

**MARITIME HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE VISAYAS:  
A PROLOGUE TO THE HISTORY OF THE ISLANDS  
IN THE SEAS**

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**ABSTRACT**

**T**his paper is a modest attempt to offer a new framework for the writing of a "total" national history, one that underscores the role of the sea as a factor in the historical development of a region. Following the trend in modern historiography inspired by Fernand Braudel, the discussion in this paper uses the maritime perspective as analytical framework for the reconstruction of the history of the Visayas. Thus, as a starting point for the construction of a historical discourse, this work explores the role of the bodies of water surrounding the Visayas Islands in the development of the region. Intended as an introductory essay of an ambitious project on the history of the Visayas, this study also examines the folklore and etymologies about the Visayan Islands.

*Everything must be recaptured and relocated in the general framework of history, so that despite the difficulties, the fundamental paradoxes and contradictions, we may respect the unity of history, which is also the unity of life.*

**Fernand Braudel**

**Introduction**

This paper intends to provide the introductory background for the development of a total history of the region.<sup>1</sup> Proceeding from the view that regional history is an aspect of national, and indeed, of world history, this paper will attempt to synthesize the history of the Visayas towards the ultimate goal of crafting a National History. The direct aim of this endeavor is to set a paradigm for the writing of the history of a whole geographic region that will contribute to the writing of a total national history. The author argues that prior to the writing of a National History, regional

history must first be developed. In pursuing this endeavor, the New Historicist framework, in particular its multi/interdisciplinary approach, provides the theoretical groundwork for the examination of the history of the Visayas.

Fernand Braudel's incredible reconstruction of history in his monumental work, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philippe II* provides the analytical underpinnings for this endeavor, in particular his proposal for a global vision of history and his call for "historians who are ambitious."<sup>2</sup> For Braudel, this new breed of historians, receptive to and challenged by his method of converging and drawing on all disciplines, will tell of a history that not only calls on witness accounts and psychology but also on geography, political economics, and sociology.<sup>3</sup> New history, as championed by the Annales School and evident in Braudel's approach, has its philosophical roots in the idea that reality is socially or culturally constituted. Central in its philosophy is the widely popular, if radical, notion that the historical world was created out of perceptions, not out of events, and the whole of history was a construct of human impressions. The sharing of this idea or assumption by many social historians and social anthropologists may explain the recent convergence between these two disciplines and other allied disciplines and the expanding dialogue among them. According to Burke, this relativism also undermines the traditional distinction between what is central in history and what is peripheral.<sup>4</sup>

But of more significance, in particular, for the purposes of this paper, is Braudel's view that Mediterranean history is an aspect of world history. In developing this theme, Braudel saw human history as basically a record of technology and exchange. To him, the core of human history is the history of technological mastery and the development of the skills basic to ancient civilization, namely: fire and water technology, pottery, weaving, metalworking, seafaring, and finally, writing. In emphasizing the physical realities of early civilizations, Braudel has enabled generations of readers and scholars to have a glimpse of the actual quality of life with such vividness that few other studies have done. Corollary to this theme, Braudel also explored the importance of exchange, particularly long-distance exchange. According to him, "Our sea

intercourse continues to link the peoples of the islands starting long before the Hispanic time. Geographically, the Visayas is a group of islands located near the center of the Philippine archipelago. It includes the larger islands already mentioned above, as well as the smaller islands of Biliran, Guimaras, and Siquijor and the numerous adjacent islets.<sup>6</sup>

The Visayas is classified as one of the major geographic regions of the Philippines due to its considerable homogeneity by virtue of location, proximity to each other, climate, ethnolinguistic characteristics, geology, history, and cultural affinity. Lying between the two largest Philippine islands, the Visayan Islands are separated from the other major islands of the Philippines by the relatively broad and deep water bodies of the Sulu and Mindanao Seas in the islands of Mindanao, and the Visayan Sea from Luzon islands. The Pacific Ocean forms the eastern boundaries and all approaches to the region from the Pacific pass through the straits of San Bernardino and Surigao. Separating the islands from each other are the Samar Sea, Camotes Sea, Leyte Gulf, Panay Sea, Tañon Strait, Guimaras Strait, San Juanico Strait, Bohol Strait, Ilo-Ilo Strait, and Pana-on Strait.<sup>7</sup> The Visayan Sea connects to the Sibuyan Sea to the northwest, the Samar Sea to the Northeast, the Camotes Sea to the southeast, the Bohol Sea to the southwest via the Tañon Strait, and the Panay Gulf to the southwest via the Guimaras Strait.<sup>8</sup>

### **Visayas Islands**

Tracing the etymology of the term "Visayas" is fundamental in the study of the region's history. This may seem easy since this region is all too well known, and voluminous publications have already been done about the area.<sup>9</sup>

However, charting the origin of the term "Visayas" may pose a challenge. For instance, a two-volume dictionary compiled by John U. Wolf of Cornell University's Southeast Asia Program entitled *A Dictionary of Cebuano Visayan* includes neither the term Visayas nor an entry of any word starting with letter "V". On the other hand, a widely circulating, and all too familiar, version is that the word Visayas originated from Sri Vijaya in reference to the Sri Vijaya Empire, the once dominant maritime power in



theast Asia. How this came to be, however, still requires a convincing explanation. If indeed it came from the term Vijaya,<sup>10</sup> it was believed that the empire's hegemony reached this part of the archipelago at its peak,<sup>11</sup> then why is it that of all the islands and regions that must have been surely reached by this empire, only this particular area got labeled as such?

