

A Short History of Lanao and the Origin and Arts of their Traditional Weaponry

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Abstract: This paper included a short documentation of Moro history, with emphasis on Lanao Military history, during the Spanish to American periods and the disarmament program during the American times. Also included was the enumeration of traditional weapons found among the Meranaw that were significantly valuable in the battles of Marawi in 1895 and up to the early years of the Americans in the country. Also discussed are the discovery and analysis of these traditional weapons' origin, design or features, and purpose. This work is a contribution to the tangible and intangible cultural heritage preservation in the province of Lanao, so that the next generation would be given more information about these cultural artifacts found in museums and in their families as heirlooms. Findings showed that the Meranaw traditional weaponry have Malay origins and show much Hindu and Chinese influences. These can explain what enabled Moro's resistance to Spanish conquest. The Moros had arms which enable them to meet enemies on equal grounds. It can be said that the Meranaws were the most well-armed group among the Moros in the 19th century because having weapons is a traditional way of life and politics.

Keywords: Meranaw, traditional weapons, warfare.

1. Introduction

Cultural Heritage is known as legacy from previous generation; it is "something that all human beings share: wherever we come from there is a culture that follows us from that place."¹ It can be a collection of sites, objects, and traditions that bring together the art and values of different cultures all over the world. Cultural heritage can be tangible and intangible. Tangible heritage consists of physical artifacts like sculptures, paintings, and traditional weapons, as opposed to intangible heritage, which covers oral tradition, rituals, and performing arts. The current study can contribute to Mindanao's tangible heritage. Studying these could bring about lessons, such as who our ancestors were, where they lived and how, and what they believed. Continued protection would be our gift to other generations so they can look at their past as we do. As UNESCO stated, heritage is the cultural legacy we receive from the past, which we live in the present and will pass on to future generations.

In Mindanao, museum visitations would not be completed

without an inspection of traditional weaponry, the kinds used by earlier people, and which usually had ceremonial and tribal significance. Other than museums, the authors have seen similar traditional weapons as family heirlooms and witnessed how valuable it was to members of the family, and how surviving pictures of their great grandfathers were taken, and they posed with inseparable weapons. From these weapons, one can see how battles were once conducted; it represent the existence of a native form of warfare dominated by bravery and honor.

In addition, the Meranaws had numerous Kota in each municipality in Lanao del Sur, and they had military history. Why did the Meranaws armed themselves? What was their history of conflicts? Thus, a study of their history and weaponry was pursued.

In the Philippines, the history of warfare could pre-date the years of conquest. Jocano (1998) stated that feuding *barangays* often raided each other's territory since pre-conquered times and laid down the causes of this warfare in the county. Some causes were insult, aggression, or rectification of wrong, piracy and plunder, and initiation of warriors. Such was the case in Mindanao, when the conquerors arrived. The natives were seasoned fighters in their native kind of warfare.

A. *The Moros in Philippine History*

To be specific there could be varying descriptions of what or who the Moros really are, but the researchers think that the description from Kuder (1945) give us the idea that:

"The Moros are those natives of the Philippines who are the Mohameddians. They did not give themselves this name, nor do they use it among themselves; but they recognize it when applied to them by others. Misnomers are often validated by time or history. The ancient Romans took a small community of Hellenes for the whole population and call them Greeks. A Mediterranean sailor thought the New World was India and called its people Indians. In extreme Western Europe the Christian Iberians, in seven bitter centuries, drove their Mohammedanized Berber cousins back to their native Mauritania, and in the process made Mohammedans a synonym for Moro, or Mauretanian². And so, although the appearance of

¹ Cultural Heritage. Retrieved from <http://culturalheritagethroughimage.omeka.net/5-reasons-why-we-should-teach-the-value-of-cultural-heritage-to-students> accessed on July 2, 2022

² Mauritania is an ancient kingdom in northern Africa

the Iberians two-fifths of the world around in the extreme fringes of eastern Asia in the 16th century was a remarkable feat, it was not strange that they called the Mohammedans they found here Moros.”

To put it simply, the Moros are the Muslim natives of Mindanao. For many years, some may accept the idea of being called by it, anyway this is history, but there are people who resent the idea of being called a Moro as it earned a negative connotation during the times of conquest and became synonymous to pirates and barbarians. However, in a tolerant mind, there is nothing wrong with the term Moro. As Rasul (2003) said, “The word is customarily used to denote, as a whole, the 13 different Philippine linguistic communities that profess Islam as a religion.”

