

The death of gold in early Visayan societies: Ethnohistoric accounts and archaeological evidences

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ABSTRACT

There is a scanty amount of literature about gold of Philippine societies in the last one thousand years. Much of what we know about the people's use of the metal comes from ethnographic and ethnohistoric sources. More so, the literature becomes even scantier when we delve deeper into how early Filipinos viewed their use of gold. Hence, the paper tries to survey vast sources of information in order to elucidate the reasons behind the apparent use of gold in death and burial practices of the early inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago, especially of the early Visayan societies. Indeed, burial sites comprise most of the archaeological sources in the area; thus, the study also concerns itself with how mortuary analyses through archaeological methodologies and inferences, could provide concrete evidences for these accounts. Focusing on the early Filipinos' concepts of death, dying and the afterlife, the paper argues that gold, as a distinct material, is deemed important in this stage of people's life. The paper introduces the concept of object-soul, an animist explanation why certain materials were buried together with the dead. However, beyond the consideration of nature spirits in such perspective, the study argues that material objects in Visayan death and burial, like gold, were conceived as having soul, thus undergo the same separation and transition that happens to the deceased. Notwithstanding that there were prevailing justifications on the use of gold in death and burial during the protohistoric period in the Philippines, and that this deliberate use was predominantly attributed to consensual spiritualism, the persevering question of why is there a limited archaeological evidence of gold in burials still posits a problem.

Keywords: *gold, burial goods, object-soul, protohistoric Visayas, material culture in the past*

I. INTRODUCTION

The first week of May of every year, though quite humid and dry, is among the busiest time for the people of the sleepy town of Oton, one of the oldest in the province of Iloilo in the Visayas. Just before the dawn of the rainy season, this is the time when inhabitants prepare for an annual event of curious tribute. Men and women, especially the

school children from every part of the locality craft costumes and rehearse dance routines. They gather in their streets and together celebrate. The routines were festive since the preparations were for a feast, but the costumes were quite distinct. Every single participant creates an interesting mask for his/her attire. They make sure that this is glittery, shiny and most importantly gold.

The event is mentioned as the Katagman Festival celebrated since the year 2002. It was an ordinary fiesta with an extraordinary commemoration, since it is a celebration of their glorious past symbolized by a mask that had been used by earlier inhabitants of Iloilo as facial covers for the deceased.

The death masks are buried together with the dead. They are usually made of metal, but gold is preferred. In 1973, evidence of such practice was recovered when Alfredo Evangelista and F. Landa Jocano found some of this kind through an excavation by the National Museum in Barangay San Antonio. The gold nose-disc and gold eye-mask was believed to be from the late 1300s to the early 1400s BCE based on the associated grave goods. Because of its historical significance and probably it is made of gold, the locals deemed it worthy of high esteem and celebration. During the Katagman Festival, people engage in various performing and visual arts competitions. It is a week of merriment and feasts. From a past practice for uninviting death, the engagement became an exhilarating festivity.

Information about Philippine prehistoric gold, like the one mentioned earlier, comes from two-fold sources that generally relate with one another. While the first concerns itself with the materials recovered and the analyses done in archaeology, the other one talks about ethnographic data which was written by foreign observers from the neighboring communities, as well as the European colonizers. The latter records of ethnohistory of the Philippine archipelago, however, composed the bulk of our knowledge about gold of our distant ancestors. So to speak, these records are ethnographies and historical accounts at the same time, since most of these narrations incorporate both the descriptions of the ways our early people lived, as well as the events and occurrences, which they personally witnessed and observed. However, documents from foreign people compose these ethnohistoric records. Neighboring kingdom like China, as well as the earliest Europeans who came to the

archipelago provided this information. These were explored in a previous study elsewhere (Estrella, 2013). Nevertheless, accounts about gold were, by and large, amazements of the chroniclers with the abundance of such material. And as would Scott (1967/94) puts it, gold is mentioned more often than any other one substance.

Conversely, it seems that evidences from the archaeological record could not rival the abundant accounts about gold in the past. In addition, a perplexingly small number of yields could pose a problem. While the various ethnohistoric records consistently account an abundance of gold, both trade and artisanal, little that we see these materials in archaeological excavations and exposed sites all throughout the country. For one, we could say that the Philippines is young, in terms of archaeological explorations and surveys. More archaeological yields of this kind require more systematic excavations. But then again, rereading these texts would suggest that at least, a site should yield a piece or two, considering also that our country is second to South Africa in gold production per square kilometre (Villegas, 2004:15/ 16). According to Bennett (2009:104/ 105), gold appears in the archaeological record only in the second half of the first millennium BCE, due to the reason that the methods of gold extraction and working were introduced to Southeast Asia through Indian and/or Chinese traders pursuing gold ores available in the region. Harrison (1968) as quoted in Villegas (2004) added further that the foremost goldsmithing occurred after 1000 BCE, especially between 1200 and 1400 BCE, since a change in trade patterns and export requirements to the mainland after the start of the Ming dynasty were prevailing in addition to the new attitudes evoked by Islam after 1400s. By and large, the disparity between the ethnohistoric and archaeological record could be attributed in gold, as a material itself (Estrella, 2013). Finally, this inconsistency might be found further in the nature and properties of gold, since it is indeed exceptional, if not a mystical metal.

