Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido, Volume 2:

Coastal Communities

Arvin L. Acosta

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MESSAGE FROM THE MUNICIPAL MAYOR



It is with a heart full of joy and immense pride that I address you today to celebrate a truly significant moment in the history of our beloved town: the official publication and release of the second volume of the Book on Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido, Palawan.

The first volume of this landmark series was a revelation, opening our eyes to the incredible wealth of heritage that surrounds us. Now, with Volume 2, we delve even deeper. This book is more than just a collection of information; it's a testament to our community's enduring commitment to preserving our past for future generations. It's a tribute to the stories whispered by our ancestors, the traditions that bind us, and the physical artifacts that serve as tangible links to our history.

Our cultural properties, whether they are archaeological sites, traditional crafts, or oral histories, are the very soul of El Nido. They are what make us unique and give us our identity. This new volume meticulously documents these treasures, ensuring they are not forgotten. It is a work of passion, a product of countless hours of research, documentation, and dedication by our local historians, cultural workers, and the many community members who shared their knowledge.

The publication of this book is not just a cause for celebration; it is a vital step in our mission to be a community that values its heritage. For our youth, this book will serve as a powerful educational tool. It will teach them about where they come from, instilling in them a deep sense of pride and a responsibility to be the next generation of guardians of our culture. For our elders, it is a validation of the knowledge and traditions they have preserved and passed down. For all of us, it is a reminder of the strong foundation upon which our modern community is built.

I encourage every family, every school, and every resident of El Nido to acquire a copy of this book. Let's make it a centerpiece in our homes and classrooms. Let's use it as a starting point for conversations about our shared history and as a guide to exploring the rich tapestry of our town. By doing so, we ensure that the stories within its pages continue to live on, not just in print, but in our hearts and actions.

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 shrines through every page of this new 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.

This achievement is a clear signal that the spirit of El Nido is strong and vibrant. As your Mayor, I am filled with immense pride knowing that we are a community that doesn't just look forward but also cherishes its roots. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this monumental achievement. Your efforts have created a legacy that will be cherished and shared for generations to come.

Congratulations to Mr. Arvin Acosta and the entire Heritage Tourism Division for this remarkable contribution to our Municipality. Let us all take pride in our heritage and continue to work together to protect, celebrate, and promote the extraordinary cultural heritage of El Nido.

With deepest gratitude and respect,

HON. EDNA GACOT-LIM
Municipal Mayor

MESSAGE FROM THE EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE



The Municipality of El Nido is deeply blessed with rich cultural properties that reflect the identity, traditions, and heritage of our coastal communities. These treasures – our ancestral practices, historic sites, indigenous knowledge, and the artistry of our people – serve as living reminders of who we are and where we came from.

As we continue to embrace progress and development, it is our collective responsibility to safeguard, preserve, and promote these cultural properties. They not only embody the spirit of our ancestors but also provide inspiration and pride for present and future generations.

Through unity and respect for our heritage, we ensure that the cultural wealth of El Nido remains vibrant, resilient, and deeply connected to the natural beauty of our coastal environment. Let us work hand in hand to protect and celebrate our natural practices, for in doing so, we honor our past and strengthen the foundation of our future.

HON. JOHN ROSTUM T. VIDAL
Municipal Councilor, Committee on Education and Culture Chairperson
El Nido, Palawan

MESSAGE FROM THE MUNICIPAL TOURISM OFFICER



Our beloved town, El Nido, has become one of the top destinations in the world, with its natural wonders capturing the hearts of people seeking to experience paradise. It is something we take great pride in and strive to preserve through consistent efforts toward sustainability. However, a place is not only defined by its landscapes. We, in the Municipal Tourism Office, acknowledge our town's heritage and history as equally important in building our identity and in showcasing what it really means to be in El Nido.

It is with pleasure that I introduce to you the second volume of the book Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido which centers on Coastal Communities. This is a collection of extensive research guided by the goal of firmly establishing our narrative as a community which traces back to pre-colonial times. In this book, we dive deep into our historical and anthropological beginnings, telling stories of how our ancestors lived and, in their precious ways, preserved the pristine wonders of El Nido. Hence, it reminds us to value what we enjoy today to honor those who lived to protect them.

This book would not be possible without the diligence of Mr. Arvin L. Acosta, the head of the Heritage Tourism Division of this Office, and his team who exerted invaluable efforts to find the stories that reflect the heart of El Nido. I also would like to express my gratitude to the people who shared their knowledge – our tribal communities, local historians and storytellers – and through this book, we honor them, too. May we all continue to support the preservation of our heritage and show the world that El Nido is not only rich in the surface but more importantly, in its people and the stories they carry.

With warm regards,

SHIRLETTE KRISTEL C. SOMAYO, MM
OIC-Municipal Tourism Officer
Senior Tourism Operations Officer

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction (p. 9)

Second Volume (p. 10), Natural Environment (p. 11), Terminologies (p. 13), Ethno-Linguistic Groups (p.16), Present-Day (p. 18)

Chapter 2: Geological Features (p. 20)

Paglugaban Is. (p. 21), Bacuit Formation (21), Minilog Limestone (p. 22), Sta. Monica Natural Fort (p. 23), Imorigue (p. 26), Cudugnon Cave (p. 29), Shimizu Is. (p. 30), Inambogol (p. 30), Lagen Is. (p. 31), Cadlao Is. (p. 32), Mountains in the Town of Bacuit (33), Pagawanen Point (p. 34), Cagbuli Strait (p. 35), Eastern Mudflat Belt (p. 35)

Chapter 3: Coastal Communities (p. 37)

Dewil Valley (p. 38), Sibaltan (p. 40), Talindak (p. 50), The Oldest Barangays (p. 58), Tagbanua Communities (p. 59)

Chapter 4: Structures (p. 62)

El Nido Port (p. 63), Canovas Port (p. 63), Balay Cuyonon (p. 65), Balay na Mabael (p. 66), Tigbaboy (p. 66), Penet p. 67), Bosyador's Hut (p. 67)

Chapter 5: Objects (p. 69)

Fish Traps (p. 69), Sarapang (p. 73), Saleng Torch (p. 74), Budyong (p. 75), Lusong asta Alo (p. 76), Pangko (p. 76), Lunday (p. 80), Yawning Jar (p. 80), Daga (p. 81), Tapayan (p. 83), Imorigue Coffin (p. 84), Tinagik (p. 85)

Chapter 6: Navigation (p. 87)

Wind Directions (p. 88), Navigational Vocabulary (p. 91), Palangat (p. 91), Celestial Bodies (p. 93)

Chapter 7: Culinary Traditions (p. 95)

Nido Soup (p. 96), Kinilaw na Tamilok (p. 97), Tanubong (p. 97), Ogdok (p. 97), Wak-Wak (p. 98), Crabs (p. 98), Manla (p. 99), Lato (p. 100), Paket-Paket (p. 100), Korot (p. 100), Sea Cucumbers (p. 101), Seashells (p. 102), Traditional Cuyonon Delicacies (p. 105)

Chapter 8: Intangible Culture (p. 107)

Dumaracol (p. 107), Pamaragua (p. 109), Karbungko (p. 110), Panulo (p. 111), Paliparan (p. 111), Belief in Afterlife 112), Babaylan Rituals (p. 113)

Chapter 9: Conservation (p. 116)

Philippine Journal of Science (p. 117), Carl Guthe (p. 117), Robert Fox (p. 118), El Nido Marine Turtle Sanctuary (p. 119), El Nido Marine Reserve (p. 119), El Nido Managed Resource Protected Area (p. 120), EUF (p. 121), Palawan Island Paleo-history Research Project (p. 122), CMMA (p.122), Kalugtan Arts Festival (p. 123), Tres Marias Project (p. 123), Eco-Tourism Development Fee (p. 124), Community Museum at the Barangay Hall (p. 126), Balay Cuyonon Museum (p. 126), Sibaltan History Museum (p. 126), Pangko Replica (p. 127), Dewil Valley Museum (p. 127), Registry (p. 128), Publication (p. 129), Barangay Festivals (p. 129), Barangay Destination Symbols (p. 130)

Bibliography (p. 133)

Index (p. 140)

Appendix (p. 147)

About the Author (p. 148)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

El Nido, a coastal town at the northern tip of Palawan in the Philippines, lies approximately 420 km southwest of Manila. Known for its crystal-clear waters, ancient limestone cliffs dating back 250 million years, and vibrant marine life, El Nido is a premier destination for both local and international travelers. As a 1st class municipality, it enjoys a thriving economy and expanding infrastructure, solidifying its reputation as one of the top tourist destinations in the region.

The Poblacion area, comprising the barangays of Masagana, Buena Suerte, Maligaya, and Corong-Corong, serves as the heart of tourism in El Nido, attracting visitors to the pristine beaches and lagoons of Bacuit Bay. Beyond the Poblacion, beaches like Nacpan and Duli in Barangay Bucana, are gaining popularity, and emerging as rising tourist hotspots. Meanwhile, Villa Libertad plays a pivotal role in the town's tourism development, featuring growing residential projects, diverse businesses, and the municipality's sole airport, all of which support and enhance El Nido's bustling tourism sector.

Beyond the main tourist areas, fishing remains the primary livelihood for many residents in the rural barangays, providing fresh seafood for both the local community and the growing number of visitors. This fishing industry also enriches the town's cultural heritage, with diverse culinary traditions reflecting the abundance of marine life. Aside from fishing, coastal communities developed a system of navigation through centuries of traversing the natural environment and interaction with migrating cultures.

While there are farming communities in El Nido, agricultural production is limited, and local crops are not sufficient to meet the demands of the growing population and influx of tourists. As a result, many agricultural products are sourced from other parts of Palawan or Manila. Despite these challenges, the natural beauty and cultural richness of El Nido continue to draw people from around the world, making it a key hub for tourism in the Philippines.

The harvesting of *balinsasayaw* nests became a defining cultural tradition for the town, inspiring its renaming to El Nido in 1954. "El Nido," which means "the nest" in Spanish, underscores the significance of this practice. The *balinsasayaw*, a swiftlet species nesting in the caves of the town's limestone cliffs, produces edible nests that once provided a crucial livelihood for locals before the tourism industry flourished. The annual Balinsasayaw Festival celebrates this rich cultural heritage, even as nest gathering faces challenges from the declining *balinsasayaw*

population and the expanding tourism sector that increasingly overshadows it.

El Nido has a rich heritage that stretches back at least 14,000 years, with its coastal culture standing out. This culture embodies the seafaring traditions that have flourished across the Philippine archipelago and throughout Southeast Asia. In fact, insights into El Nido's maritime heritage play a crucial role in deepening our understanding of coastal cultural environment in the region across various historical periods.

Second Volume

From nest gathering to culinary arts, farming, and fishing, El Nido has developed a unique culture that reflects the essence of its people and history. However, with numerous cultural properties fading from the municipality's collective memory each year, a series of books is being published to preserve as much of this heritage as possible.

This book, titled "Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido, Volume 2," is the latest addition to an ongoing series documenting the rich cultural heritage of El Nido, Palawan. This series began with its first volume, written as part of the municipality's compliance with the requirements for the coveted Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) Award. By presenting a comprehensive inventory of cultural properties, the inaugural volume laid the groundwork for the recognition of El Nido's efforts in preserving its cultural identity. It also underscored the municipality's commitment to meeting national standards in governance and cultural conservation.

This second volume shifts its focus to the traditions of the coastal communities, which play a pivotal role in defining El Nido's maritime character. The coastal way of life, deeply intertwined with the sea, encompasses practices in fishing, boat-making, and rituals that celebrate and respect the maritime environment. By documenting these traditions, the book not only preserves the knowledge of these communities but also highlights their contributions to the municipality's identity. As part of this series, Volume 2 adds another layer to the understanding of El Nido's cultural landscape, ensuring that the stories of its people and their way of life are recorded for future generations.

The chapter on coastal culinary traditions will delve into the unique and indigenous dishes of El Nido, many of which are being replaced by modern and Western culinary influences. As the town's tourism continues to thrive, restaurants offering Indian, Korean, European, and American

cuisines dominate, gradually diminishing the prominence of local food heritage. By documenting these culinary traditions, the program hopes to revive interest and appreciation for the local flavors that reflect El Nido's cultural identity.

History will also be explored in this volume, which traces the development of coastal communities over time. It delves into the shifting power dynamics in El Nido, highlighting how one major settlement emerged and was eventually replaced by another. Drawing from historical publications, the volume also raises the question of when the Municipality of El Nido was actually founded, challenging the commonly accepted belief that it occurred in 1916.

Natural Environment

The natural environment of El Nido, particularly its rich marine life, has profoundly influenced the culture of its coastal communities. Abundant species like *dugong* (sea cow), *pawikan* (sea turtle), and *butanding* (whale shark) thrived in the surrounding waters, shaping the local people's relationship with the sea. These animals were not only integral to their diet and livelihoods but also became part of their cultural lore and traditions, often highlighted in stories and rituals that celebrated the balance between humans and nature. Furthermore, ancestors crafted necklaces using shells, bones and teeth from marine animals, creating meaningful adornments that reflected their wealth, influence or achievements. Artifacts like the necklaces discovered in Sibaltan and the beads found in Cudognon reveal the intricate craftsmanship and symbolic use of marine materials in ancient local culture.

Meanwhile, El Nido's coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds supported a wide array of marine species that sustained the local economy through generations. These ecosystems provided breeding grounds for fish and crustaceans, which the communities relied on for subsistence and trade. The coral reefs acted as natural barriers against storms and coastal erosion, protecting settlements and ensuring the sustainability of fishing areas. Mangroves and seagrass beds contributed to the rich biodiversity and helped stabilize the coastal environment, which became essential for the local fishermen's selection of fishing techniques.

However, due to recurring pressures posed by climate change, illegal fishing to the coral reef and mangroves, and due to the dwindling population of some marine species like *dugongs* and *pawikans*, scientists and environmental conservation advocates pushed for the enactment of

laws to protect them. When the laws were finally enacted, coastal villagers eventually adapted to these laws and gradually moved away from consuming endangered marine creatures, making charcoal out of mangrove trees, and unsustainable fishing practices to being part of the efforts to conserve them. But still, a few individuals continue the now-illegal way of consuming marine wildlife.

The unique geography of El Nido, with its exposure to changing wind patterns and weather conditions, significantly impacted the seafaring skills of the locals. The Cagbuli Strait, in particular, is known for its strong currents, making navigation through it a formidable challenge. The frequent experience of bad weather, sudden shifts in wind direction, and powerful waves honed the navigational expertise of the local seafarers. They developed an intimate understanding of the sea, learning to read the sky, tides, and winds to ensure their safety. These skills were crucial, not only for fishing but also for trade, as they facilitated the movement of goods between islands and across regions.

The rich biodiversity and natural land formations influenced settlement patterns. Villages were typically established near abundant marine resources, close to coral reefs and mangroves where the natural environment offered plentiful fish, shellfish, and other marine harvests. Coves were also chosen as they offer protection from strong winds during bad weather. These settlement patterns include resettlement, building communities and establishing trade partnerships.

Natural coastal terrain not only plays a crucial role in the selection of settlement areas, but in the selection of areas for trade and coastal defense. In Barangay Mabini, the Canovas family strategically chose the location to build their port in 1923, using the natural beach, the deep channel and surrounding mangrove ecosystems as protective barriers. The mangroves provided natural defense against storm surges and coastal erosion while deep waters enable barges to dock in their port. The coral reef and abundant seagrass beds in front of the port further contributed to the sustainability of the area by fostering marine life crucial for fishing, trade, and food security for the workforce in charge of port operations. These natural features made Mabini an ideal site for both settlement and commerce.

Sta. Monica Natural Fort in Sibaltan demonstrates how natural high points were used as early coastal defenses during Spanish colonization, and possibly even before. The rock hill served as a natural watchtower, allowing residents to spot approaching ships or invaders from a distance, giving the community time to prepare or seek refuge. Its elevation and strategic placement made it difficult for invaders to sneak up on the

settlement, enhancing its defensive capabilities. Natural features like hills and elevated terrains have historically been leveraged for military advantage, serving as lookout points, natural fortifications, or barriers against intruders. This further demonstrates how the terrain was pivotal in the survival of coastal communities.

In Aberawan, the natural terrain around Langeb-Langeban was similarly critical in shaping the trading port of Talindak, which existed as early as the 17th century or earlier. The area was likely chosen for its accessible coastline, which facilitated maritime trade, and its protective mangrove landscape, which provided shelter for traders. Over time, as trade and settlement needs evolved, the port moved to the present town center of El Nido, but Langeb-Langeban remained historically significant for its role in early commerce. Its location at a key coastal intersection made it an ideal point for trading vessels to dock, exchange goods, and take advantage of the natural harbor.

When it comes to marine biodiversity, El Nido has 910[1] species of fish and 447[2] species of corals. The greatest number of species of fish are the families of small fishes, making El Nido as an ideal place for macro divers. Added to El Nido's biodiversity are the confirmation and publication of new plant species Amorpophallus natolii and Begonia cabanillasii. Amorpophalus natolii is a type o plant living on top of the town's limestone cliffs while Begonia cabanillasii was a type of begonia that was discovered by Will Cabanillas, a Cuyonon.

Terminologies

This book uses terms like *barangay*, *sitio*, and *purok*, which carry unique meanings within the Philippine context. To help readers unfamiliar with these local terms, this section provides clear explanations of each, tracing their origins and evolution through history. The terms *barangay* and *sitio* are commonly abbreviated as "Bgy." and "So." when placed before specific place names, such as "Bgy. New Ibajay" or "So. Sta. Monica."

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[1] Gerald R. Allen & Mark V. Erdmann, "Reef Fishes of El Nido," Primex Printers, Manila, 2009.

[2] Emre Turak & Lyndon DeVantier, "Coral Biodiversity, Marine Tourism and Conservation Priorities in El Nido, Palawan, Philippines," El Nido Foundation, Inc., Manila, 2010.

The term "barangay," as used in the Philippines today, has its roots in the word "balangay," an ancient wooden boat used by early Filipinos for transportation and settlement. These boats carried groups of families and their leaders across the seas, eventually landing and establishing communities along the islands. The social structure that evolved from these boat settlements became the basis for early governance, with the "datu" as the leader of each community. Over time, these communities grew into more developed and permanent settlements, giving rise to what is now known as the barangay, a term that carries with it the history of migration and leadership by sea. The term barangay was used interchangeably with its Spanish equivalent "barrio" while the ruling *datu* was replaced by *tiniente del barrio* during the Spanish colonization. In the book "Barangay: Sixteenth Century Philippine Culture and Society," William Henry Scott, a distinguished historian and eminent scholar, discussed the difference between the two, "It should be noted, however, that the word (barangay) continued to mean the people, not the place."[3]

In modern governance, the barangay has become the most basic political unit in the Philippines. Each barangay operates as a local government entity with its own set of elected officials, the barangay captain or *punong barangay* and barangay councilors or *kagawads*, who manage the day-to-day needs of their community. This system allows for localized decision-making, conflict resolution and governance, enabling the barangay to address issues specific to its constituents. The barangay serves as a vital link between local communities and higher levels of government, helping maintain order and provide basic services such as health, public order, and infrastructure development. The enforcement of laws is assigned to the barangay *tanods*, under the leadership of the *punong barangay* and the *barangay kagawads*. Meanwhile, conflict resolution falls under the jurisdiction of a committee called the *lupon*.

Further subdividing barangays are smaller areas known as *sitios* and *puroks*. Sitios are often rural and remote sections of a barangay, which may not be densely populated but still require attention from local leaders. *Puroks,* on the other hand, refer to a more urbanized subdivision, often consisting of a group of houses or a street within a barangay. These smaller units help manage community affairs more efficiently, ensuring that even the most remote or densely populated areas receive adequate governance and services.

The term *Poblacion* will also be mentioned here. This refers to the 4 barangays in the town proper, namely, Masagana, Buena Suerte, Maligaya

[3] William Henry Scott: Barangay, "Sixteenth Century Philippine Culture and Society," Ateneo de Manila University Press, Quezon City,1994, p. 6.

and Corong-Corong. *Poblacion* is a Spanish word for "town" or "settlement." Furthermore, the term *Poblacion* is a widely recognized designation used to describe the central area or capital barangays of most municipalities across the Philippines. As the country has progressed toward modernity, however, the term *Poblacion* has gradually fallen out of everyday use, especially in urban areas where the concept of a single town center has evolved into the more frequently used Filipino word, "bayan," or the English term "town center." Despite this shift, *Poblacion* remains in the vocabulary of the populace, especially the older generation, who, though seldom, still use the term.

The term *bosyador,* which will also receive several mentions, refers to the gatherers of edible bird's nests, locally called the *balinsasayaw*'s nest. Known for their skill and bravery, *bosyadors* climb rugged cliffs and navigate challenging terrain to collect these prized nests, which are highly valued for their culinary and medicinal qualities. The term *bosyador* reflects not only the occupation but also the cultural identity of these gatherers, who have inherited and preserved this knowledge across generations.

Similarly, we will use the term *babaylan* to describe the traditional Philippine shamans who played vital roles in spiritual and healing practices. Historically, *babaylan* were respected community leaders, deeply connected to the natural and spiritual worlds, and they performed rituals to ensure the community's wellbeing, often acting as healers, intermediaries, and protectors. "The babaylan held vital tasks in barangay or the local community, such as in the field of religion, astronomy, medicine, and agriculture."[4]

Meanwhile, Palawan has been known by various names throughout its history. During pre-colonial times, it was called Palau-Yu, and later, Spanish colonizers referred to it as Paragua. In this book, the name Paragua shall be mentioned frequently since most of the historical settings discussed shall be during Spanish period and Paragua played a big part in shaping Cuyonon coastal communities throughout history.

To ensure clarity for readers, the terms BC (Before the Birth of Christ) and AD (Anno Domini, a Latin phrase meaning "The Year of the Lord") will be used throughout this work. These terms are widely recognized and easier to understand for most audiences. However, when referencing scientific papers or publications, the terms BCE (Before Common Era) and

[4] 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.

CE (Common Era) may occasionally appear, as they are part of the quoted text and cannot be altered. The abbreviation "BP" will appear in certain quotations from scientific publications. It stands for "before present" and is used to highlight the time elapsed from a point in the past to the present.

Ethno-Linguistic Groups

In El Nido, the main ethno-linguistic groups traditionally adapted their livelihoods to the diverse ecosystems they inhabited along the coastal areas. The Tagbanua, one of Palawan's indigenous groups, established communities in various parts of the municipality. In Barangay New Ibajay, they specialized in utilizing mangrove ecosystems, engaging in activities such as gathering crabs, shells, and other mangrove-derived resources. In Sitio Catuldan, Barangay Teneguiban, another Tagbanua community focused on fishing in the reef areas, capitalizing on the abundant marine life. Meanwhile, in Barangay Bagong Bayan, Tagbanua families residing in Purok Bagong Sikat and other sitios combined mangrove and reef-based livelihoods. They inherited the tradition of collecting root crops like *korot* from nearby hilly terrains and islands.

Meanwhile, the Cuyonons, a group with distinct cultural practices, settled in coastal villages, especially Villa Paz, Sibaltan, San Fernando, and Villa Libertad where they still maintained at least 85% of barangay's total population. These communities carried with them traditional Cuyonon fishing techniques, refined over generations in the Cuyo Island. Their methods of fishing were unique and included the use of handcrafted fishing tools and sailing techniques designed for near-shore waters and larger reef areas. Their fishing and sailing practices contributed to the strong maritime culture of El Nido that will be discussed in this book.

The Aklanons fisherfolks, primarily found in New Ibajay, adapted to the rich mangrove forests and coastal waters by engaging in both crab trapping and fishing. Using traditional crab traps, they skillfully harvested crabs from the mangroves, a lucrative resource in these biodiverse ecosystems. Additionally, Aklanon fishers ventured beyond the mangroves into the reef areas for fishing, maximizing the use of both habitats. The culture they brought with them adapted to El Nido's marine environment and the existing culture of the early settlers, the Tagbanuas and the Cuyonons, contributing greatly to the development of a unique identity for the place.

The Ilonggo community in Barriong Lagi, Mabini, was established when the Canovas family brought in workers for their sawmill and port

operations. Carrying their traditions with them, the Ilonggos not only adjusted to their new coastal surroundings but also integrated with the pre-existing Cuyonon culture in the area, creating a unique blend of cultural practices. Alongside their fishing techniques, their religious practices thrived. Their chapel's patron, St. Vincent Ferrer, continues to draw devotees even from neighboring barangays to this day.

The migration of Cebuanos to El Nido was primarily driven by the pursuit for better fishing opportunities. Over time, the increasing population in Cebu and the depletion of its marine resources made sustaining livelihoods through fishing more challenging. Palawan, with its abundant fishing grounds and less crowded coastal areas, emerged as an attractive destination for resettlement. This influx of Cebuanos brought a significant cultural impact to El Nido, as they carried with them their distinct fishing techniques, knowledge, and traditions. Today, Cebuano communities are dispersed across all barangays in El Nido, actively contributing to the local fishing industry and the local economy in general.

In the book "Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido, Volume 1," the author gave us the following picture of the distribution of ethno-linguistic groups among the local population of the municipality based on the data from the Municipal Planning and Development Office:

> 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 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 intermarriage 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.[5]

Though in the first volume, the Tagbanuas in Bagong Bayan were mentioned to be living in So. Talogon, the author later found out that they were scattered in different sitios and the most number of Tagbanua families can be found in Purok Bagong Sikat. In New Ibajay, only two

[5] Arvin L. Acosta: "Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido, Volume 1," Futuristic Printing Press, Puerto Princesa, 2024, p. 9.

families remain purely Tagbanua, currently residing in Sitio Durongan. Due to intermarriage, other Tagbanua individuals now have mixed heritage, partly Cuyonon or Ilocano. They left Sitio Talesay, where they once thrived as a community, and integrated with other residents of New Ibajay. Meanwhile, the Tagbanua community in Sitio Catuldan in Teneguiban has largely remained, though some families relocated due to pressures from developers who acquired their lands. Currently, the Apostolic Vicariate of Taytay is actively helping them in preserving their ancestral lands through legal assistance and lobbying with concerned agencies.

Understanding the ethno-linguistic groups in El Nido - each with unique origins and cultural identity - is key at understanding how cultural properties are formed, merged, and enriched through centuries of migration, utilization of resources, trading, and interaction. In this book, the indigenous people are recognized as the authors of these precious properties.

Present Day

Currently, the municipality has four coastal barangays in Poblacion: Masagana, Buena Suerte, Maligaya, and Corong-Corong. To the northwest are Villa Libertad, Pasadeňa, and Bucana. Further northwest are Manlag, Aberawan, Bagong Bayan, and Bebeladan. To the north is Teneguiban, and in the eastern part are San Fernando, Sibaltan, Villa Paz, New Ibajay, and Mabini. Barotuan is located in the middle and has no shoreline.

The Poblacion area currently hosts a port actively serving various vessels, including RORO (Roll-On/Roll-Off) ships, fast crafts, small barges, tourist boats, and even navy ships. On the eastern coast, San Fernando offers an alternative port, which has the capacity to accommodate larger ships. However, the facility still lacks some essential amenities despite its inauguration on March 19, 2021. Currently, it accommodates majority of the departing and arriving expedition boats, offering a preferable alternative to the overcrowded port in the town center.

Several smaller jetty ports are also present in Bebeladan, Teneguiban, Sibaltan, and San Fernando, supporting more localized transport needs. In Bucana and New Ibajay, small yet sturdy concrete docking platforms provide a safe mooring space for local fishing boats, helping sustain the livelihoods of the community's fishermen. Together, these port facilities enhance connectivity and economic activity across the region, although some infrastructure improvements remain necessary.

The environment faces significant strain due to illegal destructive fishing methods, and the intrusion of commercial fishing boats within municipal waters, all of which deplete marine resources and harm delicate ecosystems. Overfishing compounds these issues, putting immense pressure on fish stocks that are vital for local sustenance and biodiversity. To counter these pressures, there are currently 15 Community-Managed Marine Areas (CMMAs) established to protect essential fish breeding grounds. However, only a few of these areas receive adequate protection and enforcement, limiting their ability to support fish populations and ecosystem resilience. Enhanced regulation and effective management of CMMAs are essential to alleviate these environmental pressures and secure the long-term sustainability of marine resources.

CHAPTER 2: GEOLOGICAL FEATURES

El Nido's striking geological features, especially its towering limestone cliffs and hidden caves, have shaped the way coastal communities lived, protected themselves, and prospered. Historically, these formations provided natural defense and shelter during times of conflict, such as enemy raids. Communities would flee to the caves and inaccessible areas of the cliffs for protection, using the landscape as a shield against invaders. This adaptability to the environment allowed the fishing communities to remain resilient and thrive despite external threats. Moreover, the same rock formations are home to swiftlets, whose nests are harvested for the highly valued edible bird's nests, providing a sustainable livelihood to many locals. This practice, passed down through generations, has become an essential part of the community's identity, tied closely to both survival and tradition.

Beyond their defensive and economic roles, the caves in El Nido hold deep spiritual significance for the local communities. These natural formations were often considered sacred spaces, where *babaylans* conducted rituals to honor ancestors, seek protection, or ensure bountiful harvests from the sea. These sacred gatherings reflect the communities' deep connection to nature and the belief that the caves were not just physical shelters but spiritual sanctuaries. Over time, the caves also became burial grounds, where the dead were laid to rest, further embedding these geological features into the spiritual fabric of life in El Nido. The limestone caves thus became symbols of continuity between the physical world of the living and the spiritual realm of the ancestors.

The coves dotting El Nido's coastline, also played a crucial role in the development of its fishing communities. These coves, naturally sheltered from strong winds and rough seas, offered ideal locations for fishermen to launch and dock their boats. During bad weather, the coves provided safe havens, ensuring that communities could still access the sea for sustenance while avoiding the dangers of the open ocean. The calm waters of the coves fostered the growth of settlements in these protected areas, where people could fish in shallow waters even in less-than-ideal conditions.

Additionally, the extensive seagrass beds that stretch from San Fernando to New Ibajay, combined with the mudflats that appear during low tide, created a unique fishing environment. These shallow waters are rich in marine life, providing easy access to fish, shellfish, and other resources without the need to venture into deeper, more dangerous waters. This

abundance, alongside the natural protection from the coves, shaped a way of life deeply connected to the rhythms of the tides and the sea.

Paglugaban Is.

Paglugaban Island served as the namesake for the oldest known rock formation in El Nido, as recognized by the scientific community. Wolfgang Kiessling and Erik Flügel, in their study "Late Paleozoic and Late Triassic Limestones from the North Palawan Block (Philippines): Microfacies and Paleogeographical Implications," discussed the Paglugaban Formation, stating:

> The Paglugaban Formation defined herein (Fig. 2) is only known from Paglugaban Island, south of Minilog Island (Fig. 3). The sequence consists of carbonate breccias and bioclastic limestones. The majority of limestones is completely recrystallized, but two samples with moderately preserved fusulinid foraminifera could be recovered in the central part of the island. The samples yield 'Middle' Carboniferous (late Moscovian-early Kasimovian) fusulinids (Pseudofusulinella sp.; det. D. Vachard). Although it is possible that Carboniferous fusulinids were reworked, the over-all stratigraphic and tectonic context suggests that Palugaban is largely composed of Carboniferous limestones, separated from the Permian limestones by a large oblique strike slip fault.[6]

Identifying Paglugaban as composed of Carboniferous limestones extends its age to 300 million years or older, making Paglugaban the oldest rock in El Nido.

The island is part of El Nido's history when a Japanese diver died in its underwater cave in 1990s, a tragic death that led to the renaming of Tagbao Is., the island next to it, to Shimizu Is. With this death, underwater cave diving there ceased for more than 2 decades.

Bacuit Formation

Bacuit Formation is the 2nd oldest with age at Middle Permian. That puts Bacuit Formation at an age of 270 million years old. Kiessling and Flügel also wrote in their manuscript:

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[6] Wolfgang Kiessling & Erik Flügel, "Late Paleozoic and Late Triassic Limestones from North Palawan Block (Philippines): Microfacies and Paleogeographical Implications," Facies 43, Erlangen, 2000, pp. 40-41.