The Meranaw is one of these recognized Muslim groups in Mindanao, they are one and the second numerous in population of the three major Moro groups known as: the Tausug of Sulu and the Maguindanao of Cotabato. Racially, physically and linguistically they are still Filipinos. Unlike the Maguindanao and the Tausug, who are abundant in history throughout the Spanish period, little is known of the Meranaws. Surprisingly, the little details or description regarding them have the flavor of truth in it. Further, Kuder (1945) soundly explained that “The Meranaw (people of the lake) dwell mainly in the province of Lanao, with a large section in the province of Cotabato, a smaller one in the province of Bukidnon, and scattered groups in the provinces of Davao, Sulu and Zamboanga.” But now we can find them all over the Philippines giving the appearance of being the most industrious and hardworking of all. Also for some time, they were seen as wild, energetic, aggressive and show a mild social dominance compared to other natives of Mindanao. Tawagon (1990) described that politically, “The Meranaws has always been the most divided of the Moros. They have a dozen little states each one having a head, a Datu or a Sultan with a number of title holders from women to possible heirs. As one may exaggerate, they have a thousand and one Sultans or more.”

Whereas, the Tausug were known as the most warlike, and Kuder (1945) saw them as “the most sophisticated and the most polished and knows it. He is neater, cleaner, and put up a better appearance with what he has.” Their history also saw that they have a better and higher political development than any other groups in Mindanao and ruled and established power for many years and their noble family survived sometimes weak, other times strong till the American period. Sharing this kind of popularity for many years were the Maguindanao of the Cotabato region whose historic sultan, Sultan Qudarat became the scourge of Spain in the 17th century.

Though these Moro people were not united as one, because they are geographically and politically independent from each other, their desired cooperation took place when they were brought into alliances among themselves in their strong defiance against western conquest from the Spanish to the American periods. Before the coming of the Spaniards, Hunt (1955) believed “these Muslims in the Philippines were the strongest military group in the Philippines.” When the Spaniards came with more powerful western military might,

they saw these Moros as their enemies, there were many attempts to subdue them and it continued until the American regime. It was in this Moro regions that the longest period of resistance to a colonizing power was waged.

B. Against the Spanish Conquest

The Spanish interest to conquer the Philippines began ever since the discovery of the Philippines in 1521 by Ferdinand Magellan. By 1565, the Spaniards were already in Cebu and finally, made Manila their capital in 1571. They came with the clear intention to search for wealth, to bring honor to their home country and for Christianity. In their hundreds of years stay in the Philippines they remain true to their sworn duty to spread their religion. While their religion was eventually accepted in the northern and central parts of the country, difficulty was met in Mindanao where Islam as a religion was stronger than anywhere in the country.

The Spanish made their first initiative to contact the groups of Muslims from the south as early as 1569. And from the very beginning they described the people as warlike and notorious marauders and so prepared themselves in the mighty conquest of the island. Their intention in the conquest of Mindanao can be gleaned in letters such as the one written by Spanish Governor General Francisco de Sande to Capt. Esteban Rodriguez de Figueroa, which orders the latter to conquer and convert the natives of the south. Another was written by then Governor General Gomez Perez Dasmariñas in 1591, from the records of Blair and Robertsons (1903-1919), this Governor-General said that,

“His majesty orders and charges me, by his royal instructions and decrees, as the most trustworthy and important thing in these island, to strive for the propagation of our holy faith among the natives herein, their conversion to the knowledge of the true God, and their reduction to the obedience of his holy church and of the king, our sovereign; and to this end and object of his majesty has given me commission to make the expedition and pacification that I think best for the service of God and his own, and likewise to give license and commission for making them. By reason thereof, he also commissions me to make covenants and agreements to explorers and pacifiers who are willing to bind and pledge themselves at their own cost to make expeditions and pacification. Moreover, the island of Mindanao is so fertile and well inhabited, and teeming with Indian settlements, wherein to plant the faith and of so great circumference-namely 300 leagues, and distant two hundred leagues from this island of Luzon; and rich in gold mines and placers, and in wax, cinnamon and other valuable drugs. And although the island has been seen, discussed and explored, no effort has been made to enter and reduce, nor has it been pacified or furnished with instruction or justice.”

It is clear that the Spaniards had religious, political and economic interests and it seemed that there was much excitement awaiting them in the south. But the People of Mindanao had strong characteristics of culture and territory, and aside from their established form of government, they also have the loyalty to their recognized religion and it was harder

to break. What ensued then was a centuries old chronicle of invasion and resistance which were narrated in what many Filipino and foreign historians call as the Moro wars. Therefore, we may think of it as the start of the decades of conflicts in Mindanao. And these were major events marked by conquest and resistance like the battle of Marawi in 1895 and in the early decades of the 20th century.

As if the Meranaw have an auspicious destiny, it was only in the early and last stages of the Moro wars that they experienced the colonial ambitions of Spain. But their battles to protect their faith and territory were most memorable to the Spaniards and in Philippine history. The native resistance and the rugged environs of their geography could be one of the reasons why difficulty was met in their conquest. As an overview, the first stage of the Moro wars begun at the time of Miguel Lopez de Legazpi's arrival and ended with the Spanish invasion in Borneo, covering the years 1565 to 1581. In this phase, the Spaniards were able to check the increasing Borneans in the Philippines and their commercial activities in Luzon and Visayas. In addition, in 1639 the Spanish did their first attempt to conquer the willful Meranaw in the second largest lake of the country, the Lake Lanao. It was during the times of Sebastian Hurtado Curcuera as the governor general of Philippines and Pedro de Almonte, the Governor of Zamboanga and General Commander of the islands of the south. According to a description about these two leaders and their first conquest of Lanao by Parker Hitt (1938); "They were both energetic soldiers of the type that had made Spain mistress of the new worlds, and rumors of the great lake in the center of Mindanao were enough for them to give orders for an expedition to investigate, conquer, and Christianize the place."

