

## **Philippines- Philippine Paleographs (Hanunoo, Buid, Tagbanua and Pala'wan)**

Communication by means of symbols and creative graphics is one of man's singular achievements. Syllabaries, like those that developed in the Philippines, go a step further and represent not merely graphics, but articulate sounds. Dating back to at least the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD, four sets of these syllabaries, out of a documented seventeen, have survived the centuries and remain in use to this day, notably the Hanunoo Mangyan syllabary figuring in poetry - *ambahan*-, and in song.

### **PART A - ESSENTIAL INFORMATION**

#### **Identity and Location**

Philippine Paleographs (Hanunoo, Buid, Tagbanua and Pala'wan)

Philippines

Provinces of Mindoro and Palawan (widespread location)

National Museum, P. Burgos St., Manila, Philippines

#### **Legal Information**

public ownership

National Museum, P. Burgos St., Manila, Philippines

Legal Status

public ownership

the preservation of the four samples of Philippine paleographs is ensured by the National Museum and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (public sector) and the Phinma Foundations through the Museum Foundation of the Philippines (private sector).

the paleographs are in use and can be accessed as follows: Hanunoo and Buid (Mindoro province); Tagbanua and Pala'wan (Palawan province). Detailed information is available through the Internet in Philippine Leaf (<http://www.bibingka.com/dahon>). Computer fonts are available for PC use.

no copyright.

The National Museum of the Philippines, with government and private funding, has a field team working on the propagation of the use of paleographs among the original users:

the Hanunoo, Buid, Tagbanua and Pala'wan.

## Identification

The various Sanskrit Philippine syllabaries present throughout Southeast Asia are characterised by the lack of a terminal consonant. They usually comprise seventeen basic symbols: 3 vowels (a, i, and u, the e and o being subsumed in i and u); and 14 consonants: *ka, ga, nga, ta, da, na, pa, ba, ma, ya, la, wa, sa* and *ha*. Each symbol represents a complete syllable.

A diacritical mark in the form of a dot or a dash, etc. called a *kudlit* when placed above a symbol changes the *a* to an *i* sound and when placed below changes the *a* to a *u* sound.

The Tagalog language syllabary was called *baybayin* and the script contained only two kinds of syllables: vowel (V) and consonant (C) + vowel(V). Languages, however, contain V, CV, VC; and CVC syllable types, so for example *ak, pat, tang* (*ng* being one consonant) could not be represented. There is no terminal consonant.

Syllabary was not used for the writing of history, but for personal communication and poetic forms such as the *ambahan* and *urukay* poetry of the Hanunoo and Mindoro Buid respectively.

The 4 extant scripts were declared **National Cultural Treasures** in 1997 by the National Museum of the Philippines, in accordance with the provisions of the Republic Act 4846, amended by the Presidential Decree 374. The complete documentation is kept in the National Museum. (Visual documentation attached).

When the Spaniards began their colonial rule in 1571 they found people in Manila and elsewhere inscribing syllabaries with knives and other sharp styli in bamboo, and palm leaves. This was further documented in 1604 by a Jesuit historian, Pedro Chirino who wrote in the *Relacion de las islas filipinas* - "all these islanders are much given to reading and writing, and there is hardly a man, much less a woman, who does not read or write". In 1609, Dr. Antonio Morga who was then Senior Judge Advocate of the High Court of Justice wrote in his *Sucesos de las Islas filipinas* - "Almost all the natives, both men and women, write in this language. There are very few who do not write it excellently and correctly". The widespread use of the indigenous scripts prompted religious authorities to use it for the propagation of Christianity. In 1593 a Tagalog version of the *Doctrina Christiana* was published. In 1620 an Ilocano language version was published and often reprinted during the subsequent 275 years, the final edition appearing in 1895.

By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the use of the scripts was almost non-existent due to the introduction of the Latin alphabet. One of the many causes leading to the decline of the syllabaries was probably its inability to keep pace with the changing Philippine languages.

The syllabaries' deficiency in representing sounds led to proposals to "improve" the system, e.g., by Dr. Francisco Lopez in 1620, who proposed using a cross (*kudlit*) under a basic symbol to cancel the inherent *a* sound and turn the syllables into phonemes.

The oldest of these paleographs, inscribed in copper plate and bearing a Saka date of 850, was discovered in southern Luzon. The script relates to an ancient Malay language although it is similar to other Indonesian paleographs. A second one, dating from the 14-15<sup>th</sup> century, inscribed in a piece of silver associated with Ming dynasty burials, was found in the island of Mindanao and a third from the same period was inscribed on the shoulder of an earthenware pot excavated in the Batangas province on the island of Luzon.