Part of its numinous properties is the perplexing idea that gold is indeed ironic. In point of fact, Peter Bernstein (2004/7) reveals through his striking book *The Power of Gold: A History of an Obsession*, that indeed, “gold is a mass of contradictions.” Its properties and materiality posit cunning ironies. To wit, gold is among the noble metals yet it is so ductile and malleable that a gram of it will cover half a square meter when hammered thoroughly (Austin, 1921:121; Rose, 1898:3). In the midst of being a metal, gold is also easy to work with that even the earliest of the humans moulded fascinating objects out of it largely due to its occurrence in its native, uncombined state (Alexander, 2011:171; Gimeno, 2008:2; Rapp, 2009:146; Rose, 1898:2). Gold is astonishingly dense weighing about seventeen and a half kilograms per cubic centimetre. Ultimately, the metal is chemically inert, that is why according to Venable (2011: xviii), there are little substantial formation activities that happened to gold throughout the development of the Earth, and that it is highly resistant to disparaging oxidation. In other words, the gold that we are exhausting today is physically and chemically, the same gold that the earliest people had interacted with before, yet, gold’s radiance never faded. On one hand, it is a mass of paradox, on the other and most importantly, it is a material with contradicting meanings. Various meanings attributed to this curious material create a complex confusion in the minds of the people, resulting to perplexing actions in return.

In consistent with Peter Bernstein;

Nations have scoured the earth for gold in order to control others only to find that gold has controlled their own fate. The gold at the end of the rainbow is ultimate happiness, but the gold at the bottom of the mine emerges from hell. Gold has inspired some of humanity’s greatest achievements and provoked some of its worst crimes. When we use gold to symbolize eternity it elevates people to greater dignity-royalty

religion, formality; when gold is regarded as life everlasting, it drives people to death (2004:8).

But of all the paradoxes gold entail, the ironic ways the early inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago employed this particular material in life and death baffle the researcher the most as an enthusiast. Particular emphasis is hereby given with how the early inhabitants of the Visayan polities interacted with the material in life and even in death. These contradictions in its materiality are nevertheless discussed in this paper, with the aim of providing a theoretical context in which to consider gold in burial practices done by the Visayans in the Philippine archipelago in the last one thousand years. By and large, the study tries to elucidate the following musings. Was there a high regard by the early inhabitants of the region for gold objects in death and burial? If gold is precious, then why was it disposed together with the dead, left buried underneath the cold and putrid dirt? Was the act of leaving this kind of material seen as a seize in use or could it mean something else for the people?

II. DOCUMENTARY ARCHAEOLOGY

Since the objective is to shed light to the pre-colonial Visayan belief about death and burial, the paper utilized, as a primary method of contextualizing material evidences recovered archaeologically, the documentary archaeology approach. Laurie Wilkie (2006:13) defined documentary archaeology as “an approach to history that brings together diverse source materials” concerning the culture and the societies of the past. These source materials do not only include archival documents but also other possible sources of information in the past like artifacts and other material products of past cultures—the primary concern of archaeology. The term was first introduced by Mary Beaudry (1988, quoted in Wilkie, 2006:13) forwarding a documentary analysis in archaeology that is uniquely their own. Accordingly, this approach

provides wide variety of viewpoints not possible through “single lines” of analysis through giving ample attention to historical documents, often referred to as “texts” (Wilkie, 2006:13). More than a combination of History and Archaeology in the level of the utility of sources, documentary archaeology lets scholars and investigators in the disciplines to “excavate” further these sources.

It is true that history greatly influenced the practice of documentary archaeology; however, this emerging sub-discipline is more focused on historiographical concerns in creating a story. The document or the “text”, though not the sole evidence employed, is among the most important sources of information, thus, should be treated the same way researchers in the field treat material evidences of culture. Over and above, Wilkie (2006:16) cautions practitioners that all endeavors must be guided by anthropological perspectives and concepts of materiality.

Although it seems like documentary archaeology is widely used, Wilkie (2006:33) confirms that it is still a young field, at least in its methodological practice. Both archaeological and historical evidences have been used in a lot of investigations about the past, especially in the Philippines since according to Junker (2000:29) historical and ethnographic sources which compose a large portion of our historical documents accounts for the recent past while archaeological data have allowed us to extend our country’s existence far back suggesting a more genuine cultural development. Likewise, the relationship between historical and archaeological sources has been scrutinized extensively ever since, but little has done in understanding the relationship of these two sources, more so in integrating these kinds of evidences into an evocative narratives of the past.

III. GOLD OF THE DEAD

Grave or burial sites in the Visayas are one of, if not the major, sources of gold artifacts. Scott (1984:24) maintained that it is partly due to the fact that burial sites exhibits an array of variations,

especially with the material remains it go along with. In addition, there are more burial sites than settlement at the contemporary archaeological record (Scott, 1984:24). Remarkably enough, gold is easily distinguished within the record although difficult to recover in situ. Among the most celebrated gold yields found in burial sites, is the death mask in Oton, in the province of Iloilo. The yields were accidentally recovered in Barangay San Antonio, in this first class municipality in 1973. The site is believed to be a protohistoric port settlement locally referred to as Katagman. Katagman is in the middle of the Iloilo and Batiano rivers and the settlement was one of the oldest and most important seaports during the late 1300s to the early 1400s BCE. The people were coastal traders as viewed from the associated tradeware goods and they are as well, among the few people recorded to have used gold facial covers in death and burial. The death mask is composed of two parts; the eye-piece, measuring 13.3 cm in length and 2.5 cm in width, and the nose piece, measuring 16.3 cm in width and 5.5 cm in width. Both of these covers are intricately designed and manufactured. Looking closely, the death mask might have been done out of the process of simple gold sheeting through hammering. However, applying intricate designs would have taken the artisan extra effort for repoussage and chasing techniques (Esguerra, 2013:90). A similar finding was found in the neighboring island of Cebu. In the city’s Plaza Independencia, while a tunnel was about to be built, a death mask was also recovered, but, unlike the one recovered in Iloilo, the gold mask in the Plaza Independencia is less intricately etched. Bersales (2008) described facial covers as hastily made, probably because of its appearance. Nida Cuevas (2009) the head of the project, on the other hand noted that the gold death mask was found not far away from a probably female cranium that is artificially reformed based on initial analysis. In addition, these finds were part of a burial assemblage which includes also Thai “guan” celadon, Vietnamese, and Chinese ceramics. Therefore, the gold death mask, together with the

