
**MYTHOLOGY: PATHWAY IN THE SEARCH FOR THE
PHILIPPINE BISAYANS' BORNEAN ROOTS**

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to assess the myth that the Philippine Early Bisayans originated from Borneo. through the comparative investigation of the material and non-material cultures of the Early Bisayans and the Bornean Dayaks as expressed in their epics. The comparative content analysis is based on the theory of Glasser and Straus (1967) while the comparative use of myths as data source to investigate historical events is from Oppenheimer (1999). The *Hinilawod* was used to observe the Early Bisayans and the "Story of Kichapi" for the Bornean Dayaks. From the investigation of both epics, the material and non-material cultures of the two peoples are evident. However, for comparative study, the overall data generated for the material cultures is insufficient to categorically declare the cultures as the same or different. From the available data on material culture, there is a slight indication that they are similar more than different. For the non-material aspects of the cultures, they are more different than the same in the social aspect, especially in the view of the nuclear family and the superior roles within. The political system is also pronouncedly different with the Early Bisayans' *datu* leadership and the absence of such among the Dayaks. The practice of beheading is very distinct among the Dayaks as an expression of political supremacy but absent among the Early Bisayans. Similarities are in their manners of livelihood, and epic structure. They are identical in the dominance of animism as the source of power, healing, control of environment and societal recognition. Given the findings from the observable data, the Philippine Bisayans most likely did not originate from the northwestern side of Borneo particularly from the Dayaks.

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

The Visayan Islands in central Philippines are replete with mythology that links their beginning with 10 Bornean *datus* who are believed to have come from the Bisaya River in Borneo.

Sonza (1972) asked the question, "Did the Bisayas of the Philippines originate from Borneo? He suggests that there is a possible affinity between the Bisayas during the Spanish Period and present day Bisayas along the Sarawak coast. The Bisayas of northwestern Borneo has a history of migration. After the secession to Sarawak in 1890, migration of Bisayas from Brunei to Limbang followed (Blandoi, 2002). Brewsher (1956) recorded that the Borneo Bisaya had moved from one place to another within Borneo. According to Blandoi, while anthropologists and historians through the years posed the migration theory, the veracity was never ascertained. Malig (2006) a journalist, on the other hand, strongly opposes the "out-of-Borneo" theory saying that the material evidence is overwhelming with the Ayub Cave findings by the University of the Philippines.

Borneo, located southwest of the Philippines, is the third largest island in the world and is located at the centre of Maritime Southeast Asia. The northwestern part of Borneo was home to a variety of indigenous tribes namely: Muruts, Dusuns, Dayaks, and Ibans (from <http://aroundborneo.blogspot.com/2007/11/dayak-natives-people-of-borneo.html>).

This study attempted to provide data that may clarify the historical affinity between the Philippine Bisayans and the Bornean Bisayans.

Statement of the Problem

This study was conducted to determine the truth to the myth that the Philippine Early Bisayans or the pre-Spanish period inhabitants of the Visayas (Misajon 2008) originated from northwestern Borneo.

Specifically, the study of the Early Bisayans of the Philippines through its epic Hinilawod and the Dayaks of Northwester Borneo through its epic Kichapi, aimed to:

1. investigate their material cultures in terms of infrastructure, technology, personal, food, and religious items, and objects of value;
2. investigate their non-material cultures in the following aspects: social, economic, political, religious, and aesthetic;
5. determine similarities and differences between the material and non-material cultures of the Philippine Early Bisayans and Bornean Dayaks; and,
6. determine whether or not the Philippine Early Bisayans originated from the Bornean Dayaks

Theoretical Basis

The comparative study approach is a classic framework applied by Emile Durkheim, Alfred Weber, Baron de Montesquieu, and Alexis de Tocqueville in the social sciences. Glaser & Strauss (1967), however, sets the foundation of this analysis that allows the evolution of theories and concepts from groups in comparison.

Mythology as a precursor of historical facts has proven itself by the excavation of Troy, made famous in Homer's epic poem the Iliad. From this lead, a German entrepreneur by the name of Heinrich Schliemann set out in 1870, to discover the ancient city and validate the story of Homer. By 1873, he had unearthed the city of Troy, one of archaeology's most famous discoveries (from <http://library.thinkquest.org/3011/troy.htm>). Likewise, the legendary city of Atlantis oft referred to by the Greek philosopher Plato is claimed in 2004 to be located off the coast of northwestern Africa particularly west of the Canary Islands. Bernie Bamford, an aeronautical engineer spotted it as an "aerial map" of a city through Google Earth. The underwater image can be found at the co-ordinates 31 15'15.53N 24 15'30.53W (from <http://newsbizarre.com/2009/02/bernie-bamford-google-ocean-uncoveres.html>.)