Scholars have likewise found tracing the etymologies of names and terms used especially during the Pre-Hispanic period especially problematic endeavor because of the varying scope and contexts in which these terms occurred as well as the differing interpretations attributed to them. For example, the term *indio* used by Columbus in the Americas had been translated as "Indians" by Anglo Saxon scholars. In the Philippines, *indio* referred to a native of the place and was the common name applied to indigenous inhabitants of this region. Historical accounts show that when the Spaniards discovered the cultural differences among the islanders, they began to use other descriptive terms based on their own visible physical attributes or practices, such as tattoos, to describe specific groups. Hence the term *Pintados* came to be applied to the Visayans, who were heavily tattooed. Yet still, the term *Pintados* became unpopular and was ultimately changed to *Visayas*. It should also be noted that at one point the *Pintados* were also referred to as *viseys*.<sup>12</sup> It is obvious in this context that the problem lies in the use of autonyms and exonyms. The former are names individual groups use to describe themselves, i.e. *Bisaya*, while the latter are descriptive designations externally imposed by outsiders, such as the Spaniards.<sup>13</sup>

Another interesting development supporting the link of the origin of the word Visayas to the Sri-Vijayan Empire is the ongoing study of the Laguna Copper Plate Inscription which favors to find evidence supporting the trade contacts between the Philippines and the Sri-Vijayan empire.<sup>14</sup> Findings from this study show that Tondo, Manila, and Bulacan were part of the trading network of the empire. If that indeed was the case, why come these places were not labeled as Visayas? The continuing search for answers to these questions is leading studies back to an earlier period when Chinese connection is believed to have preceded the Sri Vijayan connection.



*P'i-sho-ye* or *Pi-shioh-ya*, an earlier term associated with Visayas appeared in Chao Ju Kua's *Chu Fan Chin*.<sup>15</sup> Another term, *Pi-sho-ya*, was mentioned in Wang Da Yuan's book and defined as "a nook to the east of the sea." It is difficult to ascertain the origin or meaning of the term but its syllables suggest some close connection to the term Visayas. But as to which term came first remains problematic. In addition, the practice of replacing Chinese words with their Philippine counterpart had led to many misinterpretations and in the end caused more problems than it had solved.<sup>16</sup>

An interesting comment from these sources depicts the inhabitants as having tattooed bodies, fierce, and given to robbing and pillaging.<sup>17</sup>

On another note, the various theories about the peopling of the Philippines offer another angle regarding the origin of the word Visayas. The original form of the term seems to have been *bisaya* and a closer examination of the various meanings associated with it may offer new explanations. In one of the more recent definitions of the word, the term *bisaya* refers to "*a smaller, ordinary mongrel variety of things especially domestic animals or cultivated plants.*"<sup>18</sup> Among natives of this region, *bisaya* is always associated with something common, short in stature, primitive, native, ordinary, among others. This is best demonstrated in the expression, "*Baling Bisaya-a Bay.*"<sup>19</sup> This definition is based on an accepted fact existing within a particular cultural milieu. Taking this cue, one may infer that this might have been originally an autonym that became an exonym.

Another angle from which the origin of the word may be viewed is the trading patterns of Southeast Asia. This point of view offers new ways of understanding Philippine pre-Hispanic history and the complex migration processes and modes of exchange. In this context, the word *bisaya* may have evolved as a result of the migratory processes. Whether one believes in Beyer's theory of migration or E. A. Manuel's Philippineasian theory,<sup>20</sup> it is important to underscore that a group of people known as *Bisaya* have been living in the island of Borneo. To be specific, these tribes are classified as part of the Bumiputera<sup>21</sup> groups in Malaysia. Known as *Bisayah* in Sarawak and *Bisaya* in western Sabah,

... inhabit the stretches along the Limbang River, which flow to Brunei Bay. Because of this, they are often called "people of middle" or "people of the river."<sup>22</sup>

It may also be conjectured that this ethnic group from Borneo or Sarawak started the autonym *Bisaya* when they crossed the seas in search of a better life. As they arrived in these parts, they introduced plants and animals which eventually became native to the region. Furthermore, the practice of body tattooing was widespread not only among the early Visayans but also among the natives of the nearby islands of Makasar and Ternate thus suggesting the close relationship between the inhabitants of these islands and the Visayans.<sup>23</sup>

Among the varying versions, one description of *bisaya* appears plausible, thus:

... a generic term applying not only to the Cebuano but to the other ethnic language groups in the Visayas. Though it is uncertain, it is probably linked either to the word meaning "slaves" or to the word meaning "beautiful" which was how a Bornean Sultan described the islands, according to a popular tale.<sup>24</sup>

