

# THE HOLY WEEK RITES OF THE MANANAMBAL OF SQUIJOR<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*Intended as an introductory piece to the series of articles on traditional healing practices of the mananambal or shamanistic healers of Siquijor, this paper documents the rites and rituals observed by the traditional healers during Holy Week. Rooted in the folk belief that the spirit world opens on Good Friday and magical powers are dispensed into the environment, Holy Week is thus the most eventful activity of the year for the mananambal of Siquijor who host this event, as well as for visiting mananambal from other islands. Aside from the ritual search for medicinal materials that climaxes on Good Friday, the highlight of this celebration is the ritual cooking of two of the most important concoctions of the traditional healing practice: the igdalaut or evil brew used in sorcery and prepared during Good Friday, and the minasa or antidote to sorcery cooked during Black Saturday. Given the widespread popularity of this annual event among traditional healers, it is not surprising that the Siquijor Holy Week rites attract not only oldtimers but new faces as well. Predictably, the entry of television and film has given these once hallowed rituals both national and international attention, attracting even more followers and believers in the process. As yet, it is difficult to gauge the extent of media influence on these practices but one thing is certain, some of the mananambal themselves seemed to have understood fully the implication of media presence to their reputation and appeared to have taken advantage of this media exposure to add a bit of show effects on their rituals.*

For a long time, the small island of Siquijor has attracted the fascination of many as a place not only of natural beauty but of mysticism, traditional healing, and voodoo. In fact, in the minds of many people, the mere mention of the island's name conjures up images not so much of white beaches or lush countrysides, but of amulets, *barang*, black and white magic, and highly-skilled shamanistic healers proficient in the art of both healing and hexing. For the *mananambal* of Siquijor and their faithful followers, the Holy Week rites and rituals not only constitute the basis for the traditional healing practice, but also guarantee the effectiveness of this

practice for both white and malign-magic, as well as the efficacy of the medicinal preparations that are concocted once a year during this period.

This paper revisits a subject that continues to fascinate many scholars and researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds. Picking up from the earlier studies on healing, witchcraft, and sorcery in Siquijor (Leiban 1967; Ponteñila and Reynolds, 1971; Vista, 1978; Seki, 1994), the present study focuses mainly on the Holy Week rites of *mananambal* (folk medicine practitioners or healers) in what was popularly known during the Spanish time as the "Island of Fire." A major goal of this study is to examine the changes that have taken place through time in the healing practice and ritual observance of the *mananambal* in Siquijor. Intended as the first of three articles, this paper includes the results of initial observations and interviews conducted by the research team in 1998, as well as part of the data gathered by Prof. Rolando V. Mascuñana in 1999. It also in-

cludes the data in the video documentary coverage and photos taken by team member, Dr. Christian K. Schales. An interview schedule was designed specifically for this project. This was supplemented by informal interviews with local residents as well as with visiting *mananambal* from other islands who make the annual pilgrimage to participate in the Holy Week rites, and with observers, and regular visitors who come to Siquijor mainly to procure traditional medicine.<sup>2</sup>

### The Research Area

The small island province of Siquijor has a land area of 34,350 hectares and 73,756 population (Census 1995). Formerly a subprovince of Negros Oriental, it became a separate province in 1971 by virtue of Republic Act No. 6398. Larena was the province's former capital until the majority of the people of the province voted in favor of Siquijor<sup>3</sup> as provincial capital in the 1970 referendum. With Proclamation No. 1075, the capital was officially



Figure 1: Deforested and eroded landscape in Siquijor\*

transferred from Larena to Siquijor in 1972. However, Larena remains the commercial center of the province with the largest concentration of businesses and banks in the island.

Siquijor is approximately 30 kilometers east of Dumaguete City, the capital of Negros Oriental. Fast ferries ply daily between the ports of Larena and Dumaguete. Motor launches and interisland vessels also regularly dock on any of the three main ports located in Larena, Siquijor, and Lazi. The port in Larena is the

largest in the island and accommodates vessels up to 500 tons. Pumpboats also ply daily between Dumaguete and Solongon beach in Siquijor as well as between Dumaguete and Tambisan, San Juan. During inclement weather, the sea is rough and travel by smaller vessels is not safe.

Topographically, the island is generally hilly and mountainous. Of the island's total land area of 34,350 hectares, 12,507 hectares (36.41%) are identified as "rolling to moderately steep,"

"gently sloping" areas total 6,725 hectares (19.58%), while "flat plains" consist of 4,879 hectares (14.20%). About 6,300 hectares are identified as "steep to very steep" (18.34%), and 3,939 hectares as "undulating to rolling" (11.47%) (*Siquijor Development Profile* 1995: 3). At present, the island is heavily deforested. Devoid of vegetation, many areas show signs of mild to severe soil erosion. The massive destruction of the island's forests in the past and the continuing illegal cutting of trees in some declared forest reserves have caused the depletion of soil nutrients and the drying of some rivers and springs. This condition has further worsened the island's perennial problem with water especially during the long dry season.

The island's major economic activities are farming and fishing. Small cottage industries which make furniture from *buri* (*Corypha elata* Roxb.) and *abaca* (*Musa textilis* Nee) are thriving. Siquijor has capitalized on its beautiful beaches to attract foreign tourists and their influx is responsible for

the growth of the tourism industry in the island. In addition, the quiet, laid-back surroundings are now home to a number of foreign retirees and nationals who have found the island an ideal place to stay. But more than the beauty of its natural surroundings, it is Siquijor's famous traditional healers (*mananambal*) that have given the island its reputation as "the center of sorcery in the area of the Visayas, Central Philippines" (Ponteñila and Reynolds, 1971: 75).

The research areas covered three *barangay* of Siquijor, namely, San Antonio, Cantabon, and Punong; the Sitio of Buac-Bato in San Antonio; and the *barangay* of Timbaon in the neighboring town of San Juan. Of these places, the most noted for its *mananambal* is San Antonio, variously known as "the 'graduate school of sorcery' for the whole island" (Ponteñila and Reynolds 1971: 76) and the "seat or 'school' of sorcery in the region" (Vista 1978: 63).<sup>4</sup> An interior *barangay* located six kilometers away from Siquijor *poblacion*, San Antonio has drawn local

and foreign tourists alike to come to the island for treatment of certain illnesses, especially those attributed to *barang*, which Leiban considered as "the most notorious form of sorcery" (1967: 1). It also attracts a different kind of clientele—those who seek the services of a *mananambal* to hex an enemy or obtain medicine and other forms of charms that would cure, protect, bring luck or ward off evil, as well as stimulate sexual potency.

