

# An Interpretation on Embossed and Embedded Symbols in Lanao Traditional and Historic Implements of War (The Sundang and Kampilan)

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## ABSTRACT

The research was an attempt to put into writing a detailed interpretation or inspection on two of Lanao traditional and historic implements of war, the Sundang and the Kampilan. Visiting museums was an experience that left the writer with hunger for more information on what was visibly seen on the exteriors of these swords and what possible memories it carried. The Meranaws boasts of traditional weapons and they also have extravagant practice of its production and manufacture.

Hence, this paper includes a detailed documentation of the different parts of the Sundang and Kampilan. The Sundang is perhaps the most popular of all Meranaw weapons, and it was a weapon of war and peace. Neither too long, like the *Kampilan*, nor too short, like the *Kris*. It had a lavishly decorated handle, a blade with a symbolic cross guard, and a meaningful wavy curved blade complete with a magnificent sword sheath. The same attention was also given to the Kampilan, which was a weapon of war and of the warriors. And a distinguished traditional weapon in Mindanao.

Findings showed that these Lanao traditional weapons played a role in the making of Moro history, and that each of the details was made with art and purpose. It was a way of life to be armed with weapons and so with the coming of the conquerors, it was not a surprise that the Moros in general were able to defend and make offensive moves against their enemies. Consequently, this made Lanao, among the last to be conquered or defeated by conquerors. It can be said that the Meranaws were the most well-armed group among the Moros at the time of Western conquests, and the production of these weapons was one of the enduring contributions of the Meranaws to Moro history and culture.

**Keywords:** *Lanao, Meranaw, traditional weapons, Sundang, Kampilan*

## Main Discussion

**M**indanao State University is a leading force in the recording of history and culture in the province of Lanao del Sur, the home of the Meranaw people. It has the Aga Khan Museum which preserves some of the remnants of Meranaw past and culture. In addition to various artifacts important to Meranaw history, on display at the museum are the Meranaw implements of war, such as shields, local cannons called *Lantakas* and firearms, as well as the *Bangkaw* which was a native lance used for fishing and war. However, the descriptions given about these remnants of the past are not adequate, and information about their history is scant. Conversely, since they are viewed as primary evidence for scholars to understand the past and are perceived to give valuable information about people and culture, research about the Meranaw traditional weaponry was pursued. Likewise, the researcher deems it important that more research regarding this should be conducted to address the existing gap.

In Philippine history, the natives of the south were believed to be the most powerful military group in Mindanao and the most advanced society in pre-Spanish Philippines. In particular, the Meranaws were perceived to be a people with an innate culture of conflict; thus, the result was a history of violence. Adding to these views was their obvious love for weapons and weaponry build-up. It seems that the Meranaws of Lanao were active fighters and defenders within the confines of Lanao among themselves, and in response to outside forces. Among their collections, two traditional weapons were given utmost importance—the widespread Sundang and the fearsome Kampilan. With a qualitative research design utilizing library collections, museum visits and heirloom sightings, as well as personal interviews with Meranaw elders and blacksmiths, the author came up with a detailed understanding of the parts of the Sundang and the Kampilan.

## Parts of A Meranaw Sundang

Most Meranaw asked would identify first the *Sundang* before other weapons. In the case of this study, majority of the respondents, like the females or adult males were not aware of the *Kampilan* and the *kris*. To them all other bladed weapons were called *Sundang*. To be specific, it is the kris sword. But this weapon had its own peculiar qualities compared to other celebrated Moro weapons. It combines the beauty and purpose of both the *Kampilan* and the *kris*.

It has the wavy design mostly attributed to the *kris* and a deadly weapon like the *Kampilan*.

## The Handle

The animal figures on the wooden handles served the purpose of having a better grip on the weapons, it prevents the weapon from slipping off from the hands easily. However, there might be more about it, as an important design on these weapons. It could be derived from the pre-islamic, indigenous religious belief of the natives of Mindanao and the Philippines in general. This can be traced back to one of their general outlooks in life, and that was the existence of an “invisible and powerful spirit world, contiguous with, or congruent to, and impinging upon, the human world. All things in the human world, whether animate or inanimate, are subject to the powers, spirits, and deities in the spirit world.”<sup>1</sup> They seemed to believe that there were spirits everywhere and objects were valued for their allegedly magical powers. In line with this, some birds or animals, and insects were thought to be avatars, embodiments, or the distinct envoys of the gods and spirits and by their calls, can signal suffering or good fortunes, peril, or productive enterprise.

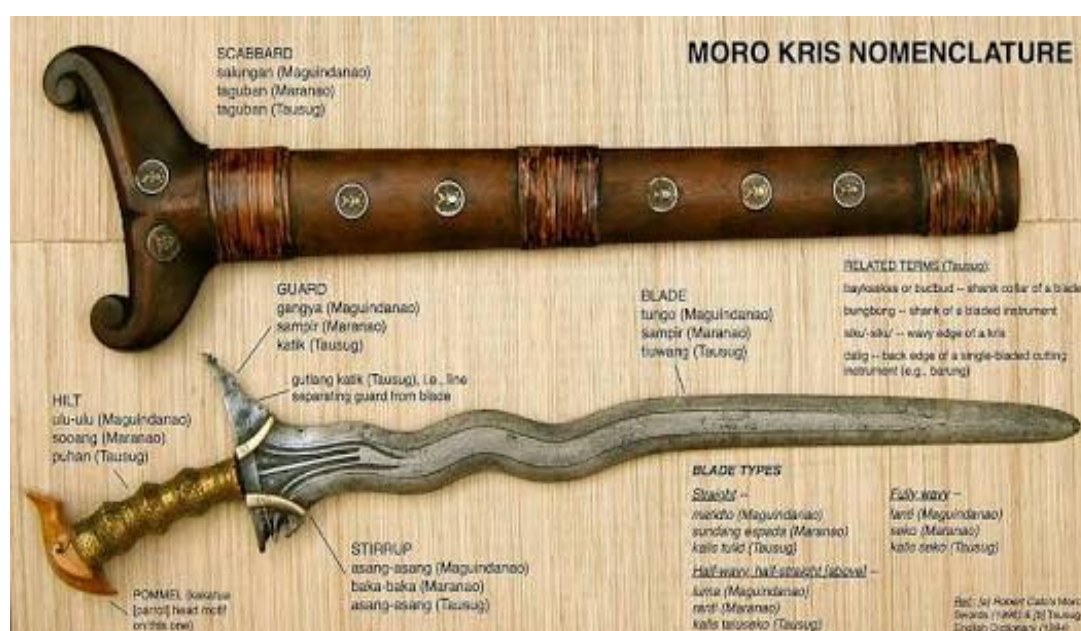


Figure 1. Illustration of a *Kris/Sundang* Parts

(Source: Robert Cato. *Moro Swords* at

<http://www.google.com.ph/search?q=sundang+images=robert=cato> accessed on August 20, 2017)

<sup>1</sup>T. Valentino Sitoy, JR. *A History of Christianity in the Philippines. Volume I.* (Quezon, Philippine: New Day Publishers, 1985). 2.