It was initially in the year 1637 that the Spaniards were deeply interested to get to the Meranaw territory. This was right after they had defeated the force of Sultan Kudarat in his capital in Lamitan. According to Blair and Robertson (1903-1919), "Actual penetration of Lanao by the Spaniards took place not to directly subjugate them but as a punitive expedition to the Meranaws, a retaliatory action taken against them who attacked and plundered the Christian districts of Cagayan which was then under the supervision of Fr. Agustin de San Pedro known as Padre Capitan, a fighting Portuguese-recollect." A description about this historic penetration to Lanao by the Spaniards was further given in Blair and Robertson and accordingly, "Indians of courage were selected, and they went to invade the enemy in their own land in order to take vengeance on them for their treacherous insults. They found no opposition on their march, one village was sacked and burned, and sufficient booty was found there to recompense the loss of Cagayan and the enemy never returned to Cagayan during the rule of Fray Agustin." This inspired Governor Curcuera for one adequate expedition to finish the Moros of Lanao or check their pride. And so, the force of about a thousand, under the joint command of Francisco de Atienza, an experienced soldier and Fr. Agustin de San Pedro, made its way up to Lake Lanao from the north carrying six boats which were carried out in four pieces with such skill that they could be easily assembled for launching. Blair and Robertson shared that, "On April 4, 1639

they set foot on the margin of the Lake without having any trouble. They assembled their six sectional boats and by land and water marched around the Lake, receiving the surrender of various chiefs and holding ceremonies of allegiance in which they enrolled many families from 50 villages."

The priest wanted to put a permanent garrison in a fort on the lake but the native troops would not consider the idea as they lacked superior orders, and the expeditionary force returned to their seacoast towns after a pleasant three months jaunt. Rivalry between the Recollects and Jesuits over the jurisdiction of the Lake Lanao also caused a delay on Spanish success in the conquest of Lanao in the 17th century. Later that year, another expedition from the coast marched through the Lake District without resistance from the inhabitants and reached the north coast's at Iligan.

According to Blair and Robertson (1903-1919), "The governor in Manila, Curcuera after hearing the reports of these expeditions, in 1640 ordered Bermudez de Castro with 50 Spaniards and 500 native troops from Bohol to go up the lake, build a fort and garrison it. However, the lake Moros by this time were more thoroughly aroused, organized and ready to fight as they were awakened by the powerful words of Sultan Kudarat about how the Meranaws would be reduced to slavery and oppression, among many things, by the conquest of the Spaniards." Hence, from the very beginning of its construction the fort was besieged and attacked. A relief of column, commanded by the formidable Fr. Agustin de San Pedro, rescued the garrison from certain extermination. Both commanders saw that the fort could not be maintained against the hordes of Moros who were bent on its destruction, so they demolished what they had built with so much labor and bloodshed and retreated to Iligan on the north coast. The detachment was there provisioned and returned to Bohol and Manila.

For the next hundreds of years, no Spanish would lay eyes again to the Meranaws of the lake. Instead, the Spanish pre-occupied themselves with their colonization plans in other parts of Mindanao, like the strengthening of their forces in Zamboanga, their seat of power in Mindanao, and continued their desire of evangelization. But what really happened according to Hitt (1938) military report was, "while the Spaniards were able to turn back the Moro attacks on the northern islands, they were never able to hispanize the Muslim areas and their influence in that region were confined to their maintenance of a few strategic garrisons."

By 1880, the Manila government would become energetic again with their plans to Mindanao and begun planting Filipino colonials. By doing these, they hope to check and fight against Moro raids that reaches as far as Luzon. The Spaniards were somehow successful in the coastal areas but found difficulty in the hinterlands of Mindanao. The first intrusion to Lanao in the 19th century was in 1891, during the times of Governor General Valeriano Weyler. By that year the Meranaw were headed by Datu Akadir an influential man known as Amai Pakpak. The Spaniards knew about his fort, the *Kota Marahui*. The fort was allegedly equipped with ancient cannons, captured European guns and assorted bladed weapons. Hundred warriors could

instantly be assembled through the sound of gongs and cannons during emergencies. Hence, the governor-general's first military objective was the destruction of this fort and other *kotas* defending Lake Lanao. (Saber, 1975)

The people of Lanao fought valiantly in their *kota* and made use of the lake to escape, whenever they needed to, and navigate to other *kotas* to continue the resistance. From the Pershing papers it was said that;