Another worthy version is the version that says that it originated from the Indian Sanskrit word *Vaisayas*, which refers to the social strata where the merchants and the landowners belonged.<sup>25</sup>

Although these descriptions may provide some explanation of the origins of the term Visayas in the Philippines, much research remains to be done to ascertain them. Meanwhile, the glaring gaps in Philippine ethnography and historiography require more thorough study.<sup>26</sup>

### Visayan Folklore

As mentioned earlier, ascertaining the etymology of the term Visayas is indeed difficult since little about its origins is mentioned in either the early Chinese, Spanish, or European accounts. But another way by which our indigenous culture may be understood



and appreciated, and thereby inspire pride among our people, is the study of our myths and legends.<sup>28</sup> As prose narratives, myths and legends offer a different way of looking at the world and explaining events or origins of things.<sup>29</sup> In striving to develop a framework towards the writing of a national history, a discussion about folk literature, in particular about the creation of the islands of the Visayas, and its links to history is appropriate.

Visayan stories about creation variously depict the struggle of the sky and sea or the earth versus the sky with the bird, *Manaul*, as the witness. Variations of these stories narrate that the islands were formed and the first man and woman emerged from the nodes of a piece of bamboo that was opened by the bird's constant pecking.<sup>30</sup> According to a *balitao*<sup>31</sup> version, the islands were formed when a boat loaded with two giants and other passengers sank during a typhoon. On the spot where the boat sank islands rose and their names, among others, Babuyan, El Fraile, Marikaban, Tablas, Carabao, Zapatos, Gigantes, Tiera del Fuego, and Panay, were supposed to represent the passengers of this boat and their belongings.<sup>32</sup>

Another version relates the quarrel of two brothers, *Dagu-ob* (thunder) and *Kilat* (lightning), for the affection of *Kabugwason* (morning star), the daughter of *Langit* (sky). In order to choose the most suitable suitor, *Langit* instituted a contest in which both *Dagu-ob* and *Kilat* were to display their artistic skill in raft making. *Kilat* won the contest and married *Kabugwason*. In despair, *Dagu-ob* killed himself but his spirit came back and smashed *Kilat's* raft to pieces. The pieces of the splintered raft formed islands and came to be known as the Visayan Islands.<sup>33</sup>

However, a closer examination of our folk tales shows that the sea is always depicted as a void. Moreover, not one of the many existing tales deals with the creation of the seas or how such bodies of water got their names. Except for those bearing the name of the islands near them, there is little in the texts that could account for the origin of these bodies of water or indicate the existence of old terms associated with them.

In tracing folk history, folk traditions, like a culture's myths and legends, may also help provide explanation for the origins of things and in this paper how the major islands in the region got

their names. According to one version, the islands of Samar and Leyte were formed from the vessels of two warring giants, *Amihan* (Ruler of the Northeast) and *Habagat* (Ruler of the Southwest).<sup>34</sup> In the ensuing battle, both their vessels were destroyed but being so huge, these vessels were not completely submerged underwater. Years later, the hulls of the ships began to form into islands which became Samar and Leyte.<sup>35</sup>

Both Leyte and Samar appeared in an old text known as *Tandaya* or *Tendaya*. However, the same text cited that *Tubabao*, which later became *Cibabao* was eventually applied to the whole eastern coast of Samar by the early colonists.<sup>36</sup> A similar account also noted that *Ibabao* or *Ybabao* referred to both the eastern and western coasts of Samar.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, *Zamal* was also referred to as an old name of Samar in the primary account of Pigafetta.<sup>38</sup> *Abbuyo*, on the other hand, is the old name of Leyte.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, Leyte was the first island to be called "Felipinas" in 1543.<sup>40</sup> In another account, the term *Leite* originated from the early European visitors who gave the islands this name after meeting some natives along the river called *Yraete* that drained near Pogot Point.<sup>41</sup> It is also possible that Leyte was a corruption of the word *Leite*, which literally connotes a combination of thunder and lightning in a thunderstorm, a common weather occurrence during the *Habagat* (rainy) season, but which in folk tales is associated with the quarrel between *Kilat* and *Dagu-ob*.

Subsequently, the narrow strait separating Samar and Leyte was named San Juanico although there are no accounts explaining how it came to be known as such. It is possible that it may have been derived from the name of the ship, the San Juanillo, the first Spanish vessel to pass through this water on its way to the islands from New Spain.<sup>42</sup> The natives, however, called it *Langpuetan* after the village near it but which also means in the vernacular as the arrival point. Another important body of water that separates Samar from Luzon is the San Bernardino Strait, named after Bernardo de La Torre, the Captain of the San Juanillo. In the early chronicles, the San Bernardino Strait is also referred to as the *Embocadero* (the channel), or the Paso de Acapulco, but a local term attached to it is *lalauiton*, which literally means entangled or puzzled.<sup>43</sup>



Meanwhile, the origin of Bohol has been traced to a folk tale according to which the island emerged from a few grains of sand that were spread on the back of a big turtle. As the story goes, the land was formed as a place of habitation for a woman who fell from heaven.<sup>44</sup> The land came to be called Bool, which was the old name of Tagbilaran. According to Combes, however, Bool is derived from *boo*, which means abaca (Manila) hemp, suggesting that the term *Boolanon* might mean farmer.<sup>45</sup>

