the author had the opportunity to learn about cultural mapping from Lace Thornberg, an esteemed American museologist who conducted a cultural mapping project in Sibaltan. This experience proved transformative, equipping him with the tools to document and analyze the rich cultural heritage of his hometown. Since then, the author has diligently applied the cultural mapping techniques he learned, gathering invaluable information about El Nido's diverse cultural landscape. His ongoing research, which began in 2015, has helped preserve and promote the unique traditions and narratives that define the municipality.

Currently, the author serves as the head of the Heritage Tourism Division under the Municipal Tourism Office, a role he has held since 2022. In this capacity, he works to integrate cultural heritage into tourism development, ensuring that the local identity and community stories are at the forefront of El Nido's tourism initiatives.

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Appendix

Republic of the Philippines
Province of Palawan
Municipality of El Nido

OFFICE OF THE SANGGUNIANG BAYAN

EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR SESSION OF THE SANGGUNIANG BAYAN OF EL NIDO, PALAWAN HELD AT THE SANGGUNIAN SESSION HALL ON JUNE 14, 2023.

Present:

HON. LUNINGNING L. BATOY	Municipal Vice Mayor, PO
HON. RAYMUNDO A. GABARRA, JR.	SB Member
HON. PERCIVAL C. AUSTRIA	-do-
HON. CYRIL L. ZUMARRAGA	-do-
HON. ROSANO G. LLANERA	-do-
HON. BERNARDO D. LEGASPI	-do-
HON. ERNESTO D. LAJALLAB	-do-
HON. ARACEL A. BACOLOD	-do-, ABC President

xxx xxx xxx

RESOLUTION NO. 23-145

A RESOLUTION REQUESTING FOR ADOPTION OF TWELVE (12) PHILIPPINE REGISTRY OF CULTURAL PROPERTIES (PRECUP) FORMS CONTAINING CULTURAL PROPERTIES OF THIS MUNICIPALITY.

WHEREAS, the Philippine Registry of Cultural Property abbreviated as PRECUP is a national registry of the Philippine Government used to consolidate in one record all cultural property that are deemed important to the cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, at the Municipality of El Nido, Palawan;

WHEREAS, El Nido continues a steady climb for tourism industry's recovery. The Heritage Tourism Division Office of the Municipality, headed by Ms. Sharmaine D. Hadji Nur, Municipal Tourism Officer was submitted the list of Cultural Properties on June 1, 2023;

WHEREAS, as one of the requirements for the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) they submitted Twelve (12) Philippine Registry of Cultural Properties (PRECUP) forms containing properties of this municipality.

NOW, THEREFORE, on motion of SB Member Lajallab and was duly seconded by SB Member Legaspi, be it;

RESOLVED, AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, to request for adoption of Twelve (12) Philippine Registry of Cultural Properties (PRECUP) forms containing Cultural Properties of this Municipality.

Page 2 of Res. No. 23-145

RESOLVED FINALLY, that copy of this resolution be furnished to Ms. Sharmaine D. Hadji Nur, Municipal Tourism Officer for their information and appropriate action.

ADOPTED.

XXX XXX XXX

I HEREBY CERTIFY to the correctness of the foregoing resolution.

JULITO V. SABENACIO
Local Legislative Staff Officer II
Acting Secretary to the Sanggunian

ATTESTED AND CERTIFIED TO BE DULY ADOPTED:

LUNINGNING L. BATOY
Municipal Vice Mayor, PO

APPROVED:

EDNA G. CACOT-LIM
Municipal Mayor

This document is not valid without Municipal Official Dry Seal

Republic of the Philippines
Province of Palawan
Municipality of EL Nido

OFFICE OF THE SANGGUNIANG BAYAN

EXCERPT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR SESSION OF THE SANGGUNIANG BAYAN OF EL NIDO, PALAWAN HELD AT THE SANGGUNIAN SESSION HALL ON MAY 26, 2025.

Present:

HON. LUNINGNING L. BATOY	Municipal Vice Mayor, PO
HON. JOEL D. ROSENTO	SB Member
HON. RAYMUNDO A. GABARRA, JR.	-do-
HON. PERCIVAL C. AUSTRIA	-do-
HON. ROSANO G. LLANERA	-do-
HON. BERNARDO D. LEGASPI	-do-
HON. EMILY A. FERNANDEZ	-do-
HON. ERNESTO D. LAJALLAB	-do-

xxx xxx xxx

RESOLUTION NO. 25-151

A RESOLUTION DECLARING AND ADAPTING CUYONON ATI-ATIHAN, GUSOS NI STA. POTENCIANA, IDELET CAVE, KAROSA, LUNDAY, MAKANGITCAVE, PALAPAK, PANALAD, SWALAWAN, TUGDA AND NOVENA PAR KI STA, POTENCIANA AS CULTURAL PROPERTIES OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF EL NIDO, PALAWAN.

Authored by: Hon. Cyril L. Zumarraga
Hon. Ernesto D. Lajallab
Hon. Angielina P. Mosqueda

WHEREAS, Section 14 (b) of the Republic Act No. 10066 or the National Historical Heritage Act of 2009 requires Local Government Unit to establish and maintain a local cultural property of registry;

WHEREAS, Section 14, 15 and 17 Article XIV 1987 Constitution declared that the state shall faster the preservation enrichment and dynamic evolution of a Filipino Culture based on the principle of unity in diversity in a climate of free artistic and intellectual expression. The constitution likewise mandates the state to conserve, develop, promote, and popularize the nation's historical and cultural heritage and resources as well as artistic creation;

WHEREAS, in compliance there to, Joint Memorandum Circular No. 2018-01 of the National Commission on Culture and Arts (NCCA) and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) dated October 09, 2018, is enjoining all local government unit to establish and maintain a local inventory of cultural property which shall form part of the Philippines Registry of Cultural Property (PRECUP);

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WHEREAS, *heritage conservation* is an action taken to sustain the value, meaning and significance of cultural resources from the past of the use of present inspiration of future generation.

NOW, THEREFORE, on motion of SB Member Llajallab and were jointly seconded by SB Member Austria and SB Member Legaspi, be it

RESOLVED, AS IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, to declare and adapt the Cuyonon Ati-Atihan, Gusos Ni Sta. Potenciana, Idelet Cave, Karosa, Lunday, Makangit Cave, Palapak, Panalad, Swalawan, Tugda and Novena Par Ki Sta. Potenciana as Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido, Palawan.

RESOLVED FINALLY, to forward copy of this resolution to Mr. Arvin Acosta, for his information and appropriate action.

ADOPTED.

xxx xxx xxx

I HEREBY CERTIFY to the correctness of the foregoing resolution.

MIGUEL F. GACASA, Ph.D.
Secretary to the Sanggunian

ATTESTED AND CERTIFIED TO BE DULY ADOPTED:

LUNINGNING L. BATOY
Municipal Vice Mayor, PO

APPROVED:

EDNA GALLOT-LIM
Municipal Mayor
Date: 06/04/25

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People behind the scenes:

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Field Research: Melyn Baluarte, Justin Mark Condesa & Kristel Abian

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