"Weyler mobilized 1,242 heavily armed troopers using four transports, namely the *Manila*, *Cebu*, *San Quintin* and *Marquez de Duero* which landed in Linamon on Iligan Bay preparatory to their overland invasion of Lanao. In spite of strong resistance from the Meranaws, the Spaniards succeeded in bombarding Fort Marahui. Both sides suffered heavy casualties. On the Meranaw camp, survivors escaped together with Amai Pakpak. The fort was captured on August 21, 1891 and for the first time the Spanish flag was raised in Marawi. However, three days after the capture of Marawi, the Spanish invaders decided to withdraw. They were forced to return to their bases in Iligan because a considerable number of Meranaws coming from different settlements around the lake came with stronger forces to retaliate against the defeat of their kinsmen."

This situation led the Meranaws to turn against Filipino colonists especially those based in Iligan and southern Misamis Oriental. Governor General Ramon Blanco then in 1894, launched the second invasion of the Lake and the Meranaws, so determined to conquer them once and for all. There were many efforts laid in this task that Spain ordered the construction of two steel gunboats later called as *SS Blanco* and *SS Lanao*, and another two *SS Corcuera* and *SS Almonte* by the following year, which will be transported and assembled in Marawi, and new models of firearms.

The Spaniards reached Marawi by March of 1895 but they were met and fought by Meranaw natives along the way and they would be pestered by ambush attacks from time to time. Their first action upon reaching the place was to build forts, as well as roads. This powerful expedition according to Hitt (1938) was a "combined actions by Land and water to struck terror into the Moro tribes of the Lake region. Their *kotas* were attacked and destroyed, their movements on the Lake were stopped and, in general, the operation was a complete success." But this Spanish conquest was short-lived because by August of 1896, the revolution in the north had begun and they had to recall all their forces in Mindanao to Manila and they never return again. In a way, the Moro resistance contributed also to the national struggle against the Spanish conquerors in the 1896 Philippine Revolution. On the forehand, some Meranaw were thankful of the revolution led by Andres Bonifacio as it stopped the total conquest of Lanao and the Christianization of their people.

However, the Meranaws would be met by another powerful colonial power, the Americans, and they would just continue what the Spanish started.

C. During the American Period

America was then a growing industrial superpower which needed colonies for their country and Philippines was a perfect

choice for a foreign market. Upon reaching the country, a revolution was taking place but obviously, they came well prepared, it will be a matter of years before their ultimate pacification of the country takes place. They were militarily powerful than the Spaniards at the time and in their conquest, they took a divide and conquer policy when they establish themselves friendly with the Moros, and enemies with those of the north. Perhaps they have the advanced knowledge about the Spanish history with the Moro people and their fighting spirit. By August 20, 1899, the Bates treaty was signed and it was the first of their agreements and it was a non-interference policy, where the Americans promised to respect the Moros; their religion, territory and cultural practices. But right after the end of the resistance in the north, the Americans in 1902 abolished the treaty and begun their conquest of Mindanao. Definitely, they were enticed by the fertile lands and abundant raw materials and products in the island and just like the Spaniards, one of their goals was the pacification of Lanao and its people. It was then in the same year that the 27th infantry was sent to Iligan and had penetrated Lake Lanao by the end of the year. And when it comes to the Meranaws, the Americans had so much to say about this people as fighters. Despite the years of battles with the Spaniards, they still have the passion for resistance more intense than any of their encounters with other natives of the island.

A glimpse of what these conquerors saw upon reaching Lanao was not much different from Spanish observations, Colonel Hitt (1938) described that "there are no towns; each chief and man of any importance has a *Kota* of fort, built of earth or rock with bamboo, rattan vines, and even trees growing in the walls, and in this *kota* there are one or several houses of bamboo and thatch for the man, his wives, and his retinue." Their *kota* was heavily armed with native weaponry. The natives then were very much ready to defend and fight. And they were used to it therefore resistance was met by the Americans especially in the southern areas around the lake.

It was in Bayang when the Americans encountered on May 2, 1902 what American General Allen (1920), in his *Memories of the Past*, recalled and described as the "hardest fought battle in the Philippine insurrection." The American troop was under the command of Col. Frank D. Baldwin which later led to his promotion to Generalship. Accordingly, the battle ensued after the refusal of Sultan Pandapatan, to come to terms with the demands of the Americans who did not like Meranaw covert ambushes to American soldiers and, accordingly, stole some of their horses. Instead of listening to them, these natives were ready for war. However, no matter was the reason; it definitely was a move to pacify Lanao. Powerful artilleries were brought in by the Americans and Allen (1920) recalled that, "The battle of Bayang had begun. Quick movements were observed here and there, companies were being assigned their positions, orders were being transmitted like lightning from point to point, and in less time than it takes to narrate it, that body of men was swung into action like the pendulum of a clock." After the battle, many Meranaw forts were gradually captured (Bakolod, Kalawi, and Taraka in 1903) and eventually they came to terms with the Americans but resistance was still widespread.