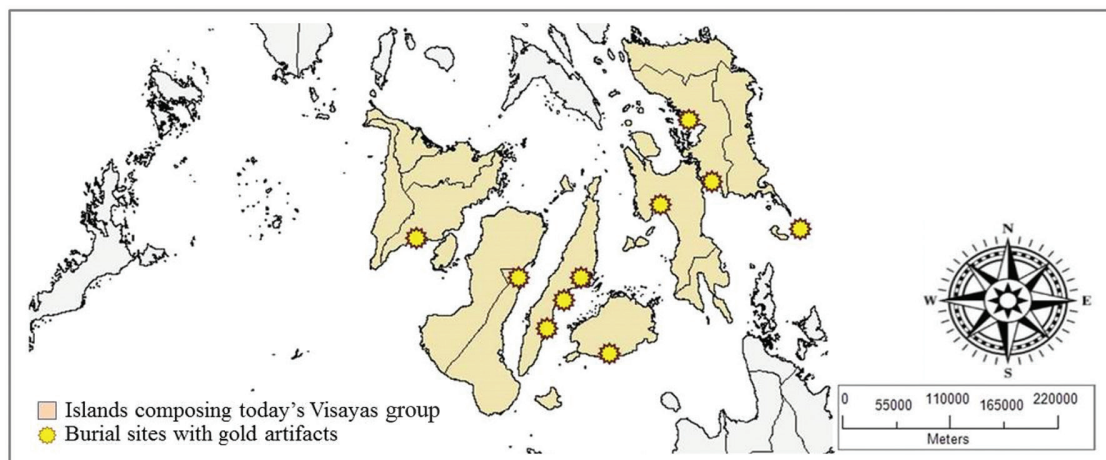
cranial reformation and associated goods, asserts the idea of a high status grave of a female in this archaeological find in Cebu (Tomada, 2008).

Further south of the province of Cebu, another gold assemblage was found in Boljoon. With the total of twenty-six burials, this sixteenth century grave site remarkably revealed a glimpse of early Cebuano burial customs through the different mortuary aspects, and more importantly through burial goods (Gerschwiler, 2009: 18-20). Within this assemblage, an astonishing 2.2 meter gold chain was found on the left side above the ribs, clasped by a male individual (Bersales & Dela Torre, 2008a). Also, in the grave of a 35-49 years old female in a supine position yielded carnelian and gold beads, and while further exploring the same grave, three gold pendants were found. One pendant shows a human face, whereas the other two exhibits zoomorphic designs. Notably also, Bersales & Dela Torre (2008b) found a gold earring found in another burial near the right lobe of a probable adult male Nonetheless, these finds were accompanied with Zangzhou-type of ceramics, plain white powder box, brass beads, iron implements and a fragmented earthenware cooking pot.

Other gold artifacts documented archaeologically in burials in the Visayas include those recovered through the efforts of the University of Michigan Philippine Expedition

headed by Dr. Carl E. Guthe. The yields comprise gold items, usually ornaments; from the town of Pangol and Carcar in the province of Cebu, Loay in Bohol, Vallehermoso in Negros Oriental, and Suluan Island in Samar (Guthe, 1927). Gold ornaments found in these burial sites in the different parts of the Visayas were mostly found together with rich associated artifacts. They were more often than not, found together with some ceramic objects that ranges from green, grey, and white sung, dark-glazed jars, celadon or green-glazed, blue and white, black and white ceramics, to stonewares and earthenwares. Iron, brass and copper implements, with a couple of beads and shell ornaments were also found associated with these goods, amounting to about hundreds of artifacts in each site (Beyer, 1947:281). Lastly, the province of Samar, towards the east of the Visayas group of islands has sites as well which yielded gold artifacts. Gold ornaments were also present in "porcelain-age" burials in the localities of Motiong, Lawaan Basey, Catubig, and Giwan (Beyer, 1947:268). Feodor Jagor in 1860 reported a gold ring of the hollow tube type found in a cave burial in Giwan, whereas Ralph S. Frush, an engineer working on a road extension, found few ornaments of this material in the barrio of Motiong. To picture out the distribution, a map showing the gold-yielding burial sites in the Visayas appears in Figure 1 .

Figure 1: Archaeologically excavated burial sites in the central Philippines with gold items.