Cebu, on the other hand has been variously known as *Subu*, *Szubu*, *Subuth*, *Sugbu*, or *Cabo*.<sup>46</sup> According to one account, the island of Cebu got its name from the local practice of greasing the hulls of boats with animal grease, locally known as *sebo*, to make them slippery and allow the vessels to cut through the waters with great speed. An anecdote goes that as three Spanish soldiers were walking along the beach, they saw some natives rubbing the hull of the boat they were building with animal grease. Purportedly, the Spaniards asked for the name of the place, but the natives, thinking that they were being asked about what they were using, answered “*sebo*,” which came to be known in the Spanish accounts as Zebu.<sup>47</sup> An older version narrates that it comes from the verb *sugbo* meaning to “walk in the water.” This refers to the shallow areas of the port where the passengers from the boats had to wade in the water to get to dry land.<sup>48</sup> Cebu is separated from Negros by the Tañon Strait, a name most likely derived from Tanai or Tanjay, the large settlement on the eastern side of Negros Island directly facing Cebu.<sup>49</sup>

As for Negros and Panay, the legend surrounding their creation goes back to the story of *Dumalapdap*, one of the giant triplet sons of the mistress of the western seas. According to the legend, *Dumalapdap*, in order to win the hand of the goddess of the evening breeze, fought the monster guarding the narrow ridge leading to the palace where the goddess was staying. In the ensuing fight, the monster was slain but in the aftermath, a big earthquake shook the land and split the ridge into two, becoming the islands of Panay and Negros. As the story goes, the three brothers divided Panay among themselves and ruled.<sup>50</sup>

The term *Panay* originated from various versions. Among the most common is that it started from the Aeta word *aninipay*,

a plant that grew abundantly on the island. In another version, it appears as *Sinugbuhan* and *Siuaraya* and referred to the places where the original Malays landed. As the Malays settled, they called their settlement *Madia-as*, which is also the name of the highest mountain peak on the island.<sup>51</sup> Still another account traces the origin of Panay to *pan-ay*, which is a Visayan term for 'mouth of the river.' A recent version is attributed to Miguel Lopez de Legazpi's utterance, "*Pan hay en esta isla.*"<sup>52</sup> However, the island is also referred to at times as Oton.<sup>53</sup>

As an exonym, the term Negros exemplifies the ethnocentric attitude of the colonizers. The term Negros can be traced to the Atlas drawn in 1545 by Spanish Cartographer Alonso de Santa Cruz which bears the legend "Y de Negros," a term derived from reports describing a place inhabited by black people. As a result, the subsequent Spanish expeditions to these regions already referred to Negros as the name of the island.<sup>54</sup>

On the one hand, the old name of Negros is *Buglas*, which in Hiligaynon means to "turn from or cut from." The Ilongo historian Modesto Sao-noy theorized that this meaning could be traced to the cutting off of Negros from the rest of the islands by geological upheavals.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, from the Oriental side, *buglas* is a Cebuano term for a cogon-like grass that abounds in the area.<sup>56</sup> Suffice to say that although the term *buglas* is recognized on both sides of the island as the native name, no move has ever been made to replace the more ethnocentric term, Negros.

Following the tradition of new historicism, it is also imperative to look at the smaller island provinces that comprise the region. Biliran, an island off the northern coast of Leyte, was originally called *Panamao*, which refers to a fishing net used to catch a fish called *amaw*.<sup>57</sup> But used in the derogatory sense, it means stupid or naïve.<sup>58</sup> The change to Biliran, which is a species of grass, seemed to have taken place sometime between 1668 to 1712, when a volcanic eruption precipitated the growth of this grass species on the lahar devastated area.<sup>59</sup> Another original meaning of the word *biliran* also refers to the boat's hull that produces furrows on the water when in motion.

The island of Siquijor, on the other hand, traces its own origins to the legendary accounts describing its rise from the sea



as a result of a big explosion of fire, thunder, and lightning. A popular joke in the vernacular puts it: "*Lato lang ang gahawid sa Siquijor.*"<sup>60</sup> However, the old name of the island used to be *Katugasan*, a native term for the molave trees (*tugas*) that used to abound in the area. When the Spaniards came, they called the island *Isla del Fuego* or "Island of Fire" from the swarms of fireflies that colonizers saw on their way to Cebu. The origin of the word Siquijor, can be traced to two versions. The first version points to the name of a legendary chieftain known as Kihod; the other from the ebbing of the tide, which in the local language, was *quiphod* or *quihod*. Subsequently, it became Siquijor with the change of the letter "d" to "r" in the Spanish euphony.<sup>61</sup>