The Americans were so determined in their conquest of Mindanao, and one Brigadier General Frederick Dent Grant says something negatively about what he thinks of the Moros;

As for the Moros, we shall have doubtless to give them a few sharp lessons. They are very similar to the American Indians or South Africa natives. We could get them into an open fight. At any time and dispose them very quickly, they pretended amenity and all sorts of vices that are hard to cope with than an open battle. Are desperate fighters who have some success against the Spaniards, which renders their self-confidence even more extreme. James Allen (1920)

It seemed that the Americans as conquerors were confident and determined in their pursuit. Not to mention, well-armed, and this became their advantage. However, from 1903 onwards, the Americans in Mindanao like in Lanao could not actually go out freely in these territories. They go around communities in group and they were constantly threatened by the Moros who always carried their bladed weapons even in the markets. Until the Americans grew dissatisfied of this situation and found a solution in 1909, when John Pershing returned to serve as the last Governor General of the Moro Province.

D. *The American Disarmament Policy*

Defiance was one characteristic of the Meranaws and Weapons were a key part of the everyday wear of a man's dress. It was their culture and was often felt that to be without a bladed weapon was similar to being naked. It is a sentiment that they shared with many natives groups of the Philippines as well as in other parts of Asia. This custom often conflicted with later attempts by colonial invaders to disarm the Meranaws and other Moro societies and this led to unfortunate conflicts. But the US colonial restrictions on the carrying of traditional weapons was a necessity and was seen as an important step taken seriously by the Americans in their pacification campaigns in Mindanao specially in Lanao. At first some Americans opposed the idea both due to fear of igniting a new road of resistance and the near impossibility of the implementing such a scheme.

But the disarmament and the control of the native weaponry was part of their agreements with previous sultans and datus in Sulu. They have some demands to Moros in general such as, "they should stipulate to prohibit the purchase by or delivery to their people rifles or war materials, as the possession of them has a tendency to stir up strife among their separate communities and to destroy the peace in the islands, which, for the welfare of all parties concerned should be maintained." Wilcry (1900). And so, it was inevitable to impose it in Lanao with the Meranaws who always caused disturbances even after 1903. When the American settled in and established a governmental set-up in Lanao many Meranaws then were against it. The Meranaws committed hostile activities like ambushes and night attacks on American camps. And for the Americans, as read from Funtecha (1979), "these necessitated several punitive expeditions which were successfully made, inflicting severe punishments upon natives. Such moves, however, left the Meranaws, throughout the greater portion of the lake region, bitterly hostile; and in other portions professing friendship, but in reality; seizing every opportunity to do harm

to American soldiers." As further stated in the book of Funtecha (1979),

Muslim lawlessness, including murders of Americans and foreigners caused Gov.Gen. Forbes to issue Executive Order No.24, Government of the Moro Province, for the purpose of disarming would be offenders. A formal order to that effect was promulgated on September 9, by Brig. Gen. John J. Pershing who was governor of the Moro Province. The principal reason for disarming the Meranaws and other Muslim groups, as advanced by the Americans, was that Muslims could not be trusted with arms. As Smith commented on the Muslim; "Human life meant nothing to him. He would kill merely to try the keen edge of a new weapon or to seize whatever pleased his fancy.

The Americans had lowly opinion of the Meranaws in general, just like the Spaniards who saw the Moros in general as nothing but criminals. Whatever the reasons, the disarmament took place and used to check Muslim plundering activities which continued till the end of the American period. To the Americans, it seemed that violence took place or as expected as long as the Meranaws and other Muslim groups owned arms. On the otherhand, Funtecha (1979)

"The Maranaos and other Muslims hesitated to surrender their firearms due to fear and doubt. Military force had to be used, precipitating more bloody encounters between them and the government troops. By the latter part of 1913, the disarmament of the Muslims, not only of guns but of fighting knives and spears, was practically completed and the safety of life and property of non-Muslims in the Moro province was, at length, generally accomplished."

Many of the traditional weapons collected from the Meranaws and other Moro groups had since then became an attraction for its historical and cultural value, not to mention, the great craftsmanship in Mindanao.

To say the least, after all the experiences of foreign conquest and contest with other non-Muslim groups the Meranaws like their Moro brothers still remain a distinct people with an awareness of a separate identity. And with sentiments like that of unconquered, whose history is a witness to their longing for their ancestral domains and right to self-determination.