### The Mananambal

The *mananambal* are "shamanistic folk healers" (Leiban 1967: 4) who cure diseases with a combination of a concoction of medicinal herbs and spiritualistic techniques. Five male *mananambal* formed the core of this anthropological investigation.<sup>5</sup> They have been identified by the team from personal interviews with the healers themselves and from informal inquiry from local residents, as well as observers who regularly frequent this annual gathering. Of these traditional healers, two are from

Barangay San Antonio (Centro and Sitio Buac-Bato), one from Barangay Punong, one from Barangay Cantabon (all of the town of Siquijor), and the other from Barangay Timbaon in the neighboring town of San Juan.<sup>6</sup> Each has established a reputation based on his own style and skill in curing illnesses particularly those inflicted either by malevolent spirits or by human beings with the intercession of another *mananambal* through sorcery, a process locally known as *daut*, literally "to destroy." Interestingly, although this is widely believed by the local population, the *mananambal* themselves do not openly admit to practicing sorcery.

For purposes of confidentiality, the names of the healers are withheld. *Mananambal A* from Centro, San Antonio, uses herbal medicine along with *oraciones* (prayers with magical powers) for treatment. According to local respondents, this *mananambal* hexes in favor of his clients but cannot undo the damage he has caused and cure the person whom he has hexed. Informants liken him to

a person who knows how to destroy a house but cannot reconstruct what he has destroyed. According to informants, he would often ask *Mananambal B* to perform the process of reversing the spell, locally known as *badbaron* or *solbaron* (to disentangle the mess). For this inability, *Mananambal A's* healing practice is widely perceived as "fabricated."

*Mananambal B* from Sitio Buac-Bato, San Antonio, uses herbal medicine and *oraciones*. He hexes as well as cures, and informants label him as "incorporated." Patients who believe they are victims of hexing consult him. His work is deemed by his followers as very effective though quite "expensive."

*Mananambal C* comes from Barangay Cantabon. Like the other *mananambal*, he uses herbal medicine and *oraciones*. Informants report that he does not hex but cures patients who have been hexed. In this aspect of healing, he has gained a reputation and patients who are victims of sorcery run to him for help. Nevertheless, he is believed to be well-versed in the trade of sorcery except that

he prefers to spend more time on healing.

*Mananambal D* is based in Barangay Timbaon, San Juan. In his healing practice, he uses herbal medicine mixed with ingredients such as coconut oil and scrapings of blessed candles obtained only from the church. Like his counterparts, he uses ritual prayers (*oraciones*) along with herbal medicine to cure his patients. But unlike the other *mananambal*, he does not hex and is very critical of the healing practices of other healers in the island. He is reportedly adept at getting rid of troublesome spirits (particularly *ingkanto*, *agta*, *duwende*) believed to cast a spell on humans.

*Mananambal E* operates from Barangay Punong. He uses herbal medicine but prefers *oraciones* to cure his patients in a unique procedure that includes making the patient stand in front of a special altar from which, he claims, "X-rays" emit.

To diagnose the ailment, he uses a piece of white paper as a kind of "film" which he positions on the patient's back.

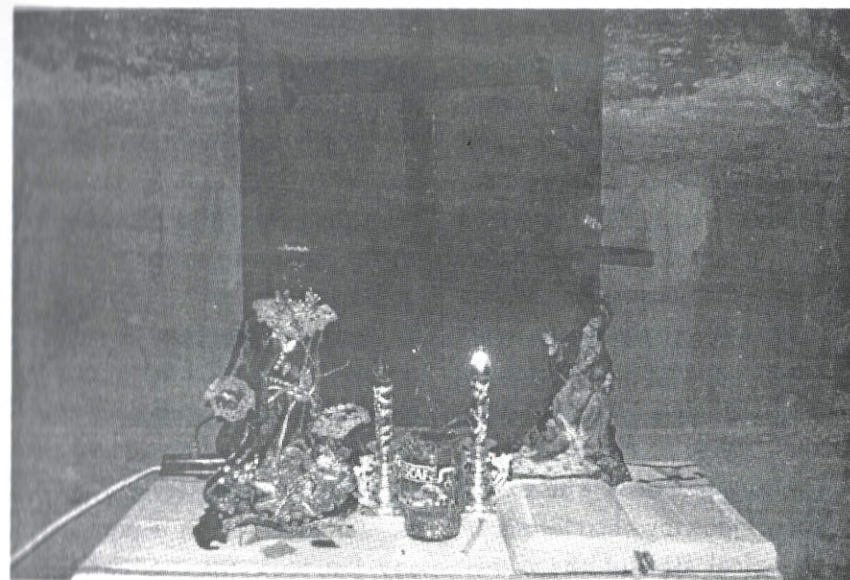


Figure 2: The "X-ray" altar of Mananambal E

He develops this film by drawing the organs and the pathological findings only he can see. After making his diagnoses of the patient's illness, he writes down on a small piece of white paper the *oraciones* that allegedly only he and his mystical partner<sup>7</sup> know. He then rolls the paper, places it inside the glass with water, and then places the glass on the altar. The patient is then made to drink the water that is believed to possess miraculous properties. In addition, this healer is reputedly able to *tag-na* (fore-

see or predict) one's future as well as locate lost or stolen items. He is said to be able to identify the finders of lost items and catch thieves by making them feel guilty for keeping the items and leaving them restless and fearful. If the lost items are not retrieved or returned, he could prescribe concomitant punishments to offenders. Allegedly, he can also exorcise and communicate with land spirits. Besides being a *mananambal*, he also claims to be a *tugaban* (faith healer) with spiritual power.

Except for *Mananambal E* who works without a following, each of the four *mananambal* has a group of men and women healers and apprentice-healers from other places within and outside the island. These four traditional healers are considered the *mananambal-maestro* or *dako-dako* (literally "big-big" or a "big man") for the quality of their *panambal* (healing practice). The size of their following therefore is an indexical sign of the *mananambal's* reputation. The more proficient a *mananambal's* healing practice, the more popular he is and the more followers he has. A *mananambal's* reputation is especially evident in the size of the crowd that gathers at his residence during Holy Week.