The pommels of the Meranaw Swords were made of hard woods, the kinds of *Marang*, Guava and Mahogany can also be used. Samsodin Calauto,<sup>2</sup> a brassware owner specified that; The trees/woods that can be used for the pommels were the *Kamagong* which the Meranaws call as *Banati*, others were *Narra* and Jackfruit woods. These were not prone to tree worms.

To use the likes of *Narra* is now a limited luxury. Similarly, metals can be used while animal horns like ivory or Carabao horn were also a favorite of the many. The interpretation on these pommel designs may vary from place to place or region to region but to the Meranaws, the following images were the obvious and common designs like a parrot or *cockatoo*,<sup>3</sup> was the most universal design; others were *Serpent or Crocodile*, *Chicken* or duck-like. The chicken design could have been inspired by the *Sarimanok*. And although very rare, in some cases dragon images were also found.

Next, following the pommel with animal figures was the grip part, which Meranaws call as *Soong*, and where exactly the palm of the hand was placed when engaged in battle, and this was also made of wood. Commonly, this was designed with a binding that looked like a connected wire wrappings which can also be made of either rattan or leather. But most decorative grip parts were covered with special cylindrical panels with intricate geometric *okir* works. And these were made of brass, silver, and rarely, even gold. In English, they call this specific parts as ferrules.

Probably, the most common decorative content of most Meranaw weapons was the *okir*, usually found on the handles, blades, and the sheath or scabbards. It is “an inscription or embossed design and is the major artistic style of the Muslim Filipinos consisting of vegetable floral motifs and geometric designs.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition, it was in the handle of the Meranaw swords that a *Munsala* was attached. This was a piece of cloth that was important in keeping the sword

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Samsodin Gubat Calauto, (50 years old) Meranaw Brass Ware store owner, at Basak Malutlut, Marawi City, Lanao del Sur on May 10, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> A type of a large parrot usually seen in the localities of Mindanao, others see this as the kind that has a colourful bunch of feathers on top of its head. It was also believed that the bird like figures were actually abbreviated forms or versions of the *Naga*, though they looked like birds their characteristic letter S-shapes make them derivations from the *Naga*. See and read Nagasura Madale’s “Myth, Symbolism and National Unity,” *Mindanao Journal*, Vol. IV, Nos. 1-4 (July 1977-June 1978), 155.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Cato. *Moro Swords*. Singapore, Graham Brash 1996. Pg.104. At [http://books.google.com.ph/books/about/Moro\\_swords.html?id=wBvAAAAMAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](http://books.google.com.ph/books/about/Moro_swords.html?id=wBvAAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y) accessed on December 10, 2017

itself and its scabbard intact, an assurance to the owner especially when not in battle. And according to Datu Kamid Anting, in an interview;<sup>5</sup> In fighting, probably a *Munsala* can also be tied to the hands so the sword was kept in arms reach.

### **The Blade** (from the cross guard to the tip)

The Sundang blades start from a beautifully made cross guard that seemed like a lead weight at the hilt. The weight made its blows so terribly that it will slice a man through the middle when used expertly. Aside from that, the weight lead at the hilt was designed like a shark or an arrowhead which in Meranaw was called *Gangya* and a chin end called *baka baka*. As a whole, these formed part of the *Sampir*. For a start, the *Sampir* seemed to be direct Meranaw word for this part of the blade. Others call it as the *Komlong*, which is the Meranaw word for shield or protective shield. As mentioned by Imam H. Usman,<sup>6</sup> who has a *Sundang* as heirloom:

That is what they call a design, all bladed weapons are designed with okir and this proves that these materials were given so much value. In those time and generation, they take care of it, it is their wealth. What I know of the design, the hilt in particular, the extension was for battles, intended in fighting, when blades meet blades, of Sundang against Sundang, it holds the enemy blade and protects its wielder's arms and hands. It can also be used to hit the enemy with its pointing/horn like edges. It has design and purpose they say.

Another description on the design on the hilt between the handle and the blade, was that: "The top flight blades often display a grooved, arrowhead design on the upper guard, with decorative metal inlays, or furrows that traverse their lengths."<sup>7</sup>

The design shown in both sides or sometimes the left side of the *Sampir* resembles that of a shark if not an arrow, and sometimes the bottom show that of a dragon or elephant; both images are a symbol of power. And so, it seemed that this kind of sword could be a symbol of power and prestige. And then both

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Datu Kamid Anting, (65 years old) DepEd Teacher, at his residence in Brgy. Pendulunan, Ganassi, Lanao del Sur on April 12, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Imam.H. Usman Ali. (65 years old) Kampilan/Sundang keeper, at his Residence in Brgy. Tolali, Marawi, Lanao del Sur on April 30 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Cato. *Moro Swords* (Singapore, Graham Brash 1996). 82. At [http://books.google.com.ph/books/about/Moro\\_swords.html?id=wBvAAAAMAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](http://books.google.com.ph/books/about/Moro_swords.html?id=wBvAAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y) accessed on December 10, 2017.



sides of the *Sampir* have decorative inlays. Which Taha Taher,<sup>8</sup> who is a Meranaw blacksmith, jokingly identify as a “necktie.”

The researcher doubted it and for her it had purpose and this was confirmed when a study described that the dividing lines in the *Sampir*, “was meant to catch the opponents blade.”<sup>9</sup> In Meranaw, this specific part was called “*baka-baka*” or chin in English or “*tumbaga puti*” meaning silver, because it was commonly made with silver.

### **The wave on the blades**

The wavy design found on the blades of the *Sundang* and of the *Kris* was definitely from that of a serpent. At first, the author thought that it was inspired by the waves of the lakes or sea. However, it was revealed, after all, that it was of a serpent. Supporting evidence of this can be found on the design at the tip of the sheath of most *Sundang* and *kris*. It looked like a hook, or an ending tail of a snake. This kind of design can be traced further to the *Naga*, which was an ancient motif that symbolized the snake or mythical dragon. “In some primitive culture, there is a close relationship between the blade and the snake. In Indonesia, for instance, in order to enhance the mystical powers of a *kris*, the owner or forger brings the blade into contact with the entails and brain of a snake.”<sup>10</sup> The author thinks that perhaps this was done by the owners in hopes for the *kris* or sword to be as swift and deadly as the snake when used in combat.