E. *Lanao Traditional Weapons*

The Meranaws of Lanao had bladed weapons: swords, daggers, spears and native cannons, as well as war drums, shields and even body armors. The swords are either the *Sundang* and the *Kampilan*, also the *Pudang* or *keping*, they also had their version of the western battle ax which they call as the *Tabas* or *Panabas*, they also were in possession of the Tausug *Barong* broad sword, their daggers were known as the *Kris*, the most popular because of its wavy or curved blade, and the *Gunong*. They had spears like the *Bangkaw* and were thrown straight at the enemy. Due to its advantages, especially in naval combat, these were a favorite of the Moros in general. Other kinds of spears were made out of bamboo and known as *Bagacayes* or *Bacayawan* to the Meranaws. They had cannons called *Lantakas*, also spelled as *Rantakas* and considered fearsome weapons, and the Moros themselves sometimes made

these. As a general term in Philippine islands, it is traceable to the root word *Lantak* which according to De Burgh & Fe Mangahas (2013) mean “an object that can damage or hurt, or *Lantakan*, meaning violent encounters where these ancient cannons were used.” These were swivel guns of the time. Furthermore, they had war drums called *Gandangan*, they had wooden shield called *Kelong*, and even body armors like the “*Raben a Potao*.” The Moros in general had firearms like the *Paliontod* which looked like a kind of Remington, if not a Mauser rifle. This kind of modern firearm became popular in the early 1900s. Author (Kiefer, 1971, p. 159) estimated that medium-sized muzzle-loading types had been in use by 1450.

Perhaps the most popular of all Meranaw weapons was the *Sundang*. It was a weapon of war and peace. Neither too long, like the *Kampilan*, nor too short, like the *Kris*, the typical length is between 22 to 30 inches. Most Meranaw asked would identify the *Sundang* first before other weapons. To them, all other bladed weapons were called *Sundang*. It combines the beauty and purpose of both the *Kampilan* and the *kris*. It has a wavy design mainly attributed to the *kris* and a deadly weapon like the *Kampilan*. The *Sundang* and other weapons of war were precious to the Meranaws, and those very old were sacred and passed on from generation to generation, giving these an air of enchantment. Moreover, these weapons were said to possess a *niyawa* or soul that helped against evil and enabled warriors to fight. And these weapons were given names.



Fig. 1. Captured Weapons of the Moros in Lanao in 1902. Photo available at www.google.com.ph. Accessed on January 11, 2019. Also in the book by Sixto Orosa “The Sulu Archipelago And Its People.”

In 19th century Mindanao, readings from historical books showed that Maguindanao at these times was disunited; there was a conflict of interest in the throne of the Sultan of Maguindanao. The death of Sultan Kudarat greatly affected the power of the Sultan of Maguindanao in the succeeding years.

On the other hand, Sulu became a protectorate of the Spanish government; they paid taxes to the Spanish government (Majul, 1973, p. 299). During these troubled times, the Meranaws remained impregnable and undefeated. Thus, it was not baseless to assume that they were the most well-armed group when invasions were on the horizon at these times of challenges. As evidenced by the historical records on the Spanish invasion in Lanao at the end of the 19th century, which was led by not one but two succeeding governors-general none other than Valeriano Weyler and Ramon Blanco, and this was something unheard of.

Moreover, with the coming of the Americans, more battles took place in Lanao than elsewhere in Mindanao, the battle of Bayang, the battle of Taraka, the battle of Bacolod, and the existence of numerous Kota meant their preparedness for war had always been there. Moreover, to be prepared for war, the Meranaw must be militarily equipped, and so why they have several weapons in their possessions; they were also notorious for waging family feuds or *Rido* among themselves. There were hostilities and lawlessness, and an author revealed that “these did not allow the Americans to rest, and reports about Maranaw trouble came in from time to time extending even beyond the period of American military occupation of Lanao.” (Marohomsalic, 2001)

Moreover, it had always been a custom among traditional leaders to be well-armed. Martel de Gayangos also noticed this in one of his books, “La Ysla de Mindanao”. As for the Tausug, it is undeniable that they had been known as warriors for a very long period. The Meranaw led the quest for freedom and protection of culture and identity at the end of the 19th century.

F. The Origin, Arts, and Symbolism in Meranaw Traditional Weapons

In Lanao del Sur, Tugaya is the traditional arts and crafts center. The same *kampilan*s, *Sundang*, *krisses*, and *Laila* can be found among the three major Moro tribes, the Meranaws, Maguindanao, and Tausug. However, the Meranaws can say that the knowledge of making these weapons has been with them for a long time. This knowledge of metal can be traced back to as early as following the development of the Neolithic age in the Philippines even thousands of years ago, also, there exist blacksmiths and forges all over the country.

Many of the Meranaws interviewed, like the Tugaya blacksmiths, agreed that perhaps the Meranaws learned of the knowledge of making these weapons somewhere. However, in tracing the origin of these Meranaw weapons and all other weapons in Mindanao, the most significant difficulty lies in that almost all of these weapons do not carry their markings for the place and date of manufacture. Fortunately, written material helped show the possible origin of these weapons.