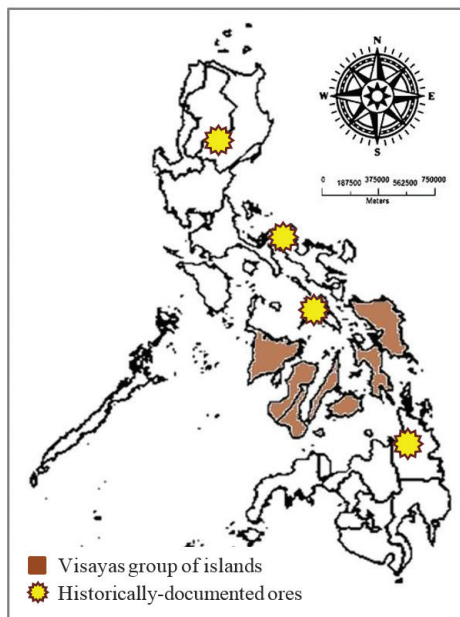
The burial assemblages where gold artifacts were found in this part of the archipelago suggest that the gold items appear and widely used when trade intensified from the last millennium up to the 1300s and 1400s. This period was commonly referred to as the protohistoric period because it denotes the period in the development of the Philippines, wherein recorded accounts about the existence of the population were generated due to rigorous contact between the indigent population of the archipelago and the societies around it, evident also in the appearance of an array of tradeware ceramics from these different neighbouring cultures of Southeast Asia and China in the archaeological record. As much as a confusing span of time when prehistory and history meet as asserted by Manuel (1979:xiii), it is also a period of link between the advent of indigenous literacy and ethnographic records of surrounding cultures, since early population in the Philippines started to build their own system of writing. Decisively, Jocano (1998:36) characterized this protohistoric period as “events” that are marked by “early cultural differentiation resulting from contacts” with foreign cultures, especially, fellow Asians.

During this protohistoric period, either trade items or local crafts, gold objects were deliberately used as burial goods and thus made its way to the contemporary period through archaeological excavations. It is never new in the Visayas, and in fact, it is quite abundant in the whole country. Primarily, this is due to the volcanic nature of the archipelago according to Robert, Poulsen and Dube (1999:210, 214). In addition, a much recent assessment reveals that the Philippines is second to South Africa in gold production per square kilometres (Villegas, 2004:15-16). Particularly in the islands of the Visayas, its coastal and riverine areas are considered to be one of the archaeologically productive places where gold artifacts are quite a find. No wonder that gold is so commonplace that even the earliest inhabitants in the region made use of this material in their daily lives—even in their

deaths. Most of the sites with gold yield exhibits proximity to coastal areas for one, settlement and therefore burials were concentrated in these topographies. Also, these sites have nearby rivers which are mostly outlets of running water coming from elevated terrains. Many of the gold artifacts are deemed to be sourced out from placer gold-rich rivers of the islands, from where the early inhabitants patiently panned dusts and nuggets. Sutherland (2007:31-32) advises that rivers play an important role in this kinds of activities. Bennett (2009:100) agreed that most of the gold in the prehistoric and early historic periods would have been sourced out from alluvial sediments through panning since this method only requires few “capital investments in equipment and no specialist technology”. But unfortunately, this method left little to no archaeological evidence. Nevertheless, Hutterer (1977:184-185) asserted that gold jewellery, among other objects were imported from other localities in Southeast Asia during the Metal Age. Allowing Rehren & Pernicka (2008:234) and Schoenberger (2010:3), economic, political and social interactions were necessitated and stimulated by the geological constrains of gold production, corresponding the spread of the knowledge with the spread of the material. This is further supported by the idea that there are no historically-documented lode ore sources within the group of islands, in contrast with those larger gold-mining and processing activities in Luzon and Mindanao. A map, showing these large gold-ore sources, appears in Figure 2. Bennett (2009:99) emphasized the abundance through irregularly of such deposits in Luzon and in Mindanao. While Morga (1609) enumerated placers and mines at Pracale in Camarines and Butuan River in Mindanao, Beyer (1947:217,253) supported this account, however identifying two gold mines in the archipelago being in the Bontok, Lepanto and Amburayan sub-provinces and in Camarines Norte as evident with gold mine workings and tools. In any other cases, these areas within certain towns or provinces had a good grasp of this metal and became important sources

of gold. This was attested by Santiago (2005:59) who claims that Iloilo, formerly referred to as Arevalo at the advent of Spanish colonization, was linked to the “gold routes.” Accordingly, the route connected the gold mines in Luzon through Paracale in Bicol, coursing southward “to foster and infuse the inter-island and Chinese trade in the Visayas” (Santiago, 2005:59). At this case, the islands of Cebu and Panay dominated this illustrious trade.

Figure 2: Historically-documented larger gold-ore deposits in the Philippines.



Moreover, apparent with the comparison of the burial sites in the Visayas appearing in Table 1, ornamentals were the most common type of finds; however, these gold ornaments could be further separated into two categories according to where in the body the items were used in addition to the functions they entail. Whereas gold objects found covering the face of the deceased serve as death masks, those found within the body serve as adornments. Both categories aim to augment the appearance of the dead body, but they are quite distinct in terms of their functions. Gold facial covers or bodily adornments could be considered

valued goods.

The kinds of items being buried together with the dead are limitless. The variety of burial goods in the world suggests that every single burial might include different kinds of objects for different reasons. As Piggott (1969, quoted in Ucko, 1969) asserted, there is a strong tendency that burial goods are socially selected, according to reasons and conditions that until this very moment remain not yet deciphered. Therefore, grave goods placed in the tomb will in no sense represent a random sample. Needless to say, only those objects with certain value are usually included since nobody would want to deck out a deceased loved one with things easily found everywhere else or with a lot of unnecessary items for no good reason. These valued items perhaps include those objects employed in their everyday pursuits, making it almost a virtually household, ornamental and devout item. More than anything else, the people looked at the some materials like articles of gold, as something relevant, giving them a different and a higher value over other common objects. According to Renfrew (1986:158) the concept of value was very complicated, however one important idea is that, it is something assigned by an individual or by a group and it may be assigned because of an array of reasons and potentials. After all, among the earliest exploited metals, gold is with quite a distinction (Guerra, 2003:1527; Rehren & Pernicka, 2008:233-234; Schoenberger, 2013:3). Nevertheless, apparent with the burial sites in the Visayas being examined this paper; gold is a customary, if not an essential part since, of Visayan burial goods. It is essential, in the sense that the metals were largely part, not only of the people’s pursuits, but also a central feature of the different stages in the development of their life and consciousness (see Estrella, 2012). Consequently, this customary inclusion of such material might suggest a reason that could be rooted somewhere else within the society. The most important question however is for what reason or reasons did these items bury with the dead.