> The type locality of the Bacuit Formation is Manmegmeg[7] Bay south of El Nido (formerly Bacuit). The Bacuit Formation includes sandstones, tuffitic shales and cherts. The total thickness was estimated exceeding 1500 m (Bureau of Mines and Geosciences, 1972). Conodonts in cherts indicate a Middle Permian age (Hashimoto & Sato, 1973). This age coincides with the proposed age of the overlying Minilog Formation, although a conformable contact is evident in places.[8]

Keissling and Flügel added in a map[9] that Bacuit formation is located in the northern part of the Cadlao Is., eastern part of Dilumacad Is., Marimegmeg Beach and Depeldet Is.

Minilog Limestone

The towering 250-million-year-old limestone cliffs, which define El Nido's iconic landscape, also shaped the livelihoods and traditions of the coastal communities. These cliffs served as the home of the swiftlets, whose nests, known as "balinsasayaw" (*Aerodramus fuciphagus*), were highly prized for their use in bird's nest soup, a delicacy in Chinese cuisine. Gatherers called "bosyadors" risked their lives scaling these steep cliffs to collect the nests, a tradition passed down through generations. The economic value of the bird's nests became a major source of livelihood for many families. This nest-gathering culture gave the municipality its identity that eventually led to its change of name in1954, from Bacuit to the present-day El Nido.

These limestone cliff formations that are concentrated in Bacuit Bay, where world-famous tourist attractions are located, can also be found in Dewil Valley and Imorigue Is., both in Bgy. New Ibajay. This type of rock formation is called Minilog Limestone by the scientific community. Minilog was the old name of the iconic Miniloc Is. The term appeared in several scientific papers, specifically in the Journal of Asian Earth Sciences in 2020 where the manuscript states:

> "The Bacuit Formation is overlain by the olistolith of the Minilog Limestone (formerly Minilog Formation by Hashimoto and Sato, 1973) which yielded Late Permian to Middle Triassic ages based on foraminiferal assemblage (Wolfart et al., 1986 in Mines and

[7] The authors were referring to the present-day area near Marimegmeg Beach.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

> Geosciences Bureau, 2010) and Middle Permian to Middle Triassic based on fusulinid and conodont assemblages (Zamoras and Matsuoka, 2001)."[10]

The age of Minilog rock can be deduced from the scientific terms used in the manuscript as it mentions Middle Permian and Middle Triassic periods. Permian is a geologic time that spans from 252 million to 299 million years ago. Meanwhile, Triassic refers to the time between 201 million to 252 million years ago.

Minilog limestone is found scattered throughout Bacuit Bay, a body of water bordered by the Bebeladan coast to the south, the long coastline from Bagong Bayan to Villa Libertad on the east, and the Caoayan group of islands to the north. On the mainland, significant formations of Minilog limestone are found in New Ibajay, particularly in a region known as Dewil Valley. The entire island of Imorigue, located on the east coast of New Ibajay, is composed of Minilog limestone. A smaller amount of this limestone also occurs in the mountains of the southwest El Nido mainland.

Sta. Monica Natural Fort

The trading community of Sibaltan, located on the eastern coast of El Nido, was historically a bustling hub of commerce since 500 AD, engaging in trade with neighboring islands and kingdoms. However, this prosperity often attracted the attention of regional powers seeking to control the valuable coastal trading routes. Among these powers, the Sultanate of Sulu, which existed from 1457 to 1915, was one of the most aggressive in raiding coastal settlements in the region. The Sultanate's powerful naval fleet, carrying fierce Muslim warriors, frequently conducted raids on communities like Sibaltan to capture goods, people, and resources. These incursions threatened the livelihood and security of the trading community, forcing them to develop strategies for defense and early warning.

In response to the threat of raids, the people of Sibaltan made strategic use of their natural environment, particularly Sta. Monica Outcrop. This elevated terrain served as a natural watchtower, allowing the community to keep a lookout for incoming war boats. From the vantage point of Sta.

[10] Graciano P. Yumul Jr., Carla B. Dimalanta, Jillian Aira S. Gabo-Ratio, Karlo L. Queaño, Leo T. Armada, Jenielyn T. Padrones, Decibel V. Faustino-Eslava, Betchaida D. Payot, Edanjarlo J. Marquez, "Mesozoic rock suites along western Philippines: Exposed proto-South China Sea fragments?" Journal of Asian Earth Sciences: X 4, 2020, p. 13.

Monica Natural Fort, sentries could spot a fleet of Moro raiders long before they reached the shore, giving the villagers time to prepare for potential attacks. The hill's strategic importance lay in its panoramic view of the surrounding seas, making it an essential part of the community's defense system in Sibaltan's former town center.

The use of the natural fort against raids started during the pre-colonial period and continued during the Spanish colonization. This was evidenced by the potteries and Ming Dynasty porcelains unearthed in the surrounding area. Furthermore, residents recounted that there were at least 3 cannons and a bell, which were stolen later on, inside a cave in front of the hill. These precious artefacts were proof that community was converted to Christianity and came under the protection of Spanish conquistadores and friars. The name of the place, Sta. Monica, is said to have come from the patron saint of the chapel that used to stand beside the hill.

Nestor Cercado, a resident of So. Buluang, shared a story passed down by his grandfather, Jorge Valdeztamon, a guerrilla fighter during the Japanese occupation. According to his grandfather, the bell was so large that it required more than four people to carry it. He recounted that the bell was used by local guerrillas to alert residents of approaching Japanese forces, giving them time to hide. The same bell might have been used to warn residents of approaching Moro raiders and to summon the faithful for Holy Mass during times of peace.

Sta. Monica was mentioned in a Spanish historical narrative of Moro raids in the archipelago. The document narrates:

> En dicho año «regresaba una expedición pirática de hacer una de sus excursiones en la costa oriental de la Paragua, donde después de haber cautivado las tripulaciones de varios pancos de comercio, habían quemado el pueblo de Santa Mónica ó Batacalan, cautivando á casi todos sus habitantes, degollando á los pocos que hicieron resistencia, y llevándose, por último, hasta las campanas de la iglesia, cuando fué avistada por un cañonero, poco después del mediodía, fondeado junto á una pequeña isla que hay en las inmediaciones de Paniquian. Los moros metieron sus embarcaciones en un sitio donde no podía llegar el cañonero; se parapetaron con sus mismas embarcaciones y con los mismos cautivos que llevaban, los cuales, amarrados entre sí, formaban la primera línea; resistieron el fuego del cañonero hasta que á éste se le agotaron las municiones, y durante la noche se reembarcaron, después de tapar con pedazos de madera y trapos los agujeros que las balas les habían hecho, y entrando en un río próximo, habitado también por moros, repararon algo mejor

sus averías, siguiendo, por último, sin más contratiempo, á la isla de Tawi-Tawi, punto de su partida (1).» (In that year, a pirate expedition was returning from one of its raids on the eastern coast of Paragua, where, after capturing the crews of several trading pancos, they had burned the town of Santa Mónica or Batacalan, taking nearly all of its inhabitants captive, slaughtering the few who resisted, and even carrying off the church bells. They were then sighted, shortly after midday, by a gunboat anchored near a small island close to Paniquian. The Moros took their vessels into a place where the gunboat could not reach, and fortified themselves with their very boats and with the captives they carried, who, bound together, formed the first line of defense. They resisted the fire of the gunboat until it ran out of ammunition, and during the night they re-embarked, plugging the holes made by the cannonballs with pieces of wood and cloth. Entering a nearby river, also inhabited by Moros, they made somewhat better repairs to their damages, and finally, without further mishap, continued on to the island of Tawi-Tawi, the point of their departure).[11]

Though the forts were effective at defending the communities, they came at a cost. There is an oral tradition in Sibaltan that describes the sufferings endured by the natives in the territorial jurisdiction of Taytay, which includes areas in present-day El Nido, from forced labor. Old folks even mentioned of soldiers lashing natives while they carry huge boulders. Nelson Bienes, former *punong barangay* of Sibaltan, recalled what his grandfather told him about the brutality of the Spaniards to the locals. They used a type of lash that is made of *yantok* (rattan) they call *latigo*. Reynaldo Gabo, a resident of Sibaltan, shared information passed down through his family's oral tradition from his grandfather, Anselmo Gabo. According to this tradition, residents of Sibaltan were not only involved in constructing the fort of Taytay but also contributed to the labor for the fort of Cuyo.

The oral tradition of the Gabo family provides more detailed accounts of forced labor during the Spanish colonial period. According to their narrative, if a group failed to meet the quota or if Spanish supervisors were dissatisfied with their work, the group's members would be reduced, but the same quota would still need to be met. Like Bienes' account, the Gabo tradition also describes punishment by lashes, but

[11] D. José Montero y Vidal, "Historia de la Piratería Malayo - Maho Metana en Mindanao, Jolo y Borneo, Comprende Desde el Descubrimiento de Dichas Islas Hasta Junio de 1858, Tomo II," Imprenta y Fundición de Manuel Tello, 1888, p. 512.

with greater detail. Here, lashes were measured using the term *pasong*, which was also used to refer to a sack of rice. One *pasong* equaled 25 lashes, corresponding to the 25 *gantangs* in a sack of rice.

The *gantang* - a unit of measurement used by the Cuyonons and neighboring regions for centuries - also framed the severity of punishments. For moderately severe offenses, the punishment was *tenga sa pasong* (half a sack), equivalent to 12 and a half lashes. For minor offenses, the punishment was *apat ka parti* (one-fourth), or 7 lashes.

The Gabo narrative also recounts those who chose to flee to the mountains to escape the forced labor imposed by Spanish authorities. It specifically mentions the Septimo family, who fled to Sitio Abuay in Barangay Villa Paz, settling at Mt. Singkukan. There, they endured a difficult life, surviving on *korot* and *borot* root crops instead of rice.

These accounts of forced labor and corporal punishment were notably absent from the chronicles of the Augustinian Recollects, likely due to their bias in favor of Christianity and the Spanish colonial government. Nevertheless, many elderly locals recount oral traditions passed down through generations, detailing the hardships their ancestors endured while constructing coastal defenses under Spanish oversight.

Pinamatayan is a place south of Sta. Monica Natural Fort. The name is a Cuyonon word meaning “place where death occurred.” The name of the place itself suggests that someone or a group of people died there. There was a legend saying that a certain Datu Sibal dueled with a Chinese merchant, Tan, to win the hand of a beautiful local maiden. The Chinese eventually won the duel and the place was named after Datu Sibal. Carlos Bienes, a resident of Sibaltan, was among those who narrated this version. Though the name of Datu Sibal rhymes with Sibaltan, it is believed that the name *Sibaltan* may have originated from the Tagalog word *sibatan,* which means "spear fighting zone." However, in the Tagbanua language, *sibatan* translates to "where fist fighting happens."

Pinamatayan may have been the site of killings, either during Moro raids such as the one previously described, or during World War II, as oral traditions recount.

Imorigue

Imorigue Island is a small, historically significant karst formation located in Bgy. New Ibajay, El Nido, Palawan. It sits just southeast of a vast

mangrove area and lies 440 meters west of Batas Island, which is under the jurisdiction of the municipality of Taytay. Imorigue's rugged limestone landscape features only a few remaining pockets of flat land, contributing to its wild and isolated atmosphere. The island's strategic location, nestled between mangroves and neighboring islands, makes it both a hidden historical site and a valuable ecological area, with its natural and cultural assets drawing the interest of archaeologists, conservationists, and tourists alike.

The island was highlighted in the 2010 report of the Palawan Island Paleohistoric Research Project. An excerpt from the report states:

> The Imorigue archaeological sites, with the Maulohin[12] ossuary site (IV-2007-L) being the most significant, is in the centre of El Nido heritage work. Heritage conservation and accessibility are being worked out within the template of the El Nido Eco/Archaeo municipal tourism master plan. The island of Imorigue is already in a new tourist trail set-up developed by the Municipal Tourism office, which includes a visit to Ille, a boat ride across the large mangrove forest to Imorigue island, snorkelling off the coast of Imorigue, and visits to archaeological sites that dot the island's coastal cliffs.[13]

According to the excerpt, Imorigue Island is notable not only for its archaeological value but also as an emerging tourist destination in eastern El Nido. Its primary attractions include the island's caves and its thriving underwater reef ecosystem. Designated as a community-managed marine area (CMMA) due to its rich coral environment, the island features zones for strict protection as well as areas for regulated tourism. Additionally, its caves are occasionally used by gatherers of edible bird's nests.

One of the island's most important historical aspects is its role as a burial site, with evidence suggesting it has been in use for at least 2,000 years. Maulon Cave, the most renowned burial site among the local population, contains the highest concentration of skeletal remains, providing valuable insights into the burial practices and beliefs of early inhabitants. Tragically, in 2010, several skeletons in Imorigue Island were stolen by individuals who either mistakenly believed they were recovering the

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[12] Maulon is the Cuyonon term for the cave, while later settlers, the Tagalogs and Visayans, referred to it as Maulohin. Despite the variation in spelling, the term shares the same meaning: "a place with many heads (skulls)."

[13] Victor Paz, Wilfredo Ronquillo, Helen Lewis, Peter Lape, Emil Robles, Vito Hernandez, Noel Emano, Mindy Ceron, Deo Cuerdo, and Wilhelm Solheim, "Palawan Island Palaeohistoric Research Project Report on the 2010 Field Season," University of the Philippines, Quezon City, 2010, p. 55.

remains of Japanese war veterans or intentionally deceived those funding the effort, as they were paid by the Japanese government for each repatriated veteran's skeleton.

The same report documented this looting incident, stating:

> Accounts by eyewitnesses described that around February and early March 2010, a group of Japanese were allowed by the bird's nest concessioner of Imorigue to collect the bones from the two ancient ossuaries of Maulohin (NM site code IV-2007-L) and Cave 3 (NM site code IV-2007-M). The visitors came on a large white speed boat and were composed of ten Japanese students, a *sensei* looking man, and a tall Japanese woman who could speak good Filipino, who acted as an interpreter for the group.
>
> At Maulohin, an eyewitness saw several of the members of the group cry when they saw the pile of bones inside the cave. They then carefully sorted the bones by type and placed them inside white 56 cotton bags. Someone from the local group asked the Japanese if they had a permit to take the bones out. The group spokesperson answered that they were going to get the appropriate permits and asked the birds nest guards to look after the sacked bones until they returned with the permits. We checked with the National Museum, the PCSD, the Municipal offices of El Nido, if indeed any attempt was made by a group to get permission to collect human bones. None of the agencies knew of any attempt to formally request permission.[14]

Ding Cervantes highlighted this scheme in his June 28, 2010 article for *Philstar News*. According to the report:

> Guy Hilbero, tourism officer of Mabalacat, Pampanga and a known promoter of Philippine-Japan friendship in his town where the Kamikaze forces of the Japanese Imperial Army were founded during World War II, cited reports that skeletal remains of Filipinos have reached Japanese soil through the unscrupulous activities of the syndicate.
>
> This was confirmed by Hilbero's friend, Japanese businessman Koji Nakamura, who, in an e-mail, identified the alleged syndicate as the Tokyo-based Ku-en Tai, which has reportedly been buying for P1,000 each set of skeletons dug up from cemeteries in northern Luzon and eastern Visayas.

[14] Ibid., p. 56.

> The group reportedly receives payment from the Japanese government for the skeletal remains of Japanese soldiers that are then buried with honors in a Japanese national cemetery.[15]

The 2010 report noted the group's initial unsuccessful attempt to remove the bones. However, following the field season, the looters ultimately succeeded in transporting the remains. Fortunately, all the human remains collected from various parts of the Philippines were intercepted at Subic Port before they could be shipped to Japan.

Despite this incident, some artifacts from the island, including a wooden coffin, have been preserved. This coffin, now housed at the Dewil Valley Museum, offers further insights into burial customs and is a crucial artifact linking the community to its ancient past. Beyond its archaeological importance, Imorigue's caves are also a prime location for gathering *balinsayaw*, or edible bird's nests, a practice carried out by bosyadors who scale the cliffs to collect these valuable nests. This traditional gathering activity remains economically significant for local residents, connecting them with the island's natural resources in a sustainable manner.

In addition to its archaeological and cultural features, Imorigue Island's rich coral reefs and vibrant underwater biodiversity have made it an attractive spot for tourism. Its pristine coral cover and diverse marine life led to its designation as a Community-Managed Marine Area (CMMA), a status that ensures protection of the ecosystem through cooperative management by the barangay and municipal governments.

Cudugnon Cave

Cudugnon Cave, one of El Nido's historical and geological marvels, is a fascinating stop on the island-hopping tours popular with visitors. Located on the scenic shores of El Nido, this cave is notable for its historical significance as a burial site dating back roughly 2,000 years. Similar to Imorigue Island, Cudugnon Cave was once a sacred resting place for the native population, containing numerous skeletal remains that, over time, gradually disappeared. The artifacts and bones that once filled the cave hinted at ancient burial practices and the spiritual beliefs of the early inhabitants of the area, adding a layer of mystery and cultural richness to the experience of visiting tourists.

[15] https://philstarnews.com/nation/2010/06/28/588036/pinoys-skeletal-remains-passed-those-japanese-soldiers.

In 2007, an attempt to develop the cave site by claimants led to the accidental unearthing of human remains on the beach adjacent to Cudugnon. Alongside these bones were shell beads and a rusted metal spear, further evidence of the cave's long history and the cultural practices of those who once lived there. These findings highlight Cudugnon Cave as an archaeological treasure, offering glimpses into the lives of the region's early people and their craftsmanship. Such discoveries underscore the importance of preserving sites like Cudugnon for their historical value, even as they become integrated into the region's eco-tourism industry.

The cave itself features a small entrance that requires visitors to bend down to enter, adding to the adventure of exploring it. Once inside, visitors can view the beautiful limestone formations that have naturally sculpted the interior over centuries. The cave opens onto a stunning seascape with clear waters abundant in coral reefs and marine life, making it a prime snorkeling spot after exploring the cave.

Though archaeologists from the University of the Philippines are already studying the human remains and artifacts found in Cudugnon's beach, there is also a need for extensive excavations and thorough analyses to give insight into the deeper significance of the cave to the coastal villages that live or once lived nearby. It would also shed light to the spear found, whether an actual battle occurred in that area or a warrior or hunter was buried there with that prized spear.

Shimizu Is.

Once known as Tagbao, Shimizu holds significant importance in both the municipality's history and its tourism industry. In 1990s, a group of divers tragically lost their lives in an underwater cave at Paglugaban, located just a few meters southwest of Tagbao. Their remains were brought ashore at Tagbao's beach while awaiting water transport. In memory of one of the divers, whose surname was Shimizu, the island was thereafter renamed.
Today, Shimizu is among the popular island-hopping stops in Bacuit Bay, where tourists enjoy snorkeling and, on occasion, have their lunch along its beaches.

Inambogol

Inambogol Island, also known as Inambuyod on some maps, is situated in the northeastern section of Bacuit Bay in Palawan, Philippines. Unlike

other popular destinations, Inambogol is not part of the usual island-hopping tours, as its significance lies primarily in the gathering of edible bird's nests, a valuable delicacy in Asian cuisine and traditional medicine. The island is known for its cave, which require *bosyadors* to crawl through a narrow passage to reach the nesting sites inside. The challenging cave entry adds to the island's mystique and preserves its status as a place reserved for specific local cultural practices rather than mainstream tourism.

Lagen Is.

Lagen Island is home to Leta-Leta Cave, a Neolithic burial site located on its eastern side. Today, the island features a luxury resort on its western side. It also has coves with thriving coral reefs, attracting tourists. Historically, Lagen Island played a significant role in the development of Neolithic communities in El Nido, serving as a burial site for early inhabitants.

Katherine Szabó and Hazel Ramirez described Leta-Leta Cave in their paper, *Worked Shell from Leta-Leta Cave, Palawan, Philippines*. An excerpt from their work states:

> Leta Leta Cave is a steep fissure in the side of an east-facing karstic sea-cliff located on Langen Island in the Bacuit Archipelago off El Nido, northern Palawan, in the southwestern Philippines (see Figure 1). It is only accessible from the sea. The floor slopes sharply from the back of the fissure down to the opening. The treacherous topography of the site, referred to as 'difficult and dangerous' by Fox (1977: 229), has been aggravated by recent sediment instability caused by an earthquake in the early 1980s which effectively destroyed anything that remained of the site.[16]

Leta-Leta was first explored by Carl E. Guthe in 1922 as part of the University of Michigan Expedition to the Philippines that happened from 1922-25. Basing on Guthe's journal, Dr. Robert B. Fox of the National Museum of the Philippines explored it 4 decades later, in 1965, after a successful exploration at Tabon where he discovered the Tabon Man and the Manunggul Jar. The most important find of Dr. Fox in Leta-Leta was the Yawning Jar, which will be discussed in Chapter 5. In addition to the Yawning Jar, Dr. Fox discovered a presentation dish, a footed jarlet, and

[16] Katherine Szabó & Hazel Ramirez, "Worked Shell from Leta Leta Cave, Palawan, Philippines," Archaeol. Oceania 44, 2009, p. 150.

a stem cup. Meanwhile, Guthe recovered earthenware pottery, bone fragments, and shell bracelets and beads from the cave's surface.

Szabó and Ramirez further noted that Leta-Leta Cave was used exclusively as a burial site rather than for human habitation. Another excerpt from their work states:

> There was no evidence of habitation at Leta Leta and the site was used primarily, if not exclusively, for burials. Five burials were excavated including four primary interments and one secondary 'bundle' burial where the bones had been gathered and placed together in a grave.[17]

Since Leta-Leta was not used for habitation, a settlement was likely located nearby. It may have been an early version of the Talindak community or a network of smaller settlements that later grew into a significant trading hub by the 16th century AD. However, little is known about these settlements, as they have yet to be located and studied. The artifacts recovered from the cave, however, provide valuable clues about how the early inhabitants lived. Leta-Leta is just one of several ancient burial sites in Bacuit Bay, along with Cudugnon and Bukal.

Cadlao Is.

Cadlao Island, the largest island in El Nido and holds some of the municipality's most diverse coastal ecosystems, including mangrove forests, seagrass beds, coral reefs, beach forests, and limestone forests. Cadlao's unique landscape supports a variety of marine and terrestrial life, making it an ecological treasure. The island's coral reefs and seagrass beds serve as essential breeding and feeding grounds for marine species, while its mangrove forests act as natural nurseries for young fish, contributing to the sustenance of local fisheries. These ecosystems not only foster biodiversity but also sustain El Nido's fishing industry by providing habitats for fish and invertebrates integral to local livelihoods.

Cadlao's highest peak was already measured during the Spanish colonial period, recorded at 610 meters in a French document published in 1858[18] and at 608 meters in a Spanish document from 1879.[19]

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[17] Ibid., p. 151.
[18] Impremirie Administrative de Paul Dupont, "Annales Hydrographique, Tome Quatorzieme, Annee 1858," Aue de Grennelle-Saint-Honore, Paris,1858, p. 113.
[19] Camilo de Arana, "Derrotero del Archipiélago filipino," Publicado de Orden del Ministerio de la Marina, Madrid, 1879 p. 1080.

Although Cadlao Island has only a few inhabitants, it plays a significant role in shaping El Nido's fishing culture and navigation practices. Local fishermen use the island's cliffs and the clouds that gather around them as natural weather indicators, allowing them to anticipate changes in weather before setting out to sea. This traditional knowledge has become an invaluable barometer for safe fishing expeditions, especially in the unpredictable tropical climate. The island's prominence in the seascape also aids in navigation, serving as a landmark that fishermen rely on for orientation. Thus, Cadlao's physical presence and its rich ecosystems contribute to both the practical and cultural dimensions of El Nido's maritime heritage, underlining its influence on the community's fishing practices and ecological awareness.

Mountains of Bacuit

While the present belief holds that Cadlao's peak is El Nido's highest, two other peaks surpass Cadlao in early records. In the same documents - the Spanish *Derrotero del Archipiélago Filipino* and the French *Annales Hydrographiques* - where the first known measurements of Cadlao can be found, the measurements of the mountains in the town of Bacuit were presented. the French account describes:

> Une chaîne centrale qui forme la continuation de celle qui contourne la baie Bacuit domine les deux côtes de Palawan, et sur le parallèle de Cadlao, où elle atteint une très-grande élévation, l'on voit une table élevée dont les épaulements N. O. et S. E. gisent à 1 mille ¼ de distance. Us ont l'un 625 mètres et l'autre 670 mètres d'élévation au-dessus de la mer. (A central mountain chain, which forms the continuation of the one encircling Bacuit Bay, dominates both coasts of Palawan; and on the parallel of Cadlao, where it reaches a very great elevation, there is a high plateau whose northwest and southeast shoulders lie 1¼ miles apart. One rises to 625 meters and the other to 670 meters above sea level).[20]

Meanwhile, the Spanish source reported almost the same, with a slight difference in measurement, stating:

> La cordillera del centro de la isla, que es continuación de la de Bacuit, domina ambas costas de la Paragua, y en el paralelo de Cadlao, que es donde alcanza la máxima elevación, forma una mesa de la que salen dos laderas que se apartan 1,25 de milla, se dirigen al NO. y

[20] Impremirie Administrative de Paul Dupont, "Annales Hydrographique, Tome Quatorzieme, Annee 1858," Aue de Grennelle-Saint-Honore, Paris,1858, p. 114.

> SE. y se elevan á 624,7 y 678 metros sobre el mar. (The mountain range at the center of the island, which is a continuation of that of Bacuit, dominates both coasts of Paragua; and on the parallel of Cadlao, where it reaches its greatest height, it forms a plateau from which two slopes extend, diverging 1.25 miles apart, running northwest and southeast, and rising to 624.7 and 678 meters above sea level).[21]

Though the measurements differ in both sources, it seems that Cadlao is only the third highest peak in the municipality. Even the American source, titled *United States Coast Pilot, Philippine Islands* and published in 1921, measured Cadlao at 2,000 ft. (609.6 m) and the two other peaks at 2,055 ft. (626.4 m) and 2,230 ft. (679.7 m), respectively.[22]

Based on descriptions from different accounts, the highest peak was identified as one of the shoulders of the plateau observed during the Spanish and American colonial periods. However, the measurements and exact locations still need verification in recent measurements.

Pagawanen Point

Pagawanen Point, located northwest of Pagawanen Beach and southwest of Pangalusian Island, is a notable maritime landmark in Palawan. This point serves as a crucial passage for marine vessels traveling to and from Liminangcong. Despite its importance, it is a place of apprehension among seafarers due to its powerful currents fueled by strong winds during *habagat* (monsoon season) and the presence of a reef bed nearby, which pose significant navigational challenges. The combination of these natural features makes Pagawanen Point both a vital and treacherous route in the region's maritime landscape.

Tani Distal, a seasoned boat operator from the 1990s and now a businessman and artist, recalls the sinking of the MV Jocelle, a wooden ship known as a *batil*, in the first quarter of the 90s. It ran aground in an area called Pinak-panakan. He volunteered to rescue passengers during the incident and vividly remembers burying five carabaos on

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[21] Camilo de Arana, "Derrotero del Archipiélago filipino," Publicado de Orden del Ministerio de la Marina, Madrid, 1879 p. 1082.
[22] E. Lester Jones, "United States Coast Pilot, Philippine Islands, Part II: Palawan, Mindanao, and Sulu Archipelago, First Edition," Department of Commerce - U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey,1921, p. 115.

Helicopter (Dilumacad) Island. The ill-fated *batil* had been carrying a full load of carabaos in its cargo bay at the time.

Cagbuli Strait

The Cagbuli Strait is a narrow passage located between Cagbuli Island, also known as Cabuli Is. in other maps, and the mainland of So. Cagbuli, situated in the northeastern part of Barangay Teneguiban. Like Pagawanen Point, it is approached with caution by sea travelers due to its consistently strong currents and waves that prevail year-round. These powerful currents have made the area a prime hunting ground for large fish and have contributed to the thriving coral reefs beneath its waters.

Before land travel became accessible via the circumferential road in the mid-1990s, residents of eastern barangays had to travel by sea to reach El Nido town for business transactions and permit processing. Alternatively, they endured long, arduous walks through forests and across the rivers of New Ibajay and Pasadeňa. Carrying luggage on such challenging terrain was exhausting, and the rivers' strong currents made crossing dangerous. Given these difficulties, most residents opted to travel through the Cagbuli Strait instead during fair weather.

Eastern Mudflat Belt

The east coast of El Nido features an extensive stretch of mudflats that spans from Barangay Teneguiban to Mabini. These mudflats are complemented by equally vast seagrass beds, forming a belt shape along the eastern coast. While these geological features pose navigational challenges for seafarers, they provide significant opportunities for subsistence fishermen, allowing them to fish in shallow waters and save time and fuel.

The mudflats are ideal for harvesting *wak-wak*, a type of sandworm used as fish bait and catch as a delicacy by the Cuyonon people. Nearby seagrass beds provide easy access to *tirik*, a type of sea urchin, while the shallow waters are also abundant with seashells, the most popular being *sikad-sikad*. Fishing methods in these shallow waters include the use of a *laya*, a rounded fishnet thrown in shallow waters, and net fishing at waist-deep waters. The area is also perfect for the traditional Cuyonon shallow-water fishing technique known as *panulo*.

The vast seagrass beds also hold significant tourism potential, serving as feeding grounds for dugongs (*Dugong dugon*), also known as sea

cows, and sea turtles, locally called *pawikan*. The most common sea turtle species in the area is the Hawksbill Turtle.

The extensive mudflat belt is a prominent feature found along all eastern barangays. Notably, the eastern shoreline has been receding more rapidly than the western coast, with an estimated loss of 5 meters over the past 40 years. In the last 5 years, however, the rate of beach erosion has increased to approximately 0.1 meters per year, likely due to rising sea levels caused by climate change. This suggests that prior to Spanish colonization, the eastern coastline was likely located several meters farther inland, encompassing what are now the mudflat areas.

CHAPTER 3: COASTAL COMMUNITIES

El Nido, Palawan is known for its stunning coastal barangays, with 17 of its 18 barangays located along the coast, making fishing and tourism central to the local economy. Only Barotuan is situated further inland, where agriculture and inland activities dominate. However, a small portion of Barotuan's population still engages in fishing, navigating through Barotuan River, which leads to the Bucana estuary, providing access to fishing areas. Despite being inland, Barotuan somewhat contributes to the municipality's maritime culture through these fishing activities.

Among the coastal barangays, the Poblacion areas of Masagana, Buena Suerte, Maligaya, and Corong-Corong have experienced a significant shift in their primary livelihood. Once dominated by fishing and edible bird's nest gathering, these barangays saw a massive change starting in 2005 as the growing tourism industry led many fishermen to convert their boats into tourist boats while *bosyadors* either became tour guides or tourist boat captains. This transition has not only brought economic benefits but has also changed the social and cultural landscape of these communities, with tourism now at the heart of daily life.

In contrast, barangays like New Ibajay, Villa Paz, Manlag, Aberawan, and Bagong Bayan are blessed with vast mangrove forests. These mangroves play a crucial role in protecting the coastline from erosion, serving as fish nurseries, and supporting biodiversity. The local communities in these areas benefit from both fishing and community-based sustainable tourism, particularly in the Dewil River in New Ibajay which has the largest mangrove forest in El Nido at 450 hectares, that even extends to Villa Paz.

Bebeladan stands out as the barangay with the most islands, boasting a total of 28 islands within its jurisdiction. As a result, it receives the highest volume of tourist traffic in El Nido. The abundance of islands and scenic beauty makes Bebeladan a prime destination for island-hopping tours, drawing visitors from around the world.

El Nido's coastal communities also served as a refuge for Vietnamese people fleeing the newly installed communist regime in Vietnam, following the victory of the North Vietnamese Army and the fall of Saigon on April 30,1975. The first group of refugees arriving on the shores of El Nido included 93 Vietnamese survivors, who reached safety after losing 21 people along their journey in that same year. In an interview with Helen Basili, Armando Lualhati recalled, "They were all totally ill and couldn't even walk, we had to bring them out of the junk.

Many El Nido people helped them out of the junk and took them to the Catholic Church shelter."[23] Vietnamese refugees were eventually transferred to Puerto Princesa City, where there was a facility prepared by the United Nations for them called the Vietnamese Refugee Camp (VRC). In 1996, refugees in the VRC finally had a permanent home in Puerto Princesa when the Vietnamese Village was established.