Most of the weapons of the Meranaws show resemblance to other weapons found in the Malay world. The names of these weapons suggest their possible places of origin. Weapon names like *Sundang* and *kris* from *Keris*, *Pudang*, *Agong*, *Lela*, *Lantakas*, or *Rantakas* showed that most had Indonesian and Malaysian origins. Indonesia seemed to be a prominent source of the origin of these weapons probably because of Java, which

some historians believed as the cradle of civilization or men in South East Asia. The most popular theory to conform with was the waves of Migration theory by Henry Otley Beyer, which holds that men settled in the Philippines via a series of migrations.

Tracing the origin of these weapons may go as far as the origin of the people themselves. As Rasul (2003) elucidated, "when the Malays migrated, they carried along with them to their new homes, the culture and the influence that were in conformity with their nature, including their ballads, legends, chronicles and other folktales." Thus, these weapons may have been some of what Meranaws inherited from their Malay ancestors. The similarities may support this argument. Saber and Orellana (1973) pointed out that, "the similarities show evidence of common origin from an ancient source."

Meranaw blacksmiths point to the Maguindanaos as the first makers of these weapons, and the Meranaws possibly learned this knowledge. Taha Taher, a known Meranaw blacksmith, said that: "Our ancestor Sultan Kudarat is famous because of his *Kampilan*, it is probable that the Maguindanaos were the first to make or forge these types of weapons."

Due to historical gaps in Meranaw history, it was difficult to confirm where, when and with whom the Meranaws directly learned their weaponry. Some authors agreed they could have learned this from their connection with the Maguindanaon. These weapons may have been given to Meranaw Datus as gifts of alliances during intermarriages. Since then, they saw it as an essential symbol of power and prestige besides its usefulness for protection in the mountainous areas of Lake Lanao. In the study of Meranaw weapons, the names of the weapons like *Panabas* and *gulok* for *gunong* are also found in Luzon, and so they appear to be borrowed from other cultures. For this, the authors argued that even so, scholars believed that culture is shared, and the similarities of the Meranaw warfare tools with those of other islands of the Philippines can be due to our Austronesian language and can be a piece of evidence to the existence of an inter-island contact, either domestic trade or piratical activities.

The introduction of Islam may have further influenced their fascination with weapons especially bladed weapons, because the *hadiths* in the Quran, about the companions of the last prophet of Islam, were imagined as warriors and considered to be the best of the best generations.

In addition, closer inspection of the engravings of the Meranaw weapons showed they bore signs of a Hindu influence in Southeast Asia in general. According to Jocano (1975), "much of the so-called Indian cultural influences reached the Philippines through Indonesia. But what penetrated these Islands, particularly in the seaport communities, were already modified versions of the Hindu cultural traits."

On the other hand, the Arabs and the Chinese were responsible for introducing firearms in Mindanao. The Arabs improved the technology, but this was reinforced by the knowledge of the Chinese or might be impossible without the Chinese, who invented gunpowder and cannons made of bamboo centuries before. Rasul (2003) affirms that; "From Arabia, the greatest gift to the Philippines was Islam as a world

religion, the sultanate, the first government in the Philippines and the Arabic scripts, Moorish arts and sciences and the use of firearms."

Firearms might have been first introduced through the coming of Muslim missionaries and rulers like Rajah Baguinda and other Muslim traders. Accordingly, Rajah Baguinda's arrival in 1400 was a tumultuous event. According to Reuben Canoy (2003): "armed with modern firearms, Baguinda's troops could mince the defenders, who wielded nothing deadlier than spears and knives. However, he decided to placate them instead. Calling for a ceasefire, he announced his good intention."

G. Design and Meaning

It can be said that the Meranaws were the most artistic of all Moro groups. However, to quote Saber and Orellana (1973) again, "Maranao art is not perhaps free from borrowed elements but has acquired distinct native traits in the course of development."

It can be discerned that Meranaws were patrons of arts, unlike their Tausug brothers, who are more warlike. This is not to say that they are not warriors; they can be if they need to. Symbols and arts were discussed from the design found in most Meranaw weapons, like the *Sundang and Kampilan*. The Meranaw blacksmiths opined that there is no actual meaning or story from these designs, they just like it. They could be inspired by what they see in the environment like the animals. They agreed that if their work had no design, no one would buy it.

The researcher posits that there are meanings behind those thorns and lines in the designs. Gardner (1936) pointed out that, "The intricate design is for the globe-trotters." Overall inspection shows that the design was also part of warfare and of culture. Also, it might have been confirmed that there was fear of empty space, and so designs were a necessity, Sakili (2003) claimed that "Meranaws regard blank spaces in an object as not visually pleasing."

What distinguishes the Meranaw weapons especially the *Sundang* and *Kampilan* accordingly, was that instead of creating fantasticommel or handle designs, the Meranaws stuck to the artistic medium for which they are best known, lavishly decorated metalworks, as seen on the weapons. Research on other weapons found in other groups also showed that different designs on many blades were combined by the Meranaws in one blade, in the *Sundang* most especially.