To elaborate this major design found in the art works of the Meranaws, there was also a mythical creature from a famous indigenous belief of Mindanaons like in Bukidnon, which is a cosmological concept from tradition or ancient legend, relating to environmental spirit and creation. Whether there is a connection or not, certainly, there exist an old tradition on this serpentine mythical creature. The tradition explained that:

The supreme god magbabaya, and in concert with him, the seven subordinate deities and he had created from seven strands of his hair, made a many layered universe, with worlds above and worlds below the intermediate world of men (*kahilawan*), which is called

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Taha Taher, (56 years old) Meranaw Blacksmith, at his residence in Brgy. Raya, Tugaya, Lanao del Sur on May 18, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> G.B. Gardner. *Keris and other Malay Weapons* (Singapore: Progressive Publishing Company, March 1936). 12.

<sup>10</sup> Mamitua Saber and Dionisio Orellana. *Maranao Folk Art: Survey of Forms, Design, and Meanings* (Marawi City: University Research Center, 1973), 43.

bugta (earth). The sky world has nine layers, as is also the netherworld. From the human world upwards, the universe is held in place by chains of gold (bagnos and kuyakoy), the whole system being secured firmly in place from on top by the grip of a gigantic mythical bird called the garula (local variant of the sanskrit garuda). On the other hand, the nether-world is kept in place by a huge mythical python, the bakusan or naga, which is given the name Intumbangel. As an explanation of the more common natural phenomena, it is said that strong winds are caused when the galura flaps its wings, while earthquakes are the result of the python's movements.<sup>11</sup>

In warfare, the wavy blades were believed to be deadly for it aimed at directly killing the opponents. As mentioned in a write up, "the wave is for easy flow of the blood of the enemy."<sup>12</sup>

### **The sheath** called *Tanguban*

The sheaths found on Meranaw weapons are mostly rectangular in shape and generally called *Tanguban* which literally means covering. As a cover for the *Sundang*, it was usually made with three glittery gilded linings with metal in lays. Some stories in the past said that it was in laid with golds rather than plain glossy metals. Other than metal gilds; pearls or shells, which the Meranaws call as *Tipay*, were scattered all over the wood or arranged on both sides with flower *okir* or diamond shapes on it. This *Tanguban* (Sheath/Covering) design sprinkled with pearls or shells from left to right or top to bottom, are a fashion among Meranaw weapons. Newer examples of *Tangubans* also show extravagant *okir* in flowing designs.

The image presented in the earlier parts of this paper showed a *Sundang* blade with its parts that were discussed and emphasized in this paper, and it also showed an artistic *Tanguban* decorated with a curved crossguard, inlaid with buttons or seven button-like circles with three parts in wire-like straps in between the buttons. The researcher cannot avoid imagining that this design resembled modern jackets. Probably, this could just be a creative illustration of a *Tanguban*, the researcher was yet to see such an example of *Tanguban* in person, among Meranaws. But when Meranaw blacksmiths were asked to judge, many of them said that such a *Tanguban* did really exist and more.

<sup>11</sup> T. Valentino Sitoy, JR. A. *History of Christianity in the Philippines*. Volume I (Quezon, Philippine: New Day Publishers, 1985). 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> See and read Jonathan Catubig. *The Moro Kota (Fort) in Lanao: A study of Maranao Martial Tradition, Colonial Warfare and Nationalism. 1907-193*. (Unpublished M.A thesis, Mindanao State University. 2008).

But the cross guard design or curved head of this *Tanguban* could be Malaysian style or in origin according to Meranaw blacksmiths like Taha Taher and Kaka Ali. However, other Meranaw blacksmiths like Hasan Arobi<sup>13</sup> and Abu Ali H. Acmad<sup>14</sup> jointly described that the *Tanguban* design presented in this writing was accordingly:

A kind of *Sampir* (cross guard) that was made of *Narra*. The circles were actually called *Plata*, the old coins. While the wires like straps were actually narrowed kinds of *Balagun*,<sup>15</sup> or rattan and this could be for support and strength to the whole *Tanguban* (sword covering) itself. And when you see these kinds of weapons, it could be the most expensive.

And this over all *Tanguban* design specially its *Sampir* (cross guard) was different from the boat-like appearance of *Sampirs* commonly found among Meranaw traditional weapons.

The trademark of Meranaw *Tanguban* or sword sheath was with a rectangular blade entrance or “*Sampir*” called *Panolong a Barko*, the Meranaw art design inspired by traditional and colorful ships of the bygone days. Unlike the picture shown in Figure 1 showing a *Sundang* with its *Tanguban*, most Meranaw *Sundang* which were documented in this research and were believed to be very old, had very simple *Tanguban*, with no design at all. Just simple woods, probably this was because the *Tangubans* were easily lost and was replaced by their owners or they tend to break easily as they were accordingly sometimes made of soft woods.

The majority of Meranaw blacksmiths do not have specific identification on the parts of this covering; they were just generally called *Tanguban*. But there were more artistic *Tangubans* being developed by other cultures which had similar structure and purpose with that of the Lanao historic swords; this other designs revealed that the parts of the sheaths could be generally illustrated and explained as follows: First is the *Sampir*, or the crosspiece encasing the guard portion of the blade serving as its protection, so the sheath won't fall or slip from the blade, and this should not be confused with the blade as they share this identification. Second, The *Tanguban* or the part covering the whole blade itself.

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<sup>13</sup>Interview with Hasan Arobi, (45 years old) Meranaw Blacksmith. At his residence and forge room at Brgy. Campong Talao, Tugaya, Lanao del Sur on June 17, 2018.

<sup>14</sup>Interview with Abu Ali H. Acmad. (47 years old) Meranaw Blacksmith. At his residence and forge room at Brgy. Campong Talao, Tugaya, Lanao del Sur on June 17, 2018.

<sup>15</sup>*Balagun* is the Meranaw for Rattan woods



The Malaysians call the parts of the sword covering as *Sarong* and the *Buntut*, which is the tip of the sheath.<sup>16</sup>

To reiterate, the Meranaw *Tanguban* can many times be extravagant and show impressive *okir* works. These *okir* designs are more or less the following: The *Birdo*, a motif of growing vines or crawling plant, *Magoyoda*, a combination of dragon and plant component motifs appearing like an S design. *Pako Rabong*, a motif of growing fern generally flowing upward and at arrested sideways movement and likened to the *Birdo* type. The *Niaga-naga*, the dragon or serpent design combined with leaves, fern and flowers.<sup>17</sup> The *Piako*, a simple or single fern motif, *Tiali-Tali* or rope like usually used as borderline and *Armalis*, a combination of *piako* (fern) and *raon* (leaf). The *Birdo* has become the favorite of the researcher and indeed, “The *Birdo* and the *Magoyoda* are considered the favorite design, the former is richer in Movement as it flows in all directions depends upon the artists application on available places.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>See G.B. Gardner. *Keris and other Malay Weapons* (Singapore: Progressive Publishing Company. March 1936). 6.

<sup>17</sup> For reference see Figure 21, pg. 126 and Mamitua Saber and Dionisio Orellana. *Maranao Folk Art: Survey of Forms, Design, and Meanings* (Marawi City: University Research Center, 1973.)