### Bibliography

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### Experts:

Prof. Aurora Roxas Lim, Asian Studies Center, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines;

Dr. Jesus T. Peralta, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, G. Luna St., Intramuros, Manila, Philippines;

Mr. Antoon Postma, Mangyan Assistance and Research Center, Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro;

Mr. Leo Batoon and Mr. Nicolas Cuadra, Anthropology Division, National Museum, P.Burgos, Manila, Philippines.

### Management Plan

Current government policy promotes the propagation of the use of the scripts where still viable. The budget is variable but covers travel to the localities, salaries and honoraria for local staff, publication of manuals and handouts, communications and miscellaneous materials.

- not applicable

- not applicable

There are five regular staff in the Palawan team and four in Mindoro, headed by anthropologists and assisted by museum technicians, but staff numbers vary with the requirements of particular field trips.

The propagation and preservation programs are incorporated in the annual appropriations of the National Museum from the government treasury.

### **Assessment according to Selection Criteria**

This documentary heritage reflects a long period of cultural and social relationships between peoples located as far apart as India and Southeast Asia. It can probably be related to population movements associated with the Austronesian family of languages, particularly the Malayo-Polynesian branch. The script has provided insight into the social, political, economic and popular strata of the Philippines, as well as the rest of Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, Borneo, and probably the Malay peninsula.

The syllabary has been related to other Sanskrit derived writing that has been traced to the syllabaries in Sulawesi and Java.

The authenticity of the scripts, notably the 10<sup>th</sup> c. Siniloan copper plate scripts, was validated by renowned paleographers in an international conference held at the University of the Philippines in 1997.

Of the 17 documented syllabaries existing in the Philippines in the 16th century only four remain and if neglected are certain to disappear since their functions have been supplanted by the Latin alphabet.

### **Consultation**

current users of the Hanunoo and Buid syllabaries of the province of Mindoro; and the Tagbanua and Pala'wan of the province of Palawan

the National Museum of the Philippines and other public and private organizations assisting in the effort of propagation and preservation.

### **Nominator**

National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), G. Luna St., Intramuros, Metro-Manila, Philippines.

under the mandate of the NCCA charter

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## **PART B - SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION**

### **Risk Assessment**

There is no risk either from the political climate, or from environment or physical conditions, but only from disuse due to the introduction of the modern alphabet

The preservation budget is incorporated in the annual appropriations of the Anthropology Division of the National Museum. More funds are generated from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts and the Museum Foundation of the Philippines. With the new Board of Trustees of the National Museum and the new National Museum Foundations supplementary funds will be allocated to support programs to propagate the use of the paleographs.

The Hanunoo and Buid (northern group) paleographs are currently used in the creation of poetry (the *ambahan* form) and songs. Previously the Tagbanua and Pala'wan paleographs were even used in political elections but this has been discontinued. It is in Palawan that the propagation program is being conducted.

### **Preservation Assessment**

The Hanunoo script is the most viable as it is preserved and in continual use through the efforts of Mr. Antoon Postma who heads a research foundation in Mindoro. Several publications have been circulated. Four years ago, in an effort to focus attention on this cultural heritage, the government declared one of the local users, an *ambahan* poet ***Gawad Manlilikhang Bayan*** (National Living Treasure).

Present Physical State.

The northern Buid script is still in use due to isolation from mainstream society. The Tagbanua and Pala'wan scripts are in advanced deterioration through disuse.

In view of the above-mentioned state of the scripts, the National Museum focused on the

Tagbanua and Pala'wan versions. The initial move was to carry out a survey to locate individuals with knowledge of, or still using the scripts. A pilot project was started in Palawan involving knowledgeable individuals to teach the script to others in the community, the training sessions being organized by local educational institutions and governments. A manual was published as a teaching aid for the propagation.

A similar survey was initiated in Mindoro among the Buid.

- The current policy of the National Museum and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts is to continue the initial program for propagation and revitalization.

- The Institutions responsible for the preservation of the heritage are the National Museum (Messrs. Nicolas Cuadra and Leo Batoon), P. Burgos Street., Metro-Manila, Philippines; and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (Dr. Jaime C. Laya and Dr. Jesus T. Peralta), G. Luna Street., Intramuros, Metro-Manila, Philippines.