Table 1: Comparison of burial sites with gold artifacts in the Visayas

| Archaeologically-documented Burial sites in the Visayas | | Samar | |
|---|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| | Suluan Is. | Motlong & Lawaan | Basey, Catubig Giwan, |
| | Cave | Early Jar | Cave |
| dated | unidentified | 60 + | unidentified |
| | None | None | None |
| artifacts | specimen | Few Ornaments | Gold ring of the hollow tube type |
| color | Green, white and grey, blue and white, black and white, dark-glazed jar ceramic fragments; white copper, iron and lead fragments | Iron implement thick unglazed earthenware | unidentified |
| found | unidentified | unidentified | unidentified |
| found | unidentified | unidentified | unidentified |
| found in | unidentified | Disintegrated | unidentified |
| | | unidentified | 1860 |
| | Expedition | Private | Private |
| found by | Carl E. Guthe | Ralph S. Frush | Feodor Jagor |

IV. WHEN GOLD DIES

The vast ethnohistoric records written by the Spanish chroniclers throughout the three centuries of their colonization in the Philippines recorded a rather detailed description of the early

inhabitant of the archipelago during these times. Especially during the initial institutionalizations of colonial systems between the late 16th and 17th centuries, many chroniclers were commissioned to report on how the people of the new colony

lived, and most probably died. Probably because of their interest, they noticed the deliberate use of gold by the early Filipinos. To wit gold objects, might be in the form of taels (monetary units) or of ornamentals, were patronized and utilized by early inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago not only to augment their appearance but also to change or maintain their experiences with the world. They were part of everyday living of the people as much as it was socialized throughout their lives. During a mother's pregnancy, Plasencia (1589:178; quoted in Blair & Roberston, 1903:180) noted about the need of the pregnant mother to give her master half of a gold tael because of her risk of death and for her inability to labour during the pregnancy. When the child was born, the mother takes it to the river to bathe, cuts the infants umbilical cord, washes it well, dries it, and turns it over to the father to place it in a bag containing small pieces of gold (Boxer Codex, 1595). At childhood, youngs were socialized with gold objects through ornaments such as necklaces, rings, most especially, earrings or circlets of gold (Colin, 1663:40; quoted in Blair & Roberston, 1903). Necklaces, collars of bead or gold, leg and arm bands comprise these ornaments. Also, at this point gold was introduced as well as penis pins referred to as *tugbuk* which was inserted in childhood. Scott (1994:24) asserted that this pin of brass, ivory or gold is aimed for greater stimulation of their sex partners at the time they were ready. They also believe that. Only wild animals had white teeth therefore it was customary for them to colour them. Gold, among other forms of colouring the teeth was considered all the more effective, and, more than enough to differentiate themselves from animals. This is evident, apparently, with the earlier discussed Bolinao gold dental peggings (Legaspi, 1966). At marriage, the soon-to-be husband is deemed to pay to his future wife dowry, as Loarca (1582a:170) observed, the sum of 100 taels, in gold, slaves and jewels. Besides, as supported by the Boxer Codex (1595) it is not only during the time of betrothals that people

wear their gold, instead, when the *maganito* is held not for a sick man, but also for the harvest in their fields, each one wears all the gold and precious stones he own. The Boxer Codex (1595) also mentioned gold being displayed in wreaths at the event one party wins warfare and abled to bring back some prizes, and these were pendant feathers of gold. Finally, may be because of gold's resilience to time, objects made from the material were being passed on from one generation to another as inheritance (Plasencia, 1589b:104). Consistent with the chroniclers' records, gold is perplexingly very crucial in virtually every aspect of human life, only to be disposed with the dead. Delving deeper into the ethnohistoric accounts about the population's belief might further enlighten us with this absurdity.

Looking further unto the people's belief in terms of death, the Povedano Manuscript (1572 quoted in an appendix provided in Demetrio, 1966:388-389) managed to account the tale of the first death according to the early Visayan spirituality. The Boxer Codex of 1590 reports this as well, whereas Miguel de Loarca (1580a:176) has a slight different version. Nevertheless, according to the story, the children of the first pair, crafted a fishing instrument and caught a shark. They brought it to the shore and caused its death. This enraged their great ancestors who sent a fly to check the event. Upon confirmation, they hurled a thunderbolt that immediately killed them. Jose Maria Pavon (1838-1839) on the other hand, tells a rather longer version, adding some curious geneses of things like the origin of corral fishing, of ray-fishes, shellfishes and tortoises, along the course of the story (Demetrio, 1966:360). In any other cases, Demetrio (1966:361) observed two deaths were first recognized to have had happened –the death of the shark and the death of the children.

Successively, the fate of the soul after death is narrated in Ignacio Alcina's (1668) *la Historia de la Islas e Indios Visayas*. Accordingly, the soul is said to go to a place called Sayar where a diwata, Bararum, governs. His primary duty is to call

and announce to all the relatives the death of a person. The dead arrives in his or her coffin and welcomed by the relative who are engaged with generous feasting. Loarca (1580a:180) asserted on the other hand, that instead of coffins, balangays are used to transport the dead to *Sisiburanen*, a high mountain in Borneo. The diwata will then recognize and should recognize the dead person because of the gold and other ornaments which adorn the person. Consistent with the Pavon Manuscripts (1838), quoted in an appendix provided in Demetrio (1966:392-395), it provided further information about the belief after what happened after the death of the first causality upon arriving in the afterlife. It tells us that the dead had the chance to go back to the mortal world but never wanted to return to the earth because of what he found out about what transpired to the relatives who are still living.