To sum up, El Nido's coastal settlements developed a distinct culture with their interaction with the maritime environment. Aside from this, they also contributed to the shared culture with neighboring peoples, kingdoms and countries through centuries of trade and diplomacy. In this chapter, communities that made significant impact to the development of El Nido's cultural identity will be discussed.

Dewil Valley Community

The earliest known coastal community in El Nido dates back to the Terminal Pleistocene to Mid Holocene, approximately 12,000 to 14,000 years ago, in the Dewil Valley, where early human settlements have left significant archaeological traces. Among the caves in the area, Ille Cave stands out as a focal point for annual studies conducted by the Palawan Island Paleohistory Research Project, led by Dr. Victor Paz from the University of the Philippines and Dr. Helen Lewis from University College Dublin. These studies have unearthed tools, artifacts, and human remains that reflect the adaptation of early communities to their environment, marking Ille Cave as a crucial site for understanding the evolution of human life in coastal Palawan. Through this research, Ille Cave has revealed layers of human occupation, each indicating how early societies were shaped by their surroundings and the sea's resources.

The geological features of Dewil Valley reveal how the earliest known settlements evolved over time, along with their cultural practices, in response to a dynamic environment. In her thesis, *Ceramics and Social Practices at Ille Cave, Philippines Volume 1*, Yvette Ellerayne Balbaligo provides an insightful discussion of the valley's terrain. Below is an excerpt from the thesis:

> The Dewil Valley in El Nido is mountainous and interspersed by flat valleys and uplands in the interior and mangrove areas at river deltas (fig. 6.64). The coastal landscape is composed of tidal flats with

[23] Helen Basili, "Paradise with a Past," Transitions, 2000, p. 22.

> mangroves, alluvial fringes, and older colluvial-alluvial valleys with Quaternary alluvium raised beaches which are Holocene in age.[24]

Maritime culture traces in these early communities are evidenced by the massive shell midden deposits in the area further emphasize this connection, as they reveal a diet rich in shellfish and other marine life, suggesting that the early inhabitants of Dewil Valley relied heavily on the sea for sustenance. This diet highlights an intimate relationship with the ocean that shaped their daily lives and resource utilization, ultimately contributing to the development of a distinctive coastal cultural identity in the region.

Boat-shaped markers that were discovered in Pasimbahan Magsanib Cave, an essential archaeological site in the Dewil Valley reveal the deep spiritual and symbolic ties these ancient communities had with the sea. These graves suggest a view of the afterlife as a journey across waters, symbolizing a passage to another realm. This unique burial practice was documented by the team of Dr. Victor Paz and Dr. Helen Lewis, who noted:

> The pit is lined by three limestone slabs and a fragment of a human fibula was also recovered. Other evidence of ritual activity include the possible interment of large marine shells such as Tridacna valves and a large Charonia trumpet shell. Some of the midden and hearth deposits can also be interpreted as remains from intermittent ritual food consumption. In Trench N2E5, a stone marker was also found composed of natural and worked limestone rocks that were shaped and arranged in the shape of a boat.[25]

Beyond the boat-shaped markers, the use of large marine shells in ritual food consumption and tool interment practices underscores the profound impact of the coastal environment on the inhabitants of Dewil Valley from at least 5,000 years ago. The report provides the following details:

> Preliminary identification of shell remains have been conducted for sixty-seven (67) contexts across the trenches of the Pasimbahan -

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[24] Yvette Ellerayne Balbaligo, "Ceramics and Social Practices at Ille Cave, Philippines Volume 1," UCL Institute of Archaeology University College London 2015, p. 295.

[25] Janine Ochoa, Victor Paz, Helen Lewis, Jane Carlos, Emil Robles, Noel Amano, Maria Rebecca Ferreras, Myra Lara, Benjamin Vallejo, Jr., Gretchen Velarde, Sarah Agatha Villaluz, Wilfredo Ronquillo, and Wilhelm Solheim II, "The archaeology and palaeobiological record of Pasimbahan-Magsanib Site, northern Palawan, Philippines," Philippine Science Letters, Vol. 7, No.1, 2014, p. 29.

> Magsanib Site (Table 3). Bivalves and gastropods that were identified to the species, genus and family levels, total to sixty-one (61) taxa while another ten (10) shell types are determined to the class level only. The molluscs derive from various habitats—marine, mangrove, freshwater, and terrestrial environments. Initial analysis across the whole sequence reveals that molluscs deriving from mud and sand flats (35 taxa out of 57 taxa) are most numerous across the assemblage, followed by those from rocky shores (18 taxa). Only a few species are from shallow subtidal habitats (4 taxa). While there is a big number of marine species (29 taxa), only a few of these are from the deep waters (Tridacnidae, Lambis sp. and Melo sp.). The mud/sand flats or tidal flats are in the shallow marine and mangrove areas that are mostly within the intertidal zone. The shell species from the rocky shore area are also in the shallow water areas.[26]

This is because Dewil Valley is currently just .88 km. away from the mangrove area and 3.5 km. from the sea, which is teeming with marine life. Shells are particularly abundant, as evidenced by the shell middens found in the valley's caves, as noted in the report.

Sibaltan

Sibaltan, known as Batacalan in the pre-colonial era, is located on the eastern coast of Palawan, holds a strategic position that likely played a crucial role in pre-colonial trade networks, especially given its proximity to key Southeast Asian powers such as the Sultanate of Brunei, the Kingdom of Champa (in present-day Vietnam), and the Rajanate of Tondo (in Luzon). This advantageous location placed Sibaltan at the crossroads of major maritime routes, allowing it to benefit from trade connections not long before the formal establishment of the Maritime Silk Road. As ships passed through the waters of the South China Sea and the Sulu Sea, Sibaltan would have been a convenient stopover for vessels needing safe harbor, fresh supplies, or goods to trade. The settlement's coastal position also provided natural protection for ships, while its high rock hills, like Sta. Monica, served as natural lookouts, giving it added significance for maritime activity.

Given its proximity to Brunei, Champa, and Tondo, Sibaltan most likely engaged in early forms of regional trade with these powerful kingdoms. In the 15th Century, the Sultanate of Brunei, a major maritime power, extended its influence over parts of Palawan, and trade goods such as pottery, textiles, and exotic items likely flowed between Sibaltan and

[26] Ibid., p. 29.

Brunei. Similarly, Champa was known for its robust maritime trade, especially in spices, ceramics, and other valuable commodities that were sought after across the region. Being near these trading hubs, Sibaltan would have been exposed to not just material goods but also cultural and technological exchanges. The settlement could have served as a point of interaction between local traders and merchants from China, India, and the Middle East, linking Palawan to a broader economic and cultural network.

Even before the formalized routes of the Maritime Silk Road, which began to flourish during the 12th century, Sibaltan likely played a role in pre-existing trade routes that connected the Malay Archipelago with the larger trading centers of Southeast Asia. The presence of seafaring communities and a rich marine environment would have made Sibaltan an ideal location for trading in goods such as sea cucumbers, pearls, and exotic hardwoods. This Maritime Silk Road was mentioned in the book titled "Maritime Trade in the Philippines during the 15th Century CE" by Bobby C. Orillaneda. In this book, the author wrote:

> After the overland Silk Road commercial route across central Asia was largely inoperable in the 12th century CE partly due to the disintegration and fragmentation of overland commercial networks (Hall 2011), merchants from the Arab states in the west and China in the east redirected trade routes. At this time, the seas were used to transport people and merchandise. The "maritime silk road", as it came to be called, stretches from the Mediterranean to southern China; traversing the Red Sea, Indian Ocean and South China Sea to Southeast Asia (Li, 2006). Although this area had been actively used for maritime commercial activities for hundreds of years, trade between the great economic markets in the east and west intensified as the seas became the primary avenue of interethnic commerce and cultural contact based on historical documents and the increasing number of shipwrecks and terrestrial archaeological evidence dated to this period.[27]

Long before the establishment of the Maritime Silk Road, Sibaltan was already an integral part of a Southeast Asian trade route that included Palawan, as evidenced by the discovery of artifacts. Among these is a jar dating back to the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), which shows that Sibaltan was part of ancient trade networks linking it to China and surrounding regions. A substantial increase in trade volume was

[27] Bobby C. Orillaneda: "Maritime Trade in the Philippines during the 15th Century CE," Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology (OCMA), United Kingdom, 2019, p. 83.

indicated by the large number of the popular "blue and white" porcelains produced during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) found in the area. This surge in imported goods reflects the intensified exchanges facilitated by the Maritime Silk Road, which connected East and Southeast Asia and bolstered Sibaltan's role as a valuable waypoint for regional trade.

Unfortunately, most of these artifacts were uncovered by local and visiting treasure hunters during the 1970s and 80s, leading to their sale to collectors and a subsequent mass exodus of artifacts from the barangay. At the time, locals had limited awareness of the historical value of these objects, which often became part of these transactions. Oral accounts also suggest that individuals claiming to be from the National Museum took some of the antiques for study, yet never returned them.

The ancient boat known as the *balangay*, first discovered in Butuan City, was integral to maritime trade across the Philippine archipelago and likely influenced coastal communities in El Nido. This vessel bears a strong resemblance to the *sakayan*, the traditional boat of the Cuyonon people. The *sakayan*, also called *pangko*, served as a merchant vessel for the Cuyonons and was instrumental in migration waves from Cuyo Island to Palawan, a movement known as *pamaragua* which will be discussed in the Chapter 8 of this book. It is most likely that the sakayan was used for trade in pre-Hispanic Sibaltan. However, it could have had a different name or a slightly different design.

Ligaya Lacsina cited the age of balangay boats saying, "The new calibrated results indicate the boat timbers date to between the late eighth and early tenth centuries AD (Lacsina and Van Duivenvoorde, 2014)."[28] These dates coincided with the establishment of Sibaltan's trading community, underscoring the probability that *sakayan* evolved from the original *balangay* design.

Based on archaeological evidence, the artifacts held by the residents, and oral traditions, we can summarize the historical information about Sibaltan with the following key facts:

1. **A trading community was established in Sibaltan as early as 500 AD.** Based on the cultural materials discovered in the area, archaeologists estimated the timeframe for the community's founding. By comparing these finds with those from Dewil valley, they proposed the following assumption in the 2010 their field report:

[28] Ligaya Lacsina, "Boats of the Pre-Colonial Philippines: Butuan Boats," Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg 2014, p. 2.

> We would like to infer that the older archaeology found in the Sibaltan Elementary School Site is as old as the metal period pottery assemblages we find in the Dewil valley. This gives us a time range of around 2000 to 1000 years ago.[29]

In 2009, while exploring the Sibaltan site, Dr. Victor Paz and Dr. Helen Lewis had lunch at the author's home in Sibaltan. During the visit, Dr. Paz noticed a jar from which Carmelita Acosta, the author's mother, was scooping vinegar. He identified it as a Dusun jar, the same type discovered in Dusun on the island of Borneo, Sabah, Malaysia. According to Dr. Paz, Dusun jars were produced during China's Tang Dynasty, which ruled from 618 to 907 AD. The identification of this Tang Dynasty jar further supports the estimated historical timeline.

The same report detailed the 2009 exploration aimed at proposing the expansion of archaeological excavations from the ongoing annual work at Dewil Valley to the Sibaltan Open Site. The survey was described as follows:

> In 2009 the project's senior staff surveyed Barangay Sibaltan together with the Tourism Officer of El Nido Arvin Acosta and Barangay Captain Carmelita Acosta of Sibaltan. We located through interviews, especially Captain Acosta's recollections, potential archaeological sites for further investigation. One of these potential sites is the compound of the Sibaltan elementary school, where burials with grave goods were uncovered in the course of school children digging rubbish pits and a water well. The accounts were also consistent that the compound was not touched by the massive pothunting activity of the previous decades. The objective of the excavation was to find archaeological horizons that may be correlated to the Dewil valley site. It was also intended that the excavation will be able to establish if there are older horizons of archaeological assemblages that will go beyond the periods associated with trade ware ceramics. The site was given a National Museum code IV-2010-G1.[30]

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[29] Victor Paz, Wilfredo Ronquillo, Helen Lewis, Peter Lape, Emil Robles, Vito Hernandez, Noel Emano, Mindy Ceron, Deo Cuerdo, and Wilhelm Solheim, "Palawan Island Palaeohistoric Research Project: Report on the 2010 Field Season," University of the Philippines, Quezon City, 2010, p. 58.
[30] Ibid., p. 32.

Archaeological evidence suggests that Sibaltan was part of a trading route predating the arrival of Spanish colonizers. The Philippines' involvement in the Southeast Asian maritime trade network is highlighted by Gregg Alfonso G. Abbang, Sherina E. Aggarao, and Mary Jane Louise A. Bolunia in their article for the National Museum of the Philippines, which states:

> In some cases, these trade wares managed to reach ports and were exchanged, while several trade ships carrying cargos haplessly sank off the coast of Philippine waters, such as the shipwrecks of Santa Cruz in Zambales, and Lena Shoal and Pandanan in Palawan. Their discovery strongly supports the country's key role in the Southeast Asian regional trading network even before the advent of Spanish colonization (Orillaneda, 2016).[31]

The shipwrecks at Lena Shoal and Pandanan serve as evidence of a trade route connecting the Bornean kingdoms to the kingdoms in Luzon Island, with Sibaltan situated along this path.

2. **Historically, Sta. Monica Natural Fort was used for coastal defense.** According to accounts from primary sources, witnesses observed cannons and a bell inside a cave at the site. They also recalled seeing a jeepney, a traditional Filipino vehicle, which remained in the area for three days. Upon the jeepney's departure, the cannons and the bell were no longer present. On May 15, 2009, Dr. Victor Paz, Dr. Helen Lewis, and the author explored the natural fort. Sta. Monica natural fort was featured in the online newsletter *Talindak* on December 17, 2009, which reported on an exploration in Sibaltan in preparation for the 2010 archaeological excavation season:

> On May 15, 2009, Dr. Victor Paz, Dr. Helen Lewis, a representative from the University of Dublin, and Arvin Acosta, Tourism Officer of El Nido, explored potential archaeological sites in Sibaltan, namely, Guinleng Open Site, Tapanan Open Site, Santa Monica Natural Keep and the Elementary School's Open Site. The team agreed to have a base camp at the Elementary School's Open Site and another excavation at Tapanan Open Site. The proposed expansion

[31] Gregg Alfonso G. Abbang, Sherina E. Aggarao, and Mary Jane Louise A. Bolunia, "From Kiln to Kin: The Philippine Ceramic Heritage," National Museum of the Philippines, 2022, p. 17.

sites will serve as test pits for students from the University of Washington and from South East Asian universities.[32]

After ascending to the natural fort, Dr. Victor Paz concluded that the rock formation functioned as a natural stronghold, with no human-made structures visible at its summit. However, locals reported the presence of man-made structures in a specific section of the natural fort. This area requires further exploration to confirm its existence and document its details.

3. **Two burial traditions were identified- one involving an individual buried with a stone slab placed on top and another in a sitting position.** During the 2010 field school by the Palawan Island Paleo-history Project directed by the Dr. Victor Paz and Dr. Helen Lewis, two sites were opened, the Sibaltan Elementary School Open Site and the Acosta Site.

   The stone slab was discovered at the Elementary School Open Site, as noted in the field report: "A large stone slab (burial marker) was found in the southeastern quadrant. This stone slab was recorded at 50 cm below DP and was perpendicular to the east wall."[33] Along with the slab, skeletal remains were found. The report further stated: “The position of the skeletal remains, like stone marker, was perpendicular to the east wall- that is the head pointing east and the feet to the west.”[34] This burial orientation contrasts with current practices in Sibaltan, where the dead are typically laid with the head pointing west and the feet facing east.

   After uncovering a human skeleton at the Acosta Site, archaeologists documented their findings: “This human burial was concluded to be originally sitting down-disturbance and scattering of bones specifically on the left side were due to root action.”[35] This burial practice contrasts greatly with those found at the Elementary School Open Site and with current burial customs in Sibaltan. Nevertheless, it provides insight into how the early settlers of Sibaltan buried their deceased, a tradition that has undoubtedly not persisted to the present day.

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[32] Arvin L. Acosta, “El Nido Archaeology Expands to Sibaltan Open Site,” Talindak Newsletter (https://talindak.wordpress.com), December 17, 2009.
[33] Victor Paz, Wilfredo Ronquillo, Helen Lewis, Peter Lape, Emil Robles, Vito Hernandez, Noel Emano, Mindy Ceron, Deo Cuerdo, and Wilhelm Solheim, “Palawan Island Palaeohistoric Research Project: Report on the 2010 Field Season,” University of the Philippines, Quezon City, 2010, p. 32.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., p. 44.

4. **The inhabitants of the area lived in huts,** as suggested by the discovery of postholes during the 2010 archaeological excavation. The excavation report detailed the findings as follows:

> At about 140cm below DP, two postholes [c.130 & c.131] were found cutting through c.114 at about the same elevation. The postholes continued through a more compact layer of mid yellowish brown indurate medium sand [c.115]. Context 130 was a 'V' shape posthole 30 cm in height and 23 cm in width located in the southwestern wall. The fill [c.117] of c.130 was a less coarse mid yellowish grey sand. The posthole c.131 was profiled on the northeastern wall; its fill [c.124] was similar to c.117. The cemented c.115 layer in which these postholes cut through was about 160 to 170cm below DP. There were a few shells and potsherds recovered from this layer.[36]

A cemented layer where one of these postholes was placed is now displayed at the Sibaltan History Museum. It was exhibited as early as 2010, shortly after the Sibaltan excavations, when a community museum was established at the Barangay Hall in Sibaltan. The round postholes indicate that huts were commonly used during that era in Sibaltan. Dr. Victor Paz hypothesized that perhaps the cave dwellers of Dewil Valley eventually migrated to Sibaltan, where they developed into a trading community.

5. **The residents wore various accessories.** A gold earring is currently housed in Sibaltan, as documented in the book *Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido*. According to the book, "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."[37] This artifact offers a glimpse into the past adornment practices of women in Sibaltan. Additionally, the presence of gold earrings, alongside a large number of porcelain items, highlights the wealth of the community during that period.

   Aside from gold earrings, other accessories were worn. During the same 2010 excavation season, several accessories interred

[36] Ibid., p. 37.
[37] Arvin L. Acosta, "Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido, Volume 1," Futuristic Printing Press, Puerto Princesa City, 2024, p. 34.

with the deceased were documented: "There were glass beads found around the torso, and small round shell beads across the skeleton. There were also four metal alloy rings on the left hand."[38]

6. **Residents used to wear brass springs on their arms.** A brass spring, uncovered by treasure hunters in Sibaltan, was displayed at the Sibaltan Barangay Hall, which temporarily served as a community museum in 2010, following a field school conducted in the area. Unfortunately, the artifact was later stolen after just a few years of display.

   The community museum was referenced in the 2010 field season report submitted by the Palawan Island Paleohistoric Research Project, as shown in the following excerpt:

   > Within the duration of the archaeological research in Barangay Sibaltan, a dedicated team had the objective of making a community museum. (On) April 17, 2010, a public museum was opened for the community. A way of showing gratitude to the community is to share new knowledge about their place, and make them understand and appreciate the past, their own culture, which will aid them to value their own identity.[39]

   This author personally attested to the existence of the said brass spring, as they had been stored in his room for three decades before being displayed in the community museum in 2010. In the photograph (Figure 1), taken during the cultural interpretation training in 2012, the brass spring is visible in the foreground, situated in a section of the Barangay Hall that had been designated as a community museum.

[38] Victor Paz, Wilfredo Ronquillo, Helen Lewis, Peter Lape, Emil Robles, Vito Hernandez, Noel Emano, Mindy Ceron, Deo Cuerdo, and Wilhelm Solheim, "Palawan Island Palaeohistoric Research Project: Report on the 2010 Field Season," University of the Philippines, Quezon City, 2010, p. 52.
[39] Ibid.



Figure 1: The brass spring can be seen in the background. The picture was taken during a cultural interpretation workshop in 2012 at the barangay hall, which has served as a makeshift museum since 2010.

7. **Weapons or tools were buried with the dead,** as evidenced by a metal blade found during the excavation, along with other burial items. The excavation report describes the discovery of the metal blade stating, "The head was excavated through the east wall, which also yielded a metal blade buried with the individual."[40]

   This tradition of burying the dead with weapons is also observed among other ethnic groups in the Philippines. Grace Barretto highlighted this practice in her study:

   > Aside from personal belongings, the Apayaos, Dumagats, Batakas, Sulods, Magahats, Boholanos, Bagobos and Badjaos placed other items such as daggers, pots, salt, and food that they believed were needed by the deceased in his journey to the beyond.[41]

[40] Ibid., p. 36.
[41] Grace Barretto, "A Survey of Literature on Indigenous Burial Practices and their Archaeological Implications," Kasarinlan, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2000, p. 107.

The early settlers in Sibaltan may have shared a similar intent, equipping the deceased with essential items for their journey to the afterlife.

8. **Residents of Sibaltan utilized porcelain ceramics,** spanning from the Tang dynasty to the Ming dynasty. These ceramics likely arrived through trade with neighboring kingdoms within the Philippine archipelago or Southeast Asia via the Maritime Silk Road, as Chinese goods were highly sought after in the region during that time.

   Ceramics produced during the Tang dynasty were predominantly olive green in color, while the iconic blue-and-white porcelain emerged during the Ming dynasty, when Chinese artisans perfected the art of creating this highly prized pottery. Tang ceramics were typically larger and used for storing liquids like vinegar and water, whereas Ming dynasty pottery was often smaller, serving decorative purposes or functioning as kitchen or dining utensils. The substantial number of blue-and-white porcelain pieces unearthed in Sibaltan may indicate the community's considerable wealth during that period. This suggests that Sibaltan may have reached its peak prosperity in the 1500s, before experiencing a decline in the 1600s.

   Gregg Alfonso G. Abbang, Sherina E. Aggarao, and Mary Jane Louise A. Bolunia provide the following perspective on the ceramic trade in Southeast Asia:

   > The ascent of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 CE) in the 14th century restricted the export of Chinese ceramics and other supplies as part of the imposed prohibition on private maritime trading to pave the way for political stability (Shiro and Reid, 2013). However, this resulted in a shortage of Chinese ceramics which other ceramic-producing countries in Southeast Asia saw as an opportunity that would benefit them. Archaeological data during this period showed an increase in Southeast Asian ceramics. Kilns in Thailand, Vietnam, and Burma expanded their ceramic production and established their own niche in the export market. While there was an official order banning the export of Chinese ceramics, illicit trading of Chinese ceramics continued but on a lesser scale. The ban ended in 1529 to reduce import limits and increase taxes for government spending (Tai et al. 2020). Subsequently, Chinese ceramics such as blue-and-white porcelain, celadon wares, and Dehua wares appeared in

Southeast Asia, while Thai and Vietnamese ceramic trading declined.[42]

The lifting of the ceramic trade ban in 1529 facilitated an influx of blue-and-white porcelain across Southeast Asia, including Palawan. Sibaltan's peak purchasing power during the 16th century coincided with this influx, as evidenced by the large quantities of such ceramics unearthed by looters in the 1970s and 1980s.

The unwritten history reflects the life of coastal communities from the pre-Hispanic up to present. It shows us how different traditions evolved through time in response to changing environment and influx of different people. Sibaltan's strategic location is worth further study. Its proximity to the Dewil valley, which is 12.8 km. south, suggests that these two early settlements influenced each other through time.

Talindak

The trading community known as Talindak or Talindac began flourishing in the 16th century in an area called Langeb-Langeban, within what is now Aberawan. At its inception, Talindak thrived as a bustling trading hub, strategically located near vital waterways that facilitated exchanges of goods between indigenous groups and visiting traders. The name *Talindak* is a Tagbanua term meaning "a chance appearance in a place" The meaning of the name of this place reflects the natives' belief in its enchanted character that makes it difficult for the outside world to locate it. Enchanted places called *panian* in El Nido and the Calamianes are believed to be influenced by the spirits of nature.

The rise of Talindak coincided with the decline of Sibaltan, as oral traditions indicate that the Sibaltan community began to weaken soon after. By the end of the 19th century, Sibaltan had lost much of its prominence, eventually becoming a mere barangay. This decline is thought to have been largely driven by devastating raids from the 16th century to mid-19th century, which significantly reduced the population and stifled the community's growth. Nevertheless, with or without raids, the community might have rebounded if viable trading opportunities had remained.

[42] Gregg Alfonso G. Abbang, Sherina E. Aggarao, and Mary Jane Louise A. Bolunia, "From Kiln to Kin: The Philippine Ceramic Heritage," National Museum of the Philippines, 2022, p. 12.

Ruling out raids as the primary cause of Sibaltan's sustained decline, several other factors may have driven the continued shift of power and wealth from Sibaltan to Talindak:

1. **Abundance of Balinsasayaw** | The limestone-rich landscape surrounding Langeb-Langeban, where Talindak was once located, offers easier access to the nesting sites of *balinsasayaw* (swiftlets). In contrast, Sibaltan had limited sources, relying on Imorigue Island and the Dewil Valley, both located over 10 kilometers south of Sibaltan port. This strategic advantage made the bird's nest trade more profitable on the western side.

2. **Geographic and Navigational Challenges** | The receding shoreline and the formation of mudflats along the eastern coast made it increasingly difficult for merchant ships to navigate and dock efficiently, further contributing to the shift in economic and maritime activities toward the west.

Talindak gradually expanded over time and eventually moved to Cabigsing, which is now part of El Nido's poblacion. Its port became a crucial trade hub for northern mainland Paragua, supporting the abundant agricultural production of nearby municipalities. It was later renamed "Bacuit." Despite the name change, its port continued to be referred to as Talindak or Talindac in official records of the Spanish and American colonial governments. Its importance was highlighted in the 1899 publication in Barcelona titled *"9é curs, La Cartografia Iberoamericana"* (*9th Course, Ibero-American Cartography*).[43] Additionally, it was featured in an earlier document printed in London, "Catalog of Admiralty, Charts, Plans and Sailing Directions, 1898," alongside Port Kulion, Port Batan, and the harbors on the southern side of Busuanga Island.[44]

Contrary to previous accounts, the author discovered a Spanish-language document indicating that the name Bacuit was in use earlier than 1890 as it was previously believed. The document states:

> Cadlao y las demas islas acabadas de describer, forman el la do occidental de una bahia profunda en cuya parte S. se encuantra la población nueva de Bacuit a la que lo s indigenas llaman tambien

[43] M. Luisa Martín-Merás Max Justo Guedes José Ignacio González Leiva, "9é curs, La Cartografia Iberoamericana," Institut Cartográfic de Catalunya, Barcelona,1898, p.79, 216.
[44] The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, "Catalog of Admiralty, Charts, Plans and Sailing Directions, 1898," London, Darling & Son Ltd., 1897, p. 166, 274.

> talindac; dicha población esta situada en una pequeňa bahia de arena al lado N. de la peninsula que forma la extremidad N. de la bahia de Bacuit. En 1851 tenia 200 varones, todos catolicos, bajo la jurisdiccion del alcalde de Taytay. (Cadlao and the other islands just described form the western side of a deep bay, at the southern part of which is the new township of Bacuit, which the indigenous people also call Talindac. This settlement is located in a small sandy bay on the northern side of the peninsula that forms the northernmost point of Bacuit Bay. In 1851, it had 200 males, all Catholics, under the jurisdiction of the mayor of Taytay).[45]

The book was published in 1879 but already mentioned the name "Bacuit," pushing the date of the renaming back to the 3rd quarter of the 19th century or earlier. The mention of the phrase *"población nueva de Bacuit"* (new town center of Bacuit) and the listing of Bacuit as a *pueblo* (town) in the book's index[46] suggest that the founding year of the Municipality of Bacuit predates the previously assumed 1916.

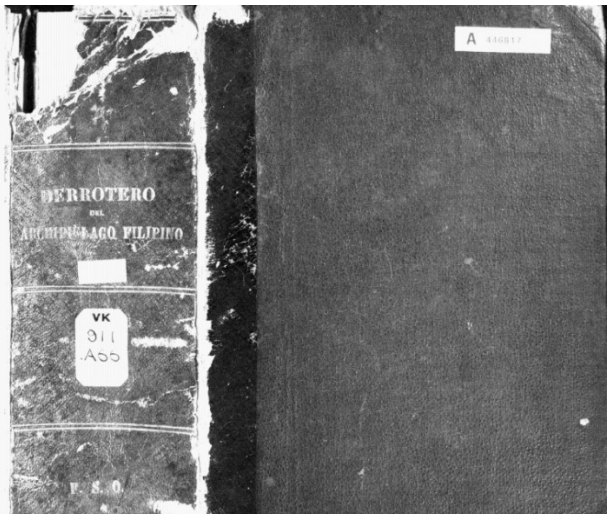

Figure 2: Picture of the cover of the book "Derrotero del Archiepelago Filipino.

It is important to note that *población* and *pueblo* are distinct terms. *Pueblo* is equivalent to a municipality. "Within each municipality was a

[45] Camilo de Arana, "Derrotero del Archipiélago filipino," Publicado de Orden del Ministerio de la Marina, Madrid, 1879 p. 1082.
[46] Ibid, p. xxxv.

core area called a población."[47] The mention of both words in the book indicates that Bacuit was both the name of the capital barangay and the municipality



XXXIV DERROTERO DEL ARCHIPIELAGO FILIPINO.

Páginas

Isla, arrecife y canal de Nacubuta; arrecife Roughton; isla Canfarman; canal del N. . . . . 1009 á 1011
Estrecho del N. de Balabac; islas Secam, Bacalan, Mantenguis y Canabungon; mareas y corrientes; instrucciones. . . . . 1011 á 1014
Islotes cerca de Bacalan; islas Pandanon, Bagack, Boucon, Apo, Gabung, Ilisa y Malisuno; canales. . . . 1015 á 1017

CAPÍTULO XVIII.

Costa Occidental de la Paragua.—Desde el Cabo Bulilugan á la bahía de Ulugan.

Isla de la Paragua; cabo Bulilugan; punta Alimudia. . 1018 á 1022
Bajos Ragnate y Kamagay; bahías de Canipan, Sinogup y Sapanzeu; montes; bajos Perigos y Antilopes; manchas Gololoy. . . . . 1022 á 1025
Bahía Marasi; barrancas de la Pigcoin; monte Mantalingajan. . . . . 1026 á 1027
Costa desde el pícaro Lita-Lita hasta punta Pamplngduyan; bahía de Ezan. . . . . 1028 á 1030
Costa desde la bahía de Ezan á la punta Hermosa; islas Malapakun y Maravias. . . . . 1032 á 1033
Islas Tripio-sima, Mangiar, de la Yerba y Natalia; fondeadero; bahías Tagbaya y Tmiloro. . . . . 1034 á 1038
Costas entre la isla Doble y punta Larga; islas Victoria; sierra de Cortadura; isla Pinula, morro de Mourcou; punta Larga; roda de Apuraman. . . . . 1039 á 1042
Pico de Anipahan; monte Stavely; Anipahan; islotes la Gallina y las Patos; monte Post. . . . . 1043 á 1046
Cabo del NO.; bahía Ulugan; mareas; instrucciones. . . 1046 á 1050

CAPÍTULO XIX.

Costa Occidental de la Paragua.—Desde la bahía de Ulugan al Cabo Norte.

Bahías de San Pablo, del Botalon y de la Cruz de Mayo. 1052 á 1054
Puerto Barron; bahía de las Reinas; punta y bahía de

ÍNDICE DE LAS MATERIAS. XXXV

Páginas.

Pagdanan; monte y cabo Capoas; bahías de Imaraan é Istulusoc; puerto de Malampaya; isla Tuluran. . . 1056 á 1064
Estrecho del bloqueo; bahía Bulalo; estrecho del Refugio; bahías del Pirata, del Caimán y Maliyú; Pascol; río Malampaya; Boalan; isla de la Tienda. . . . 1064 á 1074
Islas Calitas escabrosas; bahía de Bacuit; islas Canayan y la Caverna; pueblo de Bacuit. . . . . 1075 á 1082
Costa N. de la Paragua; sondas. . . . . 1083 á 1084

CAPÍTULO XX.