<sup>18</sup> Mamitua Saber and Dionisio Orellana. *Maranao Folk Art: Survey of Forms, Design, and Meanings* (Marawi City: University Research Center, 1973), 24.

These are further illustrated in the following images:



**Figure 2. Meranaw Sundang**

(Source: Courtesy of H. Aminah Magarang of Lumbayanague from the Sultanate of Madalum, Lanao del Sur.)

### The Parts of a Meranaw Kampilan

Some of the parts of a *Kampilan* can be identified similarly with some parts of a *Sundang*. The image below clearly indicates the parts of a *Kampilan*. It also has a hilt, with the pommel similarly called as *danganan* and the *soong*, connecting the handle and the blade commonly known as its grip part, with a guard usually made of hard wood and which is called *ampa*. The blade is called by Meranaw blacksmiths as *bakukum*, this straight blade was called *barangkas*. It is usually single bladed, and the sharpened therefore deadly part is called *garanang*, while

its pointed tip is *sokot*. Adding to its overall look, strands of hairs was sometimes attached at the base of the hilt, specifically at the base of the wooden handle. This hair is rumored to be from the victims of the wielder, but other *Kampilans* specially the newer ones were made with a goat or horse hair that looked like a big brush called *Palumpong* or *Gumba* in Meranaw and Maguindanao. According to Mahdi H. Noor,<sup>19</sup> another Tugaya blacksmith interviewed; “This could probably be used to hit and distract the enemy and cause temporary blindness.”

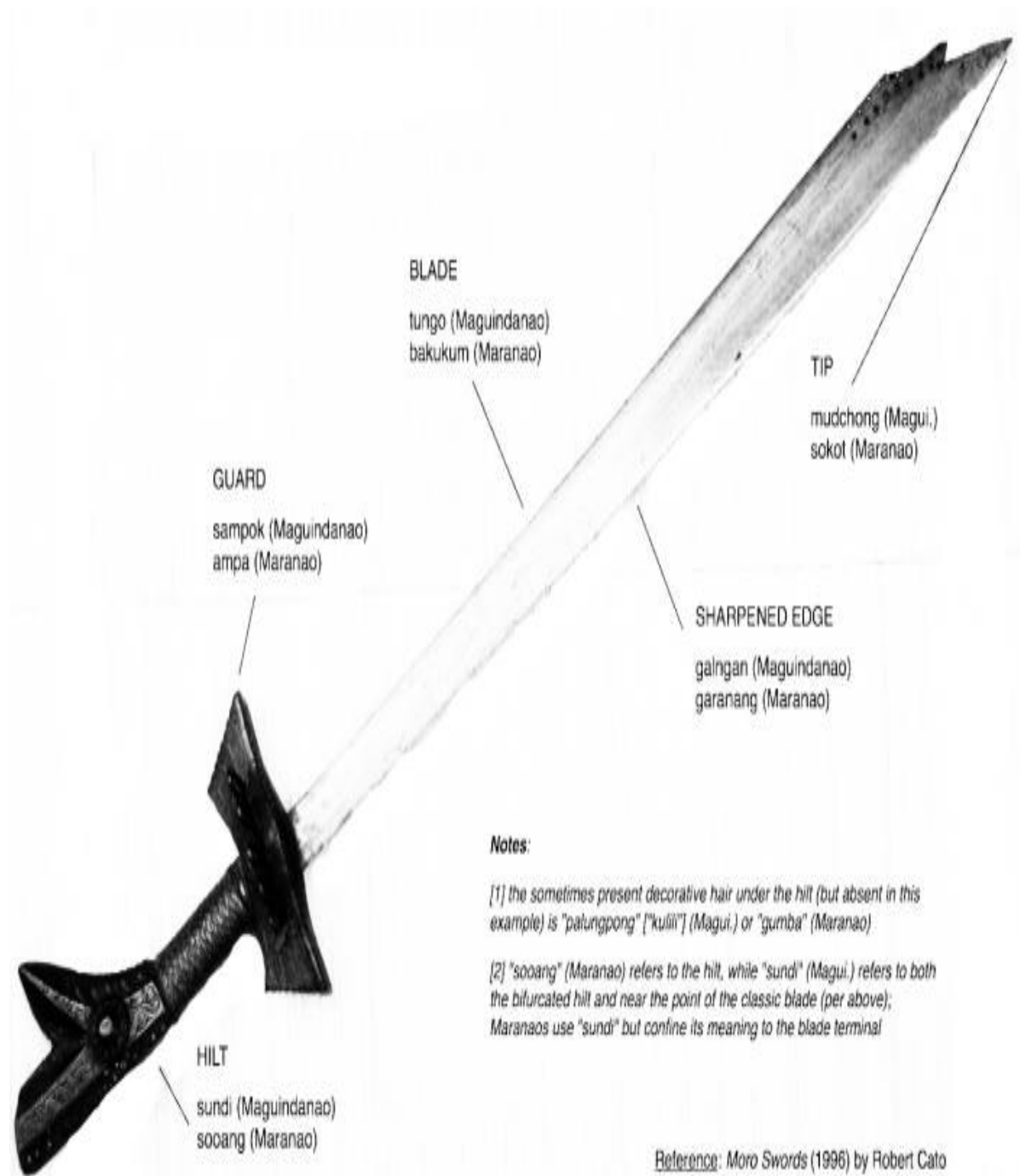
The most popular and common design found in the pommel or handle of the *Kampilan* is believed by many Meranaws as that of a crocodile mouth. This could be inspired or originated from the fact that portions of the Cotabato region is inhabited by crocodiles. In fact, Buhayen or Buayan, one of the historic sultanates in the Cotabato region within the Pulangi River meant “the place where crocodiles live.”<sup>20</sup> This could also support the idea that the *Kampilan* was indigent from the Maguindanaon. The striking and little protrusion at the tip of the blade, by the end side, was accordingly designed to pick up parts of a capitated body. And the pointed tip could be wicked in hitting vital points of the body.

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<sup>19</sup>Interview with Mahdi, H.Noar. (45 years old) Meranaw Blacksmith. At his shop and store in Tugaya, Brgy. Raya Tala-o, Lanao del Sur. May 18, 2017.

<sup>20</sup>Reuben Canoy. *The History of Mindanao* (CDO, Philippines: International School Press. 2003), 248.

Illustrations: Kampilan



**Figure 3. Parts of a *Kampilan***

(Source: Robert Cato. *Moro Swords/kampilan*. At  
<http://www.google.com.ph/search?q=kampilan&oeq=kampilan&aqs=c>  
hrome Accessed on April 2017.