As much as gold objects were used tangibly as offerings to or as materials for the idols as noted by Loarca (1582), Plasencia (1589) and Chirino (1604), they also believed that spirits around them patronize gold objects the reason perhaps why they have to constantly include such materials in their offerings. A quite parallel translation as compiled by Blair and Robertson in the early 1900s can also provide an easier reference to this. Nevertheless, gold objects appear as well, in death and burial. According to Chirino (1604b:130), "during the internment, valuables like gold rings, chains bracelets, clothing, porcelain and other goods were buried with the dead, especially if he was of a high rank." When Gemelli Careri visited the Philippine archipelago in 1697, he noticed the same practice of leaving gold bracelets and other ornaments in graves and burials (452). The people believed that if they depart rich they will be well received in the other world, but coldly if they go poor. The Boljoon Site in Cebu might provide an archaeological data when Bersales & Dela Torre (2008) found four (4) clear grave goods among the late 16th century human burials in the area. Among these goods were gold beads, gold pendants of human and zoomorphic design

and gold earring. Chirino (1604c:260) also noted about placing the gold in the mouths of the corpses, and laid with them many articles of value, and the evidence for this and other components death masks were recovered as well as in Cebu, and in Oton, Iloilo.

Based on the first-hand reports, death, as viewed by the early Visayans, is a transitory phenomenon in which the deceased goes from one known geographical unit (i.e. mortal world) to another. Therefore, death and dying are considered to be a movement from one dimension to another. More importantly, it entails separation and transformation since the afterlife is a renewed existence "different from life here, yet, strangely enough, somewhat similar to life on earth" (Demetrio, 1866:386). The difference however according to him could be seen in symbols of long journey over waters usually towards trees, caves or mountains, the judgement or separation at the centre, and the further climb up the summit for the just and descent into the place for the wicked.

Likewise in a modern investigation, the Sulod society confirms this belief of death. Sulod is a group of people living in the interior highlands of Panay. These people are among the indigenous population of this part of the Visayas and therefore deemed important source of testimonies about experiences with death and the afterlife. For them, "death is not the end of everything", thus, when the person dies, he or she assumes a different form and continues to exist as a separate personality (Jocano, 1964:52). As quite similar to the ethnohistoric reports, death therefore is seen by the members of the society as the most unwelcomed rite of passage. Death according to the field works of Jocano (1964:53) in the society is perceived as well as a process of passing a narrow door. The door is so narrow that one pulls itself hard to pass through only to be welcomed or eaten by the *mahikawon* or evil spirits, depending whether the living relatives pacified them or not through funerary rituals. The entity which passes through the door is the person's soul. It is conceived as a smoke appearance of the body, 241

finely dressed and accompanied with a variety of times, just like physical remain of the dead. It goes to *Muruburu* to bath to be properly welcomed to the realm of the dead (Jocano, 1964:54). Like the accounts of the Spanish chroniclers, separation is what feared the Visayans the most when thinking about death. Even though it is seen as a whole new existence in another dimension, the thought of not coming back, rejection to the other world, and breaking of the bond terrify the people. This could be the reason why complex ceremonies and rituals were performed to ease the anxiety. These performances, nevertheless, were never complete with material things that try to accompany the dead.

Moreover, from the ethnohistoric records, emphasis was provided to the material objects that go along with the dead. This includes the coffin or the boat for that matter; clothing, other bits and pieces and of course ornaments of gold, to name a few. One, therefore, cannot separate material things with the person even in death, at least his/her personal and treasured items, not to mention the evidence of material wealth. According to Demetrio (1966:364), this belief captured by the various chronicles, is probably the primary reason why the living “deck the dead out with material things” like curious items made out of precious stones and metals for burials. The account tells us further that in some cases, the keeper of the world of the dead fails to recognize those who carry little or no items with them, and this scenario is what early Visayans also fear the most in their death. Material things therefore are believed to have travelled also to this new dimension, the realm of the dead, just like the deceased person. Therefore, the objects go through a similar transformation that the physical material remains buried with the physical remains of the person, while a sort of soul accompany the soul of the deceased.

V. GOLD IN THE AFTERLIFE

Gold objects therefore, are indispensable items deemed by the early Visayans to accompany their deceased relatives. Based on

the ethnohistoric accounts as they verify the appearance of such artifacts in the archaeological record, gold is a customary part of the goods they buried with the dead, if not a prescribed inclusion. They are therefore, part of the separation and transition process in which according to the belief of the early Visayans that the object has a soul, and so symbolically transferred as well to the realm of the dead. Remarkably, the accounts reveal that the early Visayans believe that material goods were transported together with the dead in the afterlife, and these objects are important in order for the dead to be accepted. The dead person is initially assessed by appearance, on how he or she has been groomed, dresses or prepared. Gold, more than anything else in this case, is a significant ticket.