For Southeast Asian concerns Oppenheimer (1999) asserts that the presently submerged area of Southeast Asia was once the cradle of ancient civilization. He challenges the conventional view of prehistory through his assertions, using mainly data from myths, legends and folklore, backed by combined evidence from genetics, oceanography, archaeology, and linguistics. The richness of early oral and written literature as evidences of culture and environment has also been posited by the renewed anthropologist Felipe Landa Jocano (1975).

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study have regional, national and international significance. The Visayans of today, who are descendants of the Early Bisayans may determine their Bornean origin as closer to fact or fiction. On the national and international levels, the findings will provide insights to further comparative studies of cultures in Southeast Asia.

Scope and Limitation

The study was limited to one epic from Sarawak and one epic from the Visayas. For both, only their English translations were studied. A request was made through the Central Philippine University Luce Library for the nine books to be purchased. After two months, only one title was received since all the other books were out of print. The book "Nine Dayak Nights" which contained the epic, "The Story of Kichapi" became the only available material to study the myths of the people of northwestern Borneo.

METHODOLOGY

The only existing collection of epics of the Early Bisayans, *Hinilawod* was taken as the representative literature. In an earlier research (Misajon, 2008), facets of Early Bisayan culture were noted after studying the text of *Hinilawod*, an epic of the Sulod people of Panay, studied and translated by Jocano (2003). Manuscripts of Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei mythology were sought from the internet, libraries, Asian centers, a university in Brunei and an embassy but merited no reply. Clues from blogs on Bornean myths were also followed. Finally a publisher in Singapore, Select Books Pty Ltd was identified for an assortment of books on northwestern Bornean mythology. "The Story of Kichapi" from the only available book, *Nine Dayak Nights* was chosen as the corpus for the Dayak culture.

Initially, separate readings of both epics were made for a macro view of the stories. A second and prolonged reading was done for both to determine and understand content and details. Material and non-material culture were identified and listed down.

A final reading of the manuscripts was done for further content comprehension and counter checking of classifications. Verification was

done for overlooked or vaguely classified data. Material and non-material cultures from both epics were identified and listed down.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The two epic manuscripts of the Philippine Early Bisayans and the Bornean Dayaks provide information about their material cultures (Table 1). The 48% generated for the frequency count for “Insufficient Information” shows that the comparisons cannot be accurately completed. The 23% for “Different” shows that the material cultures have pronounced “no likeness”. The 9% for “Identical” shows that there are very few items of exact sameness and the 20% for “Similar” shows likeness at a lesser degree than “Different”. Taken individually, the small percentages show that the cultures are more different than identical or similar. But if these categories shall be taken together, it will generate 29% which will make the cultures more with similarities than differences (Table 2).

For Infrastructure, the elevated structure of houses is identical but the compartments are different. Caves are also used as dwellings in both cultures. Man-made stone structures are not referred to among the Dayaks.

Technology range from identical to similar. Work tools are identical such as fishing net, and axe. Weaponry show similarities for knives, daggers and shield but different in the use of blowpipes. Communications is identical through the use of gongs and mobility is similar through the use of boats but different only in designs. Philippine Early Bisayans have colorful *vintas* while Dayaks use canoe boats. The coconut shell is an identical kitchen tool.

Personal items show “no likeness” especially in clothing. The Philippine Early Bisayans exhibit an elaborate taste for clothes and jewelry both for the male and female, but for the Dayaks, absence of information may mean that they have very little regard for this. Clothing is just simple or functional. Extra-textual (not found in the manuscript) information like a picture validates this. A girl only uses a skirt to cover herself. The upper body is bare. (Geddes, 2002)

Objects of value like precious metals and stones are distinct among Philippine Early Bisayans but not among the Dayaks.

Ingestible items are more distinct among the Dayaks with their elaborate presentations of rice-based foods and social and religious events that include

eating. Food items are not distinctly observable among the Philippine Bisayans. Chewing betel nut is identical in the two cultures in ingredients and social purpose.