## Symbol

For the Meranaws of Lanao, these mentioned weapons were a symbol of masculinity, of unity, of the Meranaw royalty, and of the Sultanate and their authority. As mentioned by Datu Kali,<sup>21</sup> in an interview:

As far as I can remember, the use of these weapons is regulated by the Sultan and will be used with his permission. *Sundangs* were the Sultans and other datus symbol. And the use of this without their permission is punishable by death. Once unsheathed from its scabbard, it will be fall on someone. It was also used to give signals on battle, weather to attack and to channel/insinuate their bravery. And most importantly used by his followers when they visit other places in the name of the Sultan and with these weapons they are recognized and respected.

These weapons would also serve as memorabilia of the traditional sultanate so that even long after Sultan and Datus powers and influence were long gone, they would still be remembered by the people through these artifacts, which were preserved and treasured by them. The yellow color found in other artifacts among the Meranaws was most likely the symbol of royalty.

Possession of any of these traditional weapons was a symbol of power and prestige, and of personal security. These also identify the royal line of descent that was given importance by the Meranaws. In other words, it was a symbol of their heritage; especially that these weapons were widely used in ceremonies and rituals. As commonly practiced, the sultanate enthronement will not be completed without the *Sundang* as part of the ceremony.

These weapons were also not just about war, but also about peace and respect as manifested by the gift giving practices of the people before. Though not directly referring to the Moros of Lanao in particular, the author could probably use this following note from the Jesuit Missions about this particular practice among natives in Mindanao, to understand the historical context of this particular representation of traditional Meranaw weapons; accordingly,

Fr. Eusebio Barrado, missionary of the people, was telling me once that they are strongly averse to move into the terrain of another datu, to whom they were not subjects. To do so without danger to the traveler, the leading figures keep a lance called "kiap," much larger than the ordinary ones, its hilt overlaid with silvers, its tip

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<sup>21</sup>Interview with Matabalao "Datu Kali" Magondacan. (65 years old) Kali/Municipal Councilor. At his residence in Kapai, Lanao del Sur on April 12, 2017



of metal. They give it for a trifling fee, as a safe conduct to the traveler who must cross areas belonging to other datus. Recognizing the lance, the latter allow free totally undisturbed passage to the traveler, rather on the contrary, there will be much attention and respect accorded to the traveler. This happens, as someone worthy of credit told me, even when war is going between them.<sup>22</sup>

Recognizing this native custom, even the Dutch and British powers who vied for friendly trading relations with the Moros in general gave foreign blades and firearms as presents for peaceful navigation in the islands of Mindanao. Adding together, these weapons were also a mighty symbol of alliances and unity, as they were usually presented to rulers, chief, datus and sultans, as a pledge of new alliances like in wedding ties and exchanges.

In addition, this also symbolized the rich pre-Islamic and pre-Spanish culture of the people of Mindanao in general. Like many ancient traditions, it could serve as a symbol of the earlier civilizations, in their sanction of ancient gods and good fortunes as seen or signified by the talismanic designs which were inscribed on these examples of Lanao historic swords, in its blades and handles.

It could also be a symbol of how life to the Meranaws was a century ago. These Lanao weapons found much significance in Meranaw lives because it was a time when life was simple yet tough. It commanded men to be armed and strong, given the environmental conditions of those times; there were no roads as we have them today. People many times create their own pathways, and in these cases, weapons like the *Sundang* become handy. Farming was also the main livelihood, and in this activity, weapons were important in farmlands. People were few and villages might had been kilometers away, so for security reasons weapons were inseparable to them; these would be useful against thieves or wild animals. In addition, people then travel a long way to see relatives or trade for necessary items, so weapons once again were important. And so it seemed accurate when many books described that weapons were a part of the daily lives of our ancestors.

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<sup>22</sup> Jose, Arcilla. Ed. *The Jesuit Missionary Letters. Volume 4: The Dapitan-Balingasag Mission* (Quezon City: Philippine Province Archives of the Society of Jesus, 1993), 369.

## The Embedded Stories in Lanao Traditional Weapons

Many stories can be derived from these traditional weapons of the Lake people. Surely, these weapons carried the memories on *Pusakas* or *heirlooms*, Meranaw superstitions of magic charms, *tonongs* (spirits) and *inikadowa* (*spiritual guardians*). Real life stories can be explored and taken from these weapons. As Manuel Tawagon<sup>23</sup> explained:

Mere description is no use in understanding the past, like in the case of the “genealogy.” For many, this is not a good source of history. Accordingly, what is important is the story behind or the stories that can be unearthed.

He added that:

Right now I have a kris, handed to me by my father who was handed to him by his father from his great grandfather. It is a weapon used during the Spanish periods and used again during the time of the American invasion and the Japanese invasion to Lanao. In terms of the number of people it killed. It is unknown but it was definitely used. In short, this Kris struggled widely in Mindanao and once upon a time this was also used by my mother to protect herself.

Tawagon fondly recalled that:

When my father was about to die, he struggled to talk pointing at the cabinet or something under the bed. I thought it was an important treasure or gold for me to have. When I opened it, it was his kris and upon seeing that I already have it in my hands. He passed away.

This story shows the sentimental value of these weapons to the Meranaws. These traditional weapons were a *Pusaka* or *symbolic heirloom*. *Datu Kali* elucidated that;<sup>24</sup>

This is for the remembrance on how people (like The Meranaws of Lanao) lived their lives before, and their form of leadership. And when you see these heirlooms, it's as if you're seeing the ancestors and their beliefs or principles in life.

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<sup>23</sup>Interview with Manuel Tawagon. (74 years old) retired History Professor and author, At Zoey Café, Palao, Lanao del Norte on May 12, 2017.

<sup>24</sup>Interview with Matabalao “Datu Kali” Magondacan. (65 years old) Municipal Councilor. At his residence in Kapai Lanao del Sur on April 12, 2017.

In another interview with Mike Panda,<sup>25</sup> he said a similar view and sentiment:

All of their treasures were given as heirlooms. It is now called a Pusaka because it is a rare treasure that is nowhere to be found. Its purpose is reduced to house decorations. However, the greatest importance of these Pusaka lies in that we will not forget the past. It's as if you're still seeing your parents. Also, all the things the ancestors fancy were given as Pusaka or keepsakes to their children and would be passed down their children or descendants. They must take care of it, keep and secure it. In the past, these are too precious that seeing it might lead to one's death. Most are made, if not in laid, with golds.

*Pusaka* is a Sanskrit word which literally means treasure or heirloom. A term not exclusive to the Meranaws but also used widely in Southeast Asia. A *pusaka* was used to refer to any treasures or heirlooms given with so much importance. Usually, old accessories like bracelets or necklaces made of golds and others were kept as *pusakas*. Due to their importance to its owners, *Pusakas* like the bladed weapons were given names as if it has a life, a soul on its own and has a connection to the real world, to ancestry and community. Therefore, it must be protected. This was one of the many reasons why it became a *Pusaka*, because it is magical or spiritual, so it's treasured. So this intense love or interest can be traceable to the tales surrounding weapons which had been passed from generations to generations. This cautious attitude towards *pusakas* persists or lingers up to these days in remote parts of Lanao. With these, the pre-Islamic religion of the Meranaws was confirmed, that their ancestors were also spirit worshippers.