Scott (1994:77) acknowledged that the early Visayans worship nature spirits personified in entities. He noted that specific natural occurrences were believed to be caused by invisible forces. In view of that, early inhabitants in this part of the archipelago revered prescribed landscape and other natural forms. Abrera (1992), on the other hand, talked about *anting-anting*, or amulets made out of an array of materials from the environment. Particularly, she observed that among the pre-colonial Visayans, as noted by Chirino (1604, quoted in Blair & Robertson, 1903:294), gold objects, especially ornamental rings worn in the toes, served as a sort of amulets that either guide or defend its owner. The toes, Abrera (1992:284) forwards, are portions of the body greatly associated with the person’s soul, since these either enclose them or serve as openings from which the soul penetrates. Accordingly, when people sleep, their soul goes out of their body through body openings, say through their mouths, noses, ears, and eyes, as well as through the hands and the feet. At the event that the body is empty, it is most vulnerable to evil spirits that wanting to find a host. The gold ornament consequently serves as a defence that fend away evil spirits through its bright radiance. Accordingly, the evil spirits are afraid to the brightness being projected

by the gold ornaments, and are therefore forced to go, leaving the body and soul without any malign impurities (Chua, 2012:18). There were plenty other study that deals with the unseen forces in the environment and their relationship with material things. However, little has been noted about the role of the object, itself, from nature in these complex animistic practices. Very few accounted for the important beliefs concerning specific materials. Objects from nature then, have been hastily reduced to passive materials. In the case of gold, it might be found in its natural state, or crafted to become among the most stunning ornaments, accompanying the dead in burial would mean a simple object to be carried in the afterlife. Yet, this is just a part of the story. What the researcher investigates in this paper and the researcher believes another parcel of this view; is that the early Visayans' believed that certain materials, say gold, have their own soul. Thus, having a soul for itself, materials are deemed to have died and transformed to a similar form, just like the soul of the dead. This might not be apparent with the ethnohistoric accounts of the Spanish chroniclers who recorded the ways of live of the early inhabitants of the archipelago upon the initial contacts. This could be attributed to the reason that the chroniclers hurriedly encapsulated every practice and belief to a more familiar and safe term of animism, or their belief system barred them to think such complex thoughts. On the contrary, the indigenous population the foreign chroniclers had observed before might believe in the view that the soul of the object takes a similar transformation in order to penetrate the realm of the dead. The physical material is buried although the people might have known its resistance to decay. This burying act should symbolize the death of gold as well as mark the start of its transformation and further the passage of the material to the afterlife.

Nevertheless, the ethnographic accounts were more open and thus, some of these important details were noted by American ethnographers who visited and studied a couple of ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines. This

belief in the object-soul is evident not only with the Visayan population, but also observed by the different ethnographers all over the Philippine archipelago.

Towards south, in Mindanao, Laura Benedict (1916), in her documentation of the Bagobo group, noted the population's belief about *gimokod*. *Gimokod*, according to Bagobo belief as noted by Benedict (1916:53), is the "spiritual substratum or essence" of an object. When a person dies, a couple of objects are laid with the deceased to rest believing that the *gimokod* of the object abstracts and enjoys whereas the physical material left in the burial stays with the physical remains of the dead (Benedict, 1916:53). Every object is deemed to have its own soul and in consistent to Benedict's (1916:54) observation, only what is buried can go together with the dead to the world of the dead. So the object is figuratively killed through the burying and seen as transforming with the deceased. The Sama of Cagayan Tawi-Tawi has a similar belief as observed by Eric Casiño when he was studying them in 1976. The Jama Mapun, what the people themselves prefer to be called, believes that things in nature have their own spirit, might it be animate or inanimate. Casiño (1976:113) furthers that because of this belief the population grown a special reverence to certain weapons, to daily articles and especially to rice. Another group in this southern part of the archipelago believes in this idea of regarding inanimate objects with animate attributes. According to Cole, who documented the Tingguians of Mindanao in 1915, these people "enjoy unusual relations" with objects and things. In fact, she noted of people conversing with spears and jars. Their tales would provide some insights as well with how the Tingguians treat these objects, especially in magic. Likewise, this group believes that by executing different rites against garments and other objects, people can inflict harm to these object's owners (Cole, 1915:20).

Way up north, the Ifugaos of the Cordilleras believe in a *linauwa*. Translated by Roy Barton (1930: 141) as "soulstuff", he recorded that

these people conceive all things around as having souls. In consistent also with his report, the soul of an object dictates the desirable qualities and attributes of the object, say the soul of a knife is its capability of taking and holding an edge whereas the soul of rice is its productivity. In addition, Barton (1930: 142) revealed that magic could augment or abate the soul, therefore the qualities, of an object, and as he observed, headhunting is the best way to do it.

Finally, in Walter William Skeat's documentation of indigenous Malay population in 1900, the people is said to believe in soul of an animal, plants and even minerals. Likewise, the soul is conceived as a "diminutive but exact counterpart of its own embodiment, occasionally at least, to assume the shape of some animal or bird" (Skeat, 1900: 52). For the purpose of the study, a particular emphasis is given to the animist theory of the Malay world that it incorporates the belief in souls of inert objects. these include stones, weapons, boats, food, clothes, ornaments, and even minerals. Particular, gold, the Malays have a distinct reference to this kind of materials. For this population, the gold-soul takes the form of a deer or locally called *kijang* in abstraction.