Costa Oriental de la Isla Paragua.

Islas Urselu, del Arrecife y Pirata; bahía Piedras; Tacbalaba. . . . . 1085 á 1089
Bahía de las islas; islas Rana y Arena; bahía de la Aldea; puerto Princesa; bahía Honda; bante Pinig; banco Constancio; arrecife del Chorybis; islas Verdes y bahía de isla Verde. . . . . 1090 á 1102
Borbonas Ilian; isla, establecimiento y canal de Dumaran; isla Paly; islas Dalagnanem; bahía de Tay-tay é islas adyacentes. . . . . 1103 á 1117
Islas Caisian, Pinutsinayan, Mohanam y Malubcatum; bahía de las Aletas de Tiburon; isla Binubuian; sondas. . . . . 1117 á 1121

CAPÍTULO XXI.

Paso de la Paragua.—Escollos en las proximidades del paso de la Paragua y á ambos lados de él.

Escollos en la mediania de la derrota; bajos Lorenzo; rompientes de Lorenzo; bajo Friendship. . . . . 1122 á 1125
Bancos Vernon, Samarang y Saracen; bajo Luisa. . . . 1126 á 1127
Isla Saudy; bajos Real Carlota, Vitora, Ottawa y Victoria del N; arrecife Commodore y rompientes Roger; precauciones. . . . . 1127 á 1130
Escollos al O. de la derrota; bajos Hallinson, Royal Captain, Bombay, Carnatic y Holmes. . . . . 1131 á 1133

Figure 3: Page of the book "Derrotero del Achipielago Filipino" showing Bacuit as pueblo.

The French account shows the range of the timeline of the founding from 1858 to 1878, considering the publication of both narratives. The French publication, though similar to the Spanish account in their narrative, has a different description of Bacuit. This leads to the conclusion that Bacuit was not yet a pueblo until 1857.

> Le nouveau village de Bacuit, nommé aussi par les naturels Ta-landac, est construit dans une baie de sable située sur la côte Nord d'une presqu'île de roches calcaires. La partie la plus haute de cette presqu'île, le pic Bacuit, qui est assez pointu, s'élève à 456 mètres au-dessus du niveau de la mer et forme l'extrémité Nord de la baie que nous venons de décrire.[48]

The document mentioned the term "village" which is the French equivalent to a "barrio." This suggests that Bacuit became a newly established pueblo from 1858 to 1878.

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[47] Bruce Cruikshank, "A Puzzle about Padrones: Tribute in the Eighteenth-Century A Puzzle about Padrones: Tribute in the Eighteenth-Century Spanish Philippines," Philippine Studies vol. 59 no. 2, Ateneo de Manila University, 2011, p. 215.
[48] P. 112.

Traditionally, the founding of Bacuit as a municipality is believed to have occurred on March 16, 1916. This date is based on the article *"Historical and Cultural Life of the Barrios and Town of Bacuit, Palawan,"* submitted to the National Library of the Philippines by Marcial Viray and colleagues in 1952. The article was part of a nationwide effort to restore historical records lost during the destruction of the Legislative Building in February 1945, when American forces liberated Manila from Japanese occupation. As the building was restored in 1949, various cultural and historical documents were submitted to replace the burned archives.

Aside from Camilo de Arana's document, other sources also challenge this traditional account. A document titled *A Pronouncing Gazetteer and Geographical Dictionary of the Philippine Islands, United States of America, with Maps, Charts, and Illustrations,* published in 1902, categorizes Bacuit as a *pueblo* (town). Furthermore, Bacuit was mentioned in the *Report of the Philippine Exposition Board to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition,* published in 1904, where it received an "Honorable Mention" award. Another document, the *Handbook of the Philippine Islands,* translated from *Compendio de Geografía* by P. Francisco Xavier Baranera, SJ, and published in 1901, also mentions Bacuit alongside Taytay and Dumaran - towns that already existed at the time.

> Puerto Princesa, in the central part of the east coast, with a population of 1,800, is the capital. It has a good harbor and is a naval station. The town is pretty, having picturesque suburbs. Other places are Taytay, in the north-east; and Bacuit and Dumaran.[49]

After discovering the above-mentioned documents, the author finally found a record from the National Archives of the Philippines indicating the exact date when Talindac was founded as an independent pueblo, after being a *visita* of Taytay. A *visita* was equivalent to a barrio, but instead of being governed by a *teniente de barrio*, it was administered by friars and missionaries. The document is dated January 24, 1888, and was signed by Joaquin Ibanez.

However, finding the document on the founding of Talindac was not enough. The appearance of Bacuit as a pueblo as early as 1879 raises the possibility that there were two or more foundings, considering the

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[49] Alexander Laist, "Handbook of the Philippine Islands, Translated from the Compedio de Geografia by P. Francisco Xavier Baranera, SJ," William Partier, Manila, 1899, pp. 123-124.

constant restructuring of the province since its establishment as the Province of Calamianes in 1818. The province was divided into two - Castilla and Asturias - in 1858, and later into three separate provinces: Calamianes, Paragua, and Balabac. During the American colonial period, these were eventually unified into a single province of Palawan, in 1905. Given these changes in names and divisions, it is possible that Talindac or Bacuit underwent several instances of establishment and abolition as a town.

With these possibilities, Marcial Viray could be partially correct. This can be confirmed as more documents surface. Marcial Viray and his co-authors, writing in the late 1940s to early 1950s, may have relied on oral tradition and could have mistaken 1916 as the year of Bacuit's first establishment as a municipality. However, what is most certain is that 1916 marked the installation of its first Filipino municipal president, Adriano Abadiano, who governed El Nido. This milestone reflected the broader impact of the Jones Law, enacted by the United States Congress on August 29, 1916.

The Jones Law marked the first formal commitment of the U.S. federal government to grant Philippine independence. It granted the Philippine Legislature general legislative powers, though certain matters, such as immigration, currency, and public lands, remained under U.S. oversight. The law also accelerated the process of *Filipinization,* which aimed to transition governance from American to Filipino leaders.

The Jones Law also empowered provinces and towns to appoint Filipino leaders. This initiative to include Filipino legislators and local officials marked a significant step toward full independence. Known as "Filipinization," this process is detailed by Dayana Ariffin in her book *The Censuses of The Philippine Islands: From Ethnological Inquiry to the Formalization of Racial Categories in The American-Occupied Philippines From 1903 to 1939:*

> Filipinization is commonly understood to be an era from 1912 to 1916, which focused on increasing the number of Filipino officials in the government to gradually shift the responsibilities of administering the country from the Americans to Filipinos (Agoncillo, 1974). Filipinization was galvanized when the Congress of the United States approved the Jones Act to concede that the United States would "withdraw their sovereignty over the Philippine Islands and to recognize their independence as soon as an independent government

can be established therein" (Government of the Philippine Islands, 1916).[50]

The period of Filipinization, spanning from 1912 to 1916, aligned with the appointment of Bacuit's first municipal president. According to Marcial Viray and his co-authors, Adriano Abadiano served as Bacuit's first municipal president, while Juan Castro was its first municipal vice president. Their writings also note that Rosalio Castro became the first municipal mayor, with Lucio Dajon serving as vice mayor, in 1937.

Table 1: List of Municipal Officials (1916-1940)[51]

Municipal President	Municipal Vice President	Term
Adriano Abadiano	Juan Castro	1916-1919
Pedro Fernandez	Unknown	1919-1919
Felix Arzaga	Juan Reynoso	1919-1922
Luis De Castro	Nicolas Bobis	1922-1925
Tomas Rojel	Victoriano Castro	1925-1928
Severino Maceda	Rosalio Castro	1928-1931
Julian Jeminez	Manuel Dalisam	1931-1934
Rosalio Castro	Flaviano Paredes	1934-1937
Rosalio Castro (Mayor)	Lucio Dajon (Vice Mayor)	1937-1940

With Filipinos now at the helm of local governance, local residents were given the opportunity to address localized concerns more effectively, as they knew the situation better than their American predecessors. With documents supporting the establishment of Bacuit as a town earlier than 1916, the remaining possibilities are that it was a re-establishment rather than a first establishment, or that there was no re-establishment at all. Nonetheless, 1916 remains a significant milestone in the municipality's history, marking the year it appointed its first Filipino municipal president.

To complete the list of Municipal Mayors and Vice Mayors, the author referenced the souvenir book from the El Nido Centennial Celebration held on March 16, 2016. At that time, the municipality's founding date was still believed to be in 1916, leading to the celebration of 2016 as El Nido's centenary.

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[50] Dayana Ariffin, "The censuses of the Philippine islands: From ethnological inquiry to the formalization of racial categories in the American-occupied Philippines from 1903 to 1939," Social Science Diliman 15:1, Quezon City, 2019, p. 61.

[51] Marcial Viray et. al., "Historical and Cultural Life of the Barrios and Town of El Nido, Palawan," National Library of the Philippines, 1952.

Table 2: List of Municipal Officials (1940-Present)

Municipal Mayor	Municipal Vice Mayor	Term
Rosalio Castro (Mayor)	Daniel Lafuente (Vice Mayor)	1940- 1945
Rosalio Castro (OIC Mayor)		1945-1946
Francisco A Bobis Sr. (Mayor)	Adelaido P. Acosta (Vice Mayor)	1946- 1949
Francisco A. Bobis Sr. (Mayor)	Restituto Acosta (Vice Mayor)	1950- 1954
Francisco A. Bobis Sr. (Mayor)	Pedro Dangan (Vice Mayor)	1954- 1955
Jose R. Seastres (Mayor)	Victoriano Fabregas (Vice Mayor)	1956- 1959
Emilio Arzaga (Mayor)	Adolfo Castro (Vice Mayor)	1959- 1962
Francisco A. Bobis Sr. (Mayor)		1963- 1963
Pedro A. Dangan (Mayor)	Restituto Acosta (Vice Mayor)	1964- 1967
Francisco A. Bobis Sr. (Mayor)	Rosalio Castro (Vice Mayor)	1968-1971
Pedro A. Dangan (Mayor)	Adolfo Castro (Vice Mayor)	1972- 1976
Pedro A. Dangan (Mayor)	Jose R. Seastres (Vice Mayor)	1977- 1979
Ludovico F. Batoy (Mayor)	Joaquin D. Dela Cruz Sr. (Vice Mayor)	1979- 1983
Ludovico F. Batoy (Mayor)	Joaquin D. Dela Cruz Sr. (Vice Mayor)	1984- 1986
Arturo Acosta (OIC Mayor)	Henri Fernandez (OIC Vice Mayor)	1986-1987
Luduvico Batoy (OIC Mayor)[52]	Henri Fernandez (OIC Vice Mayor)	1987
Arturo Acosta	Rolando Factuar	1989-1992
Ludovico Batoy	Edwin Vidal	1992-1998
Edna Gacot-Lim	Edwin Vidal	1998-2001
Edna Gacot-Lim	Leonor Dangan-Corral	2001-2007
Leonor Dangan-Corral	Edna Gacot-Lim	2007-2010
Edna Gacot-Lim	Edgardo Trinidad	2010-2013
Edna Gacot-Lim	Nieves C. Rosento	2013-2016

[52] In compliance with the election regulations that time, Luduvico Batoy had to step down prior to elections in December 1987, Manuel Rey became the OIC mayor until the winner of the 1987 election, Arturo Acosta assumed office in February 1988.

Nieves C. Rosento	Leonor Dangan-Corral	2016-2019
Edna Gacot-Lim	Luningning L. Batoy	2019-2025
Edna Gacot-Lim	Joel B. Rosento	2025 -

The town's final name change to *El Nido* occurred on June 17, 1954 through the Republic Act No. 1140, a decision that emphasized the area's unique natural feature: the presence of edible bird's nests, or *nido*, found in the limestone caves. The name *El Nido* highlighted the region's reputation for the prized nests, which held significant economic value. Today, the economy built around edible bird's nest gathering is being overshadowed by the rapidly growing tourism industry.

The Oldest Barangays

Currently, El Nido consists of 18 barangays. Batacalan and Tiniguiban were listed in the 1900 document *"El Archipielago Filipino, Coleccion de Datos, Tomo I."*[53] Meanwhile, Batacalan appeared in older documents,[54] as early as 1888.

The new barangays that only appeared in the later 1918 Census were Lio[55] and Oton.[56] Lio corresponds to the present-day Villa Libertad, while Oton refers to the current Mabini. However, Lio might have been part of the Poblacion, as it was listed as "C. Lio" alongside "C. Nasigdon, C. Baloc, C. Kinarongon, C. Lorenzo, and C. Nagbaclao." At that time, the barangays could have been Bacuit Poblacion, Tiniguiban, Sibaltan, and Oton while Lio was just a sub-division inside Bacuit Poblacion.

It's noteworthy Batacalan was no longer listed in the 1918 Census, with Sibaltan appearing. It is possible that Batacalan was later renamed Sibaltan and further divided into two, forming the barrio of Oton.

The establishment of Oton as a new barangay coincided with the growth of settlement, driven by the Canovas family, who started a logging business and eventually constructed a sawmill in 1923. Before the sawmill, the business likely already thrived, and the port was established

[53] De la Mission de la Compania de Jesus en Estas Islas, "El Achipielago Filipino: Coleccion de Datos, Tomo I," Washington, Imprenta del Gobierno, 1900, p. 143.
[54] D. José Montero y Vidal, "Historia de la Piratería Malayo - Maho Metana en Mindanao, Jolo y Borneo, Comprende Desde el Descubrimiento de Dichas Islas Hasta Junio de 1858, Tomo II," Imprenta y Fundición de Manuel Tello, 1888, p. 512.
[55] Felipe Buencamino, Sr., "Census of the Philippine Islands 1918, Volume II: Population and Mortality," Census of the Philippine Islands, Manila, 1919, p. 412.
[56] Ibid., p. 328.

earlier. According to oral tradition, the name "Oton" is derived from a town in Iloilo, the origin of many workers hired by the Canovas family. The hymn for their patron saint, Vicente Ferrer, is sung in Hiligaynon, a tradition that reflects their roots in that town in Iloilo.

Tagbanua Communities

The Tagbanuas were the first known settlers in El Nido among the ethno-linguistic groups. However, their identity as a distinct community has become harder to recognize due to their dispersion across different areas and intermarriage with migrants who have since dominated in population size and influence. Some Tagbanuas retreated to the mountains and islands of El Nido and neighboring municipalities.

Currently, there are three Tagbanua communities in El Nido: Catuldan, Daguyon, and Bagong Bayan. Although they only migrated in the 1960s from the Calamian group of islands and from Malampaya Sound in Taytay, they may be descendants of the Tagbanuas who originally settled in the El Nido region during the Neolithic period. This is because the Tagbanuas have always been a migratory people, except for the Tagbanua Silanganen, who intermarried with the Cuyonon migrants during the Spanish colonial period. The Catuldan and Daguyon communities trace their origins to Calibangbangan Island in Linapacan, while the Tagbanua of Bagong Bayan came from Liminangcong and Inalwáyan in Malampaya Sound.

The Catuldan community, one of the Tagbanua groups residing along the coast, has managed to maintain its unity despite facing pressures from developers. They have preserved their traditional organizational structure and continue to live separately from neighboring Cuyonon and Visayan settlements. Cultural practices like the traditional dances *tarek* and *suring* remain integral to their identity.

According to local Tagbanua residents, the name "Catuldan" originates from the presence of *kiwet* hives found along its shoreline. *Kiwet* are small, stingless bees valued for their honey production and pollination. These bees, typically dark brown or black with glossy bodies, build their nests in tree trunks or crevices, creating waxy hive structures. Although their honey yields are modest, it is prized for its distinct flavor and medicinal properties. Gentle by nature, *kiwet* bees are safe to handle and play a vital role in maintaining the ecosystem's biodiversity.

Today, the organizational structure in Catuldan consists of two types of leaders: the *apong dakulo* (chieftain) and the *mamaepet*, who serves as an advisor. The *mamaepet* is usually chosen from among the eldest

community members because of their wisdom and experience. The Daguyon community follows a similar structure. However, the Bagong Bayan community differs in that it does not recognize the terms *mamaepet* and *apong dakulo*. This is so because the center of leadership is not in Bagong Bayan. Therefore, the research team of the Heritage Tourism Division needs to gather information from Inalwayan in Malampaya Sound, where their chieftain resides. This will also shed more light on understanding the larger community to which the Tagbanuas of Bagong Bayan belong.

Unlike other Tagbanua communities in Palawan, the Tagbanuas of El Nido no longer have a *babaylan* in their organizational structure. *Babaylans* are spiritual leaders traditionally revered for their wisdom but who hold no formal authority. There are tales of Tagbanua *babaylan* rituals in New Ibajay; however, there is no confirmation that those who performed the rituals were part of the formal organizational structure of the Tagbanua community in New Ibajay in the past.

The Catuldan community now faces mounting pressure from developers who have acquired land in the area. As a result, the community was forced to relocate approximately 100 meters inland from their original beachfront settlement. Catuldan's coastline features a small offshore island called Daracuton Maitey (Small Daracuton), also known as Brother Island. It is so named because of its proximity to Nalbot, its "sister island" to the northeast. Catuldan is a *sitio* of Teneguiban, situated south of *So. Cagbuli*.

Presently, the acting *apong dakulo* of Catuldan is Dionel Saison, the vice chieftain. He assumed the role due to the current *apong dakulo* being imprisoned for resisting developer's pressures. In Daguyon, Nilo Abina serves as the *apong dakulo*. Since the communities in Bagong Sikat and other sitios acknowledge the chieftain from Inalwayan, the Heritage Tourism Division still needs to know the name of the leader, their equivalent terms for *apong dakulo* and *mamaepet*, and whether they have a *babaylan* in their organizational structure. For El Nido as a whole, Nemia Ormido is the one monitoring the registration of Tagbanuas.

There are noticeable differences between the Tagbanuas from Calamian and those from Malampaya. Although their languages share many common terms, there are distinct variations. Even their makeshift houses, which will be discussed later, have different names and usage: the Tagbanuas from Calamianes refer to them as *tigbaboy*, while those from Malampaya call them *tamil*. While *tigbaboy* is erected near the shore *tamil* is put on a banca.

The differences in terms and usage may have arisen from the distinct challenges brought about by their respective environments. The Calamian group consists of islands in the open sea, exposed to the battering of the northeast monsoon, while Malampaya Sound is securely surrounded by landmasses. *Tamil* is suitable for calmer seas, whereas *tigbaboy* needs to be placed on land. Perhaps one of these designs preceded the other as the communities migrated.

CHAPTER 4: STRUCTURES

Structures of historical and cultural significance serve as tangible connections to the past, embodying the culture, values, and social needs of the time they were constructed. These buildings or sites often fulfilled critical functions within a community, whether as places of worship, trade, governance, or defense, reflecting the society's priorities and technological advancements of the era. By studying the architectural style, materials used, and layout, we gain insight into the level of craftsmanship, resources available, and aesthetic preferences, allowing us to understand not just what was important to people then but also how they approached problem-solving, sustainability, and communal life.

In terms of cultural preservation, these structures or their remnants hold memories that help form cohesive historical narratives. Each element of a culturally significant structure tells a story - of the hands that built it, the people who inhabited or utilized it, and the transformations it underwent over time. These sites anchor collective memory, offering a sense of continuity and identity for future generations. As people seek to maintain their cultural heritage, preserving these landmarks, whether through restoration, adaptive reuse, or commemorative markers, enables communities to retain a physical link to their heritage. This continuity is essential for cultural education and for fostering pride, respect, and awareness of shared histories.

Moreover, historical structures provide insight into the challenges and opportunities posed by the surrounding environment and neighboring communities. Buildings in coastal regions, for example, may reveal adaptations to climate or the demand of trading activities. By preserving these structures, we preserve knowledge of how past societies adapted to and engaged with their environment and outside culture, thus enriching our understanding of their resourcefulness and resilience.

Though material evidences reveal that coastal defense was part of the culture of El Nido's early settlements, they are not included in this chapter but in the geological features section because, unfortunately, there are no existing traces of structures dedicated for defense. The only immoveable cultural property that has military use in the area is the Sta. Monica natural fort in Sibaltan and it is not man-made.

Some structures are no longer standing. However, each design is still preserved in the memories of the people, highlighting its cultural impact during a certain period in local history. Discussing these designs helps us preserve them and, if possible, recreate them in the future, as was done with the Balay Cuyonon replica.

El Nido Port

The present-day port of El Nido, situated in So. Cabigsing, Barangay Buena Suerte, holds significant historical importance, particularly in the context of commerce and trade. The establishment of the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) in El Nido on April 13, 2003, under the directive of then-President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, marked the start of a series of expansions aimed at accommodating the town's burgeoning tourism industry.

Before the opening of El Nido's first resort, Miniloc Island Resort, in 1983, the port underwent several repairs and upgrades. These transformations date back to when the Talindak community relocated from Langeb-Langeban to Cabigsing, spanning the Spanish colonial period, the American regime, and the era of the independent Philippine government. Evidence of port expansion during the 1930s was documented in the first volume, including a record of Palawan hero Higinio Mendoza, then-governor, who inscribed his handwriting on the port's wall.

Although the establishment of the PPA is well-documented, the origins of the port's construction remain unclear. It may have been built when the Talindak community relocated to Cabigsing or existed prior to their arrival. Whether the relocation occurred gradually or all at once also remains uncertain. Cabigsing's favorable location likely influenced the move, as its position, shielded by a massive limestone cliff on the west side, offers protection from the strong *habagat* (southwest monsoon) winds. Additionally, the limestone caves provided refuge during raids.

The name Talindak appears in a historical document titled *Catalog of Admiralty, Charts, Plans, and Sailing Directions, 1898*, published in London. This catalog listed charts of significant ports worldwide, along with their respective prices, and was updated bi-monthly by the Hydrographic Department of the Admiralty. The Palawan section, illustrated in Figure 3, confirms Talindak's importance as a port in the Calamianes region during that era.

The writing of Palawan's hero and former governor, Higinio A. Mendoza, can still be seen on one of El Nido Port's old walls. This was discussed in the first volume of this series.

Canovas Port

The Canovas Port was one of the structures built by the Canovas family, headed by Ramon Canovas, in 1923 at *Barriong Lagi* (Old Barrio),

Mabini. “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.”[57] The other structures were a sawmill, a house and a drinking pond for cattle. The remnants of the few structures, posts of the port and some partially broken drinking pond for cattle are still visible. The bulldozers, which the residents recount, are no longer there.

“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.”[58] The statue helped the coastal community of “Oton,” the former name of Mabini, grow in faith with their devotion to St. Vincent Ferrer.

The Canovas' timber business was affected by the transition from Spanish to U.S. colonial rule, which brought changes in policies. Under the Spanish regime, timber was primarily used for constructing ships and houses. However, with the arrival of the Americans, timber exports to the United States increased, serving purposes such as furniture making, house construction, and various industrial applications. In her book *"Power from the Forest: The Politics of Logging,"* Marites Vitug highlights the sustained high demand for timber from the Spanish colonial period through the American era. She writes:

> It was the American colonial forestry in the Philippines, however, which continued the systemic denudation of the forests. Goerge Ahern, first American director of the Bureau of Forestry, presided over the passage of a forest law in 1904 that gave the bureau the power to issue timber concessions on whatever scale and duration they deemed a lumberman’s resource could match. Nearly 20 million hectares of forest lands were under his control.[59]

The 1904 forest law may have motivated the Canovas family to pursue logging as demand increased. During that period, only Spanish families in El Nido had the financial resources to engage in such ventures. Notably, the Vazquez family, another Spanish family in El Nido, operated their own

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[57] Arvin L. Acosta: “Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido, Volume 1, Futuristic Printing Press,” Puerto Princesa City, 2024, p. 24.
[58] Ibid., p. 25.
[59] Marites Vitug, “Power from the Forest: The Politics of Logging,” Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Philippines, 1993, p. 12.

port for timber transport in New Guinlo, Taytay while the Rey family had their logging turf at Teneguiban and San Fernando.

The coastal barangay, originally established due to the Canovas family's timber business, was eventually moved 784 meters inland. Today, the former site serves as a recreational spot for local beachgoers and occasional tourists, as well as a jumping-off point for local fishermen. Recognizing the port's historical importance, the Barangay Council of Mabini has installed an information kiosk in the area.

Balay Cuyonon

The *balay Cuyonon* is a traditional Cuyonon house design that, while once common, has fallen out of use in El Nido. *Balay* is Cuyonon word that refers to "house." During a cultural mapping workshop in Sibaltan, participants identified the *balay Cuyonon* as a valuable cultural heritage needing preservation. Facilitated by American museologist Lace Thornberg, the workshop led to a successful funding request to the U.S. Embassy in Manila. With the grant, a replica of the *Balay Cuyonon* was constructed in 2012. This replica now serves as an ethnographic museum dedicated to Cuyonon culture, becoming the first museum in El Nido and a significant reminder of the area's heritage.

Similar to the typical Filipino *bahay kubo*, the *balay Cuyonon* features a roof made of *paod* and walls crafted from *sawali*. *Paod* is the traditional roofing material in Palawan made from layers of dried nipa palm or coconut leaves. Its equivalent in Tagalog is *pawid*. Meanwhile, *sawali* is a traditional wall material crafted from thinly split bamboo that is woven into intricate, crisscross patterns. While the normal sawali has an x-pattern, Balay Cuyonon normally has a grid pattern.

A key difference is that the kitchen is separated from the main house. This design reflects the Cuyonon way of thinking that, in the event of a fire - most likely originating from the kitchen - the main house could still be preserved. The bamboo bridge that connects the kitchen to the main house is called *tambi*.

Robert Arevalo, a Senior High School teacher, and Joie Matillano, the Municipal Tourism Officer of Taytay, Palawan, both Cuyonons, described the key components of the *Balay Cuyonon* as follows:

1. **Kasaw** – Bamboo strips attached to rounded wooden trusses, where *pawid* (thatch) is sewn using rattan threads called *way*.

2. **Langen** – The Cuyonon equivalent of joists that support either the floor or the roof.

3. **Salud** – Wooden planks that provide support to the floor joists.

4. **Panalegan** – Wooden trusses, also called *soleras*, where bamboo flooring is attached.

5. **Arigi** – The house's structural pillars.

6. **Tambi** – A bamboo bridge connecting the main house to the kitchen.

7. **Atep** – A roof that is usually made of woven *nipa* or coconut leaves called *pawid*.

While farmers also use the same *balay Cuyonon*, most of these houses are situated in coastal areas. In El Nido, Cuyonon communities predominantly reside along the coast, where they sustain both agricultural and fishery traditions, benefiting from convenient access to the sea for trade and transportation.

Balay na Mabael

Between the late 19th century and the early 20th century, Spanish families settled in El Nido, including the Vazquez, Rey, Fernandez, and Canovas families. The Vazquez family constructed a house in the Poblacion area, now part of modern-day Buena Suerte. This house, known as "Balay na Mabael," a Cuyonon phrase meaning "The Big House," stood out for its size compared to typical homes of the time. Its grandeur reflected the wealth and influence of the Vazquez family, making it a significant landmark and a gathering place for prominent individuals in El Nido.

Balay na Mabael was situated in the present-day in Barangay Buena Suerte. The two-story wooden house was burned during World War II to prevent Japanese forces from using it as their headquarters. Despite the destruction, the Vazquez family managed to preserve photographs of the house.

Tigbaboy

The *tigbaboy* is a simple, makeshift shelter originally used by the Tagbanua people and later adopted by Cuyonon fishermen as a

temporary shelter when their main homes were located further inland. This structure is partway between a tent and a small hut, designed for easy construction and quick shelter. Its roof and walls are made of *pawid*, which offers protection from the elements while maintaining a lightweight, breathable structure. The floor is made of bamboo slats, elevating it slightly off the ground. The *tigbaboy* serves as a practical solution for fishermen, providing a comfortable resting place close to the shore, combining both function and traditional design simplicity.

Surprisingly, the Tagbanuas in Bagong Bayan use a different name and usage for *tigbaboy*; they call it *tamil*. However, *tamil* can no longer be considered a structure, as it is already a part of a banca. Its purpose, however, remains the same - it serves as a shelter for fishermen.

Penet

The *penet* is a traditional fish pen used by the Cuyonon fishing communities, crafted with nets supported by wooden poles to create an enclosed space in the water. The structure includes an opening that narrows as the fish swim further inside, making it nearly impossible for them to exit. In some cases, penet installations include small stilt houses that provide temporary shelter for guards or harvesters who monitor the catch. This traditional fishing structure reflects the deep connection of Cuyonon culture to sustainable fishing practices. In places like El Nido, however, only a limited number of *penet* fish pens are permitted to ensure the preservation of marine life and protect fish stocks for smaller-scale fishers, supporting both environmental sustainability and community livelihoods.

Bosyador's Hut

Bosyadors are dedicated gatherers who construct simple huts near caves where they harvest *balinsasayaw*, the edible nests of swiftlet birds. These huts serve as their lookout posts to guard against thieves, who are a frequent threat, especially at night or outside the official gathering season (from December to May). The presence of these guardians helps in protecting the nests from unsustainable harvesting methods often practiced by poachers. Unlike *bosyadors*, who adhere to a sustainable approach - waiting for the hatchlings to leave the nest before collecting it - thieves tend to disregard this practice. They take nests prematurely, threatening the bird populations. The vigilance of *bosyadors* not only secures a valuable resource for the community but also preserves a delicate ecological balance essential to the survival of the swiftlets.

The huts that *bosyadors* construct on Pinagbuyutan Island, Cadlao Island, and Imorigue Island are made from local materials, namely, bamboo, wood, nipa leaves, and rattan. Raised above ground level, these huts provide a clear view of approaching boats. Measuring at least about 3 meters by 4 meters, they are compact yet sufficient as a sleeping quarter for three people comfortably. Inside, there is a small kitchen area equipped with basic cooking utensils, including a kettle for heating water to make coffee. Shells tied with transparent nylon are hung along the paths leading to the caves. Positioned close enough to the trail, the shells create sounds when disturbed by unsuspecting intruders, alerting the guards in the huts to any unauthorized movement near the caves.

CHAPTER 5: OBJECTS

This chapter presents ethnographic objects related to maritime culture, offering a visual gateway into the lives and traditions shaped by centuries of interaction with El Nido's coastal environment. These objects embody the skills, methodologies, and daily practices of coastal communities, capturing how they have adapted to and thrived within their surroundings. Through the study of tools, fishing implements, boat models, and traditional clothing, we gain insight into the resourcefulness and ingenuity that have been honed over generations. Each object reveals a specific aspect of coastal life, from intricate fishing nets that reflect local craftsmanship to navigational tools indicating knowledge of tides, currents, and seasonal patterns. These artifacts allow us to witness the practicality and artistry developed in response to the demands of a maritime lifestyle.

Beyond functionality, these ethnographic objects reflect the beliefs and celebrations that have developed over time, illustrating the cultural dimensions of El Nido's maritime communities. Decorative elements on tools and ceremonial items used in festivals and rituals reveal a spiritual connection to the sea, highlighting the role of the ocean as both a life-giving force and a sacred realm. These objects symbolize more than just livelihood - they represent values of respect, community, and continuity with the past. Through them, we see the evolution of celebrations, such as fishing festivals and maritime rites, which honor both the bounty and power of the sea. Together, these artifacts create a narrative that enriches our understanding of El Nido's maritime culture, offering a tangible record of the beliefs, practices, and historical resilience shaped by the coastal environment.

Fish Traps

The coastal communities of El Nido use a variety of trapping devices for fish and crabs. While many of the traps share similar features, they also have unique variations in form and terminology, shaped by the local environment and culture of Palawan. Here are some of the most common fish traps found in these communities:

1. **Bubo** | The *bubo* is a traditional fish trap similar to the *panak*, used widely among the Cuyonon and other Visayan-speaking communities. However, unlike the *panak*, which has a single opening at the top, the *bubo* has entrances on both sides, increasing the chances of trapping fish or crabs as they swim through. The *bubo* is crafted primarily from bamboo, bound

together with rattan for durability, making it sturdy enough to withstand underwater currents. This construction differs slightly from the *panak*, which uses rattan as the main material and bamboo for structural support. The dual openings and durable build make the *bubo* an effective and popular choice for traditional fishing people across various Visayan regions, reflecting a shared cultural practice in sustainable fishing.