The identical animistic cultures put sorcery items as common in both. Both use potions and charms. The English translation of potions in Dayak is “medicine”, because these are perceived by the Dayaks as substance that brings healing as they attribute all illnesses coming from spirits.(Geddes, 2002) They both use containers and equipment in sorcery varying only in the kind used.

Table 1. Level of Sameness and Differences Between the Two Cultures from *Hinilawod* and The Story of *Kichapi*.

General Category	Specific Category	Identical	Similar	Different	Insufficient Information
Infrastructure	House	✓			
	House parts		✓		
	Fortress			✓	
	Cave		✓		
Technology /Tools	Weapons		✓		
	Work		✓		
	Personal				✓
	Recreation				✓
	Mobility		✓		
	Communication	✓			
	Music				✓
	Kitchen		✓		
	Containers			✓	
	Sleeping				✓
	Fuel				✓
Personal items	Male clothes (royalty)			✓	
	Female Clothes				✓
	Male Headgear				✓
	Female Headgear				✓
	Male belt				✓
	Female belt				✓
	Fabric			✓	
	Male Jewelry				✓
	Female Jewelry				✓
	Hair				✓
Objects of Value	Heirlooms				✓
	Bride gift			✓	
Ingestible Items	Fish	✓			
	Chewing	✓			
	Smoking				✓
	Vegetables				✓
	Rice				✓
	Pork				✓
	Fowls				
Sorcery Items	Herbs				✓
	Ingredients			✓	
	Equipment			✓	
	Containers		✓		
	Potions		✓		
	charms		✓		
	Weapons				✓
	Garments			✓	
omens			✓		
Art				✓	
Total	44 items	4	9	10	21

For the non-material aspects (Table 3), the two cultures vary in their view of the family. The Philippine Early Bisayans view the nuclear family as the main unit of kinship while the Dayaks view their community as the main unit. While parental authority is supreme among the Philippine Early Bisayans, among the Dayaks, Grandparent authority is supreme, with the Grandfather playing the most respected role. Respected individuals in the community are labeled “Grandfather” even without blood relations with the addresser.

Both cultures live by the produce of the sea as fishermen. The Philippine Early Bisayans are weavers while the Dayaks are carpenters and basket makers.

A stratified political system is observed among the Philippine Early Bisayans with the head called distinctly as the *datu*. A governing political system is not pronounced among the Dayaks rather a distinct extended family system.

The animistic nature of both cultures are almost identical with the power given to the spirit medium. Potions and charms are viewed as desirable for power, good health and general success in life. They only differ in their objects of worship, The Philippine Early Bisayans worship gods and goddesses while the Dayaks worship dead ancestors and spirits.

Artistry is visible in both cultures. The Philippine Early Bisayans exhibit it through personal items like clothing, jewelry and elaborate carved treasure chests. The Dayaks express this in dancing.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Levels of Sameness and Differences.

Levels of Sameness	f	%
Identical	4	9
Similar	9	20
Different	10	23
Insufficient data	21	48
Total	44	100

Table 3. Comparative Summary of the Non-Material Cultures of the Early Bisayans and the Bornean Dayaks as seen from the Two Epics.

	Early Bisayan	Bornean Dayaks
Social Family Gender Classes	The nuclear family is manifested to be a strong unit where parents are deeply respected. A strong clan relationship is also observed. Polygamy is practiced. The man is perceived as the leader of the family but the woman plays an acknowledged dominant role. The male is pictured with strengths and weaknesses and is recognized to have a higher place in society. Societal stratification is very clear with nobles and servants.	While the nuclear family system is observable it does not appear to be very strong and cohesive. What appears to be strong are ties among people not necessarily related by blood but drawn to be part of the same community. The "Grandfather" figure dominates the culture more than the parents. Generally, the woman is perceived to play a supporting role, but a female dominance is observable. Exclusive sexual relationships are observable but violable. Servility generally does not exist in this culture. The inclusion of one servant in the corpus is accompanied by an annotation that it is not the norm.
Economic Livelihood	Very little data directly refers to the economic system but the working tools provide clues. Their means of livelihood are fishing, weaving and carpentry. Trading is also observable from the purchase of foreign materials	Very little data directly refers to the economic system but the working tools provide clues. Their means of livelihood are fishing, farming, carpentry and basketry. Trading is also observable from the purchase of foreign materials.
Political Government	There is a very pronounced political system, with the datu heading the community. Communities establish alliances with other communities for mutual protection. Protection through an assortment of weaponry is both personal and communal.	There is no very pronounced political system, rather extended family systems. Protection through an assortment of weaponry is personal. Political victory is the beheading of enemies.
Religious Faith Rituals	Animism dominates the spiritual life. The <i>babaylan</i> or the priestess is respected and sought by the community for power, healing and control of environment. Charms, potions and rituals are accepted as natural and positive aspects of successful living. There is a dominant connection to the spirit world but the highest powers are attributed to the gods and goddesses called <i>divata</i> who are worshiped and pleased for blessings.	Animism dominates the spiritual life. The hero's strength emanates from potions called medicines. There is a dominant blending of the supernatural and the natural environment. Heads of dead enemies are considered precious and those of loved ones as sacred. Dead ancestors and demons are worshipped and pleased.
Aesthetic Arts Language Literature Dance Clothing Adornment	Artistry is dominantly visible in personal items like clothing and jewelry. The literature is replete with emotions and follows the structure of poetry chanted by a medium or a priestess called <i>babaylan</i> . Portions of the epic are repeated in the same format. Music is present in this culture. Art gain a greater value with the use of gold and silver. The original text is in <i>Kinaray-a</i> .	Dance is the dominant artistic expression, followed by basketry. There are no elaborate references to male and female clothing or jewelry. The epic was told by a medium or a high priest called <i>manang</i> . Portions of the epic are sang and repeated. The original text is in the <i>Bidayuh</i> language.