In the past, all the island provinces were part of the bigger islands in their political administration. Of the three, Guimaras is the newest province having been proclaimed independent in 1992. *Himal-us*, a Kinaray-a term that literally means "island at the center of the sea," was the old name of Guimaras. This term alludes to the geographic location of the island between two big islands, which made it a safe haven for inhabitants during a storm. The term Guimaras has its roots in the legend about two lovers named *Guima* and *Aras*. On account of his slave status, *Aras* was forbidden from marrying *Guima*. The lovers decided to elope instead but as the story goes, their boat sank in the storm. On the site of the tragedy, according to the legend, an island rose which now bears their names.<sup>62</sup>

### **Ethno Linguistic Groups**

Despite the proximity of the islands to each other, there remains the issue of difference in languages leading anthropologists to classify them as ethno-linguistic entities. Although the people of this region are generally called *Bisaya*, linguistically, they speak different languages: the Ilongos of western Visayas region speak *Hiligaynon*; the central Visayas speak *Cebuano* or *Sugbuhanon*, also called *Binisaya*; while people in the eastern region speak *Waray*.

Waray refers to the inhabitants of Samar, Leyte, Biliran, and other islets and their language. As an ethno-linguistic group, they identify themselves according to their place of origin as

Samareños (Samar) and Leyteños (Leyte).<sup>63</sup> Aside from the coastal communities, most of the Warays in Samar live in the lowland areas around Catarman on the north and Calbayog on the west. In Leyte, most of the Warays inhabit the northeastern-most portion where one can find Tacloban nestled at the top of the Leyte Gulf and the southern end of the San Juanico Strait.<sup>64</sup>

On the other hand, the inhabitants of the western section of Leyte from the central cordillera down to the valley drained by the Pagsangahan River to the Ormoc Bay, including the southwestern part from Baybay to Maasin, speak Cebuano. This is due to their proximity to and continuous communication with the Cebuanos in Cebu and Bohol rather than with the Warays who live on the other side of the same island.<sup>65</sup>

Cebuano chiefly defines the Philippine ethnic group with the same name. The homeland of the Cebuano-speaking people is Cebu. But this term also refers to speakers of the language who come from the nearby islands of Bohol,<sup>66</sup> Siquijor, eastern Negros, western Leyte, southwestern Masbate, Camotes Island, and many parts of the coastal provinces of northern and southeastern Mindanao where the cultural reach of the Cebuano has extended.

Hiligaynon is the more formal and literary language used by the Ilongos of Panay,<sup>67</sup> Guimaras, western Negros, and other parts of southern Mindanao island. The Ilongos are traditionally believed to be the first descendants of early migrants who came from Borneo and peopled other areas of the Philippines. Though the account is in question,<sup>68</sup> it serves as cultural illustration of the relationship of the lowlanders and highlanders in exchange and trading mode patterns.

### **The Visayan waters: Connecting People and Culture**

Various texts and subtexts of the folk tales, as well as the literature written at the time of the Spanish contact, show the Visayas as the preferred living sites of early Filipinos. This is because the Visayan Islands are located near sheltered bays and places protected by off-shore islands, or along streams and rivers. Within the narrow straits and seas, dominant ethno-linguistic groups have populated all parts of the region carrying with them their language, traditions, and socio-economic activities. In the past,



the people living along the coasts traveled less by land for watercraft provided the most common and effective means of transportation. Thus, transportation by the seas has spurred the development of close cultural relationship throughout the region.<sup>69</sup> An examination of the cultural ethos of the various islands at Spanish contact also point to the seas as one fundamental base of culture. The geographical location of the people in separate yet adjacent islands contributed immensely to the formation of "cultural niches."<sup>70</sup>

History provides ample evidence indicating the vital role of the seas as the loci for the development of societies and transmission of trade and culture. For this reason, maritime trading occupied a central place in the economic life of coastal communities around the Visayas. Through this exchange, cultural relationships between and among inhabitants of the coastal communities have been fostered and enhanced. Moreover, the seas have also provided the stimulus for the movement of people from island to island impelled as they have been, and still are, by the effects of the two monsoon systems. Because of the changing monsoon patterns, for instance, fishermen move from one fishing ground to another in search of good fishing grounds.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

As mentioned at the outset, this paper focuses on the role of the bodies of water in the etymology, folk tales, cultural affinities, and cultural consciousness of the region as basis for the development of a historiography of national history. It is evident that the seas provide the common backdrop for the region's folk tales as well as the basis for explaining the etymologies of native seed words and the origin of the names of islands. Although the Visayan seas may seem to the ordinary observer as mere bodies of water that divide the islands, they serve more purposes than just dividing. Folklore and early accounts provide glimpses into the role of the sea as shaper and purveyor of culture, source of food, and most of all, the link that connects people and culture.