Cynthia Neri Zayas, in her book "Persistence of Bubo, Fish Trap in the Philippine Artisanal Fishery," discussed *bubo's* place in south Asia fishing culture saying, "They are generic terms for fish traps in many places in the Philippines, Indonesia, and all the way to Madagascar. The widespread use of the device reflects the utility of the ancient practice of fish trapping throughout the Malayo-Polynesian world. Similarities of the term indicate the languages in these areas as related."[60] Based on Zayas' study, we can conclude that the similarity of the term in the region not only reflects the relation of languages but also the adoption of fishing techniques among kingdoms and settlements in the region. The widespread use could be attributed to its effectiveness, availability of materials and convenience in carrying the traps on small boats.

After discussing the widespread use of bubo in the South and Southeast Asia, Zayas discussed bubo specifically in the Palawan setting, citing the works of Umali:

> Bubos are constructed for target organisms, for example, the *panak-alimango* from Cuyo Island which is used for catching *alimango* 'land crab' (Umali, 1950: 130), and the *bubo-sa-hipon*, a cylindrical fish pot with a nonreturn valve on its two openings used in Laguna for catching shrimp (Umali, 1950: 106).[61]

It mentioned here that there are two types of *bubo*, the *panak-alimango* and *bubo-sa-hipon*. Here we can see that *panak* was a type of the generic *bubo*.

Furthermore, Zayas cited different sources, discussing the pervasive use of bubo in the archipelago as depicted in the Philippine art scene:

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[60] Cynthia Neri Zayas, "Persistence of Bubo, Fish Trap in the Philippine Artisanal Fishery," Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnography, Osaka, 2022, p. 88.
[61] Ibid., p. 90.

> Several source materials attest to the pervasive use of *bubo* in Philippine fisheries: the watercolor paintings of Jose H. Lozano in the mid-19th century, and the results of studies reported in the 1930s by Talavera and Montalban (1932), Aldaba (1931a; 1931b; 1931c), Montilla (1931), Umali (1950), and Blanco (1956).[62]

In El Nido, various versions and styles of *bubo* are used, each designed for specific purposes. Some are intended for catching fish, while others are crafted for trapping crabs. Along the Dewil River in New Ibajay, *bubo* is particularly popular for crab-catching. It is common to see *lunday* boats filled with *bubo* traps navigating the river.

2. **Panak** | *Panak* is a traditional fish trap used by the Cuyonon people, designed not only for catching fish but sometimes for trapping crabs as well. Crafted from bamboo and rattan, the *panac* resembles a large, sturdy basket with an inward-facing opening, making it difficult for any fish or crab to escape once they have entered. This ingenious design leverages the natural behavior of fish, allowing them to swim in but preventing their exit. Fishermen position the *panak* on the sea bottom, often in areas with seagrass beds, using a long pole to carefully secure it in place. This fishing method reflects both the resourcefulness and respect for natural materials that are characteristic of Cuyonon fishing practices, providing a sustainable way to harvest seafood while maintaining traditional skills.

   As previously mentioned, *panak* is a type of *bubo,* a generic type of fish trap that is widely used throughout the archipelago and across Southeast Asia. The Cuyonon people continue to use the term *panak* today, reflecting the localized influence of the widespread *bubo* culture in the region. In El Nido, Cuyonons normally use *panak* in seagrass areas where they catch herbivore rabbitfishes called *manlalada, bararawan* and *barangen*.

   Medardo Bienes, a fisherman from Sibaltan who started using *panak* at the age of 30, shared that fishing with a *panak* is his primary source of livelihood. His fishing season starts in March, when the fish bait, *lumot* (algae), begins to grow, and lasts until October. Though *manlalada* and *danggit* are normal catch, other types of fish occasionally get caught in the *panak* as well. To set

[62] Ibid., p.91

the bait, Medardo places it into the holes of the Panak and adds three stones to weigh it down, ensuring it sinks. He leaves it underwater for a day and checks it the next day. On average, he catches between five to eight kilograms of fish each day, which he sells, keeping some aside for his meals.

Salvador Baluarte, another fisherman from Sibaltan who began fishing at the age of 12, sets the *panak* based on weather conditions and the growth of sea algae. As noted by Medardo, the earliest growth of seaweed occurs during March, and if the north winds are not too strong, the *panak* fishing season may extend until September or October. Like Medardo, Salvador's primary target fish for the panak is *manlalada* or *danggit*. However, when *manlalada* is scarce in the panak, he occasionally catches other species such as *mol-mol*, *isdang bato*, *alimasag*, among others. *Isda* means "fish" and *bato* means "stone" in Cuyonon. Isdang bato refers to fish species that thrive in stony areas.

Daily fish catch is the same for both fishermen; it depends on the number of *panak* they set. The average catch is a kilo per panak being set. Madardo sets 3 panaks per day while Salvador sets two panaks daily, depending on the weather conditions.

3. **Bintol** | The *bintol* is a type of crab trap commonly used by the Aklanons in Barotuan. In Barotuan, the *bintol* is favored for crab fishing in mangrove rivers due to its easier application considering the formation of riverbeds and the influence of Aklanon culture. Unlike the *bubo*, *panak*, and *sarading*, which require careful placement, the *bintol* is simply tossed into the water from a boat. It is retrieved by pulling on its buoy, typically a floating bamboo piece or bottle attached to the trap. In their journal, "Blue Swimming Crab Stock Assessment in the Western Visayan Sea," researchers Sheryll V. Mesa, Drusila Esther E. Bayate, and May R. Guanco from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources identify the *bintol* as equivalent to a "crab lift net."[63]

   Compared to the *bubo* and *panak*, the *bintol* is easier to construct and use. While the *bubo* and *panak* are traditionally made entirely

[63] Sheryll V. Mesa, Drusila Esther E. Bayate and May R. Guanco, "Blue Swimming Crab Stock Assessment in the Western Visayan Sea," The Philippine Journal of Fisheries 25 (1), 2018, p. 77.

of bamboo and rattan, the *bintol* uses additional materials such as a square-shaped fishnet (with sides averaging 0.75 meters) and stones. The net is supported by two curved bamboo sticks that intersect, with stones placed where the sticks cross and at their four ends. According to Eduardo Cabintoy, an agro-tour guide, some fishermen substitute metals for stones in constructing the *bintol*.

4. **Sarading** | S*arading* is a traditional crab trap used by the Cuyonon people, essential for capturing various crabs that are a staple in their diet, including mud crabs like *alimango*, *peye*, and *kuday*. Made from locally sourced materials, the *sarading* is cleverly designed to capture not only these crabs but also *manla*, a type of mud crayfish found in the mangrove areas of El Nido. This trap is specifically suited for the coastal and mangrove ecosystems, where it is strategically placed to intercept crabs and crayfish as they move through the muddy terrain. The *sarading* reflects the ingenuity of Cuyonon fishing techniques and their deep connection to the mangrove and coastal habitats, enabling sustainable harvesting that supports both the community's dietary needs and traditional ways of life.

Sarapang

The *sarapang* is a type of fishing spear, typically featuring three spearheads arranged at equal 5˚ angles from the center. The spear itself is usually about 2 meters in length. A variation of the *sarapang* has a single spearhead instead of three. The spearheads are commonly crafted from steel, though some are made from *anibong*, a durable hardwood derived from palm trees.

Sarapang is documented by Muhammad Rafiekand and H. Rustam Effendi in the book *A Semantic Analysis of the Fishery Vocabulary of the Hulu Dialect of Banjarese*. The document highlights the similarity of the term used to describe a spear in the region:

> Sarapang or sirapang lexeme is called serampang in Malay. This suggests that sarapang or sirapang undergoes the absorption of the consonant /m/ on the second syllable and the change in the sound of the vocal /e/ to /a/ in the first syllable.
>
> Sarapang or sirapang is a fishing gear that has the form of a four-eyed spear. The naming is based on more than one spearhead used to spear fish. Sarapang or sirapang can be used as fishing gear by

> attaching it to a long tipless bamboo as a handle. After it is attached to the long tipless bamboo, it is used to spear the fish. The fish that had been speared will immediately stick into the sharp corner of the eye of sarapang or sirapang. Sarapang or sirapang has a four-eyed spear which consists of a three-eyed spear outside and a sharp one-eyed one in the center. The function of the four spear eyes is to ensure that the fish that is speared will be directly and firmly speared and cannot break free anymore. It can be used to spear any kind of fish. Furthermore, fishing with sarapang or sirapang is called manyarapang or manyirapang.[64]

The book describes the **sarapang**, or **sirapang**, as a four-pronged spear, distinct from the typical Cuyonon sarapang, which usually has three prongs. However, the Cuyonon version can sometimes have four prongs as well. Its purpose remains the same: to trap fish between the prongs, with the center prong piercing the fish's body. While fishing with a *sarapang* is called *manyarapang* in Banjarese, it is referred to as *panarapang* in Cuyonon.

In El Nido, the sarapang is still used by Cuyonon fishing communities. It is commonly employed in *pakinas*, a daytime fishing technique in shallow waters, and *panulo*, a traditional method of fishing at night in shallow waters using torches. The sarapang is especially effective for catching small fish, eels, and crabs.

Saleng Torch

The torch used by *busyadors* is made of saleng, a flammable sap that can be found in the forests of El Nido. Saleng is preferred by *busyadors* as fuel for their torch because it produces smoke as fragrant as incense.

Paula Satizábal et. al. discussed saleng in their research titled "Seascape shadows: life in the ruins of the edible bird's nest harvest in northern Palawan, the Philippines." Here is an excerpt from their manuscript:

> Before using battery-powered flashlights, the Tagbanua and Cuyonon busyador burned saheng resin (or saleng, Canarium luzonicum, and

[64] Muhammad Rafiekand H. Rustam Effendi, "A Semantic Analysis of the Fishery Vocabulary of the Hulu Dialect of Banjarese," Studies in English Language and Education, 9(3), 2022, 1267.

C. asperum) wrapped in dried nipa (Nypa fruticans) leaves as torches to illuminate cave walls and butas during the harvest.[65]

In their research, they opted to use the term *saheng*, which is commonly used in other parts of the Philippines. In El Nido, the Cuyonons refer to it as *saleng*, while the Visayans use the term *sahing*.

Budyong

Budyong is the Filipino term for "helmet shell" (Cassis cornuta). This large marine gastropod is commonly found in Philippine waters, and its thick, durable shell makes it suitable for crafting traditional horns. Like in other parts of the country, the Cuyonons use it as a shell horn or conch.

It holds an important role in Cuyonon culture, traditionally used to signal gatherings, or other significant events. While the memory of its use remains alive among Cuyonons today, only a few still possess the skill to blow it as a conch.

In El Nido, the use of *budyong* dates back as far as the Neolithic period. The 2005 archaeological excavation report from Dewil Valley document the presence of conch shells in ancient graveyards. The report states:

> Of particular note was one grave from the East Mouth, in which lain slabs of limestone covered a body with large shell disc beads, a conch, and pig incisor grave goods. This was the lowermost grave of the main cemetery found to date, and it is possible that it dates into the Neolithic. In the West Mouth, graves with a conch and a stone adze were found that may also date to an early phase, and a dog burial was found associated with a human grave.[66]

When the Balay Cuyonon Museum was established in 2012, as discussed in Chapter 9, *budyong* was included in the exhibit as part of efforts to preserve Cuyonon culture.

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[65] Paula Satizábal, Wolfram H. Dressler, Eulalio R. Guieb III, Jessie G. Varquez Jr., Canada Michael Fabinyi, "Seascape shadows: Life in the ruins of the edible bird's nest harvest in northern Palawan, the Philippines," Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space, 2021, p. 10.

[66] 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 and Wilfredo Ronquillo, "Early occupation at Ille Cave, New Ibajay, El Nido, Palawan, Philippines: report on the 2005 excavation season,", A report for the British Academy, NERC/Orads and the National Museum of the Philippines, 2006 p. 54.

Lusong asta Alo

Lusong and *alo* are inseparable, as each relies on the other to function, making them a single cultural entity. In Cuyonon, *lusong* refers to a mortar, while *alo* means pestle. The term *lusong* is of Austronesian origin and has been retained in various languages across the Philippine archipelago.

Like in many parts of the country, *lusong* and *alo* are primarily used for pounding rice. In addition to rice, they are also used to grind coffee, corn, cassava, and banana. Beyond food preparation, they serve another important function - during emergencies, forcefully striking the *lusong* with the *alo* produces a loud noise, which can be used to warn neighbors or call for help.

Many historians suggest that the island of Luzon was named after *lusong* due to its supposed resemblance to a mortar. However, historian William Henry Scott offers a more plausible explanation. While he agrees that Luzon derives its name from *lusong*, he attributes it to another meaning of the word - "to come down from the heights."[67] The same double meaning is also shared by the different languages in the country, including Cuyonon language.

Scott's interpretation is more logical, as Manila's lowland plains historically served as a destination where highlanders descended to trade goods or settle on more fertile lands. In contrast, the shape of Luzon hardly resembles a mortar - unless imagined as one tilted at a 45-degree angle.

Pangko

The *pangko*, or "sakayan," is a traditional boat used by the Cuyonon people, whether for trade, transporting people or fishing expeditions in the main island of Paragua. During the Pre-Spanish period, as Cuyo Island's agricultural lands struggled to support its increasing population, the Cuyonons utilized the *pangko* to reach Paragua (modern-day Palawan Island) for rice farming. Some Cuyonons eventually settled in Paragua, contributing to the island's growing population. Over time, the *pangko* became a regular vessel for transporting passengers and goods between Cuyo and Paragua.

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[67] William Henry Scott, "Barangay: Sixteenth Century Philippine Culture and Society,", Ateneo de Manila University Press, Quezon City,1994, p. 191.

In Sibaltan, the *pangko* remained in use until the 1950s. However, after several *pangkos* capsized during a storm in Linapacan Strait in the 1960s or 70s, the boat evolved into a motorized version, which was later replaced by the modern *lantsa*. By the 1970s, a larger vessel called the "batil" was used for the Sibaltan-Manila trade route, leading to a decline in the use of the *lantsa* on the Sibaltan-Cuyo route.

In 2012, Dr. Carlos Fernandez, a Cuyonon anthropologist, visited Sibaltan and inquired about the *pangko*. The officers of the Sibaltan Heritage Council, Inc. (SHCI) realized that they had little knowledge of this traditional boat. To preserve this heritage, SHCI conducted research by consulting elders in Sibaltan, who provided detailed descriptions of the *pangko*.

In July 2013, the Ancient Shores, Changing Tides project proposed by Ms. Lace Thornberg and funded by the American Alliance of Museums included the construction of a *pangko* replica. Five carpenters, led by Pablo Eleazar - the only remaining carpenter in El Nido that time with experience building *pangkos* - began work on April 30, 2014. The aim of the project was to preserve the design of the traditional boat. During the construction, the knowledge was passed on to Salvador Donde, Erwin Andao, Eddie Cabanag, and Roderick Garcia - the four other carpenters who participated in the project. On July 29, 2024, Mr. Eleazar finally died at the age of 89, leaving his legacy to these four carpenters.



Figure 4: The construction of pangko replica in Sibaltan.

The *pangko* replica was inaugurated on October 24, 2014, serving as an ethnographic museum of Cuyonon maritime culture. It became the second ethnographic museum established in El Nido after the Balay Cuyonon Museum, a replica of a traditional Cuyonon house, built in Sibaltan in 2012. The replica remained drydocked for display while jars and other materials that can be found during *pangko* voyages were put inside. Unfortunately, the replica withered through time and only 70% of it remained.

As previously discussed in page 42 of this book, *pangko* could have evolved from *balangay*. The striking similarity is the use of non-metal fastenings. Regarding *balangay*, "Metal fastenings

were not used in the construction of any of the Butuan Boats. Their builders edge joined the planks with wooden dowels. The edges of the keel plank and all other planks were drilled with holes through which dowels were inserted to fit tightly."[68] In a similar manner, *pangko* used dowels called *tarogo*. They were made of different types of hardwood such as *sumalagen* and *anibong*.

In the book "From the Sea to the Stars: The Forgotten Journeys of the Philippines' Ancient Explorers," Timothy James M. Dimacali mentioned "wooden peg" citing an account from a Jesuit chronicler:

> Over a century after Pigafetta, in 1668, a Jesuit missionary by the name of Francisco Ignacio Alcina wrote an overview of life in the Philippine Islands for the Spanish Crown and included in his account a very detailed description of the balangay. Not a single nail was used in its construction, he remarked. Its long planks were painstakingly carved from hardwood tree trunks, which were then fitted edge-to-edge with wooden pegs and caulked with fibers and resin.[69]

The excerpt mentions not only dowels but also the use of fibers and resin. This is another notable similarity between the construction of the *balangay* and the *pangko*. After building the pangko, its builders also use fibers to fill the gaps between planks, followed by applying a resin called *balao* as the final finish before launching it at sea.

Residents of Sibaltan note that *pangkos* vary in size: the smallest are around 10 meters long, medium-sized boats reach about 15 meters, and the largest extend up to 20 meters. Due to budget constraints, the replica built in Sibaltan was the smallest version of the *sakayan*, matching the size of the typical *balangays* discovered in Butuan.

Scientists initially believed that *balangays* measured approximately 10.2 meters (33 feet) in length and traveled as a flotilla of smaller boats. However, later discoveries revealed the existence of larger *balangays*, with the flotilla often accompanied by a "mother ship." Timothy James M. Dimacali, in the same book, recounted the discoveries made by archaeologists from the National Museum, quoting Mary Jane Louise Bolunia words:

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[68] Ligaya Lacsina, "Boats of the Precolonial Philippines: Butuan Boats, Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2014, p.5.

[69] Timothy James M. Dimacali, "From the Sea to the Stars: The Forgotten Journeys of the Philippines' Ancient Explorers," University of the Philippines, 2018, p.15.

> She holds up her hand and curls her fingers into a large circle. “That’s just one of Figure 5: The centerpiece of the Balangay Shrine Museum in Butuan, Mindanao. 18 the treenails.” Treenails, the technical term for the wooden pegs used to put the planks of a balangay together, are usually about as thick around as a thumb. These newfound ones were the size of soda cans.[70]

The dimensions of the wooden pegs mentioned in the excerpt provide insight into the immense size of the "mother ship." The book further detailed the discovery, describing the eighth boat as having a pea pod shape and measuring 15.24 meters (50 feet) in length, larger than the first seven boats. This was followed by the ninth boat, which measured over 24.4 meters (80 feet). These size descriptions align with the dimensions of the *sakayan* as recounted by Sibaltan residents.

Aside from transporting people and goods, the *pangko* also serves as a fishing vessel. Shrimp is the most common catch, which is processed into *ipon*, the Cuyonon shrimp paste, and stored in jars called *tapayan*. During fishing expeditions, *tapayans* filled with *ipon* are the typical cargo of the *pangko*. During harvest season, sacks of rice are the primary cargo, transported from Paragua to Cuyo. On the return trip, the *pangko* often carries *kalamay*, a Cuyonon delicacy made from buri (palm) sap, back to Paragua.

According to Rey Bataluna, former *punong barangay* of Villa Paz, the *pangko* typically has a crew of 12 members, or less but not fewer than 7. He noted that each crew member brings his own food supply, including at least half a sack of rice, as their trips often last up to two months at sea. Cooking responsibilities rotate among the crew, with each member contributing one *salop* (2-2.5 kilos) of rice per meal from their provisions. When the wind slows their journey, crew members take the opportunity to fish. The diligent ones sail with stocks of dried fish, while those less industrious go without.

In Agutaya, an island municipality in northeastern Palawan, their traditional ship is called a *balangay*, while in Cagayancillo, another island municipality in eastern Palawan, their traditional boat is referred to as a *pangko*. The term *pangko* in Tagalog means "to carry in someone's arms."

[70] Ibid., p 18.

Lunday

The term *lunday*, referring to a boat without outriggers, is used by both Cuyonons and Tagalogs. This type of boat is typically employed for transport in calmer waters, as its lack of outriggers makes it less stable than traditional outrigger boats in rough seas. In various parts of the Visayas, it is referred to as *bandong*.

In New Ibajay, crab trappers use *lunday* to transport *bubos* from their homes to the mangrove areas and to carry crabs and damaged *bubos* back for repair. Some fisherfolk prefer the simpler *baruto*, which is easier and less expensive to construct. However, using a *lunday* makes it more convenient to navigate even the narrow sections of the Dewil River. *Baruto* is a Cuyonon term for a small boat, typically equipped with outriggers.

In Bagong Bayan, they still use the *lunday*, but they have made it motorized. According to Adoracion Castillo-Iga, a *lunday* owner in Bagong Bayan, they were already tired of paddling, so they came up with this innovation. Another change they introduced was the use of paint. The original lunday design normally had no paint, so it was mostly brown in tone.

The heavier version of the *lunday* has a box-shaped hull. It is usually used for carrying heavier cargo such as sacks of charcoal or lumber, while the smaller ones are mainly for fishing gear. The only confirmed existence of these heavier *lundays* is in New Ibajay and Corong-Corong.

Yawning Jar

In 1965, Dr. Robert Fox unearthed a jar in Lete-Late Cave on Lagen Island, Barangay Aberawan. This discovery coincided with his finding of the Manunggul Jar in Quezon, Palawan. Initially called the "Leta-Leta Jar," it was later renamed the "Yawning Jar" due to its uniquely distorted mouth, resembling a yawning human. Adding to its human like form is that it has ears and eyes. As of now, the Yawning Jar is the only distinct artifact from El Nido exhibited at the National Museum of the Philippines, alongside the renowned Manunggul Jar.

Although smaller, the Yawning Jar is older than the Manunggul Jar. The Manunggul Jar is estimated to date back to between 710 and 890 BC, while the Yawning Jar is believed to date as far back as 1,500 BC. In his

writings, Dr. Fox noted, “The writer is assigning an even earlier date to the pottery of Leta Leta Cave, El Nido, about 1500 B.C.”[71]

Unlike the jars from later periods, such as those from the Tang and Ming Dynasties that show similarities across Southeast Asia due to mass production for trade, the Yawning Jar, along with the Manunggul Jar and other Palawan jars of that era, is distinct. These jars do not resemble any pottery from neighboring regions, highlighting their unique local origins. Dr. Robert Fox further discussed in his book:

> The comparative data, as both Solheim (1959: 186) and Wall (1962: 427) have stressed, would not indicate that the dispersal of this pottery tradition was through recurring trade, the result of "waves of migrations," or that the various pottery complexes which are related to this tradition "depended" upon each other for their development. Rather, the related pottery complexes appeared to have developed by and large independently from one another, showing many local specializations and elaborations in form and designs. Thus, the pottery of the Tabon Pottery Complex displays unique features and lacks as well some of the characteristics of probably related pottery found in neighboring areas.[72]

This supports other findings that trade flourished in El Nido only at around 500 AD. Prior to that, large scale trading did not exist yet in Palawan. Prior to this, communities were not large and organized enough to trade with the neighboring communities and kingdoms.

Considering its local origin, it is likely that the Yawning Jar was created for a specific purpose, such as serving as a wine container used during rituals. Its unique shape could be intentional to convey something or indicate its purpose or it could have accidentally tilted before firing and the maker just made it look human.

Daga

The *daga* is a wooden stick used by babaylans, often adorned with decorations resembling a knife. The Filipino word “*daga*” translates to “dagger.” It is one of the many ritual paraphernalia utilized by babaylans. While Visayan babaylans commonly use the *daga*, Tagbanua babaylans

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[71] Robert B. Fox, “The Tabon Caves Archaeological Explorations and Excavations on Palawan Island, Philippines,” Monograph of the National Museum Number I, Manila, 1970, p. 70.
[72] Ibid., p. 96.

are typically observed using pom-poms crafted from dried leaves during their rituals.

In 2013, a *daga* was discovered in Idelet Cave, located in Barangay New Ibajay. Archaeologists from the Palawan Island Paleohistory Research Project accidentally unearthed the artifact while backfilling a pit left by treasure hunters. The finds included the Idelet Jar and various other artifacts. According to the project's 2013 report:

> The looter's pit located east of the main trench, Trench A, was backfilled. This is to ensure safety for locals and tourists alike from falling down the pit. Prior to being backfilled, samples for macrobotanical studies as well as micromorphological analysis from c.22 and c.55 (black clay) were collected from the stratigraphy. The spoil seemed to have been scattered extensively throughout the cave mouth as well as the cave platform. For example, it has yet been determined whether c.105 (clay mixed with soil) in Trench A is an in-situ layer or a re-deposited layer from the looter's pit spoil. The spoil itself contained copious amounts of artefacts, from earthenware pottery sherds to a single piece of carnelian bead. Aside from these, a metal bangle was also retrieved from the spoil heap. One of the more unique finds is the discovery of what turn out to be a ritual specialist's wooden, intricately engraved wand known in the Aklan language as "Daga". Elderly locals of New Ibajay when interviewed revealed that the artefact would have been specifically used by a babaylan or a high-level ritual specialists/healer.[73]

The recovered *daga* was already broken, but remnants of wood fibers kept it intact. The artifact, measuring approximately 28 cm in length and 2.58 cm in width, is adorned with intricate carvings. It is currently housed at the University of the Philippines - Diliman School of Archaeology.

This discovery confirms that coastal communities in El Nido practiced *babaylan* rituals. It also affirms that Aklanons brought their cultural traditions with them as they migrated to New Ibajay, successfully integrating their practices with El Nido's environment, especially in the limestone-rich Dewil Valley.

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[73] Victor Paz, Helen Lewis, Wilfredo Ronquillo, Jane Carlos, Janine Ochoa, Myra Lara, Vito Hernandez Deo Cuerdo, Mark Mabanag, Emil Robles, Rebecca Crozier, Shawn O'Donnel & Wilhelm Solhiem II, "Palawan Island Palaeohistoric Research Project Report on the 2013 Season," Archaeological Studies Program University of the Philippines, Quezon City, 2013, p.38.

Tapayan

Tapayan is the Cuyonon term for a "large jar," typically measuring between 0.7 to 0.8 meters in height and 0.5 to 0.7 meters in diameter. These jars are usually dark grey in color and are commonly found as cargo in the storage bays of *sakayan*/*pangko*. During voyages, *tapayan* is often used to store *ipon* (shrimp paste). At home, Cuyonons in El Nido use *tapayan* as containers for water or vinegar. The use of these jars dates back to the pre-colonial period. In Villa Paz, a significant number of *tapayan* are still preserved by residents, though in other barangays only a few have maintained or continue to use them.

Filipino historian Ambeth Ocampo, in his book *Yaman: History and Heritage in Philippine Money: The Numismatic Collection of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas*, describes *tapayan* as follows:

> Tapayan or tempayan (also known as banga, balanga or belanga) is a large earthen or stoneware jar with a wide mouth found in various cultures in Southeast Asia. They are used for fermenting rice, vinegar or alcoholic beverages or storing food and water, cooking or even burial for the dead.[74]

Ocampo's description aligns with the historical and contemporary uses of *tapayan* in El Nido. From the pre-Hispanic era to the colonial period, these jars have been an essential part of daily life. Even today, residents continue to use *tapayan* for storing *tuba* (coconut wine) until it ferments into vinegar. During *sakayan* voyages around Paragua Island and neighboring regions, they were commonly used to store *ipon*. On *tapayan* as burial container, there is a possibility that some pre-colonial *tapayans* in El Nido have been linked to burial practices, as it was a common practice in the archipelago.

The term *tempayan*, which Ocampo mentioned as another name for *tapayan*, is commonly used in Indonesia and Singapore. The book *100 Everyday Objects from Southeast Asia and Korea*, published by the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU), describes a *tempayan* displayed at the Peranakan Museum in Singapore:

> Jars like this were used to store rice, water, and other staples in a Peranakan home. The contents were kept away from pests, especially when covered with a wooden lid and raised off the ground on a stand.

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[74] Ambeth R. Ocampo, "Yaman: History and Heritage in Philippine Money: The Numismatic Collection of the Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas," Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, 2020, p. 71.

> Many Peranakan families preferred storage jars that were shaped like ovals, hexagons, or starfruit (belimbing). Over time, these jars became family heirlooms, treasured and passed down through generations. They are seen as sources of life and continuity of the family.[75]

This description closely parallels the use of *tapayan* in the Paragua region. The similarity in both terminology and function highlights the vibrant trade, migration, and cultural exchanges that shaped the Southeast Asian region.

Imorigue Coffin

The coffin discovered at Imorigue Is. gives us a glimpse into the burial practices of the early settlers in El Nido. There was only one coffin discovered in burial sites situated in the coastal areas of El Nido. The most common burial was leaving the bodies in the caves and letting them decompose. This is evidenced by the stockpile of skeletons found in Cudognon Cave in Barangay Bebeladan on the mainland and in Maulohin Cave on Imorigue Island in Barangay New Ibajay.

As mentioned in p. 29 of this book, the Imorigue Coffin is now displayed at the Dewil Valley Museum. This is only one of the few objects, along with some broken pottery, that were left at the cave site when looting of skeletons happened in 2010 discussed in p. 27-29.

In her thesis, *"Landscape as a Network: Archaeological and Ethnographic Approaches to the Dewil Valley, Palawan, Philippines,"* Zuzanna Kowalczyk mentioned the Imorigue coffin as one of the finds in Maulon Cave:

> Maulohin Cave in Imorigue Island is located about 30 m above the water level in the cliff wall. A special discovery at the site was a carved wooden coffin with numerous human bones and 4 skulls (probably not in situ) with surrounding fragments of pottery and stoneware (fig. 16.) (Paz et al. 2008).[76]

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[75] Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding (APCEIU), "100 Everyday Objects from Southeast Asia and Korea," Amarin Printing & Publishing Company Limited, Bangkok, 2015.

[76] Zuzanna Kowalczyk, "Landscape as a network. Archaeological and ethnographic approaches to the Dewil Valley, Palawan, Philippines**,"**, Adam Mickiewicz University, 2021, p. 31.

She also explored the context of the findings in the cave, interpreting them through the lens of their belief system:

> All of the sites described above include burials and/or votive offerings. These are intentional material manifestations of human symbolic activities. Due to their scope and scale, it can be assumed that they are associated with a more or less complex belief system and/or cosmology.[77]

The Imorigue coffin is simply one element of the intricate belief system or the way the ancestors perceived the environment around them. As noted in the thesis, human bones, along with pottery fragments and stoneware, are also part of this context.

Measuring approximately 102 cm in length and 31 cm in width, it is small for a standard burial and is more suitable as a secondary burial container.

Tinagik

The Tagbanuas have a distinct practice for laying their dead to rest. As shared by Nemia Ormido, a former female chieftain of the Catuldan community, and Emeliana Gomez-Perez, a Tagbanua resident of Bagong Bayan, the deceased are wrapped in *tinagik*, a mat made of bamboo strips and woven with rattan threads. After being wrapped in cloth and *tinagik*, the body is either buried or placed in a cave, depending on the location of the community. Gomez emphasized that once the dead are laid to rest, they must not be disturbed, as the Tagbanuas regard the remains as sacred.

In her manuscript *"A Survey of Literature on Indigenous Burial Practices and Their Archaeological Implications,"* submitted to *Kasarinlan* journal, Grace Barretto cited Worcester's account, stating, "The dead is buried in the woods his own dishes and earthen pots are broken on top of his grave to mark it. His house is torn down (Worcester 1899)."[78]

In Bagong Bayan, burial practices included placing dishes and earthen pots with the deceased, along with other valuables that were once treasured by the dead. The burial orientation in the Calamianes region

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[77] Ibid., p. 32.

[78] Grace Barretto, "A Survey of Literature on Indigenous Burial Practices and Their Archaeological Implications," Kasarinlan, Volume 15, No. 2, 2000 p. 101.

contrasts with that in Malampaya Sound. Adoracion Buloc, wife of acting Chieftain Dionel Saison, recalled that in their place of origin, Calibangbangan, the deceased were buried with their heads pointing east and their feet facing west. This positioning symbolized the deceased facing the setting sun, representing the end of life. Similarly, Nilo Abina, Chieftain of Daguyon, also remembered burials on the same island, where their tribe traces its roots.