For an overall view, the levels of sameness of the material cultures were classified into identical, similar, different and insufficient information. To draw conclusions on similarities or differences, the data for “Identical” and Similar” were fused. This joint data were compared with the data on “Different” and Insufficient Information” to generate a macro view of the two cultures. The sameness or differences were based on numerical data in percentages. The non-material cultures were also laid together with the material culture for a greater macro view of the culture. Since non-material culture is non-quantifiable, the general sameness and differences were articulated through descriptions (Table 4).

Table 4. Comparative Summary of Findings between Philippine Early Bisayans and Bornean Dayaks.

Type of Culture	Level of Sameness	%	Category and Descriptions
Material Culture	Identical to similar features	29	Infrastructure e.g. houses Technology e.g. work, kitchen and communication tools Sorcery items e.g. potions, charms, ingredients and equipment Ingestible items e.g. fish for food, betel nut for chewing
	Different	23	Personal items e.g. fabrics Objects of value e.g. heirlooms Sorcery items e.g. garment and omens
	Insufficient Information	48	Technology for personal and recreational purposes Personal items like clothing and personal adornment Ingestible items like variety of food Sorcery items like weapons and herbs
Non-material Culture	Identical To similar features	Non-quantifiable	Female dominance is recognized in both cultures. Livelihoods include fishing, carpentry, weaving and trading. Animism dominates both cultures. Artistry is present in both cultures varying only in medium of expression. Epics of both are in poetry form and chanted by a spiritual medium.
	Different	Non-quantifiable	Family reference: one is nuclear, the other extended Family role: one dominated by parents, the other by grandparents Social classes: one is stratified, the other is not Political system: one is with clear leadership, the other one is without; victory over other communities is manifested by recognition of the datus, in the other, by beheading.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Generally speaking, the comparative data generated from the two epics are insufficient to draw definitive conclusions about the Bornean ethnic origin of the Philippine Bisayans. This is mainly due to missing citations in one of the epics. While several material items are cited in the Philippine Bisayans' epic, in the Bornean Dayak epic there are no mention of them. These may not necessary mean absence, rather of exclusion.

However, from the available data, the following conclusions are drawn about the two peoples:

1. Both have evident material culture in infrastructure, technology, personal items, objects of value, ingestible items and sorcery items. Objects of value like silver, gold, and precious stones are however, not important in the Dayak culture.

2. Both have evident non- material culture expressed in the social, economic, political, religious and aesthetic aspects.

3. Both have a slightly similar material culture.

4. The non-material cultures of both are very different in the social and political aspects. There is similarity in the economic and aesthetic aspects and distinct likeness in the religious aspect.

5. The ethnic origin of the Philippine Early Bisayans is not from the Bornean Dayaks.

6. The Philippine Early Bisayans did not come from the Sarawak area of northwestern Borneo.

RECOMMENDATION

The following are recommended after the findings and the drawn conclusions:

1. Replicate the study using the epics of the people closer to the northern tip of Borneo, particularly Brunei and Sabah and the Philippine Bisayan epics to ascertain origin.

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