As a preparation for the writing of a national history that encompasses the history of the various regions, this prologue draws inspiration from Braudel's studies on the Mediterranean world. Following Braudel's model, this paper uses the maritime

perspective for examining the role of the seas in the development of trade and exchange, seasonal variations and their effects on agriculture and the economy, spread of ideas, development of ports, among other things. Specifically, the maritime perspective that this paper is espousing takes an anthropological view of the sea as an ecological maritime resource. This argument is based on the belief that the sea serves as the basis for subsistence as well as for social and cultural intercourse.<sup>71</sup> The seas have carried adventurers and traders across continents in search of products and markets—in short, a better life. As in the past, the seas continue to disseminate new ideas, values, and attitudes across continents while enriching cultures.<sup>72</sup>

This paper underscores the view that the maritime parts of the Visayas are central to the region's identity and cultural heritage.<sup>73</sup> It argues that the concept of using the maritime perspective can help in understanding the view that regional ethno-nationalism and ethnicity is a product of colonization.<sup>74</sup> In developing a framework towards the writing of a national history, the seas can be an excellent link to the study of the historical discourse of a nation because they provide the link to all. Throughout the history of humankind, the seas have played a vital role in the development of civilization and culture through the exchange of knowledge, goods, and ideas. Thus, it is imperative that to be able to develop a total national history, a collective and collaborative effort is needed to unify all the texts transcending regional and cultural lines.

The maritime perspective also shows that the Visayans understood and continue to appreciate the immense importance of the seas around them as vehicles of contact with and influence over neighboring peoples in a larger Asian setting. These waters have brought foreign influence into our shores, which in turn contributed to the enrichment of Filipino culture and opened up the archipelago to the larger ambit of trade and exchange. As historical records show, the early colonizers understood and exploited our knowledge of the seas and administered and colonized the islands by establishing trading posts and missionary posts. On the pretext of a seaward expansion and security, the Americans, during their turn to colonize this country, used our seas to overpower the inhabitants and assimilate the natives.



However, they were more concerned with the opening up of the islands' "non-Christianized" tribes rather than developing the sea-based and sea-related industries, overlooking the fact that the Philippines is a country which the sea unites what the land divides. In effect, the value of the sea in connecting the divided islands had been largely diminished. Nevertheless, that the sea is in the blood of every Filipino, that we continue the legacy of being masters of the sea, is attested by the presence of at least one Filipino in every ship that sails the seas around the world.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to Fernand Braudel's *Mediterranean*, the cutting edge masterpiece of history of our time, the history of events (*histoire & egravev & egravenementielle*) is "no more than the foam on the waves of the sea of history". In Braudel's view, "economic and social changes over the long term (*la longue duree & egravee*) and geo-historical changes over the very long term are what really matters." Cited in Peter Burke, (Ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR/burkenh.html> See also Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, tr. S. Reynolds, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London 1972), 3.

<sup>2</sup> For an example of the use of Braudel's methodology of total history as applied in Southeast Asia, see Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450 – 1680* vol. 1, *The Lands Below the Winds* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

<sup>3</sup> This paper is aware of the challenge of Alfred McCoy for the need to work on inter-regional studies. See *Philippine Social History: Global Trade and Local Transformations*. Alfred A. McCoy and Ed. C. De Jesus. eds. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1982), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Burke. (ed.). *Overture: the New History, its Past and its Future*, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Warren D. Smith, *Geology and Mineral Resources of the Philippine Islands* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1924), 1531.

<sup>6</sup> Frederick L. Wernstedt and S.E. Spencer, *The Philippine Island World: A Physical, Cultural and Regional Geography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 444. In this study Masbate, Romblon, Tablas, Sibuyan, Ticao, and Burias are not included because of their new political classification.

<sup>7</sup> Wernstedt, *The Philippine Islands*, 444 – 500.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.das-inselparadies.del/english/maps/Visayas.html>. P.1 using www.yahoo.com

<sup>9</sup> Yet the term is not even listed in the cultural dictionary. See *Cultural Dictionary for Filipinos* Thelma B. Kintanar and Associates (Quezon City: UP Press & Anvil 1996)

<sup>10</sup> In Sanskrit it means great victory. The notion that the term *Visayas* came from Vijaya is common. For example, Msgr. Guillermo Gaston during the 12<sup>th</sup> Regional Seminar Workshop on Oral and Local History in Bago City mentioned this in his paper presentation. See Bernardita R. Churchill, ed. *History from the People*. (NHI and PNHS, 1998), vol. 12:27.

<sup>11</sup> Although a study by Lourdes G. Gomez disproves this. See “Sri Vijaya and Majapahit,” *Philippine Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1 (January 1967): 78, cited in Eufemio P. Patanñe, *The Philippines in the 6<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Manila: LSA Press Inc., 1996), 253.

<sup>12</sup> Document of 1571 – 72 in *Philippine Islands, 1493 – 1898*. Emma Blair and James Alexander Robertson, eds. Mandaluyong: Cachos Hermanos Inc., 1973), vol 3: 147.

<sup>13</sup> Eric S. Casiño, “The Filipino Nation,” *The Philippines: Lands and Peoples, A Cultural Geography*. (Grolier International, 1982). 28.

<sup>14</sup> The ongoing debate in deciphering the true text is interesting. Patanñe explains this in detail on pp.92 – 96.



<sup>15</sup> This was the assertion of the Chinese scholar Liu te Chen as cited in Patanñe, 62 – 71.

<sup>16</sup> In Rizal's annotation of Morga's *Sucesos*, Leyte is also called Pai-Pu-Yen and Bohol is Pu-li-lu.