As *pusakas*, Meranaw traditional weapons served as magic charms and amulets. It can either negatively or positively affect its owner and dependent on the will or spirit of the item. To Meranaws interviewed, they have heard numerous tales of warding off diseases due to their *pusakas*. As amulets, this embodies the very definition of spirit worship. As discussed in the book, *A Short History of the Filipino Muslims*; "The truth in animism seemed to be that many people believed that all objects about them to which their attention were called were either alive or inhabited by spirits- a tree, a mountain, a river, the sea, the sky, the moon and the star. Even a stone or blade grass was regarded as animate,

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<sup>25</sup>Interview with Mike Panda. (50 years old) A Farmer, at Papandayan, Marawi Lanao del Sur. November 20, 2017.

credited with the power of good and evil.”<sup>26</sup> The Meranaws had in their superstition words like *Palimunan* (an *Agimat*), and it was an amulet that can make one invisible especially to the foe. They also used *K’ubul* (another *agimat* name), a magic charm that can make any fighter invincible to gunshots.

Another use of these weapons to the ancestors was as fetishes. It was another object of ancient worship and these were:

manufactured objects supposed to possess supernatural powers for averting evil and bringing good to their possessors. Every house would have a supply of them. Fetishes were also made to be worn by a person or to be carried about with one. Some were entire horns of antelopes or buffaloes on the tips of the horn, filled by medicine men with herbs and clay and the open end were sometimes decorated with pieces of iron, brass or gold. The horns were thought of as vehicles of gods, by whose name they were called and whose power they were supposed to convey to those who owned them. Mere possession of a fetish was thought to ward off evil from a house and bring blessings upon it. These practices were prevalent among some of the Muslim inhabitants of the Philippines during the early part of the American regime.<sup>27</sup>

Many Meranaws also recalled the days when they refuse to take these weapons or if they have, they give it away for reasons that it carried a disease or a curse that befall to family members. And when it was gone from their possession, all diseases also went away, which confirmed their suspicions. Still some were honored to have these traditional swords as collection, some Meranaws were also a believer of the tradition that ancient or very old materials can house a spirit or attracts a strong spirit.

An example of these was the old local cannon that lie undisturbed up to these days in some parts of Lanao like in Ragain. These local cannons were so heavy that the residents refused the idea of disturbing it by moving it somewhere else. According to Jumaima Mabaning:<sup>28</sup>

The one in Ragain was the remnant of the Kota e Kotongan, who happened to be my mother’s great grandfather, it lives there till these days because 15 men tried before to lift it but they could not

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<sup>26</sup> Jainal D. Rasul, Sr. *Struggle for identity; A Short History of the Filipino Muslims* (Quezon City; Line Art Printing, 2003). 15.

<sup>27</sup> Rasul, Sr., *Struggle for identity; A Short History of the Filipino Muslims*, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Jumaima Mabaning. (38 years old) DepEd School Teacher, at her IDP residence in Steeltown Iligan City on June 26, 2018.

carry it. A *tonongor* spirit must inhabit it. So the people stayed away as respect.

These examples of Lanao traditional weapons were also brimming of stories about an *inikadowa* or twin spirits/guardian spirits. To Abdullah Madale, a scholar, this means, “the other self, and the *inikadowa* may assist or do harm to his human “half” depending upon whether the latter takes good care of it or not.”<sup>29</sup> The Meranaws had this old belief that every men was born with a twin spirit and in the past, they could sometimes see their twin spirit who participated in human affairs and they either bring fortune or they mean to get your soul and harm a person. They also possess human beings and in fighting them and to exorcise them, the role of the swords and the *Kelong* (*Shield*) were important as if spirits were weak to iron or steel. And these stories of the ‘other self’ were also mentioned in the *Darangen*. And in connection to this epic, these Lanao traditional weapons and the Meranaw interest to these could also be an influence also of the stories in *Darangen*. As an answer to what were embedded stories found in these weapons, Bae Jalilah Batara in an interview shared that; “This is what we inherited from our ancestors. Like in the stories about Rajah Indarapatra and Bantugan, and all their descendants who were equipped with inseparable weapons.”

In reference to both heroes of the *Darangen*, Madale analyzed that, “For indeed, there is no other personality that has influenced the thinking and ideology of a Meranao than the hero himself. Every Maranao for that matter claims that he is a hero, adored by everyone, just like Rajah Indarapatra.”<sup>30</sup> So then having their weapons with them was an important part of being a Meranaw. This could certify him as someone who had a *bangsa*<sup>31</sup> or someone of importance.

It was also a surprise to encounter that the Meranaws had their own version of King Arthur’s famed *Escalibur* and there seemed to be no harm in sharing it in this chapter. For instance, in one territory in Lanao, there was the old story

<sup>29</sup> Abdullah Madale. *The Maranaws, Dwellers of the Lake* (Manila: Rex Bookstore, 1997), 56.

<sup>30</sup> Nagasura Madale as quoted in Manuel Tawagon, “Meranaw Oral Literature: A study of Darangen Andang sa Muna and Anonen a Rawaten.” In Felipe, Jocano (ed). *Filipino Muslims: Their Social Institutions and Cultural Achievements*. (Diliman, Quezon; Asian Center, University of the Philippines, 1983), 50.

<sup>31</sup> The principle relates individual to individuals, relates households to households, and agamas to agamas.. relates the states to each other. It relates who one is and the rightful duties one has in relation to others. Charles K. Warriner, “Notes on the Maranao,” *Mindanao Journal*, Vol. XI. Nos.1-4 (July 1984-June 1985), 3-13.



of the 7 *Maruhoms* who were sons of *Balindong*, the reigning chief, who once upon a time challenged his sons that whoever finds and pulls out the sword of legend would be the next ruler. Two of his sons pulled out the sword and they were *Rahmatullah* and *Jalalludin*. Thus, their line became rightful heirs in one of the Sultanate of Lanao. From *Rahmatullah's* line were peace advocates while *Jalalludin's* were warrior like.

Most of all, when looking at these Meranaw traditional weapons, they served as reminders of those years of conflicts which brought many glories and helped shaped the characters of our ancestors that we may have forgotten at present. Being the pampered generation enjoying the sacrifices of our ancestors. History should never forget these weapons' importance during those years of resistance in Lanao. From the *kampilan*, many will be reminded about the historic battles where the natives of Mindanao and of the Philippines won and posed a great challenge to the Spaniards.