### The Holy Week

To the *mananambal* of Siquijor, Holy Week is the most eventful activity of the year. Considered an important Christian celebration, this occasion is the time for folk healers to renew their vows before God, whom they consider the giver of life and source of their

*gabum* (healing power). According to the *mananambal*, this power has been given to them not for their own personal gain but in order to help their fellowmen. Prof. Magos's study on the *ma-aram* (or the traditional healers) in a far-flung *Kinaray-a* community of Antique, Panay, provides some insights into the significance of Holy Week to traditional healers. The study observed that "... Good Friday is a potent day [to look for medicinal plants] because the environmental spirits are believed to be roaming about and it is easier to communicate with them" (1992: 83). It is believed that at this time the doors of the spirit world open and therefore a good moment to connect with essence and commune with nature. Similarly, according to Arens, "...magical powers are given ... especially on Good Friday, so that materials used in magical practice have to be gathered or prepared on this particular day" (1956: 135).

The Holy Week is significant for another reason. It is at this time that new medicine is

prepared or "cooked" and "old medicine" is either discarded or "mixed" with new ones. As the efficacy of new medicine is said to last for a year, a new concoction has to be brewed each year and only during Holy Week. Because these medicinal concoctions made from certain roots, barks, and herbs have to be ritually prepared, they are brewed only by the *mananambal*. The new concoctions are eventually distributed to fellow practitioners and apprentices. Because of the widespread reputation of Siquijor-based *mananambal* in the practice of traditional healing, as well as in both white and malign magic, many *mananambal* from Mindanao, Negros, Panay, and other towns in Siquijor converge in the area in a kind of annual pilgrimage in order to participate in the ritual preparation of healing oils and potions. At the time of the field work, the researchers noted that each group of local *mananambal* hosted about 15 to 25 practitioner-members who in turn came with their assistants and apprentice-healers. One of the *mananambal*, a woman from

Panay who considered herself a specialist in women's illnesses and parturition, had been to the island four times.

The Holy Week rites commence on Holy Thursday with the arrival in the island of visiting *mananambal* at the homes of their host-*mananambal* with whom they have been associated. Some of them are in the island as early as Tuesday or Wednesday. Being an annual event, this occasion is an opportunity for renewing friendships as well as meeting new acquaintances. Visiting *mananambal* bring with them their provision to last for three to four days. These consist of rice, fresh or dried fish, canned sardines, and packed noodles, among others. Food is collectively prepared and meals are served on the long table for all the *mananambal* to share. Each one also brings some of the ingredients needed in the preparation of the medicines that will be cooked on Holy Friday and Black Saturday. These contributions are collected and recorded by a family member of the host-*mananambal*.

### The Rites

The rites performed by the *mananambal* begin with *pangalap*, the annual ritual search for the medicinal materials performed seven Fridays before Good Friday. This is followed by the activity known as *pangadlip*, or the chopping or cutting of the medicinal materials for the preparation of the "evil brew" or *igdalaut*, and the cooking preparation of the counter sorcery called *minasa*.

### The Pangalap

*Pangalap* is part of the vocabulary of the *mananambal's* healing practice (Vista, 1978: 63). As a noun, it refers invariably to the ritual search for special medicinal ingredients that will go into the brew, as well as to the special ingredients themselves, many of which are believed to possess either potent curative or baleful qualities. Its verb form, *mangalap*, refers to the major activity in the *mananambal* healing practice of going out to search and collect these special medicinal materials during the ritually-

specified period of time. This ritual search covers a period of seven Fridays commencing immediately on the Friday after Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, and ending on Good Friday during the Holy Week. According to respondents, the searching, collecting, and stockpiling of the medicinal materials, such as leaves, roots, barks and branches of trees, vines, scrapings of blessed candles, coconut oil, holy water, graveyard sand, and items from the sea are performed during the seven successive Fridays preceding Good Friday. The sources of these medicinal ingredients are forest, the seashore and/or sea, caves, cliffs and riverbanks, churches, and graveyards or cemeteries. In their search for *pangalap*, the *mana-nambal* are careful not to miss a single site.

Since the *mananambal* often have to scrounge the most remote places for their medicinal ingredients, they are said to face some danger along the way. The hazard of this undertaking is vividly described by one *mananambal* who commented that,

*Dili baya lalim ang mangalap. Aduna'y aksidente nagpahipe kanunay. Peligro kon mapa-akan ka'g sawa didto sa lasang ug di kaba layogon ka's mga unggoy*

(It is not a joke to search for medicinal ingredients. One is likely to meet an accident along the way; your life could be in danger from snake bites or monkey attacks in the forest").

For this reason, female *mananambal* usually affiliate themselves with male *mananambal* who undertake this perilous activity on their behalf. For instance, an elderly female *mananambal* from a neighboring town gets her supply from a *mananambal* in Cantabon. She is among the small group of female healers who regularly come to him during the Holy Week. Another female practitioner from Dipolog obtains her herbal medicine from her *maestro* at Barangay Buac-Bato. In this context, *mangalap* can also literally mean "to secure medicine from a *tambalan*."

Thus, "*mangalap mi'g tambal sa Siquijor*" means "we will procure medicine in Siquijor."

Visiting *mananambal* who arrive in the island early join their host-*mananambal* in the search for the remaining ingredients. By dividing among themselves the task involved in the ritual search, visiting *mananambal* ease much of the burden from the *mananambal-maestro*. In an organized division of labor, one group is assigned to conduct the search in the sea or along the seashore. The other group takes care of searching in the caves for *panga-ay* (stalactites and stalagmites). This group has to explore around 25 caves in the island in search of the desired cave materials. Another group is assigned to search in the church premises. While undertaking this ritual search, talk is minimal and the activity is expected to be carried out in secret. Thus, when the *mananambal* accidentally meet each other along the way during the ritual search, they use the term *panginbas* (to collect or glean shellfish as one does during low tide) to metaphorically allude

to their activity and greet each other like this: "*Asa man, manginbas na sab ta?*" (Where to, out to 'glean'?).

Each *mananambal* is expected to gather enough species of plant materials as ingredients for the *minasa*, the antidote for sorcery. For the *mananambal* to be able to collect as many as 100 to 200 herbal materials requires a considerable number of Fridays to spend in the forest. Among the *mananambal-maestro* in Siquijor, *Mananambal C* is believed to mix the largest number of plant species for his medicinal concoctions. Because of his knowledge of herbal medicine, he was hired by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to plant and propagate those species that are becoming extinct. One of his tasks is to maintain the nursery for medicinal plants in Mt. Bandilaan. Although not all *mananambal* are directly involved in the DENR project, they are nevertheless allowed to use the forest resources.<sup>8</sup>

The order of visits to specified geographical sites during the period of search for

the medicinal ingredients is decided by the *mananambal-maestro*. For *Mananambal A* and *B*, the first Friday of the ritual search usually starts in the direction towards the east. On the second Friday, they take a westerly direction, towards the north on the third Friday, and towards the south on the fourth Friday. The remaining three Fridays are scheduled depending on which items in the stockpile are still lacking. For his part, *Mananambal C* spends the first three consecutive Fridays in the forest of Mt. Bandilaan in search of herbs and related materials. The last three Fridays he spends each in the caves, seashores, and church.