In contrast, respondents from Bagong Bayan, Adoracion Castillo-Iga and Ameliana Gomez, described the modern burial practice of positioning the head to the west and the feet to the east, mirroring the practice in Christian cemeteries. This shift may be attributed to the proximity of Liminangcong to the Spanish authority based in Taytay Fort, while Calibangbangan, being a remote island, experienced less Spanish influence.

CHAPTER 6: NAVIGATION

The navigational skills of fishermen and seafarers in El Nido are a testament to the deep-seated knowledge and expertise developed over generations, particularly among those who operate the traditional Cuyonon boats known as *sakayan* or *pangko*. This chapter delves into how these seafarers have honed their abilities to interpret wind directions, sea currents, weather patterns and celestial formations.

Navigation skills have been the cornerstone of El Nido's maritime trade, enabling local seafarers to forge trading routes across vast distances using the *sakayan*, the traditional Cuyonon vessel. Oral traditions recount how skilled navigators on these sturdy boats ventured north to Mindoro and south to Sabah, connecting El Nido with distant markets and cultures across the Sulu Sea. Mastery of the winds, currents, and celestial navigation empowered these traders to undertake long and often perilous journeys, transporting goods such as dried fish, seashells, and handicrafts, while bringing back essential items and new influences to their community. The *sakayan* itself was ideally suited for these expeditions, with its stability and agility crafted specifically for extended sea voyages. This navigational prowess not only facilitated trade but also fostered cultural exchange, as El Nido's mariners encountered and interacted with other coastal societies, broadening the scope of their own maritime heritage and reinforcing El Nido's role as a vital link in the region's trading network.

From the premise of the discovery of human traces in Kalinga and Callao, Timothy James M. Dimacali, made the following assumption in his book:

> Still, the most striking thing about the Kalinga and Callao fossils isn't their age but that they were found on an island cut off from the rest of the world by foreboding seas. Both discoveries were made in an area nestled between the country's tallest mountain ranges, beyond which lie the West Philippine Sea and the Pacific Ocean. To the north are the dark and deep waters of the Luzon Strait, where even today only seasoned fishermen or the foolhardy dare go.[79]

The book suggests that the seafaring skills of early Filipinos enabled them to reach the island of Luzon. It even references a statement made by Dr. Armand Mijares in a 2010 media interview, where he remarked,

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[79] Timothy James M. Dimacali, "From the Sea to the Stars: The Forgotten Journeys of the Philippines' Ancient Explorers," University of the Philippines, 2018, p.7.

"These early humans already possessed knowledge of seacraft-making in this early period."[80]

Archaeological evidences reveal the deep-rooted seafaring traditions of Filipino ancestors, showcasing their advanced knowledge of boat-making, navigation, and maritime trade. These traditions, which have been passed down through generations, remain a vital part of the cultural heritage of coastal communities. However, as modern fishing methods and technologies have been introduced, many traditional skills and practices have been forgotten or abandoned. Preserving the traditions that still exist today is crucial to maintaining the cultural identity of these communities. The surviving knowledge and skills - reflected in the craftsmanship of traditional boats and sustainable fishing techniques - are invaluable legacies that need to be documented and celebrated to ensure they are not lost to time. By doing so, we honor the ingenuity and resourcefulness of our ancestors while fostering a deeper appreciation for the maritime heritage that continues to shape Filipino identity.

Wind Directions

Before discussing wind directions, it is important to revisit the directional terms once used by El Nido's early sailors. The Cuyonon terms *sidlangan* (east), *amianan* (north), *kasaplan* (west), and *bagatnan* (south) illustrate a rich cultural evolution shaped by interactions with foreign traders and a close relationship with the natural environment. These terms were once indispensable for maritime navigation, enabling Cuyonon seafarers to cross open seas with accuracy and confidence. Today, however, awareness and use of these traditional terms are steadily fading within Cuyonon communities. Modern technology, like GPS and digital mapping, has largely replaced indigenous methods of orientation, with younger generations increasingly adopting the foreign terms east, west, north and south. This shift reveals broader cultural and linguistic changes, underscoring the need to preserve these meaningful elements of Cuyonon heritage.

Cuyonon navigators have a traditional set of terms for the wind directions, essential for seafaring and fishing communities. *Amian* refers to the wind coming from the northeast, *daplak* to the wind from the north, *abagat* to the wind from the southwest, and *salatan* to the wind from the southeast. Among these, *daplak* is particularly feared by fishermen and sailors in El Nido, as it brings the most destruction,

[80] Ibid.

especially to boats anchored along beach areas. This northern wind can cause strong waves and unpredictable weather, often damaging anchored vessels and making nearshore fishing and transport treacherous. The knowledge of these wind patterns has been passed down through generations, guiding Cuyonon seafarers and emphasizing the resilience and adaptability required to navigate these waters.

Puntanen, the northwesterly wind in Cuyonon, holds a unique place among wind directions due to its irregularity and potential impact on navigation and fishing. This term was first heard by the author from former municipal councilor Rosano Llanera. With the aim of verifying the existence of the concept, the author gathered information from several sources. Ronnie Alcantara, El Nido's Municipal Engineer, shared information and described it as a wind that flows from the northwest toward the southeast. He added that it can be hazardous, as it may carry *daplak* with it. The fact that Cuyonon navigators gave it a specific name highlights its significance and the need for caution whenever this rare wind makes an appearance. Meanwhile, Manuelito Espartero, a farmer and a fisherman residing in Bgy. Teneguiban, confirmed the risk posed by *puntanen* because of its unpredictability. Unlike *daplak*, which is expected December and January, *puntanen* comes anytime, catching seafarers off-guard.

Furthermore, *abagat* wind is subdivided into three types: the *abagat sa adlao*, which comes from the west; the *abagat sa matadleng*, coming from the southwest and the *abagat sa silad*, coming from the south. However, In Bgy. Bebeladan, they call south wind *abagat sa Capuas* instead of abagat sa *silad*. This is obviously Capuas, a mount in the Municipality of Taytay, which serves as a visible landmark for Bebeladan's southern directions. The term abagat sa Capuas was adopted by fishermen in the neighboring barangays.

As the eighth wind direction in Cuyonon navigational vocabulary, there is *timog*, a wind that directly blows from the east. These wind directions show us how Cuyonon seafarers treat the weather patterns seriously. They affect their decision on when to sail, change direction or safeguard their boats.

El Nido experiences two primary wind seasons defined by the prevailing winds. *Amian*, the northeasterly wind, dominates from December to May, bringing calm seas and fair weather, ideal for fishing and seafaring. *Abagat*, the southwesterly wind, takes over from June to November, often accompanied by rain and rougher seas, marking the rainy season. November and May serve as transition months, during which both winds may alternate, creating unpredictable weather shifts. The northerly

daplak wind, though less frequent, can strike unexpectedly from December to February, especially when typhoons pass near Palawan, bringing powerful gusts and hazardous conditions to anchored boats and coastal areas. Meanwhile, *salatan*, the southeasterly wind, occasionally appears after intense weather disturbances, signaling the return of stability after erratic conditions. These wind patterns have long shaped local fishing practices, travel, and daily life, demonstrating the Cuyonon people's deep knowledge of and respect for their natural environment.

Cuyonon seafarers' meticulous observance of wind directions reached its peak with the ninth wind, the "amian sa mait." This term was described by former councilor Rosano Llanera as referring to a seasonal wind from the north-northeast direction, a wind direction that is carefully monitored by local fishermen. While *amian* refers to the cool, dry wind from the northeast that typically arrives between November and February, *mait* translates to "from the north." Together, *amian sa mait* describes the north wind's arrival and marks the transition to a season of cooler, calmer weather, in contrast to the strong southwest monsoons of the rainy season. Councilor Llanera added that the *amian sa mait* follow the strong *daplak* wind, indicating that the weather will soon improve. For Cuyonons, *amian sa mait* is more than just a change in the weather - it signals a time of favorable sea conditions, when fishing and inter-island travel are safer and more reliable.

The awareness of *amian sa mait* reflects the Cuyonon people's deep knowledge of their environment and their meticulous way of observing weather patterns. This knowledge and expertise may have been passed down through generations, even before the arrival of the colonizers since ancient Filipinos were excellent sailors. While Filipinos generally possess excellent seafaring skills, the Cuyonons stand out as keen observers of wind directions. This is evident in the numerous specific names they have for different winds - far more than the two in Tagalog and five in Bisaya.

Table 3

Origin	Bisaya	Tagalog	Cuyonon
North			Daplak
Northwest			Puntanen
West	Kasadpan/ Kanaway		Abagat sa Adlaw
Southwest	Habagat	Habagat	Abagat sa Matadleng
South	Salatan		Abagat sa Silad
Southeast			Salatan

East	Kabunghan/pasidlakan		Timog
Northeast	Amihanan/Dumagsa	Amihan	Amian
North northeast			Amian sa Mait

The question arises, "Why are Cuyonons better at observing wind directions compared to their neighbors?" Eric L. Lopez, a Cuyonon and a resource speaker on climate change, offered a logical explanation: "It's because Cuyo is exposed to winds from all directions."

Navigational Vocabulary

The Cuyonon people possess a unique navigational vocabulary, especially in maneuvering traditional boats like the *pangko* or *sakayan*. These commands, once essential for maritime travel, reflect a blend of indigenous and Spanish influences, revealing a rich history of language and cultural adaptation. For generations, Cuyonon sailors used distinct terms inherited from Spanish that were adapted to local dialects, aiding them in coordinating precise maneuvers across the sea. However, as the *pangko* and similar vessels fade from everyday use, these specialized terms face the threat of extinction. Younger generations rarely encounter or discuss these aspects of their heritage, putting both the linguistic and cultural aspects of Cuyonon seafaring at risk of being lost entirely.

Palangat

Cuyonon sailors have honed a remarkable navigational technique known as *kwadrante* or *palangat*, which allows them to orient themselves by observing the relative positions of nearby islands. By carefully noting the angles between islands, sailors can gauge their location and even approximate their speed and direction. This skill relies on a deep familiarity with the landscape, as subtle shifts in the angles between islands indicate movement through the water. By interpreting these changes, Cuyonon navigators gain a dynamic sense of their journey's progress without the need for modern instruments. *Palangat* exemplifies the ingenuity and observational expertise developed by Cuyonon sailors, reflecting an intimate connection with their environment and a highly specialized form of traditional knowledge.

The author once delivered a lecture to a group of barangay tanods on heritage tourism. During the session, the term *palangat* emerged as a local equivalent for *kwadrante*, a Spanish term commonly used in Visayan languages. At the end of the lecture, four *tanods* were interviewed.

Felicicimo Caabay, the first tanod interviewed and also a fisherman, shared that he first heard *palangat* from his grandfather and parents, all of whom were fisherfolk. Rodel Gaspe, another *tanod*, learned the term through his own experience as a fisherman, as it was commonly used among fisherfolk. He explained that *palangat* is crucial for navigating back to his *taket* - a Cuyonon word for a specific fishing spot known for a reliable catch.

The third tanod, Remuel Capara, discussed how they used natural landmarks for navigation. "*Kung adin, Sir, ang matas nga area, duto ka mag bel ang sintro* (Find the highest point, Sir, and use it as your central reference)," he explained further, citing a pointed island as example. The fourth one, Leoven Nangit, gave the following detail on how they do *palangat*:

> Halimbawa, bukid, bago lukutan ang darwa ka bukid y ang, halimbawa, mi ag lukot dutong bukid sa anang sintro. Bago, maga bel ka reman digi sa luyo anang pinaka-iskwala, mi tatandan ka duto, halimbawa, mga punong kawayan. Tapos pag-abot digi sa luyo, maga-bel ka ra diyan. Pag sa sintro ka digi is (ay) primirong palangatan, ibig sabihin imong ing-tatargit dato maman. (For instance, you might start with a mountain, then identify another landmark that fills the space between two mountains, such as a smaller mountain in the middle. Next, you'd find an angle of reference on the opposite side, perhaps marked by something memorable like a bamboo tree. You'd look for a similar reference point on the other side as well. If you reach the center of the previously used *palangat*, then you're right on target).

The interviews with the four *tanods* proved exceptionally fruitful, as their shared experiences as fishermen provided valuable insights into preserving maritime culture amidst the rise of modern technology. Their knowledge of traditional navigation techniques, such as *palangat*, reflects a deep connection to the sea, one that has been passed down through generations. This cultural heritage, which relies on natural landmarks and learned instincts, represents a way of life that could soon fade. As GPS devices become increasingly affordable due to mass production, these traditional methods may eventually be replaced, leaving practices like *palangat* at risk of being forgotten. Their accounts not only highlight the skill and knowledge embedded in their navigation techniques but also underscore the importance of preserving these traditions before they are lost to modern conveniences.

Celestial Bodies

Before the arrival of the Spaniards, the indigenous people of the Philippine archipelago had already developed a sophisticated understanding of the stars, deeply intertwined with their daily lives, environment, and cultural beliefs. They named constellations and heavenly bodies based on familiar surroundings, reflecting the natural elements, animals, and objects central to their communities. Relying on keen observation more than foreign-introduced instruments, they charted time, navigated seas, and planned agricultural activities through a practical and intuitive understanding of celestial patterns. This indigenous knowledge demonstrates a unique astronomy that was both functional and symbolic, allowing them to live in harmony with the cycles of nature and the heavens.

Daniel L. Ambrosio, in his book *Balatik: Katutubong Bituin ng mga Pilipino*, provides valuable insights into how our ancestors perceived celestial bodies:

> *Bituon* ito sa Aklanon, Bikol, Hiligaynon, Maguindanao, Samar-Leyte, at Sebu. *Bituun* ito sa sa Kinamigin, Mansaka, Sama, Tagbanua, at Tausug. At *bitun* naman sa Gaddang, Ibanag, Itawis, at Subanun. May naiba sa karamihan, gayunman. Mamahi ang tawag ng mga Sama ng Tawi-Tawi sa bituin. Mangirim at Panggasam ito sa mga Mangyan at talaw naman sa Kordilyera (Reid 139; Yap 64). Sa mga ilokana, *baggak* ang matulaing taguri rito.[81] (Filipinos' names for stars are quite similar across languages. *Bituin* is the term in Binukid, Manobo, Sambal, and Tagalog. In Aklanon, Bikol, Hiligaynon, Maguindanao, Samar-Leyte, and Cebuano, it's *bituon*. It is *bituun* in Kinamigin, Mansaka, Sama, Tagbanua, and Tausug. Meanwhile, in Gaddang, Ibanag, Itawis, and Subanun, they say *bitun*. There are some exceptions, however. The Sama people of Tawi-Tawi call it *mamahi*, it's *mangirim* and *panggasam* among the Mangyan, and *talaw* in the Cordillera. For the Ilocano people, the poetic term for star is *baggak.)*

In El Nido, the Cuyonons and Tagbanuas, like many indigenous communities across the Philippine archipelago, may have long observed celestial bodies, a tradition that predates colonial influences. However, current knowledge of the stars is not fully complete. For example, Reynaldo Gabo, mentioned earlier recognizes the *balatik*, a term used in various parts of the Philippines, but he cannot identify other constellations by name. While he knows the Southern Cross, he cannot

[81] Daniel L. Ambrosio, "Balatik: Katutubong Bituin ng mga Pilipino," Philippine Social Sciences Review, Vol. 57, Nos. 1-4, 2005, p. 3.

recall its native name. Still, he understands its movement and how it marks time. Reynaldo is the third El Nido resident we have encountered with this same level of knowledge about the stars. Additionally, he knows the local names for the morning star, *karamlaganen*, and the evening star, *tirigapunon*.

Even though many constellations lack specific names, they still serve as important markers for navigation at night. For example, the Southern Cross helps indicate the southern direction and can also be used to tell time.

CHAPTER 7: CULINARY TRADITIONS

El Nido's coastal settlements are celebrated for their culinary traditions, yet two dishes stand out to both residents and visitors: *Nido* (or *balinsasayaw*) soup, made from edible bird's nest, and *kinilaw na tamilok*. *Nido* soup, prized for its texture and reputed health benefits, is made from the nests of swiftlets found in El Nido's limestone caves, symbolizing the area's ecological wealth and cultural practices. Meanwhile, *tamilok*, a woodworm harvested from mangroves, offers a distinct taste of the local ecosystem and has become a must-try for adventurous food lovers. This chapter goes beyond these well-known dishes, showcasing the breadth of El Nido's cuisine, where the abundant marine life has inspired an array of recipes that have evolved or been introduced over time. Sadly, only these two prized recipes are known in Palawan. And most tour operators do not offer other recipes.

The Heritage Tourism Division of the Municipal Tourism Office is actively mapping the culinary traditions across all 18 barangays. Notably, *manla* in Manlag, *ogdok* in Mabini, *korot* in Bagong Bayan, linapay in Barotuan, karawkaw in Pasadeña, *peye* in Villa Paz, *wak-wak* in Sibaltan, *tanubong* in Bucana and *bilaog* in Aberawan have emerged as distinctive dishes in their respective communities, reflecting their unique flavors, local environment, and rich cultural heritage.

Here are several popular ways to cook food in the coastal communities in the municipality:

1. **Ginataan** - In this method, vegetables or seafoods are cooked in *gata* (coconut milk). It is often paired with either *sili* (chili) leaves or *malunggay* (moringa) leaves for added flavor.

2. **Inasleman** - is the Cuyonon take on the Tagalog-style *sinigang,* where seafoods are boiled with souring ingredients. Lilibeth Lim, a Mabini resident, suggests using *tamalarong* (a type of citrus) for the best flavor in this dish. Kristel Abian, also from Mabini, prefers using *kalatutuytoy* as the souring agent. Other common souring ingredients include *kalamansi, kandis*, or *kamias*. The dish is typically paired with vegetables like *alugbati*, *malunggay, sili* leaves, or *kangkong* (water spinach).

3. **Sinabawan** - is the simplest preparation. Seafoods are simply boiled with onions for flavor.

4. **Ginisa -** In this method, seafoods are sautéed with onion and garlic. Afterward, water and ginger are added to complete the dish.

5. **Adobo** - is the most iconic Filipino dish. Here, seafoods are simmered in soy sauce and vinegar, with garlic, onion, pepper, and sometimes bay leaves for added flavor.

6. **Kinilaw** - is the Filipino version of ceviche. It can be called "raw seafood salad." It refers to a dish made of fresh raw seafood, usually fish, marinated in vinegar or calamansi juice, and mixed with ingredients like onions, ginger, chili, and coconut milk.

7. **Laswa** - is a traditional Cuyonon dish that begins with grilling fish before adding water, salt, and vegetables. Sweet potato shoots are the preferred choice, though *saluyot, alugbati*, and papaya are also commonly used.

Nido Soup

Nido soup, a unique delicacy made with edible bird's nests known locally as *balinsasayaw*, has become a defining dish of El Nido, Palawan. The nests, produced by swiftlet birds, are harvested from cliffs and caves and prized for their gelatinous texture and subtle flavor, especially popular in Chinese cuisine for their health benefits. Before El Nido's tourism industry boomed, gatherers known as *bosyadors* collected these nests and sold them to buyers in Manila, where upscale Chinese restaurants used them in luxurious soups. However, as bird nest stocks declined and competition increased, profits from selling nests to Manila lessened, leading to a new approach to market *balinsasayaw* more sustainably.

As tourism became a central industry in El Nido, locals began serving Nido soup to tourists, introducing visitors to the island's signature dish and creating a direct market for the nests. This shift provided a profitable alternative for the businesses, who could now earn more by serving the soup locally than by exporting the nests. By integrating Nido soup into the culinary experiences offered to visitors, El Nido has created a sustainable income stream that benefits local gatherers while also giving tourists a unique taste of the island's natural resources and traditions. The success of Nido soup as a tourist offering has proven profitable in the long term, transforming it from an export product into an essential part of El Nido's gastronomic identity.

Kinilaw na Tamilok

Kinilaw na tamilok is a well-known delicacy in Palawan, often served to adventurous tourists seeking a taste of local cuisine. This unique dish features a worm-like mollusk harvested from decayed mangrove trees, where it burrows into the wood. To prepare *tamilok*, locals rinse and soak it in vinegar, onions, and spices, a method similar to *kinilaw*, which involves marinating seafood in vinegar. The vinegar tenderizes the meat and adds a tangy flavor, complementing the slimy, oyster-like texture of *tamilok*. Often described as a "woodworm" or "mangrove worm," this dish has become a signature experience in Palawan, giving visitors a taste of the island's natural resources and culinary culture.

Tanubong

The *tanubong* is a unique root crop that thrives along the sandy stretches of beach, its presence first documented as a food source in Barangay Bucana during a cultural mapping workshop. Later field validations revealed that *tanubong* also grows along Pagawanen Beach in Barangay Bebeladan, indicating that it has been a traditional food in multiple coastal areas. However, community knowledge about the *tanubong* is diminishing as the practice of eating it has become less common over time. This decline is compounded by the actions of developers who, unaware of its cultural importance, have removed many of these plants from the beach to clear the land. As a result, both the plant and its heritage as a local food source face the risk of being forgotten, despite its historical role in the coastal diet and cultural identity of these communities.

Ogdok

Ogdok is a type of eel commonly found in the mangrove areas of El Nido, Palawan. Traditionally, it has been both a source of food and a useful bait for local fishers. While interest in consuming *ogdok* has declined over time in most areas, the community in Mabini has preserved this culinary tradition. In Mabini, *ogdok* remains a valued ingredient, and local cooks continue to prepare it in traditional ways. To sustain this heritage, initiatives are underway to preserve *ogdok* recipes, and a unique cultural tour has been designed to offer visitors an authentic *ogdok* experience. This tour will soon show the preparation and cooking of *ogdok*, connecting guests to Mabini's rich fishing culture and the community's respect for traditional foods.

Wak-Wak

Wak-wak is a type of sand worm found abundantly in the sandflats and mudflats of El Nido's eastern coastal communities, including San Fernando, Sibaltan, and Villa Paz. This versatile creature serves a dual purpose in local life: it is both a delicacy and an effective bait for fishing. Rich in nutrients and flavor, *wak-wak* can be prepared in various ways, adding a unique touch to Cuyonon cuisine. It can be cooked as *adobo*, made into *kinilaw* (a raw, vinegar-based dish), or even dried preservation or fried for added texture. The vast mudflats in these areas make it easy to gather *wak-wak*, which remains an essential part of the diet and culture for many coastal families. Its use as both food and bait highlights the sustainable practices of these communities, maximizing local resources while preserving their culinary traditions.

Hunting *wak-wak* is complicated. Hunters use a 2 feet long pointed rattan stick. Its point is non-metal but looks like a barbed arrowhead. Hunting is done in the mudflats and, for expert hunters, in shallow waters. In the mudflats, it easier to identify *wak-wak* holes. They have two dots near the hole.

Crabs

Crabs play a crucial role in the diet of El Nido's coastal communities, particularly among the Tagbanuas and the Cuyonons. They had a diverse variety of crab species to choose from:

1. **Alimango** - *Alimango* is the most common crab species in the municipality. It can grow from 8.9 cm. to 22cm.

2. **Peye** - *Peye* is a small mangrove crab native to the coastal and mangrove areas of Palawan, especially valued in Cuyonon cuisine. This crab is a favorite dish among the Cuyonon people, often prepared in coconut milk, which enhances its natural sweetness and complements its delicate flavor. Among El Nido's 18 barangays, Villa Paz stands out for its abundant *peye* catch, particularly in Sitio Abuay, where the crabs are harvested in significant quantities. Local fishers in Abuay supply *peye* to neighboring communities, including Sibaltan, a nearby tourist destination, where this unique delicacy has become part of the menu occasionally in some of its restaurants. The *peye* trade supports local livelihoods, sustaining traditional fishing practices while sharing Cuyonon culinary heritage with a broader audience.

The *peye* crab is smaller than the typical crab, with a body measuring around 5 to 6 cm from side to side, not including the pincers and legs. It is usually caught using crab traps known as *sarading* and *bubo*.

3. **Kuday** – a small type of crab, usually around 5 to 9 cm. across the shell**,** found in mangroves and shallow waters. It is often used in local dishes, either boiled, grilled, or cooked in coconut milk.

4. **Tarawis** – *tarawis* is the Cuyonon equivalent of Tagalog's *alimasag*. It has a sharp edge on both sides. *Tarawis* is usually caught during shallow water fishing at night, called *panulo*.

5. **Dawat** - refers to a type of swimming crab, likely similar to the blue swimmer crab (*Portunus pelagicus*) that grows up to 10 cm. to 14 cm. These crabs are characterized by their broad, flat shells and long, paddle-like back legs, which help them swim efficiently in coastal waters.

6. **Alikumo** - *alikumo* is a smaller type of crab, averaging about 5 cm in body width. It is usually caught in mangrove areas by digging with the hands or using a shovel.

Manla

The *manla* is a type of mud crayfish found in the mangroves of El Nido, particularly abundant in the barangay of Manlag, which was named after this crayfish due to its once-thriving population in the area. The mangrove ecosystem surrounding Manlag provided the perfect habitat for the *manla*, making it an important resource for local fishers, who could easily harvest and sell it to nearby towns and the Poblacion. Historically, the manla has been deeply tied to Barangay Manlag, and to honor this connection, the barangay proudly launched its first Manla **F**estival on February 1, 2024, coinciding with their annual celebration of the barangay's founding anniversary.

Among the Cuyonons, *manla* is a treasured ingredient in traditional cuisine, often prepared as *ginataang manla,* where the crayfish is simmered in rich coconut milk to highlight its delicate flavor. This dish reflects the Cuyonon's love for fresh, local ingredients and underscores a deep culinary tradition rooted in the unique mangrove ecosystem of El Nido. Although manla remains a beloved dish in many El Nido homes, it is slowly being overshadowed by modern and Western foods. Additionally, the *manla's* natural habitat - the mangroves - faces threats

from unsustainable development and illegal charcoal production, which endangers both the crayfish and the environment it relies on.

Lato

Lato, a type of seaweed, holds a special place in Cuyonon cuisine, celebrated for its unique texture and rich iodine content. Often described as "sea grapes" due to its small, green clusters, *lato* is harvested abundantly in Bgy. Mabini, where locals gather it fresh for sale during *tabuan*, the traditional market days in El Nido on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Its popularity among Cuyonons dates back to their origins on Cuyo Island, where *lato* has long been a dietary staple and a source of local pride. Enjoyed in simple salads or as a fresh, salty accompaniment to meals, *lato* embodies the Cuyonon preference for fresh, natural ingredients. This cultural fondness for *lato* even inspired a song by Cuyonon composer Nonoy Lanzanas, titled "Latong Cuyo," capturing the affection and nostalgia many feel for this delicacy. Through its role in food, music, and tradition, *lato* connects generations of Cuyonons to their island heritage and coastal lifestyle.

Lato is consumed raw, typically soaked in water to remove sand and saltwater, then dipped in vinegar to complement its naturally salty flavor. To maintain its freshness and prolong its shelf life, it is wrapped in banana leaves.

Paket-Paket

Paket-paket is a type of seaweed commonly found in the Cuyonon diet, typically harvested from seagrass beds during low tide. The mudflat areas along the eastern coast of El Nido are perfect for gathering it. Although it's not as well-known as lato, *paket-paket* is similarly enjoyed raw, often soaked in vinegar, and sometimes paired with onions and garlic.

Korot

Korot was already featured in the first volume of this book series as a significant part of the early settlers' diet, particularly among the Tagbanuas. Later, the Cuyonons incorporated korot into their diet alongside rice. This wild plant serves as an ideal food source in island areas with limited space for rice paddies. In the first volume, Armando Zumarraga, a farmer from Manlag, shared his memories of gathering

korot on Cauayan Island in Buena Suerte before a resort was developed there.[82]

Sea Cucumber

The Cuyonons in El Nido have developed a diverse range of culinary traditions centered around various species of sea cucumbers. Among these, *balat* is the most well-known and is primarily harvested for export, while other species are commonly consumed by the coastal communities of El Nido. All sea cucumber varieties are typically eaten raw, marinated in vinegar and chili, and sometimes served with onions - this dish is known as *kinilaw* in both Cuyonon and Tagalog.

Here are some of the sea cucumber species recognized in El Nido:

1. **Balat -** The term *balat* is used in Cuyonon for sea cucumber, while in other Filipino languages it is called *balatan*. Found in deep waters, typically at depths of 15 meters or more, this species can grow to a length of 20 cm to 35 cm. *Balat* is mainly exported to Manila, where it commands a high price, but locals also enjoy eating it due to its good taste.

2. **Bulunan** - is a smaller variety of *balat*, as described by Florife Villanueva, a member of the Barangay Masagana Massage Therapist Association. It is typically found in muddy areas and is a bit smaller than the usual *balat*.

3. **Tagekan -** Another variation of *balat*, the *tagekan* is described by Remecleta Piolo, president of the Barangay Masagana Massage Therapist Association, as having a blackish color. It grows to a length of about 9 cm to 11 cm and can have either an elongated or rounded shape. A key distinguishing feature of the *tagekan*, aside from its color, is the white, sticky fluid it secretes, called *tagek*, which is the source of its name. Compared to other species, the *tagekan* is softer in texture. Tagekan is also called *lawayan*, a Cuyonon term describing "saliva discharge."

4. **Kortido** - is a large type of *balat* that thrives in the deeper parts of the sea, growing up to 80 centimeters. Alipio Nadao Jr., a fisherman from Barangay Corong-Corong and an experienced

[82] Arvin L. Acosta, "Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido, Volume 1," Futuristic Printing Press, Puerto Princesa, 2024, p. 43.

skin diver, provided the description of *kortido*, noting that the juveniles are only about 10 cm long.

5. **Anginan** - is another variety of large sea cucumber that thrives in deeper waters. According to Alipio, it is harvested at a depth of 15 fathoms (22.5 meters). It can grow to lengths of 80 to 120 cm and reach a diameter of 12 to 14 cm.

6. **Abokado** - is the third type of sea cucumber described by Alipio. It has a distinct shape, being rounded with a diameter of 14 to 17 cm and a thickness of 5 cm.

7. **Susuan** - is the fourth sea cucumber on Alipio's list. It measures 120 to 130 cm in length, but its diameter is relatively small for its size, measuring only 9 cm.

8. **Tataripon** - Summing up Alipio's underwater experience, he described the fifth type of sea cucumber he knows, the *tataripon*, which also thrives in deep waters. It grows to a length of 120 to 130 cm and has a diameter of 20 to 25 cm. Alipio mentioned that this type can be intimidating, as its side resembles that of a millipede.

The sea cucumbers described by Florife, Remecleta, and Alipio are all prepared in a *kinilaw* style, where the sea cucumber is soaked in vinegar and eaten raw. Kinilaw is best enjoyed with onions and chili.

Florife and Remecleta focus on smaller types of *balat*, as they primarily engage in *pakinas* or fishing in shallow waters. In contrast, Alipio, with his skin-diving skills, has encountered the larger sea cucumber varieties found in deeper waters.

Seashells

Seashells have long been a staple in the diet of El Nido's coastal communities, dating back to early settlements in Dewil Valley. Even today, various types of seashells continue to be enjoyed as part of the local cuisine.

Here are some of the seashell varieties commonly consumed in El Nido:

1. **Tagitis** - is the most common seashell found in the area and can be easily collected along the shorelines. It has a white color and

comes in different sizes, with some as small as 1.3 cm and others growing as large as 5 cm. *Tagitis* is most delicious when served as *sinabawan*.

2. **Karawkaw** - is a type of seashell that thrives in the coastal areas of Sitios Cagbatang and Lamuro in Barangay Pasadeña, where it is found in abundance. While it can also be spotted in other barangays, it is most commonly associated with these areas. This small shell, measuring just 2–3 cm in diameter, is easily recognizable by its distinctive pinkish-white color. The *karawkaw* is not only part of the rich biodiversity of the region but also holds cultural and ecological significance for the local communities that depend on the coastal environment.

   The significance of karawkaw in Barangay Pasadeña was highlighted during the Cultural Mapping and Festival Designing workshops held from July 29 to 31, 2024, at their barangay hall. During the workshop, the community selected karawkaw as their destination symbol and named one of their festivals the Karawkaw Festival. This festival aims to celebrate the culinary heritage of Lamuro and Cagbatang while also highlighting karawkaw's impact on the livelihood of the local people. Karawkaw is commonly cooked as *ginisa*.