Perhaps the earliest known record that we can provide about the *kampilan* is the following: Firstly, The *Kampilan*, being the notorious war weapon might have even been the kind of weapon used by Lapu-Lapu in his defense of Mactan against the Spanish invasion led by Ferdinand Magellan. In 1596, the *kampilan* was also the very weapon that left a mark to the Spaniards as the most deadly of the Mindanao weapons as it was the one that was used to kill the very first of the Spanish leaders to the conquest of Mindanao and the most valorous, Capitan Esteban de Figueroa. "The Spanish troops he led numbered to 400 Spaniards and four thousand Indians and reached Mindanao. When the army disembarked, and the natives of the area fled, victory for Spain was declared but their satisfaction was disturbed and forever will be threatened. Hiding somewhere in the bushes, along the road where the army was marching, was a Moro warrior resolved to kill the leader of the expedition at the cost of his own death."<sup>32</sup> With the *Kampilan*, the warrior leaped out of the bushes surprisingly and struck the said captain. The record on this described that, "The blow on his head was so fierce that it cleft his skull from ear to ear."<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, his death at the *Kampilan*, "was the origin and the beginning of the misfortunes and calamities which for so many years have caused so much sorrow in the Filipinas,"<sup>34</sup> and where the Spaniards experienced their first defeat in Mindanao.

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<sup>32</sup> Emma Blair, and James, Robertson. *The Philippine Islands: 1493-1898. 55 vols.* (Cleveland: A.H Clark Co., 1903-1919), Vol. 29., p. 92.

<sup>33</sup> Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, Vol.29, 92.

<sup>34</sup> Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, Vol.29, 92.

Furthermore, the weapons discussed in this paper's chapter were the kinds of weapons utilized by the Mindanao fighters, or pirates against the conquerors, when they roam around not only in the Philippines but to other parts of the Southeast Asia. Once upon a time, when piracy was a worldwide phenomenon, the natives here in Mindanao became so notorious that they earned such titles as the fishers of men or lords of the eastern seas. They were specifically referring, among others, to the Iranon or Ilanon but according to some historians, the Iranon were not so numerous in those times so, "actually the notorious Ilanon sea-rovers of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were Magindanao, who manned the vessels, carrying crowds of Meranaw warriors as marines."<sup>35</sup> The Iranon were also described in some books as the greatest blacksmiths. Although for many years, the Meranaws were not mentioned; however, it was the Meranaws to these days who are the skilled artisans whose craftsmanship was now recognized in Mindanao. Perhaps, this is because the Iranons were the shore-dwellers, they were the first to become known to sea-borne visitors and invaders that their name Iranon came to be applied in describing many, including Meranaws and other Moro natives of Mindanao.

Discovering these types of weapons among the Meranaws of Lanao might also serve as proof to their possible participation in this kind of activity. The Meranaws were well armed with their native kind of weapons when they encountered their enemies. Most Meranaws who were interviewed said that from their recollection, the ancestors got it from their enemies like the Spaniards. They also practiced slavery. Where did they get these slaves? Were they slave raiders as well? Not many written records during the Spanish and American periods were written regarding Meranaws as slave raiders, so this was like a gap in their history. But why was it that some Spanish forts were found in Ozamiz and in the inner parts of Mindanao, were these forts designed for the raiders coming from the hinterlands? so they could be Meranaws. There was little to prove this even if historians believed that Meranaws were part of this slave raiding activity. However, most Meranaws interviewed refused the idea that Meranaws were part of it; they said that it was un-Islamic.

Nevertheless, slave raiding did exist and there could be Meranaws who were involved because it was an economic activity until a century ago. And an archival document even pointed out that slave raiding also existed within the tribes. There came to a point where they began stealing children among

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<sup>35</sup> Edward M. Kuder. "The Moros in the Philippines." *The Far Eastern Quarterly*. Vol. IV.119-126 (February 1945), 123.

themselves. As explained; “The Moros cannot exist without their slaves, and when they cannot have Christian ones, they procure them from among their own race. Malabang and Baras have been for a long time the chief markets of human flesh; and to the said points were carried those captured in Lanao, to be sold to the Chinos of Cotabato or to the Moros of the Rio Grande. And there also were sold those captured in this last named place to be sold in turn to the Moros of Lanao.”<sup>36</sup>

Hence, this becomes another explanation to the author, why people armed themselves with several kinds of weapons. It could have been also for personal security against raiders and rido. Their weapons could be a means to communicate the idea that anyone carrying it was not a nobody who was ready for taking.

Furthermore, just by looking at these traditional weapons of the Meranaws hanging in some local’s living room or in a Museum, we can recall the tales of the old men who treasured the traditions of the forefathers. It only confirms the narratives in various history books and traditions. In history, we learn that the Meranaws held themselves proud and different as they remain to be history-makers and one of the most resilient of groups in Mindanao. These weapons or swords bring back memories, both the victor and the fallen, especially to those who carried them in battles and those who were hit by it. One can only imagine the battles fought, the shouts of bravery and the “Spaniards beaten in battle, ravaged by cholera in camp, slain by deadly fevers on the marsh, while the hated swine gorged themselves upon the flesh of the fallen along the pathways of disaster down toward the sea.”<sup>37</sup> Those were just the realistic hardships experienced by men who fought the battles.

Furthermore, we remind ourselves of the many Meranaw epic battles led by our own heroes and their sacrifices in the name of family, culture, religion and territory. First of these battles was the battle of Marawi, the battle in Bayang and other lake side areas. It was only natural to recount these events for it was in these years that these weapons were put to too much use, and these were two of the most historical events involving the Meranaws in the Philippine annals of conquest and resistance.

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<sup>36</sup>Taken from the *Annual Report of Major General George W. Davis* of the United States Army, Commanding, Division of the Philippines from October 1, 1902 to July 26, 1903. Manila, Philippines: 148.

<sup>37</sup> Chaplain Bateman. “The fall of the Sultan.” *Overland Monthly*. Vol. XLIV. Dec. 1904. Pg. 569-582:571.

When interviewed Meranaws were asked about the stories which can be derived from these traditional weapons, the majority begun talking of the famed Battle in Marawi and in Bayang. H. Daud Sarip, in particular, said;

The way the ancestors lived and how they stood on their principles could not be matched by this generation, they have true form of leadership and bravery. The biggest example is when the elder Meranaws led by Ama I Pakpak fought and the bravery demonstrated by Bayang against the coming of powerful Americans.

The Battle of Marawi and the heroism of Ama I Pakpak<sup>38</sup> can be traced back to 1639 when the Spaniards came to the Lake Lanao after the ferocious encounter with the forces of Sultan Kudarat in Lamitan. During this event, the Meranaws fought after they had been accordingly convinced by the Sultan to fight in the name of religion and territory. The fighting quality of the Meranaws was a surprise to the Spaniards, "At times when a Kota was surrounded by the enemies, these warriors would spring out like tigers from the bushes and charge invaders with a few captured European guns and numerous bladed weapons of which they were experts at close range."<sup>39</sup> Owing to their resistance and due to the difficulty of reinforcing and supplying their troops, the Spanish occupation of Lanao lasted only a year. They retreated to Iligan in 1640 and would return after more than 200 years. The reason for this Spanish disinterest was explained as:

The Spaniards had no use for Lanao as a staging area for their planned invasion in other lands in South East Asia. Spanish colonizers had long planned on using Mindanao as a launching pad for the annexation of Borneo, the Moluccas and the islands of present Indonesia. Its inland location made Lanao useless for this purpose. The lake dwellers posed no serious threat to their colonial efforts. Unlike the Maguindanao or Sulus who had large and powerful navies capable of attacking Spanish military bases and Christian missions in Luzon and Visayas, the landlocked Meranaws had only a few boats that they used principally for trading.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Amai Pakpak must have been pronounced as Amai Papak since the Meranaws likely say *papak* which means wings rather than *pak-pak*, the tagalized version.