Good Friday, the last day of the ritual, search is done in graveyards and is conducted at noontime when no one is usually around cemeteries. Only the *mananambal-maestro* undertakes this particular ritual search which involves collecting sand from the grave, said to contain bits and pieces of human bones. The collection of sand starts from the four secluded corners of the cemetery

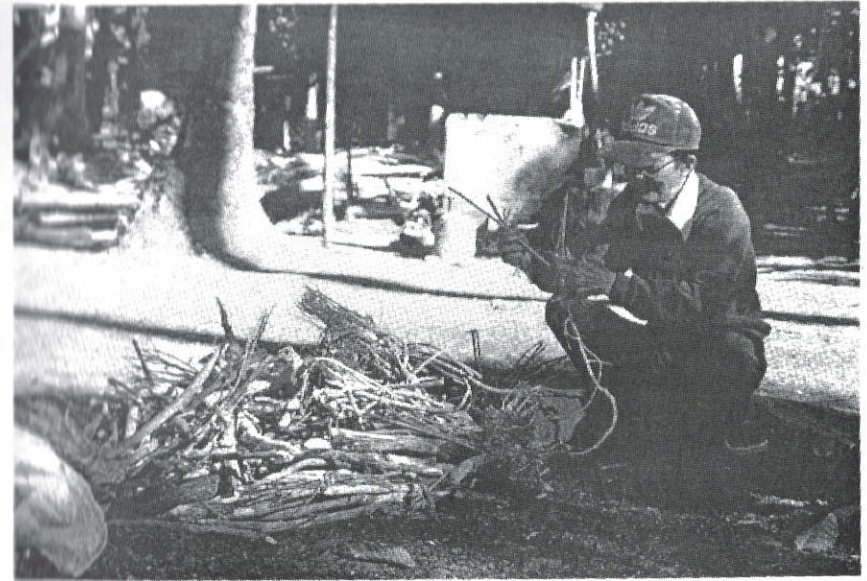


Figure 3: Mananambal-maestro examining items collected during pangalap

and ends at the center where the big cross or chapel is found. Supposedly, this is where the human remains of unknown individuals are kept after these have been exhumed from the grounds. Here, the *mananambal-maestro* offers prayers and lights candles for the repose of the souls. A part of this ritual, strictly observed by the *mananambal-maestro* when he heads home after this task, is silence and avoidance of human interaction along the way. For this reason, he tries as much as

possible to avoid meeting people or talking to anyone.

All herbal medicine collected during the ritual search are stored in a place not far from the *mananambal's* house before these are cut, chopped or shaved into small pieces called *inadlip* (*adlip*: to cut).

During the field work, the researchers noted that *Mananambal A* placed his medicinal collection in a small hut near a pigpen while *Mananambal C* deposited his in the *landaban* (copra dryer) not far

from his house. Meanwhile, *Mananambal B* placed them under his house. For his part, *Mananambal D* placed his collection in a small hut adjacent to his house. Since these medicinal materials are still fresh and have not been processed yet, they are intentionally left outside to dry. It is believed that they lose their curative potency if placed inside the house, as well as make everyone in the house ill due to their still active components.

The collected medicinal herbs are separated according to whether they have healing ("good") or harmful ("bad" or "evil") properties. Since the *mananambal-maestro* is believed to possess a special knowledge about herbal medicine, he takes responsibility for sorting out the herbal materials according to their specific properties and characteristics. In doing this, he takes utmost care that these materials are not mixed up during the *pangalap* as well as during the *pangadlip*. He then proceeds to keep them separately in empty grain-sacks properly marked. This is strictly observed be-

cause although the identified clusters of herbal ingredients undergo the same preparation procedure, they are not processed together. For example, the *inadlip* labeled "good" are burnt or roasted black (*agiwon* or *pagongon*) in a distinct *kawa* (metal wok) separate from those labeled "bad." These charcoal-like materials are then powdered by using a set of pestle and mortar designated for this purpose. The powdered materials are then set aside as ingredients of the *minasa*, the antidote against sorcery. Meanwhile, *inadlip* labeled "bad" also undergo the same process but using a different set of cooking utensils, including the pestle and mortar, likewise especially designated for the purpose. These powdered materials become the ingredients for *igdalaut* (sorcery).

### The Pangadlip

*Pangadlip* is a Holy Thursday activity collectively participated in by men and women *mananambal*, as well as by apprentice-*mananambal* who are followers of a *mananambal-*



Figure 4: Pangadlip: chopping *inadlip* for the *minasa*

*maestro*.

The 1998 research team noted that neither number nor gender determined the composition of participants in the *pangadlip*. For instance, at the house of *Mananambal B*, where the research team had the opportunity to observe the activity, three women and eleven men comprised the *pangadlip* group.

The following account observed from the place of *Mananambal B* and *Mananambal C* will provide a glimpse of the process.

As soon as the group is constituted, all participants pick up a knife and a chopping board and gather around the improvised jute mat placed on the ground by the *mananambal-maestro* to begin the *pangadlip* process. The *mananambal-maestro* "ritually" initiates the process of chopping. From his stockpile he picks one item at a time, a small branch or piece of root, for example, and whittles off three small pieces from it. In a counterclockwise motion, he hands the bigger piece to the person to his right who



does the same thing and then passes this on to the next person. This process continues until the last person in the circle to the *mananambal's* left has gathered all the remaining items handed to him. While this activity progresses, an atmosphere of conviviality takes place as male and female *mananambal* in the circle talk freely and exchange banter while chopping the medicinal materials on the wooden board.

As soon as a large quantity of *inadlip* materials have been prepared and piled, they are collected by the assistants and brought to the cooking field for further processing. They are then roasted or burnt to charcoal in a large metal wok, a process called *agiwon*, *ulingon* or *pagongon*. The burnt materials are then powdered and stored inside a big barrel and covered with elephant leaves locally known as *badjang* or *badyang* (*Alocasia macrorrhiza* (L.) Schott.). The leaves are secured with a strip of bamboo vine tied around the barrel as rope. About 10 kilos of powdered stuff are stored in this container as medicinal ingredi-

ents.