<sup>17</sup> This is due to the raid that they allegedly did in southern China (Guanzhou) in 1172. This book came out in 1349 entitled *Tao-I-Chi-Lioh* (*Summary Notices of the Barbarians of the Isles*). See Patanñe, p. 75 and in William H. Scott, Barangay. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1995). In Scott is an excellent discussion on the Visayan 16<sup>th</sup> Century Culture and Society.

<sup>18</sup> *A Dictionary of Cebuano Visayan*. vol. 1: 142.

<sup>19</sup> Rough translation means, "You are so ordinary." However, a recent movement alludes to "**Bisdak**" or **bisayang dako** (lit. big bisayan) to correct this prejudiced concept. The co-convenor of this 23<sup>rd</sup> PNHS National Conference, Dr. Madrileña de la Cerna, is an avid advocate.

<sup>20</sup> It would have been easier if he included in his discussion the seed words of the Visayan areas, but his inquiry offers fresh discourse about the ancestry of the Filipino people. See E. Arsenio Manuel. *Documenting Philippineasian*. (Quezon City: New Luna Press, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Groups with cultural connections to the region and with one another, who are generally related to the Malays. see <http://www.almanac.com.my/mal-info/background/e-pop01.html>

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p\\_code6/873](http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code6/873). Html using [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

<sup>23</sup> Francisco Colin, S.J. "Native Races and Their Customs," Madrid 1663 as quoted in Labor Evangelica (Madrid, 1663) in Emma Blair and James Alexander Robertson, eds. *Philippine Islands, 1493 – 1898*. (Mandaluyong: Cachos Hermanos Inc., 1973), vol 40: 44. The same view is shared by Juan Francisco de San Antonio in his "Cronicas" (Manila, 1738 – 44) in Blair and Robertson, vol. 20 pp. 309 – 312.

<sup>24</sup> Resil Mojares and M.P. Consing, "Peoples of the Philippines." *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art.* "vol. 1 (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1994), 206.

<sup>25</sup> This seems to be a corruption of the term "vaishyas." This source even declared that "Bisayans referred to merchants, an allusion that fitted well with the natives of Western Islands" although there was no proper acknowledgment of the source. See Lina Quimat, *Glimpses in History of Early Cebu.* (Cebu, 1980), 6.

<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note that a sample of the "Lord's Prayer" in Bisaya (Sarawak) is very similar to the Cebuano version. One big question remains: Are these the same people coming from the Visayas in the Philippines or are they the direct ancestors of the Visayas as depicted in the early accounts from Panay?

<sup>28</sup> Francisco R. Demetrio, S.J. *Myths and Symbols, Philippines.* Revised ed. Metro Manila: National Bookstore, Inc. 1990, 6. as cited in *Philippine Folk Literature Series: The Myths.* Vol. 2. Damiana L. Eugenio ed. Quezon City: UP Press, 1996 xlvii

<sup>29</sup> William Bascom, "The Forms of Folklore: The Prose Narrative." *Journal of American Folklore*, 78 (307) 1: 3-20 in *Phil. Folk Literature*, 20.

<sup>30</sup> See introduction in *Philippine Folk Literature Series: The Myths.* Vol. 2, Damiana L. Eugenio Ed.

<sup>31</sup> It is a love debate in song and dance by a man and a woman. The ancient term is *ayayi*. See Maria Colina Gutierrez, "The Cebuano Balitao and How It Mirrors Visayan Culture and Folklife," n.d., p. 3 as cited in Galang and Osias, *Encyclopedia of the Philippines.* Vol. 1 (Manila: P. Vera and Sons Co., 1935), 34.

<sup>32</sup> Felix B. Regalado and Quintin Franco. *History of Panay.* (Jaro: Central Philippine University, 1973), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Quintin B. Franco, "Source Materials in the Study of the History of the Island of Panay." (Unpublished Master's Thesis, CPU, 1956), 188.



<sup>34</sup> This pertains to the two dominant monsoon wind systems that influence the climate of the region.

<sup>35</sup> *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*. Vol. 2, p. 454. For the complete tale refer to *Philippine Folk Literature: The Myths*, 210.

<sup>36</sup> Legaspi's "Narrative of His Voyage," dated 27 May 1665 doc. 1565w from manuscript in Madrid, formerly MBU 170-20-3a, cajan 22; copy in Chicago Ayer ms. 1391; vol. Xx11, doc – 6. As quoted in *History of Micronesia: A Collection of Source Documents* vol. 2 compiled and edited by Rodrigue Levesque (Quebec: Levesque Publications, 1992), 135. This citation was made possible through the generosity of August de Viana of the National Historical Institute who provided the author a copy of the document as culled from his research in Guam.

<sup>37</sup> Leyte-Samar Studies. "Alzina's Historia de las Islas e Indios de Bisayas...1668. A translation of the Lenox Text by Cantius J. Kobak, O.F.M vol. IV no. 1 (Tacloban: Divine World University, 1970) p. 22 – 28.

<sup>38</sup> From the Italian Manuscript L 103 sup. In the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan and trans. By Pinkerton as quoted in Levesque vol. 1, 209.