<sup>39</sup> Mamitua Saber and Abdullah Madale. *The Maranaw* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing, 1975). 20.

<sup>40</sup> Reuben Canoy. *The History of Mindanao* (Philippines; International School Press, 2003), 551.

But at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Spaniards would realize the greatest importance of Lanao not only for Christian missionary work but for its secret riches and agricultural wealth. Which Gayangos believed to be the “richest of all in the Filipino archipelago.”<sup>41</sup> And this time, the Meranaws proved once again their resolve for resistance. Under the leadership of Spanish Governor General Valeriano Weyler, the Spanish troops arrived from Malabang to the Meranaw territory and so the second battle of Marawi took place in 1889. And this time, the striking leader of the Meranaws recognized for his valor was no other than the leader of fort Marahui who came to be known as Ama I Pakpak. Though he died in the third and final battle with the Spaniards in 1895, his name was forever immortalized in Meranaw history as a hero.

Likewise remembered in the same manner was the Battle of Bayang. As recalled by H. Daud Sarip;

The most memorable to tell is the *Pudang Kerbala*, so called because it was likened by the Meranaws to the holy battle in Baghdad by the grandson of the prophet. It took place on May 2, 1902 which lasted for two days, and the fight went on, rain or shine. Where hundred Meranaws died, accordingly, what happened was a blood bath. The Meranaw martyr heroes of this battle were Sultan Samporna, who happened to be the first sultan of Bayang, Datu Pandapatan, Zainal Abedin, the Pitiilan of Bayang and two trusted warriors, one coming as far as Basilan, namely Datu Madayo and the other, Datu Mamintung from Zamboanga.<sup>42</sup>

They fought against the leadership of John Pershing’s hot-tempered colonel, Frank Baldwin, Pershing at that time was a captain and was in the northern part of Lanao. The said battle was gruesome that by the end of the battle only seven household had a Male member. All other households were left without a father, a brother or a male adult. And their resistance was so fierce and inflicted serious damage. They surrendered later only due to the death of the leader and were completely surrounded.

Afterwards, the battle became so memorable and many stories circulated about the valors shown by the Meranaws in Bayang. Winner or not, that was not important to them, what they saw was their leaders were true to their principles and were able to stand strong against invaders. One famous story after this event say that; “The Imams quickly spread a story among the

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<sup>41</sup> Canoy, *The History of Mindanao*, 551.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with H. Daud Sarip, (71 years old) retired Professor, at his residence in Brgy. Rantian Bayang, Lanao Del Sur On February, 2018



Meranaws that, following the death of the principal war leader the Sultan of Pandapatan, four angels appeared from a blinding flash of lightning to bear his body up to heaven on a chair, then called down a punishing deluge of rain to force the Americans to withdraw from the Kota and spend a night in misery. The next morning, a bright rainbow appeared, so the story went, signifying that the people of Bayang, by aggressively defending their part of Dar Ul Islam,<sup>43</sup> and had greatly pleased God and directly emulated the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, grandson of the prophet Mohammed, at far distant Karbala some twelve centuries before.”<sup>44</sup>

Overall, The theoretical implications that this paper could contribute in the writing of Moro history in general are the analysis that the author was able to come up with in the study of the Meranaw military experiences. Firstly, from the literature review conducted, it appeared that there seemed to be a pattern of development among the Moro groups, the Maguindanaos ruled and were dominant in the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries onward, they were eclipsed by the Sulu in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Sulu played a strategic role in the so called Sulu Zone. The Meranaws remained unknown until the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now, they became active players not only in Mindanao but also in other parts of the Philippines. And in the preservation of tradition and culture such as the production and manufacture of these remnants of the past, they were also the most active.

A second important implication of this paper would be its attempt to correct or clarify a popular local belief by the Meranaws that they were “never defeated in battles”. The study of these remnants of the past would always bring its readers to a history on the battles engaged by the Meranaws, and so, one could realize that no matter how well equipped the Meranaws were, their weapons, such as the Sundang and the Kampilan, were eventually overpowered by the newer and powerful weapons of the Spaniards and the Americans. An analysis this paper could provide would be its insistence that contrary to popular Meranaw perception, historical records would tell that these long standing perception is wrong. The Meranaws were clearly defeated by the Spanish by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and by the Americans in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, instead of saying that they were never defeated, since it is historically wrong, the proper way to address it is by admitting that they were defeated but

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<sup>43</sup> Dar Ul Islam is defined as the territorial world of Islam

<sup>44</sup>Robert A Fulton. *The History of Uncle Sam and the Moros 1899-1920* (Bend, Oregon: Tumalo Creek Press. 2007). 116.

unconquered. Unconquered? Yes, because of all Moro groups they were never changed, or they were the hardest to change. Their convictions, perceptions, traditions, and culture were not altered in profound ways. The Meranaws remained resilient throughout the years.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following conclusions have been arrived at. First, the artistic design, as well as the symbolism of Meranaw weapons, has led to the conclusion that the Meranaws are master weapons craftsmen, warriors in their ways, and most well-equipped of traditional fighting implements. The Sundang and Kampilan had decorated handles, cross guard, blade and sheaths. The common Sundang design was the cockatoo in the pommel part and the blade is serpentine instead of saying wavy. The kampilan handle design is like a crocodile mouth. And it truly is a warrior's weapon. Second, these Lanao weapons carried the memories on *Pusakas or heirlooms*, Meranaw superstitions of magic charms, *tonongs* (spirits) and *inikadowa* (*spiritual guardians*). It is a symbol of power, of prestige, of the sultanate and old or pre-american government in Lanao, and some pre-islamic belief of the Meranaws, of Historic battles in Lanao like the Battle of Marawi and the Battle of Bayang.

These remnants of the past contained important memories. And as one recommendation, the author would like to emphasize that the new generation should be thankful with what we presently have. Definitely, the present lives in a world that does not necessarily have to carry weapons. In the past, carrying weapons was a way of life. At present, there certainly is no need to be armed, ~~and~~ so this study discourages carrying weapons. However, it strongly encourages the spread of knowledge of the past and in the continuous efforts in the preservation of artifacts that encapsulate past memories.

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