Meanwhile, those *mananambal* who are not directly involved in the roasting and powdering of the wood and herbal chips continue with *pangadlip*. The remaining *inadlip* are then stashed away by the *mananambal* for their own *panambal* or home remedy. Extra cuts or shavings are collected at the house of the *mananambal-maestro* and sold to visitors who want to place them in bottles filled with *lana* (coconut oil) or use them as ingredients in tonic drinks which are believed to be physically invigorating.

There are two sets of medicinal concoctions prepared by the *mananambal* and his apprentice during Holy Week. The first brew, the *igdalaut*, is "cooked" during Good Friday and contains the maleficent ingredients<sup>9</sup> collected by the *mananambal* from various *pangalap* sites mentioned earlier. The second brew, cooked during Black Saturday, is the *minasa* or *panagang*, a concoction of various ingredients collected by the *mananambal-maestro* and his assistants during the



Figure 5: Cooking the *igdalaut*

*pangalap* and considered as a potent *panagang* or antidote against sorcery.

#### The Evil Brew or *Igdalaut*

As the term suggests, the *igdalaut* or evil brew is made from ingredients with maleficent properties collected by the *mananambal* from various *pangalap* sites. It is cooked during Good Friday in a small new earthen cooking pot specifically designated for the purpose of sorcery.

This particular cooking

pot is never used again and is disposed of by destroying and burying it in a place far from human activity. The first set of ingredients to be added in the brew includes *pangalap sa dagat ug baybayon* (*pangalap* from the sea and seashore) which, until they are ready for processing, are stored in a sealed bamboo container known as *sugong*. Among these are *tuyom* (sea urchins), *coroscoros* (starfish), *bukya* or *bulbog* (jellyfish), *botbot* (a species of sea anemone), *bagbabag* (*Synapta* sp.), and species of *botete* fish (Tetra-

odontida), crabs, and algae from the sea. These ingredients share some things in common—they are either poisonous, spiny, or prickly creatures from the sea. As soon as the *pangalat sa dagat ug baybayon* have been placed in the pot, they are mixed with the *inagiw* or *pinagong*, the powdered burnt chips and shavings of herbal materials which have harmful effects.

Coconut oil extracted from a lone coconut fruit facing westward is then added. The significance attributed to this particular coconut in folk medicine stems from the belief that a lone coconut that matured singly rather than in a bunch, in a branch facing the west, augers death and is therefore effective for malignant purposes. This concept is reinforced in sorcery by the equally pervasive belief that the west is an unpropitious direction since it is where the sun sets and thus symbolizes death. Furthermore, this special coconut fruit must be picked from the tree and never allowed to drop onto the ground. Consequently, an able assistant of the

*mananambal* has to get the fruit by climbing the tree, taking extra care when descending. In addition, certain taboos have to be observed during the processing of this nut. For instance, the meat should never be eaten nor its water contents drunk. The *sapal*, (desiccated byproduct left after extracting the coconut milk), should be buried in a safe place and not given as feed to hogs as usually practiced with ordinary coconuts. Likewise, the *lunok* (greasy substances that solidify before oil comes out during cooking) is disposed of by burying. Violation of these taboos is believed to cause sickness or misfortune. Meanwhile, the husks and shells are used for fuel in the *palina* (fumigation or smudging).

As observed by the research team, the cooking schedule varied according to the *mananambal-maestro's* discretion. During the 1998 field work, for example, the cooking of the *igdalaut* was set on Good Friday at 12:00 noon. In 1999, however, the cooking at *Mananambal-maestro B's* house was set at about 5:00 in the

afternoon and spectators, including some people from the media, who stayed to watch were told to come back the following day, Black Saturday, to observe the activity supposedly designed especially for the public. The cooking of the *igdalaut* brew was conducted in a secluded wooded place and attended by very few practitioners, all of them male.<sup>10</sup> The cooking pot was placed over a small makeshift stove made up of three large stones positioned like a tripod between which fire was continuously burning. This improvised stove was located between two other stoves of piled rocks big enough to fit a large *kawa*. The three stoves were arranged in a triangle. The stove designated for the "evil brew" was positioned at the far end pointing westward.

The following is a description of the *pangdaut* or *igdalaut* ritual performed by *Mananambal C* and recorded in the field work data gathered by Mascuñana in 1999.

The first to cook are the items taken from the sea, *mga katol sa dagat* described earlier, whose special properties are

believed to cause an itch. Next, coconut oil extracted from a nut hanging singly from a branch facing westward is added. As the cooking progresses and the powdered *inagiw* from chips marked "evil" are added to the preparation, the contents of the pot are continuously stirred to ensure a well-blended mixture. The next ingredients to be added are those items from the sea believed to have poisonous or baneful properties, *mga dautan ug lala sa dagat*. After its contents have been poured into the pot, the bamboo container on which these items have been kept is then thrown away. Finally, sand taken from the cemetery, purportedly symbolizing death, is added to the mixture.

The smell emanating from this cooking is overpowering. At the time of his field research in 1999, Mascuñana was given the leaves of *pabiuli* or *pabauli* (scientific name not available) to protect himself from the toxic smell. The leaves have medicinal properties and when they are squeezed their sap emits a pleasant and thera-

peutic aroma. When the squeezed leaves are inserted in one's nostrils, they dispel the noxious odor and relieve the person of the debilitating effect of the brew. During the cooking, a spectator who saw the cooked brew commented: "It's all black and looks evil," while no less than the *mananambal-maestro* himself exclaimed, "*Kining bubata gabom ni Satanas*" (This is Satan's work). Before the pot is taken out from the stove, its mouth is covered with the leaves of *badyang*, an itchy plant, which are fastened in place with a strip of banana stalk and wound tightly around the neck of the pot. The pot containing the brew is never placed in the house but isolated in a safe place as far away as possible from the *mananambal's* residence, for it is believed that it will make everyone, including animals, ill. According to Lieban's study, "these ingredients in... sorcery rituals possess a potency whose action is automatic and amoral" (1967: 42).

*Mananambal C* made this brew available to anyone inter-

ested for a small fee especially to those who have no sufficient knowledge to prepare the concoction themselves. As the *mananambal* themselves professed, the brew is used only as the need arises, for example, "as a means of direct aggression against those who antagonize or injure him/[her]" (Leiban 1967: 34).