H. Meranaw Warfare

The conquerors appreciate the bravery, courage, and fierceness of the Moro groups and the Meranaws of the Lake, as mentioned and repeated in numerous letters written by Spanish officials and missionaries like Father Chirino and Francisco Combes.

If one used the *Darangen* as a basis, the epic expressed ideas on the kind of warfare the Meranaws had. In summary, the Meranaw warfare may have consisted of the following: horsemanship, initiation of war, the practice of chivalry, military instruction, and many more. However, as fighters, the

Meranaws, unlike the Tausugs and Maguindanao, had no record of any military training in preparation for battles. However, in all their encounters with the conquerors, Meranaws were highly praised for their courage. Despite their weakened military strength in the face of the newly developed fire powers of the Americans, they fought so that the conquest of Lanao was indeed over their dead bodies.

In Meranaw oral narratives on wars and conflict, one may hear words like "Katitimbaka" or firings, "kaprido" meaning violent encounters due to family feuds and grievances, and "Ka-Kota" as in they hide or retreat but they prepare to fight and defend in native fortresses. From what can be deduced from history books, it seemed that there were two kinds of warfare dominant in their history of conflicts: the *Kota* warfare and the guerrilla warfare. However, Rido is the violent encounters within their territories in Lanao and even with outsiders. As marked by Torres III (2007), "rido is a term used by Meranaos, Iranun, and Maguindanao, to refer to clan conflicts or violent retaliation. It must be noted that rido and the phenomenon of feuding are of pre-Islamic provenance." Given this situation, Meranaws may have adopted and developed weapons for protection and security. From pre-colonial to colonial regimes, warfare was part of the Meranaw way of life.

The *Kota* of the Meranaws was so vital that a discussion on the Meranaw *Kota* would even summarize the tales of Meranaw warfare. *Kotas*, or fortresses in English, were an integral part of warfare among Meranaws and military groups. Though different from those in Europe in form or structure, the idea of defense was the same. In Mindanao, *Kotas* was stretched across Mindanao. These were very important to the Moros, as these people had a love for territory, loyalty to their faith, and freedom. Thus, *kotas* were built for this purpose, for the protection of the interests as mentioned earlier. Another specific reason behind the construction was the resolute resolve of the Moros to defend themselves against other Moros, probably when *Rido* takes place, and especially against invaders.

Unlike the Spaniards with their stonewalled forts, according to Vic Hurley (1938, p.264);

The Moro *kotas* generally were forts of Bamboo and Nipa, with thick double walls of tree trunks packed with earth or broken coral. They were defended by *Lantakas*, which are ornately carved, swivel cannons of the Moros, and older than the written history of the archipelago. Some authorities have stated that these cannons of the Malay pirates were among the earliest forms of the portable ordinance.

In Lanao, *kota* was made of layers of stones and wood; many writers noted that these were very old, and Tawagon (2001) identified the distinction of the *Kotas* of Lanao.

The *Kota* was a legacy of the wars fought centuries ago and the fighting spirit of a people who were always ready to defend.

The *Kota* warfare of the Meranaws was supplanted by guerrilla warfare, particularly during the American times in Lanao when *Kotas* proved powerless against the American bombardments and artilleries. With this kind of warfare, the Meranaws who were still against the Americans and the new government they established, conveyed their dissatisfaction and continued resistance.

Thinking of Philippine history, an idea would come that the Island that has the most colorful history and culture is Mindanao. It is the second largest island of the Philippine archipelago and home of the Moros, especially in the olden times of Spanish era in the country. The Moros had a colorful history as people, they were notorious especially in the Spanish eyes and propagandized as pirates and heretics. But to modern historians and Moro sympathizers, their century's old resistance and defiance to Spanish rule was seen as a manifestation of their valor towards a foreign colonizing power. If the Aztecs and Mayans were conquered by the Spaniards, then the Moros of Mindanao were not. In short, there is so much more to the Moro natives of Mindanao than just pirates, or savages.

2. Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusions have been arrived at: The Moro resistance, as well as the Meranaw resistance, contributed also in the national struggle against western invasion from the early years of conquest up to the culmination of native resistance in the 1896 Philippine Revolution. It also saw that the Meranaws were a well-armed group among the Moros in the 19th century because having weapons is a traditional way of life and politics and many battles were fought in Lanao in the early years of the 20th century than elsewhere in Mindanao. They armed themselves for several reasons, other than resistance to western conquest, they had Rido among themselves and in their society and so, having those traditional weapons and being prepared for war was part of their lifeways in the past. Moreover, their traditional weaponry was relevant to them as people and in the study of their history. Readers can also get many ideas from a study of the artistic design, and symbolism found in these Meranaw weapons, in a way one can be led to the conclusion that the Meranaws are master weapons artisans, skilled warriors, and well-equipped fighters. The Moro's historical trading relations with the rest of Asia can also be seen in their weaponry. Their weapons also show much Hindu, Arab and Chinese influences.

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