3. **Bakalan** - is a rounded seashell, typically measuring between 4.5 cm and 5 cm in diameter. It is commonly found in the muddy areas of mangrove regions.

4. **Kibaw -** Similar to bakalan, kibaw is also found in the muddy areas of mangrove zones. It has a rounded shape, but with a larger diameter, ranging from 6 cm to 14 cm.

5. **Balilit** - is found in the same mangrove areas as bakalan and kibaw but has a distinct conical and elongated shape. It measures between 7 cm and 8 cm in length, with a diameter of 2.4 cm to 2.6 cm. It is often found clinging to the trunks or roots of mangrove trees (*kabakawan*).

6. **Tutok** - resembles *balilit* in shape and habitat but is smaller, measuring about 4 cm to 5 cm in length and 1.9 cm to 2.1 cm in diameter. *Tutok* is best served as *ginataan*.

7. **Aripuros -** Unlike *tutok* and *balilit*, *aripuros* has a more perfect cone shape, with its diameter and length roughly equal,

averaging 4.5 cm. *Aripuros* is best enjoyed in a *ginataan* dish, often paired with *malunggay* for added flavor.

8. **Bilaog** - In Barangay Aberawan, a unique seafood delicacy enjoyed by locals is the *bilaog* seashell. According to Marive Gacot and Melanie Insigne, barangay *tanods*, *bilaog* is particularly beloved by Aberawan residents. However, they typically cook it only for personal consumption, as they do not gather enough to sell to other barangays. Aberawan is the only barangay in El Nido that actively collects and consumes *bilaog,* as it is found buried about half a meter deep in the sand.

   Marive and Melanie mentioned that *bilaog* is commonly gathered from sandbar areas along the shoreline. It has an elongated, white shape, which allows it to blend into the sandy environment where it thrives. However, its two eyes are visible in the surface, giving *bilaog* hunters an indication of its location.

   For the locals, bilaog is a versatile ingredient, often prepared in dishes such as *adobo* or *sinabawan*. These dishes highlight the delicate, fresh flavor of *bilaog*, making it a valued part of Aberawan's local cuisine.

9. **Kegpan** - Another common seashell gathered in Aberawan is *kegpan*, a smaller shell that averages 5.08 cm in length. *Kegpan* is easily recognizable by its distinctive tail, which measures about 6 cm to 7 cm. Found in mudflat areas, it has three eyes, which gatherers use to locate it, as the eyes appear on the surface of the mud.

10. **Munlo** - is a larger shell compared to kegpan, with an average diameter of 6.4 cm. *Bilaog, kegpan*, and *munlo* are all favorite seafoods in Bgy. Aberawan.

11. **Sikad-Sikad** - is the most common catch during *pakinas*. Similar to *balilit* and *tutok*, it has an elongated shape, measuring 6 to 8 cm in length and 2.3 to 2.5 cm in diameter. It is best cooked as *ginataan* with *malunggay* leaves.

12. **Tagimtim** - grows on rock surfaces up 7 to 8 cm. in diameter. It is flat and rough, blending with the shape of the rocks. It is commonly eaten raw after smashing its shell with a stone and washing it in seawater.

13. **Capiz** - is the Filipino term for "windowpane oyster." Similar to *tagimtim, capiz* is flat but larger, measuring 12 to 13 cm. in diameter. It has been highly valued since the Spanish colonial period for its smooth, translucent inner walls, which were used in windows as it allows light to pass through, illuminating the interiors of colonial houses. Even today, Capiz windows remain in use. While it is primarily known for its use in windows, the meat of the *capiz* oyster is also a popular delicacy among locals and tourists, with grilled version being a favorite.

14. **Talaba** - is the Filipino term for "edible oyster." While both *talaba* and *capiz* are oysters, *talaba* is smaller in size, typically ranging from 6 to 10 cm in length, although some may grow larger depending on their environment. Like *capiz*, *talaba* is also best enjoyed when grilled.

Some shellfish used to be part of the diet of El Nido's residents but certain regulations prohibit consumption of them. These are *taklobo* (giant clams), *manlet* (clams) and triton shells.

Traditional Cuyonon Delicacies

Most information gathered on snacks were mostly from Cuyonon traditions. They were brought by the Cuyonons when they migrated to Paragua. The type of Cuyonon delicacies we gathered are as follows:

1. **Kumbo** - fried sliced banana with rice flour topping mixed with siwiti (achiote) for orange coloring.

2. **Boti-Boti** – pop rice balls coated with caramelized sugar with a size of 7.5 cm in diameter.

3. **Maruya** - a popular banana fritter made by dipping sliced saba bananas in a batter of flour, sugar, and eggs, then deep-fried until its color becomes golden brown. It is often sprinkled with sugar before serving.

4. **Bandi** – a Cuyonon traditional cashew brittle made from caramelized sugar and roasted cashew. The mixture is spread thin on a *nigo*, Cuyonon for "winnowing tray," and left to harden.

5. **Linupak** – a mashed snack made from boiled bananas or cassava, pounded with sugar and margarine. It is usually wrapped in banana leaves.

6. **Ibos** – a type of suman (sticky rice cake) made from glutinous rice cooked with coconut milk, wrapped in young coconut or buri leaves, and steamed. It is usually eaten with sugar or latik (coconut caramel).

7. **Galang-Galang** – is a twisted, deep-fried Cuyonon snack made from glutinous rice flour, sugar, and sometimes coconut milk.

CHAPTER 8: INTANGIBLE CULTURE

This chapter will explore the rich intangible cultural heritage that has flourished within El Nido's coastal communities, a legacy that is intricately woven into their daily lives and collective identity. It delves into the region's unique oral epic, handed down through generations, which recount heroic journeys and the interconnectedness of the people with the sea. Skills such as traditional fishing techniques, boat-making craftsmanship, and knowledge of ocean currents are also examined, illustrating the adaptive expertise developed over centuries of coastal living. Additionally, the chapter highlights the beliefs that guide respectful interactions with the ocean, where the sea is viewed as a sacred entity deserving reverence. Festivals and communal celebrations, reflecting both gratitude and a shared cultural pride, further reinforce the community's unity and resilience. Altogether, these intangible treasures reveal an identity deeply rooted in maritime culture, shaped by the people's enduring relationship with their coastal environment.

Dumaracol

In 2014, Dr. Eulalio R. Guieb III submitted an insightful study to the *Humanities Diliman Journal* at the University of the Philippines, examining the epic of *Dumaracol*, a traditional narrative preserved in the oral culture of the Tagbanua people. Dr. Guieb observed that *Dumaracol* was performed as a lengthy song, a format that allowed it to be passed down through generations while maintaining its storytelling essence and rhythmic structure. This epic song details the heroic exploits of Dumaracol, a revered figure who embodies courage and resilience, as he defends his people from Moro raiders, who were a constant threat to the community during a tumultuous period in history. Dr. Guieb's study emphasized the song's intricate narrative structure, which not only recounts Dumaracol's heroic deeds but also provides insight into the values, struggles, and spirit of the Tagbanua people.

Dr. Guieb's research highlighted the *Dumaracol* epic as a significant cultural artifact, serving both as a historical record and a means of communal bonding among the Tagbanua. By recounting the bravery and leadership of Dumaracol, the song reinforces a collective memory of resistance and survival against external forces. The epic provides a symbolic representation of the community's enduring strength and cultural identity, showcasing the importance of oral traditions in preserving history and moral values within indigenous groups. Dr. Guieb's analysis underscored the necessity of preserving and documenting such epics, as they serve not only as artistic expressions

but also as vital connections to the indigenous past and as testimonies to the community's resilience.

In his study, Guieb III includes a valuable interview with Blas Juan, a tribal Chieftain residing at So. Paduldulan on Pical Is. in Linapacan, Palawan, who provided insights into the traditional contexts in which the *Dumaracol* song is performed. He is an excerpt of Blas' narration:

> "*Inaawit ito noong kanyang kabataan habang masaya silang nagtitipon-tipon at nagpapahinga sa gabi pagkatapos ng mahabang araw ng pagtatrabaho. Ito ang dahilan kaya nakasanayan na rin ni Blas na awitin ang dumaracol sa gabi kung kailan nagpapahinga silang mga Kalamianen Tagbanua*."[83] (This was sung in his youth while they joyfully gathered and rested at night after a long day of work. This is why Blas also grew accustomed to singing the *dumaracol* in the evenings when the Kalamianen Tagbanua would take their rest).
>
> "*Madalas ring awitin ang dumaracol sa mga pulao o lamay sa patay. Itinuturing kasi nila ang pulao bilang mga gabing nagtitipon-tipon ang halos lahat ng miyembro ng kanilang lipi sa lugar, at ito ang ginagamit nilang pagkakataon upang gunitain ang kanilang kasaysayan*."[84] (The *dumaracol* is also often sung during *pulao* or vigils for the deceased. They consider *pulao* as nights when nearly all members of their tribe gather in one place, using this opportunity to remember and reflect on their history).

The epic song of *Dumaracol* has historically been sung across a wide expanse of coastal and island communities in Northern Palawan by the Tagbanua Calamianes. In the municipality of Taytay, *Dumaracol* is performed in the island barangay of Batas, as well as in the communities of Payatpat and Cansela. This practice extends to the islands of Malaquequen, Binulbulan, and Cagdanao under Bgy. Casian, and even spans as far as Malampaya Sound.

The reach of *Dumaracol* stretches beyond Taytay, encompassing neighboring regions such as as the islands of Pical and Abang-abangan in Linapacan and Bgy. New Ibajay and the island of Maosonon in El Nido. The singing of the epic in the territorial jurisdiction of El Nido was recalled by Petra D. Gabayan, a participant during a cultural mapping workshop in New Ibajay. She described how people were singing

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[83] Eulalio R. Guieb III, "Ang Dumaracol ng mga Kalamianen Tagbanua ng Hilagang Palawan: Isang Panimulang Paglalahad," Humanities Diliman, 2014, p. 44.
[84] Ibid.

Dumaracol during special occasions joyfully in the past like the way we sing karaoke during present-day celebrations.

Pamaragua

Pamaragua is a Cuyonon term meaning "the act of going to Paragua," and it reflects the deep-rooted tradition of travel and exploration among Cuyonon coastal communities. The phrase "*Tara, maparagua kita,*" which translates to "Come, let's go to Paragua," captures the routine of visiting or moving to the island now known as Palawan. Historically, this journey was common among Cuyonons, who traveled to Paragua not only to plant rice but also to seek new areas for settlement. The term *pamaragua* signifies both the literal act of traveling and the ambition of Cuyonons to explore opportunities beyond their homeland, shaping their lives through the rhythm of seasonal migrations and communal journeys.

The spirit of *pamaragua* fueled waves of migration to Paragua, as Cuyonons discovered vast, unclaimed lands suitable for farming and settlement. This movement fostered the expansion of Cuyonon culture across the island, eventually making Cuyonon communities an integral part of present-day Palawan's social fabric. Today, *pamaragua* stands as an intangible cultural heritage, embodying the courage, resilience, and adaptability of Cuyonons who ventured beyond familiar shores. This tradition has left a lasting legacy, defining the identity of Cuyonon coastal communities that now spread across Palawan, continuing the cycle of exploration and settlement that started generations ago.

In their book *Palawan at the Crossroads: Development and the Environment on a Philippine Frontier*, James Eder and Janet Fernandez discuss *pamaragua*. Drawing from Worcester's account, they provide insights into this migration and the factors that drove it:

> Cuyonons had a headstart in their migration, reinforced by their seasonal sail towards Palawan, custom called pamaragua. Cuyo was crowded, and with pressure of a high people-land ration, migration to the island became a desired goal. Worcester (1909, 79) provided us this picture in 1887: "On arrival at Cuyo we were surprised that the people who came off to the ship with fruits, eggs, chickens, and the like were all women. Later we learned that there were very few men to come. It is difficult to gain a livelihood in this island that the boys and young men make their escape soon as they are big enough

to shift for themselves, and the result is that ninety percent of the population are women.[85]

The account reveals that the land could no longer sustain the growing population at the time, leading the male inhabitants to seek livelihoods elsewhere. During this period, Paragua was sparsely populated and had an expansive land area.

This tradition of travel happened all throughout Palawan, and it probably even happened during the reign of Spanish colonial government and even earlier due to the existence of pre-colonial trading ports in different parts of Palawan.

Karbungko

Karbungko is a legend among coastal communities, describing an ancient serpent dwelling in a cave that breathes out glowing fireballs. Fishermen at sea and beachgoers watching Imorigue Island often see these fireballs, believing they originate from this enormous, old snake. Some *karbungko* fires are seen at the mountains by fishermen at the sea.

The glow the fishermen and residents see could be St. Elmo's fire or torch of *busyadors* inside the caves. It could have been interpreted as the fire as coming from a giant snake. The author personally heard the stories during childhood until adolescence. It was about the snakes that have grown old and big that it could already breathes fireballs. They live in the caves or the forests.

Alipio Nadayao Jr., who previously discussed *balat* in Chapter 7, witnessed an actual *karbungko* fire inside a cave on Matinloc Island. He believed the fire came from a large snake, as he had once encountered an enormous serpent on Matinloc. According to him, the snake was very old and would soon descend to the depths of the sea. Among the fisherfolk of El Nido, it was a widely held belief that when a giant snake reaches old age, it spits fire - known as *karbungko* - before retreating to the ocean's depths to die.

Carlos Bienes, first mentioned in Chapter 2, shared that *karbungko* could also be seen in the forest of Siwangwang, a sitio in Sibaltan where the Siwangwang waterfalls are located. He added that it could also be found

[85] James Eder & Janet Fernandez, "Palawan at the Crossroads, Development and the Environment on a Philippine Frontier," Ateneo de Manila University Press, Manila, 1996, p. 31.

in Mt. Magtabako of Mabini. According to Bienes, *karbungko* is a pearl, called *mu'ya'* locally, which exists in all animals - even small snakes and centipedes. He described it as floating in the air before gradually falling to the ground. If one happens to see it up close, he advised covering it with a frying pan to conceal its glow.

Panulo

Panulo is a traditional Cuyonon fishing technique where fishers use torches to illuminate shallow waters at night, attracting fish and making them easier to catch. Typically done in knee-deep waters, panulo originally relied on torches made from coconut leaves, known as *palua*. However, with the advent of new technologies in the 1970s and 1980s, the brighter and more durable kerosene lamps called *pitromaks* - a name that evolved from the German brand "Petromax," created in 1910 - replaced the traditional *palua*.

Fishers, armed with bamboo or wooden spears, wade silently through the water, their torches casting a glow that draws fish closer and provides better visibility beneath the surface. The flickering light both mesmerizes the fish and helps the fishers spot their targets, allowing them to spear with precision. Common catches during *panulo* include crabs like *tarawis* and *dawat*, a type of eel called *indong*, as well as *sikad-sikad,* a type of seashell, and *gipo-gipo*, the smallest species of octopus in the area.

Panulo requires skill, patience, and an intimate knowledge of fish behavior and tidal patterns, as well as deft hand-eye coordination. This method not only embodies sustainable, small-scale fishing but also reinforces a communal and cultural practice, as *panulo* is often performed with family or neighbors. Although electric lights are sometimes used today, the traditional torch-lit *panulo* remains a meaningful aspect of Cuyonon heritage, symbolizing a connection to ancestral ways of harmonizing with the natural environment.

Paliparan

Paliparan is a tradition among *busyadors* that involves allowing the *balinsasayaws* (swiftlets) to fly before harvesting their nests. This practice is crucial for sustaining the nest-gathering industry in coastal communities within the municipality. The term *paliparan* is derived from the Tagalog root word *lipad*, meaning "to fly," and is mentioned in Paula

Satizábal et al.'s research, "Seascape Shadows: Life in the Ruins of the Edible Bird's Nest Harvest in Northern Palawan, the Philippines."[86]

The tradition of *paliparan* developed among *busyadors* to counteract the harmful practice of harvesting nests before the *balinsasayaws'* eggs could hatch. Such malpractice led to a decline in the swiftlet population, which in turn negatively impacted the income of *busyadors*. This practice was often driven by pressures from concessionaires and the greed of thieves who disregarded established rules.

Premature nest harvesting is only one factor contributing to the decline of the *balinsasayaw* population. Other significant factors include air and noise pollution caused by the rapid growth of El Nido's tourism industry. Swiftlets are highly sensitive to noise, which disrupts their natural behavior, especially during the mating season. They are also sensitive to scents, prompting *busyadors* to avoid wearing perfume before gathering nests. Instead of using kerosene or diesel lamps, *busyadors* rely on *saleng* torches, which produce incense-like smoke that does not disturb the birds.

The *paliparan* tradition highlights the *busyadors'* commitment to protecting the *balinsasayaws*, which are vital to their livelihood.

Belief in the Afterlife

The belief in the afterlife is deeply rooted in the traditions of the natives of El Nido, as evidenced by their burial customs. These practices are discussed in Chapter 3 of this book, particularly the boat-shaped grave markers in the Dewil Valley (page 24) and the diverse burial traditions in Sibaltan (page 45).

Dewil Valley presents various clues about how the earliest settlers may have viewed the afterlife. At Ille Cave, a burial pattern was observed where the deceased's head was oriented towards the cave. Meanwhile, the boat-shaped grave marker found in Pasimbahan Magsanib reflects the Dewil Valley community's connection between the coastal environment and their beliefs about the afterlife. This tradition mirrors similar practices in Batanes, where numerous boat-shaped grave markers have also been uncovered (Dizon et al., 2007).

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[86] Paula Satizábal, Wolfram H. Dressler, Eulalio R. Guieb III, Jessie G. Varquez Jr., Canada Michael Fabinyi," Seascape shadows: Life in the ruins of the edible bird's nest harvest in northern Palawan, the Philippines," Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space, 2021, p. 19.

In Sibaltan, a distinct burial orientation was uncovered at the Elementary School site, where archaeologists noted that the head of the deceased pointed east, while the feet pointed west. This contrasts with the orientation in the current cemetery, where the head points west and the feet face east. This shift likely reflects a change in religious beliefs, from pre-Hispanic traditions to those introduced during the Christianization of the region.

A Catholic burial tradition discussed by Benjamin Štular in his case study of Bled Island offers insight into this practice. Štular notes:

> Medieval graves are usually oriented in an east-west direction, with the head on the west side, i.e., facing east (e.g., Knific 2004; Brundke 2013, 32 with examples and literature from north-east Bavaria; Nowotny 2018). This orientation must have had similar or perhaps even the same reasons as the orientation of contemporary churches, but the exact answer is not yet known. According to the aforementioned13th century French bishop Guillame Durando, the deceased were aligned in this way so that they could be resurrected facing the place of Christ's resurrection.[87]

Sibaltan, being under the protection by Spanish colonizers, will most likely adapt the Christian burial orientation. Spanish protection was evidenced by the Church bell found in the Sta. Monica Natural Fort area.

Babaylan Rituals

Babaylan rituals were historically performed in the coastal communities of El Nido, spanning the caves of Dewil Valley to those in the Poblacion area. Archaeological findings and oral traditions reveal that rituals were conducted at Pasimbahan Cave in Poblacion, as well as at Idelet and Makangit caves in New Ibajay. Descendants of the babaylans still recall their attire and the practices associated with these rituals.

Tagbanuas, Aklanons, and Ilonggos had their babaylans conduct rituals within the municipality. The discovery of *daga* at Idelet Cave, as discussed in Chapter 5, confirms that an Aklanon babaylan performed a ritual in that location. However, no evidence or oral traditions suggest that Cuyonons practiced babaylan rituals in El Nido or the province. The

[87] Benjamin Štular, Založba ZRC Ljubljana, "Grave Orientation in the Middle Ages: A Case Study from Bled Island," 2022, p. 51.

Cuyonons had babaylan rituals before the arrival of the Spaniards in Cuyo Island.

Before 1805, Cuyonon *babaylans* still perform their duties to their communities despite their conversion to Christianity. This was done in secret for fear of Spanish authorities. However, during that time, Spanish friars in Cuyo actively suppressed the animistic traditions still practiced by the Cuyonons. In contrast, the *babaylan* culture of the Tagbanua and other animistic traditions may have persisted due to the remoteness of their communities, which were primarily located in the mountains and on isolated islands, far from Spanish administrative centers.

This suppression of animistic traditions is referenced in the article "A History of Palawan" from the compilation "Palawan as the Crossroads, Development and the Environment on a Philippine Frontier," which states:

> The parish priest of Cuyo, Fray Pedro Gilbert de Santa Eulalia discovered in 1805, after six months of investigation, that about two-thirds of the natives still vigorously observed pre-Hispanic rituals. A large number of inhabitants had been gathering in the mountains to pay homage to a certain Virgen del Monte (apparently a Spanish term for a native category), as they had 30 years before.[88]

This suppression had a lasting impact, even as the Cuyonons migrated to Paragua. While they preserved most of their traditions, animistic practices were largely abandoned. In El Nido, there is no recorded evidence of *babaylan* rituals based on archaeological findings, written records, or oral traditions. However, the ritual of *sadga* remained widely practiced, possibly because Spanish friars did not consider it overly animistic or because it resurfaced during the American colonial period. Today, Cuyonon healers practice *tapa* instead, a method similar to the Tagalog *pagtatawas*. The incorporation of Christian prayers into healing sessions likely made it more acceptable to Spanish authorities, allowing the tradition to persist.

Cuyonon babaylans were documented by the Augustinian Recollect chroniclers. They had a specific name for a babaylan who offered sacrifices to the moon, called *mangalog*. Retired Professor Emmanuel Luis A. Romanillos wrote the following in the **Philippine Journal of Science**:

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[88] Nilo S. Ocampo, "Palawan as the Crossroads, Development and the Environment on a Philippine Frontier," Ateneo de Manila University Press, Manila, 1996, p. 28.

> The first Recollects observed that the early inhabitants of Cuyo and the Calamianes offered sacrifices to the moon through shamans called mangalog in order to obtain healing of ill relatives and assistance at the time of death. They also sought the services of priestesses called babaylanas who rendered worship to various deities and spirits. The natives did not have any social or political life at all. They lived in complete freedom, scattered in various areas, or in the mountain fastness and forests without forming a single community.[89]

The term *mangalog* is similar to the present-day term *mangalok*. The *mangalok* has no exact equivalent in English; it lies somewhere between a witch and a flesh-eating demon in human form. However, it has exact equivalent in Tagalog, the *aswang*. According to legend, the *mangalok* can transform into different animal forms, such as a dog or a bird. The *mangalok* may have been the friars' way of demonizing the babaylans so that the Cuyonons would not associate themselves with them for fear of persecution and shame.

[89] Emmanuel Luis A. Romanillos, 'Augustinian Recollect Contributions to the Church History and Cultural Patrimony of Palawan." Philippine Journal of Science, Volume 1, No. 1, Quezon City, 2018, p. 84.

CHAPTER 9: CONSERVATION

The preservation of the culture and history of coastal communities still has a long way to go, though initial steps have already been taken by the national government, local government units, and the academic sector. Currently, El Nido has two museums - one in New Ibajay and another in Sibaltan. Additionally, 23 cultural properties have been submitted to the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, along with two resolutions from the Office of the Sangguniang Bayan adopting them.

The preservation of the natural environment surrounding coastal communities began earlier than cultural preservation. This was in response to the declining populations of critical species of flora and fauna worldwide, which led to movements that contributed to the establishment of endangered species lists. However, ongoing protection is necessary as decades pass. In El Nido, efforts began with the declaration of a marine turtle sanctuary, which later expanded to the El Nido Marine Reserve and eventually became the El Nido Managed Resource Protected Area.

The establishment of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species in 1964 had a global impact, prompting many countries to create their own national lists and enact protective laws. In the Philippines, these conservation efforts enhanced the protection of El Nido's coastal environment. However, they also led to the discontinuation of certain traditional culinary practices, such as consuming dugongs, *pawikans*, and whales. To preserve the historical significance of these now-forbidden food traditions, the Heritage Tourism Division is documenting them while promoting a transition from the consumption of endangered species to wildlife tourism.

Currently, two dive shops in Sibaltan offer manta ray watching, while turtles are increasingly becoming a highlight of island-hopping tours. Dugongs, however, remain an occasional sight rather than a regular attraction. Although local fishermen are now aware of wildlife protection laws, there is still a need for them to experience the direct benefits of tourism in their communities.

Another pressing concern is the rapid development driven by the continuous rise in tourist arrivals. This growth threatens both ecosystems and cultural traditions, as irresponsible construction, shrinking agricultural lands, and the introduction of foreign influences alter the local landscape. Additionally, this shift in priorities affects career choices among the youth, with more students opting for tourism-related courses

over those focused on agriculture and environmental conservation. As a result, fewer individuals are engaged in preserving farming traditions and protecting natural resources.

Funding for cultural and environmental conservation plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges. While El Nido receives financial support from the national government, non-profit organizations, and foreign entities, long-term sustainability depends on user fees. At present, the Municipal Government of El Nido collects an Eco-Tourism Development Fee (ETDF), while the El Nido Managed Resource Protected Area (ENMRPA) manages an Integrated Protected Area Fund (IPAF). The Municipal Tourism Office is actively advocating for the unification of these two fee systems to ensure a more efficient and sustainable funding model.

Philippine Journal of Science

Bacuit was already mentioned in Volume 5 of the *Philippine Journal of Science*, published in 1910. The document includes the following text referencing Bacuit:

> It will be noted that, with the exception of Tara Island and Bacuit, the chief collecting was done in the immediate vicinity of Iwahig, located at about the central portion of the Island of Palawan. There is no doubt but that careful collecting by one familiar with this order would result in our obtaining four or five times as many species both in Heteroptera and Homoptera.[90]

This suggests that researchers, under the American colonial government, were conducting regular scientific surveys across the Philippine Islands, with Bacuit being one of the areas studied. Aside from taxonomy that became valuable to environmental protection in 70 and 80s, the Philippine Journal of Science also collected anthropological and archaeological data that built the archive of information for Philippines and became references for later explorations.

Carl E. Guthe

Bacuit first gained attention in the field of archaeology when Carl Guthe visited the area in 1922. Carl E. Guthe was an American academic and

[90] Bureau of Science, "The Philippine Journal of Science, Volume 5," Bureau of Science Printing, Manila, 1910, p. 33.

anthropologist who founded the Society of American Archaeology. The esteemed academic headed the University of Michigan Expedition to the Philippines from 1922 to 1925 with the aim of creating a Philippine collection at the Museum of Anthropology. There are 485 sites represented in the total collection, 120 caves, 134 burial grounds and 231 graves (Solheim 2002).

Bacuit at that time was part of Guthe's Philippine itinerary. During his survey, he explored the eastern side of Lagen Island, the vaulted cave on the island's east side, the west coast of Bacuit Bay, and Malpacao Island.[91] The data gathered in this expedition became the basis of later explorers, Dr. Robert B. Fox and Dr. Wilhelm Solheim.

Robert B. Fox

Building on the work of Carl Guthe, El Nido became part of Dr. Robert Fox's itinerary in 1965. Dr. Robert Fox was a distinguished American anthropologist whose research, teaching and publication contributed greatly in Philippine anthropology. This came after his exploration of South Palawan, particularly the Municipality of Quezon, where he discovered the Tabon Man in 1962. Later, he also uncovered the Manunggul Jar at Lipuun Point in Tabon Cave.

Dr. Fox's survey led to the discovery of the Yawning Jar and other artifacts at Leta-Leta Cave on Lagen Island. This expedition also brought Dewil Valley into the spotlight of Philippine archaeology. This exploration at Leta-Leta highlights Dr. Fox's contribution to El Nido archaeology.

By comparing findings from the recent exploration of the Tabon Cave Complex, Dr. Fox estimated the age of the Yawning Jar and the period when the cave was used as a burial site without utilizing the radiocarbon dating method. However, in their paper *Worked Shell from Leta-Leta Cave, Palawan, Philippines*, Katherine Szabó and Hazel Ramirez reported the radiocarbon dating of two shell samples, which yielded a time frame of 3,450–3,580 BP (Before Present). In their report, they reached the following conclusion:

> The radiocarbon dates accord very well with Fox's original estimates for the site. Without details of stratigraphy and layout, however, it

[91] Grace Barretto-Tesoro, "A local discourse on the early belief system from the Philippines using evidence from the Guthe Collection," SPAFA Journal Vol. 4, 2020, p. 31.

> cannot be determined whether all the remains at Leta Leta date to this period.[92]

The work of Dr. Fox at Leta-Leta could have been continued by present archaeologists but since the site is dangerous, made worse by the earthquake in the 1980s, the archaeologists opted for Dewil Valley instead.

El Nido Marine Turtle Sanctuary

El Nido was designated as a Marine Turtle Sanctuary on December 10, 1984, through Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) Administrative Order No. 518, Series of 1984. This designation aimed to protect marine turtles, locally known as *pawikans*, particularly the hawksbill (Eretmochelys imbricata), green (Chelonia mydas), and olive ridley (Lepidochelys olivacea) turtles. The sanctuary was established in response to growing threats such as habitat destruction, poaching, and the local tradition of consuming *pawikans*.

El Nido Marine Reserve

El Nido's protection status was elevated from a Marine Turtle Sanctuary to the El Nido Marine Reserve with the issuance of DENR Administrative Order No. 14 on April 5, 1991, which amended A.O. No. 518, Series of 1984. At that time, the existing administrative order did not specify a management office, which is now provided in Section 3:

> The authorities, management and control of the above stated area, subject to private rights, if there be any, shall be under the DENR (El Nido Marine Reserve Management Office, or any other office as may be authorized by the DENR) the agency authorized by law to manage and enforce legislations and regulations pertaining to the protection and development of natural resources and environments, in coordination with the local municipal government.[93]

On January 31, 1992, the DENR issued Administrative Order No. 04 Series of 1992, which amended A.O. 14 and updated its zoning plan. Thus, finalizing the following management zones in the area:

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[92] Katherine Szabó & Hazel Ramirez, "Worked Shell from Leta Leta Cave, Palawan, Philippines", Archaeol. Oceania 44, 2009, p. 152.
[93] Section 3, "Administration and Control," DENR Administrative Order No. 14, April 05, 1991.

1. **Core Zore** – area that is off limits to human activities while environmental law enforcement and approved scientific research are allowed.

2. **Buffer Zone** - surrounding the areas of the core zones where activities are limited.

3. **Multiple Use Zone** - areas where controlled development and visitor activities are permitted.

The zones included “compatible uses” in each zone to consider the existing livelihood of the community. Some activities such as basnig fishing and squid gathering were considered in some areas.

The El Nido Marine Reserve phase marked a golden era for environmental protection in the region, under the leadership of Nilda Baling. During this period, local enforcers were trained as members of the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU), which equipped them with government-issued rifles. Key enforcers at the time included Edward Lorenzo, Alberto Pe, Emmanuel Llanes, and Harvey Templado. Current Provincial Board Member Nieves Rosento was also part of the El Nido Marine Reserve Office. This era saw a heightened campaign against illegal activities, both marine and terrestrial, and a strong push for El Nido to be officially designated as a fully protected area.

El Nido Managed Resource Protected Area

The El Nido Marine Reserve was elevated and officially became a protected area, known as the El Nido Managed Resource Protected Area (ENMRPA), through Proclamation No. 32 issued on October 8, 1998, by the Office of the President. This followed the recommendation of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

A presidential proclamation marks the initial step in the process of designating an area as a fully protected site, as outlined in Republic Act 7586, or the National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) Act of 1992. The final step in this process is the declaration through a Republic Act.

What distinguishes the El Nido Managed Resource Protected Area from other protected areas is its inclusion of existing settlements, which is why the term "managed" is part of its name. The area is divided into

different zones, which are similar to those used during the Marine Reserve phase, with only slight changes in terminology:

1. **Strict Protection Zone** – Areas where environmental law enforcement and approved scientific research are permitted.

2. **Buffer Zones** – Surrounding areas of the core zones where activities are restricted.

3. **Multiple Use Zones** – Areas where controlled development and visitor activities are allowed.