### The *Minasa* or *Panagang*

The second brew is the *minasa*. Like the "evil brew," it is prepared but once a year, but unlike the former, the cooking is done specifically on Black Saturday, and its purpose, ingredients, as well as the process of its preparation differ significantly from the *igdalaut* brew. The word *minasa* comes from the Cebuano root word, *masa*, meaning "to mix." As a medicinal preparation, it is widely believed to be a potent *panagang* or antidote against sorcery. Among its ingredients are the roasted and powdered *inadlip* from herbal medicine labeled "good." *Minasa* is used for various medical home remedies such as *palina* or *tu-ob*,



Figure 6: Ingredients for the *minasa*

that is, to "smoke away" the illness or to drive away evil spirits, and can be done without the assistance of the *mananambal*. *Minasa* is also believed to possess healing properties. Popularly used as *habak* (amulet), it is usually inlaid in a bullet shell or stitched into a small pouch of cloth tied around the neck or waist. As *anting-anting*, it is believed to bring good luck during cockfighting, fishing, and planting crops.

Although the *minasa* is cooked only on Black Saturday, the specific time for cooking

varies from *mananambal* to *mananambal*. In 1998, for instance, *Mananambal A* performed his *minasa* ritual at 6:00 in the morning of Black Saturday. On the other hand, *Mananambal B* carried out his ritual cooking at 10:00 in the morning which allowed the team to observe part of the ritual. Perhaps because of the time, the house of *Mananambal B* was crowded with visitors including media people, who recorded the event on video camera, and foreign tourists who took photographs of the



Figure 7: Cooking the minasa

activity.

Meanwhile, the *minasa* ritual at *Mananambal C* started shortly after lunch and there the research team was able to watch the observance in its entirety. Also because of the time, the house of *Mananambal C* was likewise crowded with people, including the place where the cooking was to be done. The ritual cooking of *minasa* started at about 1:00 in the afternoon at the same secluded wooded area where the *igdalaut* was cooked the day before. Two large *kawa* were set

over the cooking stove as assistants and other *mananambal*, all male, prepared the ingredients. Unlike at the *pangadlip* where both men and women participate, the *minasa* ritual appears to be a predominantly male activity. Although women-*mananambal* participated in the chopping of candles<sup>11</sup> in the cooking area, they remained on the sidelines as plain observers during the cooking of the *minasa*.

The *minasa* ritual described below was observed at the house of *Mananambal C*



Figure 8: Distributing the minasa

during the 1998 and 1999 field work. The sequence of the activity has been cross-checked with the video documents taken in 1998 by Schales.

The first ingredients placed in the metal wok are *suka* (vinegar) and *tuba* (fermented coconut wine). As the mixture is brought to a boil over medium- to high heat, it is stirred slowly but constantly with the use of a long-handled coconut shell ladle.

As soon as the mixture boils, pieces of *kabulay* (honeycombs) are dropped into it and

*dugos* (honey) is poured into the cooking vessel. The next ingredients to be added are the items from the sea, *mga dautan*, *katol ug lala sa dagat*, which have been combined together and are in a state of decomposition by this time. The assistants of the *mananambal-maestro* constantly stir the contents as the blessed candles, incense, holy oil, and other items obtained from the church are added. Then *lana* (coconut oil), extracted from a lone nut facing eastward (*silangan* or *sidlakan*),<sup>12</sup> is added. As the pow-

dered *inagiw* from the "good" chips are added to the concoction, the mixture is stirred continuously as the cooking progresses. Finally, the last ingredient, sand taken from the cemetery, is added. While still hot, the cooked *minasa* is fluid-to jelly-like and gradually solidifies as it cools.

When the cooking is finally over, *Mananambal C* calls for silence in preparation for the benediction and then blesses the *minasa* with holy water obtained from the church. As he sprinkles holy water into each of the cooking woks, he recites the following prayer loudly:

*Dungan sa pagisong sa atong  
Ginoo,  
Tambal akong gimugna ug  
pabendicionan Kanimo...  
Sa ngalan sa Amahan, Sa  
Anak, ug Sa Dios Espiritu  
Santo...*

Together with the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
I humbly ask Thou Lord,  
that Thou bless this  
medicine that I had prepared/made...

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit... (Free translation)

After the ceremony, the *mananambal-maestro* starts distributing the *minasa*.

The names of each *mananambal* are called one by one and their contributions to the preparation of the *minasa*, such as the blessed candles, *tuba* or vinegar, honey, honeycomb, and the like are acknowledged. As each member's name and contribution are mentioned by the record-keeper, he/she comes forward with a container (tin cans or plastic) to claim his/her share of the concoction. Members of the group (*mananambal* and apprentice) whose names are listed in a notebook by the daughter of *Mananambal C* are the first to receive their portion of the *minasa*. The quantity of *minasa* that one receives is in proportion to one's contribution, i.e., the more contribution, the bigger the share. Those who give more, for instance, may get as much as three to four scoops of *minasa*

to last them till the following Holy Week. Those members who provided labor in the preparation of the medicine are the next to be served. They include those who were involved in procuring some of the items during the *pangalap* for six consecutive Fridays. Each gets a couple of scoops. After all the members have been served, spectators and other individuals get their turn to obtain their share of *minasa* by contributing an amount of PhP5.00 or more. Usually everyone receives a scoop of *minasa*. It must be mentioned, however, that although the *mananambal-maestro* does not put a set price on this medicine, the quantity of *minasa* that one can have is also in proportion to the amount of individual donation. To facilitate the collection of the contribution, the amount is put inside the owner's empty container, a small tin can or coconut shell. Mainly because the *minasa* is prepared only once a year, participants and observers are equally eager to get their share of the present concoction.<sup>13</sup>

The *minasa* ritual of

*Mananambal C* finally ended at about 5:00 in the afternoon. At this time the crowd slowly dispersed and the ritual place became deserted. Also at this time, nonresident *mananambal* started packing their things and prepared for the trip home. Before leaving, they checked their supply of *inadlip* and other medicinal herbs to make sure they have enough to last a year until the next Holy Week. Spiritually invigorated and restocked with the essential paraphernalia for their healing practice, the *mananambal* finally headed home. The effectiveness of their *panambal*, according to Pontiñela and Reynolds, "...depends upon the amount [*sic*] of belief the people themselves have in these beliefs and practices" (1971: 95).