<sup>39</sup> From Pigafetta's Italian manuscript as well as in Combes, Francisco, S.J. "Historia de Mindanao y Jolo." (Madrid, 1667, col. 747)

<sup>40</sup> Montero Y Vidal. *Historia General de Filipinas*. 27.

<sup>41</sup> Combes, 747 in Kobak, 28.

<sup>42</sup> Kobak, 22.

<sup>43</sup> Literally means "Passage to Acapulco" *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*. Dr. Rolly Borinaga provided additional information during a discussion on November 21, 2002 at UP Cebu City.

<sup>44</sup> *Philippine Folk Literature*, 1. The whole text is found on p. 207 but the *CPP Encyclopedia* has a better version in vol. 1, 151 by G.E.P. Cheny with R. Javellana, S. Pilar, and E.A. Manuel.

- <sup>45</sup> Combes, col, 764 as cited in Kobak, 28.
- <sup>46</sup> Fernand O. Oliviera, Viagem De Ferñao Magalhaes "The Voyage of Ferdinand Magellan." From the original Portuguese manuscript in the University Library of Leiden (The Netherlands) by Piere Valiere, trans. By Peter Schreurs (NHI, 2002).
- <sup>47</sup> "Socio-Economic Profile of Cebu City, 1980." From the Historical Data Bank of the National Historical Institute.
- <sup>48</sup> *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art.*, vol. 2:206.
- <sup>49</sup> My research about the etymology of this term has yielded nothing and at present this is just a theory until a better one can be found.
- <sup>50</sup> Teofilo del Castillo Y Tuazon and Buenaventura S. Medina Jr., *Philippine Literature: From Ancient times to Present*. (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1964), 30-32.
- <sup>51</sup> Regalado and Franco, 2.
- <sup>52</sup> "There is bread on this land." See *CCP Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 p. 56 by R.C. Lucero with E. A. Manuel.
- <sup>53</sup> Juan Fernandez, "Historical Annotations on the Island of Panay." (1967, p. 10) from a typed manuscript as quoted in Regalado, 2.
- <sup>54</sup> Valentino Sitoy "The Making of Negros: A Brief History" In *Kabilin*. Merlie M. Alunan and Bobby F. Villasis, eds. (Negros Oriental: Negros Oriental Centennial Foundation, Inc., 1993), 2 as cited in Carlos Quirino, *Philippine Cartography*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1963), 31.
- <sup>55</sup> Modesto P. Saonoy, *A History of Negros Occidental* (Bacolod: Today Printers and Publishers, 1992), 2-3.
- <sup>56</sup> See Lapyahan (Dumaguete City: Diocese of Dumaguete, 1980)
- <sup>57</sup> Mateo Sanchez, *Vocabulario de la Lengua Bisaya*, 1617.



<sup>58</sup> Literally means stupid or naïve. See the interesting article of Rolando O. Borrinaga “Lost Meanings in Biliran.” in the Inquirer Visayas Section of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 5, 2002 as posted in <http://www.geocities.com/bilirannews/whatname.html> using www.yahoo.com

<sup>59</sup> Rolando O. Borrinaga “How Biliran Got its Name.” Inquirer Visayas Section of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, November 25, 1999.

<sup>60</sup> Trans: “Only the seaweeds are keeping Siquijor from drifting elsewhere.”

<sup>61</sup><http://www.wowphilippines.com> using www.google.com

<sup>62</sup> Anna Eva Villanueva, Executive Director of the Guimaras People’s Economic Foundation; interview with the author, Jaro Museum, Archbishop’s Residence, Jaro, Iloilo. Oct. 25, 2002.

<sup>63</sup> *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*. Vol. 2, 440.

<sup>64</sup> Casiño, 176.

<sup>65</sup> Casiño, 179.

<sup>66</sup> The Boholano language is classified as a dialect of Cebuano with some phonetic peculiarity.

<sup>67</sup> The province of Aklan has a distinct dialect known as Kinaray-a.

<sup>68</sup> See William Henry Scott, *Pre-Hispanic Sources Philippine History*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Quezon City) which dismissed the manuscript as a historical hoax and of a more recent origin.

<sup>69</sup> Wernstedt, 470.

<sup>71</sup> See anthropological case studies in *Binisaya nga Kinabuhi (Visayan Life)*, Iwao Ushijima and Cynthia Neri Zayas, eds. *Visayas Maritime Anthropological Studies II*, 1993 – 1995 (Quezon City, CSSP Publications, UP, 1996), 3.

<sup>72</sup> The Philippines in Pre-Historic Times: A Handbook for the First National Exhibition of Filipino Pre-History and Culture. (Manila: UNESCO, 1959), 25.

<sup>73</sup> Donald K. Emmerson, "The Case for a Maritime Perspective on Southeast Asia," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. XI, no. 1 (March 1980): 139. With special appreciation to Dr. Bernardita R. Churchill for sharing the manuscript with the author.

<sup>74</sup> Arnold M. Azurin, "Regional Ethno-Nationalism and Self-Determination Leading to National Consciousness." in *The Making of the Filipino Nation and Republic*, Jose V. Abueva, ed. (Quezon City: UP Press, 1998), 720.