These minor changes in terminology stem from the implementation of the National Integrated Protected Area System (NIPAS) Act and the subsequent Expanded National Integrated Protected Area System (ENIPAS) Act. Currently, El Nido only applies the Strict Protection Zone and Multiple Use Zone within the protected area, while the Buffer Zone applies only to the areas surrounding the entire El Nido protected area in its general management plan. Additionally, a name change for protected area offices occurred with the enactment of the ENIPAS, transitioning from the Protected Area Office (PAO) to the Protected Area Management Office (PAMO).

EUF

Together with the establishment of the ENMRPA, the Environmental User's Fee (EUF) was introduced. A fee of Php 20 per tourist per day was collected to fund the Integrated Protected Area Fund (IPAF), which was intended to support environmental protection within the ENMRPA. The rationale behind the fee was that since tourists use the environment and their activities often cause damage to ecosystems, they should contribute to repairing that damage.

The concept behind the EUF in El Nido is that funding from the European Commission is not permanent; instead, El Nido must gradually become self-sustaining. This funding was referenced on the UNESCO website, which stated:

> Over the years, with shifting Government bodies & various lobbies for international grants, the UN came to Mother Nature's rescue again. With the annual financial support of $US 300,000 by the European Commission, the Department of Natural Resources established the "El Nido Taytay Managed Resource Protected Area Management Board " & a small (40 US cents) daily conservation fee is required to enjoy our

reserve. Cash donations are also encouraged for those who can afford a little more.[94]

The collection was sustained through the years, but efficiency declined due to the lack of policy enforcement. Eventually, most accommodation establishments stopped collecting. By 2005, only Miniloc Island Resort, Lagen Island Resort, and Dolarog Resort continued collecting the EUF. Later, Dolarog Resort stopped collecting after reporting a case of slash-and-burn (kaingin) to the Protected Area Office (PAO). When the PAO failed to act on the report, they decided to stop collecting the EUF.

Palawan Island Paleo-history Research Project

Annual archaeological excavations at Dewil Valley began in 1998 when the National Museum of the Philippines, in collaboration with archaeologists from the University of the Philippines, launched the initiative. This was made possible through the efforts of Dr. Wilhelm Solheim II. Archaeologists from countries such as Ireland, the United States, France, and Australia also participate in the yearly excavations. This initiative eventually led to the establishment of the Palawan Island Paleohistory Research Project (PIPRP).

The PIPRP is also actively involved in public archaeology, organizing exhibitions and educational campaigns on El Nido's archaeological heritage in public schools and community spaces. Additionally, PIPRP regularly provides lecturers for the culture and arts forums at the annual Kalugtan Arts Festival. It also oversees the Dewil Valley Museum, which serves as an educational hub for both locals and tourists. Established in 2014, the museum was funded by Nido Petroleum.

CMMA

The San Fernando Marine Sanctuary was the first Community-Managed Marine Area (CMMA) in the municipality. Established in 2004, it was created with the support of the Sustainable Coastal Tourism in Asia (SCOTIA), a non-profit organization funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). SCOTIA assists coastal communities in Asia with sustainable tourism, solid waste management, and environmental protection.

[94] Source: whc.unesco.org.

The San Fernando CMMA eventually became their destination symbol, reflecting their rich maritime culture and their care for their coastal resources.

Following the establishment of the San Fernando CMMA, a pool of facilitators led by the El Nido Foundation conducted the planning and delineation of other CMMAs. By 2007, the number of CMMAs in the municipality of El Nido had expanded to a total of 15. Fisherfolk were also organized to manage these marine areas.

Kalugtan Arts Festival

The Kalugtan Arts Festival was founded in 2005 by local artists from El Nido, led by Rene Acosta, Tani Distal, Vladimir Datuin, and the author. Jonathan Benitez, one of Palawan's leading visual artists at the time, played a key role in the festival's conceptualization and brought in artists from Puerto Princesa City to lead arts workshops. The festival aimed to train both residents and tourists in various art forms while raising awareness about environmental conservation. The name "kalugtan" is derived from the Cuyonon word "lugta," meaning "earth," chosen to reflect the festival's focus on celebrating Earth Day.

The festival also became a venue for environmental and cultural preservation. The festival usually starts with eco-care activities such as coastal clean ups or tree planting activities. Included in the festival are the forums on environment and archaeology. Indigenous dances and songs were included in the workshops and performances. The traditional buri weaving were also included in the workshops.

Tres Marias Project

Tres Marias is a group of islets located to the north of Miniloc Island, consisting of Tres Marias 1, Tres Marias 2, and North Rock islets. Only Tres Marias 1 and Tres Marias 2 were included in the designated Community-Managed Marine Area (CMMA), while North Rock remained a diving site.

The establishment of the Tres Marias CMMA in 2006 led to the introduction of Ecoreef, a ceramic coral reef in the municipality, funded by Seacology, an international organization focused on coral rehabilitation, through the El Nido Foundation, Inc. (ENFI).

To safeguard the rehabilitated coral reef at Tres Marias, a patrol boat was stationed there around the clock. Initially funded by ENFI, the protection's funding was later taken over by the Municipality of El Nido. This approach proved effective, as fish biomass significantly increased over time. Tres Marias site was chosen as the rehabilitation site using Ecoreef because it was the best diving and snorkeling destination prior to 1998, when there was a mass destruction of coral reef in Bacuit Bay.

To this day, Tres Marias remains under round-the-clock protection by environmental law enforcers hired by the Municipal Government of El Nido, with oversight from the El Nido Foundation, Inc., making it the most safeguarded CMMA in the municipality. These conservation efforts have proven effective; within just a year, fish biomass increased significantly, leading to higher fish yields in nearby fishing grounds. Additionally, the Ecoreef has played a crucial role in accelerating coral reef recovery over the years.

The mass coral die-off of 1998 was documented by reef scientists Emre Turak and Lyndon DeVantier in a coral reef assessment report commissioned by the El Nido Foundation, Inc. The report states:

> These results are consistent with those of previous studies of El Nido's reefs over the past 20 years, and also with a degree of recovery over the past decade. Major recent impacts to corals include mass coral bleaching in 1998 and (to a lesser extent) 2007, predation by crown-of-thorns seastars (2003-present) and corallivorous snails and diseases. Some evidence of anchor damage and earlier poison and blast fishing was also apparent.[95]

The Tres Marias was a success, demonstrating the effective way of protecting a CMMA by guarding it 24/7. It set an example that it was emulated by the CMMA at Mitri Is. This time it was being helped by the Malampaya Foundation in partnership with the Barangay Council of Buena Suerte and the Municipal Government of El Nido.

Eco-Tourism Development Fee

As the tourism-related establishments increase in number, the collection of IPAF at the accommodation level was not consistently enforced. By 2005, only Miniloc Island Resort, Lagen Island Resort, and Dolarog

[95] Emre Turak & Lyndon DeVantier, "Coral Biodiversity, Marine Tourism and Conservation Priorities in El Nido, Palawan, Philippines," El Nido Foundation, El Nido, 2010, p. 2.

Resort continued to collect the IPAF from their guests. In response, the Municipal Tourism Office worked with the Protected Area Office to encourage members of the Cottages, Resorts, and Restaurants Association of El Nido (CRRAEN) to resume fee collection. Unfortunately, this initiative was short-lived and eventually failed, as not all members participated, and there was no monitoring of compliance. This issue led to the local government taking over the collection process and establishing the Eco-Tourism Development Fee (ETDF).

In 2008, a technical working group was established to evaluate a fee system proposed by the Municipal Government of El Nido (MGEN) to replace the Integrated Protected Area Fund (IPAF) collection in the municipality. That same year, Ordinance 006 Series of 2008 or the Eco-Tourism Development Fee (ETDF) Ordinance authored by councilors Nieves Rosento and Gonzalo Rico Fernandez, was passed. However, it faced strong opposition from the Cottages, Resorts, and Restaurants Association of El Nido (CRRAEN), primarily due to a provision that penalized establishments for failing to collect the fee.

To address these concerns, Mayor Leonor D. Corral revised the implementation approach, shifting the focus to inspecting ETDF tickets before tourist boats departed rather than penalizing accommodations. The ordinance officially took effect on November 27, 2009. As part of the agreement, the Protected Area Office ceased collecting IPAF fees but continued to receive funding, with 10% of ETDF collections allocated to support its operations.

An article on the official website of the Municipal Government of El Nido recorded the early success of the ordinance:

> After 12 days of implementation, the Municipal Treasury reported that it has already collected a total of Php 104,400 as of December 2, 2009, 2:15PM. Php 67,800 (65%) were collected by the Municipal Tourism Office, Php 18,000 (17%) by Artcafe, Php 6,800 (6%) by Green View Resort, Php 6,000 (6%) by El Nido Beach Hotel, Php 2,800 93%) by Islandfront Cottages, Php 2,400 (2%) by Four Seasons Resort and Php 600 (1%) by Alternative Inn.[96]

Notably, six establishments participated in the collection of ETDF, despite their organization's initial opposition to its implementation.

By the end of 2009, the first full year of ETDF implementation, MGEN had collected approximately Php 4,000,000. This resulted in a Php

[96] Source: www.elnido.gov.ph.

400,000 allocation to the Protected Area Office - double the Php 200,000 it had earned from IPAF collections the previous year.

Community Museum at the Barangay Hall

The first museum in El Nido was technically the Barangay Hall of Sibaltan, established in 2010 following the Field School conducted by the Palawan Island Paleohistory Research Project. This museum's creation was documented in the 2010 Field Season Report, as referenced earlier on page 47 of this book.

This makeshift museum occupies only a portion of the walls of the Barangay Hall, which continues to serve as the session hall for the Barangay Council. Due to this arrangement, security was not assured, as individuals conducting business with or working for the barangay government frequently came and went. As a result, an artifact, the brass spring, was lost.

However, this was the initial step in educating the community on the importance of the archaeological finds in Sibaltan.

Balay Cuyonon Museum

The Balay Cuyonon appeared the cultural mapping in 2012 in Sibaltan as discussed in page 65. The participants, mostly Cuyonons, pointed out the original design of the Cuyonon house that can no longer be seen at that time in El Nido. In the course of the cultural mapping, the participants eventually planned to have a Balay Cuyonon rebuilt as a replica and a museum. Lace Thornberg, the workshop facilitator wrote a proposal to the United States Embassy in Manila and the project was approved.

Normally, the embassy does not fund infrastructure but since the Balay Cuyonon was an exhibit itself, the construction was approved. In the same year, the Balay Cuyonon was built. It was managed by Sibaltan Heritage Council that time, falling into the classification as a community museum.

Sibaltan Archaeology Museum

Behind the Balay Cuyonon Museum, the Sibaltan Archaeology Museum was established in 2013 by the Municipal Government of El Nido. This marked the relocation of exhibits from the makeshift community museum

at the Sibaltan Barangay Hall to a dedicated museum space. In 2025, both the Balay Cuyonon Museum and the Sibaltan Archaeology Museum were integrated into the newly constructed Sibaltan History Museum, placing a balay Cuyonon replica, a pangko replica and a building for archaeological and ethnographic objects in one place.

Sibaltan is rich in archaeological heritage. Although younger than Dewil Valley, the volume of artifacts discovered in Sibaltan far exceeds those found in Dewil. Unfortunately, many of these artifacts were lost due to extensive looting in the 1970s and 1980s. The establishment of this museum was a crucial step in safeguarding the remaining archaeological treasures of Sibaltan. Though long overdue, its role in preserving what remains is invaluable.

Pangko Replica

A replica of the *pangko* was built in 2014, as previously mentioned on page 57. It was part of the *Ancient Shores, Changing Tides* project, funded by the American Alliance of Museums. This cultural exchange program connected the Cuyonons of Sibaltan with the Suquamish Indians of Seattle. As part of the exchange, Cuyonon representatives visited Seattle in 2013, while the Suquamish Indians traveled to Sibaltan in 2014.

At the project's conclusion, both indigenous groups were to hold an exhibit, and the participants from Sibaltan selected a *pangko* replica as their centerpiece. The *pangko* symbolized the shared maritime heritage of both communities, highlighting the sea's vital role in shaping their histories and cultures.

Beyond its symbolic significance, the *pangko* replica served as a museum piece showcasing Cuyonon maritime traditions, preserving the vessel's traditional design while educating the public. However, over time, exposure to the elements led to its gradual deterioration. It was drydocked without a roof, leaving it vulnerable to sun and rain. As a result, the replica steadily degraded, and today, only 58% of its original structure remains intact.

Dewil Valley Museum

The Dewil Valley Museum was built in 2014, funded by the Nido Petroleum. Currently, it is managed by the School of Archaeology of the

University of the Philippines in partnership with the Municipal Government of El Nido. It is located 50 meters east of Ille Cave.

Currently, it houses Imorigue Coffin and replicas of the tiger bones, Shikamaia fossil and potteries from Sinalakan Tower. It became a must-see place before exploring Ille Cave, the most important cave in the Dewil Valley and the nearest from the museum.

Registry

The Municipal Tourism Office organized cultural mapping workshops across 15 barangays to collect data on cultural properties, with New Ibajay and Sibaltan undergoing the process twice. The initial cultural mapping in Sibaltan took place in 2012 and is discussed on page 65 of this book. Data from these workshops were recorded using registry forms provided by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) for the Philippine Registry of Cultural Properties (PRECUP).
Twelve (12) cultural properties have been submitted to the NCCA and have attained compliant status following the completion of the necessary documentation, which includes:

1. Cover Letter
2. Accomplished PRECUP Forms
3. Local Cultural Property Index (LCI)
4. Sangguniang Bayan Resolution adopting the 12 Cultural Properties

This registry is part of the cultural conservation efforts mandated by Republic Act 10066. Additionally, it serves as a requirement for the prestigious Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG). The law states that:

> Establishment of a Philippine Registry of Cultural Property. - All cultural properties of the country deemed important to cultural heritage shall be registered in the Philippine Registry of Cultural Property. The Commission, through the appropriate cultural agencies and local government units, shall establish and maintain this Registry within three (3) years from the effectivity of this Act.[97]

In 2025, another 12 cultural properties were submitted to the Office of the Sangguniang Bayan. Out of the 12 submitted, only 11 were adopted through Resolution No. 25-151 dated May 26, 2025.

[97] Republic Act No.10066, Article V, Section 14.

Publication

Another requirement for SGLG is the publication of book on cultural properties. The first book was published on October 18, 2024 and was launched on December 2, 2024 at the Municipal Covered Court of El Nido. The title of the book was "Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido, Volume 1." It was authored by the same author of this book.

Copies of the book were distributed to public school teachers, tour operators, government employees and public officials. There are copies also given to academic institutions for the libraries. Persons who provided cultural information for the book were also given a copy each.

The publication of the book was a start of a series of publications to establish an archive for the municipality. This book is the second in this series.

Sibaltan History Museum

Sibaltan History Museum was conceptualized in 2023 and was completed in 2025. The idea was to merge Sibaltan Archaeology Museum, balay Cuyonon and *pangko* replica into one. The new project has a main building to house artifacts while having small versions of a balay Cuyonon and a *pangko* in front.

Sibaltan History Museum was funded by the Eco-Tourism Development Fee (ETDF) with a project cost totaling to Php 4,000,000.

Barangay Festivals

Festival designing workshops were conducted in various barangays by the Heritage Tourism Division. In 2022, three festivals were developed: *Pagampo* in Mabini, *Manla* in Manlag, and *Mangongoma* in Barotuan. In 2023, another three festivals were introduced: *Depunay* and *Kasagingan* in San Fernando, and *Yamang Bukid* in Bucana. In 2024, a festival designing workshop was held in Pasadeña, leading to the formulation of two festivals: *Urugyawan* for the barangay proper and *Karawkaw* in Sitio Lamuro.

Even without undergoing festival designing workshops in 2024, Bebeladan launched the *Beregsayan Festival*, while New Ibajay named their festivities the *Carabao Festival*. Additionally, two barangays adopted their destination symbols without formal festival designing

workshops: Aberawan introduced the *Talindak Festival* in January 2025, while Bagong Bayan launched their *Nami Festival* on May 25, 2025.

In Sibaltan, the *Pamaragua Festival* was established earlier, launched on May 18, 2017, through Ordinance 004, Series of 2017, enacted by the Barangay Council of Sibaltan and approved under Resolution No. 13097, Series of 2017, by the Provincial Board of Palawan. This predates the formulation of the other barangay festivals mentioned.

The development of barangay festivals serves as an initial step in cultural preservation. During the workshops, participants were guided to create festivals that represent their culture, unique environment, history, and ethnicity. Many barangays incorporated destination symbols identified through cultural mapping workshops into their festival identities.

Manla, *Nami*, and *Dipunay* Festivals celebrate the history of their respective barangays, as these were their original names and hold cultural significance. *Pagampo* reflects religious traditions, while *Mangongoma* - an Aklanon term for "farmer" - honors Barotuan's Aklanon farming heritage. *Karawkaw* is named after a type of shell, as referenced on page 103 of this book.

Overall, barangay festivals celebrate their distinct destination symbols, either directly or indirectly. Through these celebrations, communities are deepening their appreciation for and taking pride in their heritage and identity.

Barangay Destination Symbols

Destination symbols for all barangays are meant to highlight their distinct stories. The first purpose is to establish cultural identity, which will serve as the foundation for cultural conservation efforts. Secondly, they serve as tools for brand positioning in a tourist destination, where the islands of Bacuit Bay are the main attraction. Since not all barangays are blessed with beautiful beaches, they need to market other products such as forest-based natural attractions, mangroves, historical sites, and cultural presentations. This aligns with the Heritage Tourism Division's goal of diversifying tourism products to decongest Bacuit Bay and bring economic benefits to rural communities.

On July 17, 2015, the cultural mapping workshops for 18 barangays concluded. As a result, the following destination symbols for the barangays were finalized:

Table 4

Barangay	Destination Symbol	Description
Sibaltan	Balay Cuyonon	Balay Cuyonon is the traditional Cuyonon house. Its design is gradually being forgotten in El Nido, as there are no more houses built in the traditional style in the municipality.
New Ibajay	Dewil Valley	The most important archaeological sites in El Nido are located in Dewil Valley. The site is significant in the study of archaeology, geology, and paleontology.
Manlag	Manla	Manlag is named after a type of mud crayfish called 'manla,' which is abundant in its mangrove areas
Mabini	Canovas Ruins	The Canovas family was one of the Spanish families that lived in El Nido. The ruins of their sawmill built on April 3, 1923 is located in Barriong Lagi, named after a Cuyonon phrase meaning "Old Barrio."
Teneguiban	Bell of Nuestra Seňora del Salvacion	The old bell bears the mark "Año 90," and it was probably made in 1890 or earlier.
Villa Paz	Puting Bato	It is a cave made of quartz located in the forests of Villa Paz. It also serves as a landmark for trekkers inside the forest.
Villa Libertad	Inigtan Cave	Inigtan is the cave where residents of Villa Libertad hid during World War II.
San Fernando	Community-Managed Marine Area (CMMA)	San Fernando was the first barangay in El Nido to establish a CMMA. Their destination symbol reflects their maritime history and culture.
Bagong Bayan	Nami	Nami is the old name of Bagong Bayan. It is also the Tagbanua term for *korot*, a poisonous root crop traditionally consumed after a tedious preparation process.

Barotuan	Mangongoma	Mangongoma is the Aklanon word for "farmer." The population of Barotuan is composed mostly of Aklanon farmers.
Bucana	8 Beaches	El Nido's best mainland beaches, Nacpan and Duli, are located in Bucana. Patuyo, Lalutaya, Mataged na Baras, Calitang, Zone 3 Beach, and Yucuton complete the 8.
Maligaya	Taraw	*Taraw* is the Tagalog word for limestone cliffs. The cliffs in Maligaya offer the best view of the town. Moreover, St. Francis of Assisi Parish, located in Maligaya, celebrates the Taraw Festival every 4th of October in honor of its patron saint.
Corong-Corong	Mt. Putok-Putokan	Mt. Putok-Putokan holds historical significance, as residents of Corong-Corong once crossed this mountain to reach Poblacion before a road was built.
Aberawan	Talindak	The old site of the town, formerly called Talindak, was once located in Sitio Langeban in Aberawan.
Pasadeña	Karawkaw	Pasadeña is the barangay where *karawkaw*, a type of shell, is most abundant.
Bebeladan	Cudugnon Cave	Cudugnon Cave is a burial site on the east coast that was used by the natives around 2,000 years ago.
Masagana	Katumbal	*Katumbal* is the Cuyonon word for red chili. It is the former name of Masagana.
Buena Suerte	Cadlao Island	Cadlao is the largest island in El Nido. It serves as a weather barometer for local fishermen.

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Index

A

abagat 88, 89
abagat sa matadleng 89, 90
abagat sa Capuas 89
abagat sa silad 89, 90
abokado 102
Abuay 26, 98
Acosta Site 45
alimango 70, 73, 98
amian 88, 89, 91
amian sa mait 90
amihan 91
anibong 73, 78
arigi 66
aswang 115
atep 66

B

Babaylan 15, 20, 60, 81, 82, 113, 114, 115
bahay kubo 65
balat 101, 102, 110
balinsasayaw 9, 15, 22, 51, 67, 95, 96, 111, 112
balangay 14, 42, 77, 78, 79
Balay Cuyonon 62, 65, 66, 75, 77, 126, 127, 129, 131
Balay na Mabael 66
Balilit 103, 104
barangay 8, 13, 18, 36, 58, 131
Barriong Lagi 16, 63
baruto 80
Batacalan 24, 58
batil 34, 35, 77
bilaog 95, 104
bituin 93
bitun 93
bituon 93
bituun 93
bosyador 15, 22, 29, 31, 37, 67, 68, 96
bubo 69, 70, 71, 72, 80, 99
budyong 75

bulunan 101
busyador 74, 110, 111, 112

C

Cadlao 22, 32, 33, 34, 51, 52, 68, 132
Canovas Port 63
capiz 105,
Capuas 89
Catalog 51, 62, 134
Catuldan 16, 18, 59, 60, 85
Cudugnon Cave 29, 30, 132
Cuyo 16, 25, 42, 70, 76, 77, 79, 91, 109, 114, 115
Cuyonon 13, 26, 35, 42, 59, 65, 70, 77, 83, 87, 91, 95, 109, 127, 131

D

daplak 88, 89, 90
datu 14, 26
dawat 99, 111
Dewil Valley 22, 23, 29, 38, 39, 40, 51, 75, 102, 112, 122, 127, 131
dugong 11, 35, 116
Dumaracol 107, 108, 109
Dumaran 54

E

El Nido Port 63
El Nido Marine Reserve 116, 119, 120
Elementary School Open Site 45
ENMRPA 117, 120, 121
ETDF125, 129
European Commission 121

F

Filipinization 55, 56
Fox, Robert B. 80, 81, 118

G

gantang 26
Gazetteer 54
ginataan 95, 99, 103, 104
gold earrings 46
Guthe, Carl E. 31, 117

H

Habagat 34, 63, 90

I

Idelet Cave 82, 113
Ille Cave 38, 112, 128
Imorigue Is. 21, 26, 29, 50, 67, 84, 110, 128
Inasleman 95
IPAF 117, 121, 124, 125, 126
Ipon 79, 83,

J

Jones Law 55

K

kabakawan 103
kagawad 14
kanaway 90
karawkaw 95, 103, 129, 130, 132
karbungko 110, 111
kasaw 65
kegpan 104
kinilaw 96, 97, 98, 101, 102
kiwet 59
korot 16, 26, 95, 100, 101, 131
kuday 72, 99
kwadrante 91

L

Langeb-Langeban 13, 50, 51, 63
Langen 31, 66
Lato 100
LCI 128
Leta-Leta 31, 32, 80, 118, 119
lupon 14

M

Magtabako 111
Makangit Cave 113
Malay 41, 73
Mamaepet 59, 60
mangalog 114, 115
mangalok 115
Mangongoma 129, 130, 132
manla 73, 95, 99, 129, 130, 131
Manunggul Jar 31, 80, 81, 118
Maulohin Cave 27, 28, 84
Maulon Cave 84
Manyarapang 74
Manyirapang 74
Minilog Formation 22,
Munlo 104
mu'ya' 111

N

Nami 130, 131
Nido Soup 95, 96
nipa 65, 66, 68, 75

O

ogdok 95, 97
Oton 58, 59, 64

P

Pagawanen 34, 35, 97

Paglugaban 21, 30
paket-paket 100
paliparan 111, 112
pamaragua 42, 109, 130
panalegan 66
pangko 76, 77, 78, 79, 87, 91, 127, 129
panian 50
panulo 35, 74, 99, 111
Paragua 15, 24, 33, 51, 55, 76, 79, 83, 84, 105, 109, 110, 114
Pasimbahan 113
Pasimbahan Magsanib 39, 112
pasong 26
pawid 65, 66, 67
pawikan 11, 36, 116, 119
penet 67
Petromax 111
peye 73, 95, 98, 99
Pinamatayan 26
PIPRP 122
Pitromaks 111
PRECUP 128
Puerto Princesa 38, 54, 123
pulao 108
punong barangay 14, 25, 79
puntanen 89, 90

Q

Quezon 80, 118

S

sakayan 42, 76, 78, 79, 83, 87, 91
salatan 88, 90,
saleng 74, 75, 112
salop 79
salud 66
sarapang 73, 74
sawali 65
Seacology 123
serampang 73
shell beads 30, 47
Shimizu 21, 30

Sirapang 73, 74
Sibaltan 18, 23, 40, 50, 57, 65, 77, 96, 116, 126, 127, 130
sikad-sikad 35, 105, 111
sinabawan 95, 103, 104
Singkukan 26
spear 26, 30, 73, 74, 111
Sta. Monica Natural Fort 12, 23, 26, 44, 62, 113
sumalagen 78
suring 59

T

Tagbanua 16, 17, 18, 26, 50, 59, 60, 67, 74, 81, 85, 93, 98, 108, 114, 131, 133
tagekan 101
taket 92
Talindac 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 147
Talindak 12, 24, 25, 32, 44, 50, 51, 62, 130, 133
tambi 65, 66
Tamilok 95, 97
tanod 14, 91, 104
tanubong 97
tapayan 79, 83, 84
tarawis 99, 111
tarek 59
tarogo 78
Taytay 18, 25, 27, 54, 59, 65, 86, 89, 108, 121,
Tempayan 83
tenga 26
timog 89, 91
Tres Marias 123, 124
tutok 103, 104

U

UNESCO 121
United States 34, 54, 55, 64, 122, 126, 127
University of the Philippines 30, 38, 82, 107, 122, 128

V

Villa Libertad 9, 16, 18, 23, 58, 51, 131

Villa Paz 16, 18, 26, 37, 79, 83, 95, 98, 131
Virgen del Monte 114

W

Way 65
Worcester 85, 109

X

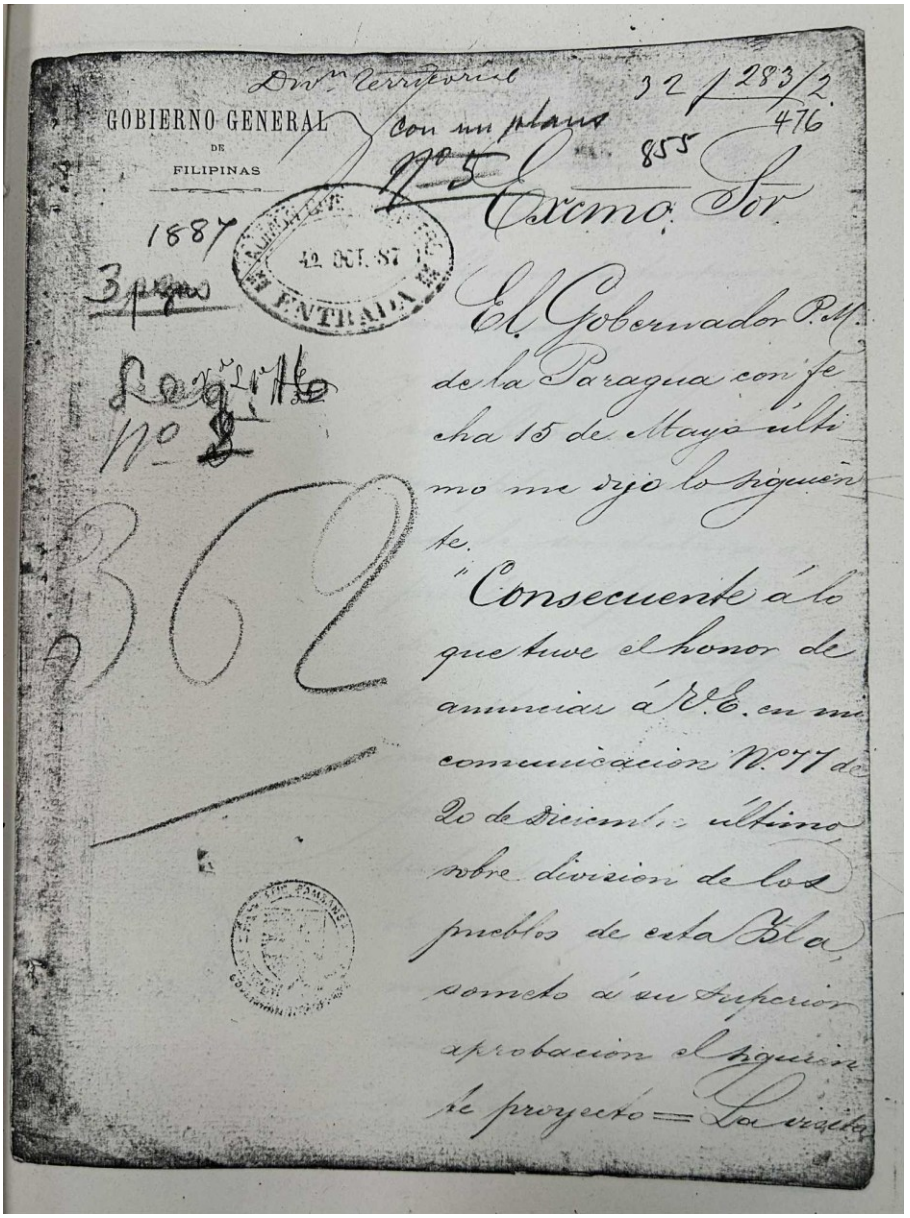
x-pattern 65

Y

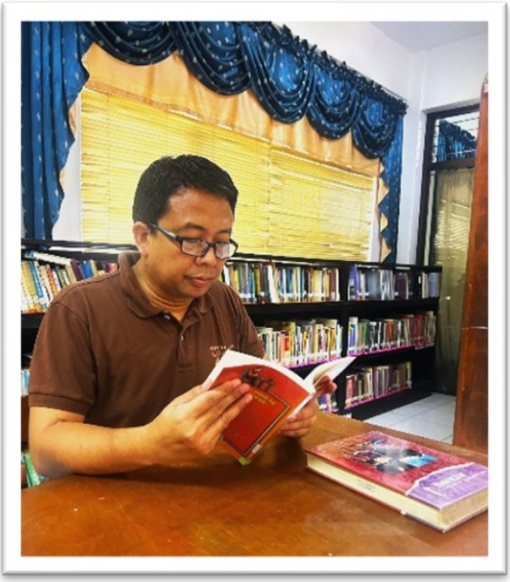
yantok 25
Yawning Jar 31, 80, 81, 118

Appendix

First page of the document establishing Talindac as an independent pueblo:



About the Author



Arvin L. Acosta currently heads the Heritage Tourism Division of the Municipal Tourism Office as Tourism Operations Officer II. He graduated *cum laude* with a Bachelor of Arts degree, major in Philosophy.

His role involves developing heritage tourism products for El Nido. In addition, he oversees the registry of cultural properties in the municipality, as mandated by Republic Act No. 11961, which led to the issuance of a Certificate of Compliance from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts on January 27, 2025.

The author has already published the first volume of this book series, titled *Cultural Properties of the Municipality of El Nido, Volume 1*, which was launched on December 2, 2024. The series aims to establish a collection of printed materials discussing local cultural properties, both for preservation purposes and in compliance with the requirements for the Seal of Good Governance Award.

The author is also a visual artist and a visual arts instructor, teaching in several barangays across the municipality. He placed third in the Kalinawa Arts Exhibit held in 2005 in Puerto Princesa City, an art competition intended for artists from the different indigenous groups of Palawan.