An interesting incident that happened after this particular ceremony in the house of *Mananambal C* in 1998 is worth mentioning here for its glimpse into some aspects of the healing beliefs and practices of the *mananambal*. This story was shared with the crowd by the *mananambal-*

*maestro* and one of the visiting *mananambal* from Zamboanga del Norte. This story revolved around an incident that happened the night before Good Friday of 1998. This story is worth telling and here are some of the salient details of that narrative, in free translation, as recounted by the *mananambal*:

The daughter of a prominent family and politician in the province of Siquijor fell victim to the mischief of some spirits (*engkanto*) and disappeared mysteriously for some time. It was reported that earlier in the afternoon, she came to the house of *Mananambal C* to accompany a group of media people who wanted to cover the ritual activity. During this time, she was seen with her friends in the very same wooded place where the cooking was done. Before her mysterious disappearance, she was seen by some people swinging the vines dangling from the big trees in the area. Ac-

ording to some witnesses, she exhibited rather strange behavior and showed signs of not being in her proper mind. Later, she was reportedly spotted walking away from her companions, heading toward a narrow dirt road seemingly without direction. When the *mananambal* learned of this incident, they secretly performed a ritual among themselves designed to overpower the *engkanto* believed to have abducted the victim. It was almost dark when she was finally recovered, looking physically exhausted. According to the *mananambal*: "Had the rescue come later, it would have been difficult to save her once the *engkanto* had her completely under their spell.... This area has lots of caves and we don't know which cave to go to. Besides, it was already getting dark. This is the first time that an incident of this kind happened

here." A *palina* (ritual fumigation) was immediately performed to relieve the victim of baneful influence. To protect her from the *engkanto*, she was made to wear a *habak* (amulet), especially prepared by the *mananambal-maestro*.

Whether this incident did indeed happen is a matter of speculation, but to the group of *mananambal* and their followers, there was no question in their minds that it was real.

#### ***Inadlip* and Other Uses**

The leftover *inadlip* can be used for other purposes. For example, some of the "good" *inadlip* that are not used in the preparation of the *minasa* are placed in small plastic bags and sold at the *mananambal's* house. They may be mixed with inexpensive alcoholic drinks such as *Vino Kulafu* or *ginebra* to make an invigorating drink. When taken before meals and before going to bed, a spoonful of this drink is believed to restore one's health and vitality. Consequently, this drink is espe-

cially recommended for the elderly. It is replenished by continually adding liquor into the bottle.

Leftover *inadlip* may also be used as ingredients for the *sagradong lana* (sacred oil). Prepared by the *mananambal*, this medicinal concoction is made from oil extracted from a *bugtong* (lone coconut fruit) facing east. According to Arens (1956), "...[t]he best time for picking the coconut fruit is at twilight and in weather that suggested loneliness. The sea breeze should give a chilling touch and the moon should shine like a perfect marble ball" (1971: 99). However, since most people do not have the time to look for this special coconut fruit, they would rather buy ready-made medicinal oil prepared by the *mananambal*.

Nevertheless, while some people prefer to buy only the *lana* (oil) without the *inadlip* ingredients, others choose to buy only the *inadlip* materials and mix them with homemade oil later. The *inadlip* have to be dried first before they are mixed with coconut oil, pref-

erably extracted from a single coconut facing eastward. The mixture (*inadlip* and oil) is ready for use after six to seven days. According to *Mananambal-maestro C*, any homemade oil may be mixed with the *inadlip* as long as the oil used is not from a bunch of nuts facing west. There is no taboo in using the same homemade oil to fill the medicinal oil (i.e., combined *inadlip* and blessed oil) originally obtained from the *mananambal* during the Holy Week. According to the *mananambal*, the medicinal oil will remain potent.

During the 1999 field work, *Mananambal C* showed the container of his medicinal oil, an old liquor bottle containing *inadlip* of various herbal ingredients. According to him, he inherited this bottle from his wife's maternal grandfather who was a *bantugang mananambal* (noted healer) in Siquijor in the past. The curative power of this medicinal oil is enhanced by adding more oil and *inadlip* to the bottle during Holy Week. From this "mother container" small bot-

les of oil about the size of a 25 ml Efficascent or Johnson's Baby Oil bottle are made available to interested parties.<sup>14</sup> According to *Mananambal C*, a few drops of this sacred oil on the *minasa* during *palina* or fumigation will prove efficacious in warding off evil spirits. This oil is also believed to possess healing properties capable of curing *buyag-buyag* (skin rashes, itchiness, skin eruptions, and skin pain inflicted by displeased or malevolent spirits) by massaging a few drops of it on the inflicted part. It could likewise be used for external purposes as *haplas* (lotion) on any skin disorder caused by insect bites. If internal ailments, such as poisoning or stomach problems occur, a drop of this oil mixed in a small amount of warm water may be taken. Allegedly, this oil will bubble when witches or *dautang espiritu* are in the vicinity of the victim. Its special properties are said to make the witch feel uneasy and itch all over the body thus driving her/him away from the holder of this oil. A similar effect is said to be felt by a *bilolan*, a practi-

tioner of sorcery who uses certain methods of magical poisoning techniques called *bilo* (poison) to destroy his victim (Lieban 1967: 22; 36). A few drops taken orally, this oil is said to be an antidote against this kind of poisoning.

### Afterword

Given the widespread popularity among traditional healers of this annual event, it is not surprising that the Siquijor Holy Week rites attract not only old-timers but new faces as well. Just as conspicuous at this event is the absence of familiar faces. For instance, the 1999 research noted that two of *Mananambal B's* disciples whom the 1998 research team met were not present for that year's celebration. Yet, even if there were other reasons for this absence, for traditional healers steeped in the well-known Siquijor lore, there is only one explanation: death by sorcery. Since it is widely accepted that a *mananambal* will never try to miss this important event, his absence could only be due to his untimely death. Thus, the

group of healers who provided Mascuñana with information were convinced of only one thing—that the two missing *mananambal* in the 1999 Holy Week celebration could have fallen victims to malign magic or sorcery. *Mananambal B* opined that this might have happened because the *mananambal* were still neophytes in the art of healing and were unable to protect themselves from possible counter-sorcery. He speculated that the illness the missing *mananambal* had caused on someone may have been cast back (*gisumbalikan*) at them by another more powerful *mananambal*.

This belief persists even more strongly to the present time not only among the circle of traditional healers but their followers as well. Similarly, the Holy Week rites and rituals have been passed on from one generation of *mananambal* to the next, surviving in time with expected variants as new and younger generation of *mananambal* takes over the trade, and modern technology such as the media continues to encroach into the

ritual field, attracting even more followers and believers. Interestingly, the entry of television and film has given these once hallowed rituals both national and international attention, winning for them not only a growing following but also serious academic interest from scholars and researchers fascinated by the subject. For their part, the *mananambal* themselves seemed to have understood fully the implication of media presence on their reputation and appeared to have taken advantage of this media exposure to add a bit of show effects on their rituals. It is too early for this paper to speculate on the extent of media influence on the changes that have taken place in the ritual practices, but it is mentioned here to provoke interest on the subject and suggest further directions for investigation and discussion. A critical study of these vital interconnections will be the topic of the next paper on this subject.

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*mananambal* for making themselves available for observation and interview and for allowing the team to take photos and video coverage of their respective ritual practices. Without their kind cooperation this study would not have been possible. Narciso Omandam of Barangay Cantabon, Siquijor, a close relative of one of the *mananambal*, shared his insights with us about *panambal* in the locality. Special thanks go to our research student assistants, Demberge A. Caballes, Alex S. Baena, and Mark Percy L. Abjelina, for their invaluable assistance during the field work. Similar thanks also go to Ruel Acain, our transport driver and new friend, who provided able direction and useful information which facilitated visits to our respondents on schedule. Dr. Christian K. Schales, a colleague and member of the team, deserves most of the credit for generously sharing his resources that inaugurated this research project, his professional expertise, and encouragement.

### Notes

- \* Photos and digital imaging are by Christian K. Schales.
1. The research team was composed of Dr. Christian Karl Schales, Prof. Rolando V. Mascuñana, Dr. Ceres E. Pioquinto, and two student assistants, Demberge A. Caballes and Alex S. Baena. The first field work was conducted in Siquijor during the Holy Week, April 9 to 12, 1998. The following year, Holy Week of April 1 to 3, 1999, a follow-up observation by Mascuñana and a graduate student assistant, Mark Percy L. Abjelina, provided additional information to the previous data set gathered in 1998. During this field work, the researcher and his assistant lived in the house of one of the respondent-*mananambal* and carried out the research using the participant-observation technique. This time, visiting *mananambal* were included as respondents but their responses are not yet presented in this report.
  2. Elderly beach personnel at

Little Islander's Paradise Beach in Sandugan, Larena, also provided valuable information. The driver of our hired jeepney was also a good source of information having driven patients to the *mananambal* in the past.

3. The town of Siquijor is the capital of the province. It is the largest and the most populated of the six municipalities. It became a municipality and the first parish to be established by the Spaniards on the island in 1794 although as early as 1790, the Spanish priests were already in the island. As population increased, Siquijor's barrios grew into towns and parishes. One is Cano-an, also Can-oan, now the town of Larena (1836) named after the late Governor Demetrio Larena of Negros Oriental. The town of San Juan (1863) was formerly called Campilay, Capilay, also Macalipay. The municipality of Maria (1877) was known as Cangmeniac. Enrique Villanueva (1925), named after former Legislator Enrique Villanueva from



Negros, was originally called Talingting (after the bird). At that time, it was a barrio of Cano-an. Cano-an grew to become the town of Larena today. The town of Lazi (1857) used to be called by the natives as Cantambo or Tigbawan, after a species of tall grass (*Saccharum spontaneum* L.), that thrived in sandy or gravelly soils in Lazi's bay. The word Lazi is a phonetic corruption of the Spanish "La C," believed to have been derived from the town's shoreline which appeared to form the letter "C."

4. Earlier studies done on Barangay San Antonio included the 1991-1995 field research of Kazutoshi Seki, an assistant professor in the Institute of History and Anthropology of Tsukuba, Japan. Mascañana had the opportunity to meet Seki, who, prior to his 1991 research in Siquijor, visited the Silliman University Anthropology Museum to look for available information about the island, as well as view the museum's ethno-medical

collection from Siquijor. Seki, who spent a total of twelve months within a five-year period (1991-1995) of research, was invited on one occasion to give a lecture about his island experience and research in Mascañana's Folklore class at Silliman.

5. More *mananambal* have been identified in the 1999 observation.

6. For confidentiality, the names of the respondent-*mananambal* are not divulged in this study. Mention, however, is made of the place where the respondents live.

7. Usually a spirit (*engkanto* or *ingkanto*) with whom the *mananambal* has a friendly relationship. They are believed to act as the supernatural sponsor and spirit guide of the *mananambal* and the source of his power to diagnose and cure ailments. However, they are alleged to also cause illness and death on someone on the intercession of the *mananambal*. One may enlist the help of the spirits or *engkanto* by offering them rituals or sacrifices.

The *mananambal* has a yearly obligation to perform offerings so that the relationship is maintained. Patrons of *mananambal* also include God, Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary, Sto. Niño, and other saints.

8. For more information on the ritual search of *pangalap*, refer to Vista's detailed study (1978: 69-72).

9. Among these plants considered are: *alipata* (*Excoecaria agallocha*), *badyang* (*Alocasia macrorrhiza* (L.) Shott.), *bagacay* (*Schizostachyum dielsianum*), *balalanti* (*Macaranga tanarius*), *balikbalik* (*Croton* sp.), *gabi* (*Colocasia esculenta* (L.) Schott.), *gusoguso* (*Euphorbia tirucalli* L.), *kanomay* (*Diospyros multiflora*), *mangungkong* (*Celtis luzonica*), and *sorosoro* (*Euphorbia neriifolia* L.).

10. Mascañana counted 18 male participants composed of 11 adults (including the researcher and his student assistant and a cousin of the student assistant) and seven children.

11. The candles used for this

purpose have to be blessed during the February Feast of the *Candelaria* or Candlemas, a Catholic religious festival in honor of the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple (also the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin), when candles are blessed before mass every February 2. As an official rite, "The Blessing of the Candles," takes place forty days after the birth of Christ. Traditionally, these blessed candles were meant to be lit in the event of a calamity or epidemic such as thunder, lightning, fire, or earthquake for the protection of the family.

12. It is considered a propitious direction where the sun rises. It symbolically means rebirth or a "new life" and hope. Extra care is also observed that, when harvesting, the nut should not fall to the ground. No taboos, however, are observed when this nut is processed. The meat and the water are considered therapeutic. The *sapal* are good for the hogs. The *lunok* is medicinal as

well. The husks and shells are considered good fuel for *palina* while the shells can be made into pendants for amulets (luck, charm, or protection).

13. In the 1998 research, both Mascuñana and Pioquinto were each able to get a scoop of *minasa* from *Mananambal B* and *C*.

14. In 1999 Mascuñana was able to obtain a small bottle of this oil from *Mananambal C*. During the 1998 research, both Mascuñana and Pioquinto were able to obtain some oil sample from *Mananambal D* of San Juan.

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