Early inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago therefore, like the general population of the Malay world, have this kind regard to the soul, which a member finds in virtually everything around. This belief was earlier explored in an animist context by Abrera (2007). Looking into the context of the employment of boats in pre-colonial Philippine society, according to her, the belief in a soul elucidates the presence of an array of materials within a grave. And, these objects' souls accompany the dead to the afterlife, going beyond their normal function in the society (Abrera, 2007:5). In the case of the indigenous boat, its soul is revered in an array of activities, such as from cutting a tree, from which the boat will be built, conducting rituals, before, during and after its use, and even at its disposal. Ultimately, Abrera (2007:7) asserted that because the people believe that objects, particularly boats, have soul, they

are qualified to accompany the deceased to the afterlife. Her argument is compelling enough; however, there is one thing that Abrera (2007) might have failed to expound further, yet quite evident with the direction of her paper. Beyond mere accompaniments of a dead person's soul in the afterlife, objects, in this perspective, have a rather active role in the society of the living, which enables the object to have a certain degree of "potency" (Gilmore, 1919:14). The role was active in the mortal world, or simply, in the society of the living, more than in the realm of the dead. The use of such materials or the inclusion of certain objects in graves and burials is for the living more than for the dead. It may be true that the belief prescribes particular objects needed in the world after, but the command is more for the living to procure, provide and even display these things. The concept is quite related with Alfred Gell's (1992/1998) notion of agency. According to Gell's (1992:43) "technology of enchantment", the production of certain materials are conceived not in individual ability to create these objects, but the ability of the group of people to consensually create purposes for the materials. Although forwarding the same ability of collectively creation of purposes, the concept of the object-soul on the contrary shifts the focus on the certain degree of potency provided by a group of people to an object, perhaps due to its properties, materiality or value.

The object-soul therefore is deemed to be the abstracted element of an object. It is the form of an item that is created and maintained in a person's mind, perpetuated through his or her belief. The essence, spirit or any abstraction came from the distinctive natures of an object, its materiality, ascribed value, hailed qualities or simply attached memories. Gilmore (1919:14) further characterizes the concept of animism in the context of belief in object-soul, claiming that any object, in this kind of belief system, it might be tangible or intangible, as possessing emotional, volitional, and actional potency like that he himself possesses. Things, of whatsoever sort, he

may consider the subjects of feelings—likes and dislikes, appetites or disinclinations, affections or antipathies, desires and longings; of will—to help or injure, to act or refrain from acting; and of the power to act according to the promptings of these feelings and the determinations of will.

In any other cases, the object is seen as having life, takes part of the everyday living, and even dies. Therefore in death, it is symbolically or ritually killed as well, through breaking and burning, by any destructive or additive transformation, or mere seizure of use.

Gold and Cultural Development

Most, if not all, of the techniques employed by our early ancestors could be recognized through careful considerations of the goldworks themselves. As Eluère (1983:82) would sum up, the examination of these artifacts are “viewed from the viewpoint of their structure, the nature of the alloys used in fabrication and the techniques by which they were made.” Accordingly, studies of gold in prehistory which focus on the technical aspects enables archaeologists to construe information about the ancient industry. Such information might include (1) the cultural context of the manufacturing process, (2) the link between forms and techniques, (3) the effect of the raw materials in the production, and (4) the organization of the craftspeople (Eluère, 1983:82). Over and above, looking into the technical features of the material would inevitably shed considerable light to the industries oftentimes misunderstood.

However, the amount of gold from secured archaeological contexts in the Philippines is quite scanty. This is also true when looking into the whole Southeast Asia (Miksic, 2013:72). The problem arising from this fact is primarily the difficulty of delving deeper into the thoughts and interactions of the people with this extraordinary material. Miksic (2013:76) furthers that “much potential data has been lost because of the pressures of poverty and the easy convertibility of gold into cash.” This must be the bitter truth the

material entails, other than its brilliance. Gold, in any other form, is still gold. And, gold in today’s time more than the past, has a high economic value.

In addition, another reason why we do not have the equal amount of gold in tangible material with what was written in ethnohistorical records is the material’s ability to be reworked. According to Guy (2013:87), gold is among the “most vulnerable, readily melted down by those desiring its metal value or wishing to make adornments of their time.” Reworking of gold, on the other hand, is possible. In fact, gold has been sought after because of this ability to be reworked into newer objects. Besides, as Bennett (2009:102) forwarded, because gold is never thrown away, it has, most probably, been recycled and traded many times. In other words, gold has never been disposed; instead it underwent transformations that by and large coped with the desires of the people who used it from generation to generation. Although the design and decorations might change, gold traverses temporality through the value of the material. Miksic (2013:72) agrees in stating that “until recently, antique gold was synonymous with scrap gold”. Thus, regardless of its form, it is constantly being melted, reworked and recasted to suit the demands of the time.

Clearly, the ancient Filipinos had this sophisticated way of life during this early phase of Philippine history. One indicator of this sophistication could probably be read and reread amongst the records of past chroniclers who witnessed this magnanimity. And according to them, this complexity is the capacity of the early Filipinos to create, manipulate and maintain commodities that in return, create, manipulate and maintain societal systems in the form of restricting luxury and prestige goods. Indeed, Miksic (2013:66) claimed that “goldwork is a highly sensitive indicator of cultural change and communication.” The acquisition and perpetuation of the different knowledge and skills about the fabrication of luxury goods, like gold works, other than subsistence technologies

at this early point in time, could be considered as an advancement, if not an achievement. The people were aware of the need of this industry inside and outside the archipelago; therefore, they coped up by learning the craft. Likewise, goldsmiths in the Philippines, as Miksic (2013:69) would assert, aware of the Hindu and Buddhist artistic traditions widely prevailing in the region. However, the goldsmiths who designed them did not include motifs that would concretely assign them a specific identity.

Even so, the studies about gold as a material culture in Southeast Asia and in the Philippines are stylistic in nature. And from this single parameter, a lot of scholars agree that the ancient Philippine society is among the advanced cultures in the region as manifested with their knowledge and skills. This concern could either be a good or a bad thing. On one hand, investigators in the field could probe on this topic comprehensively; on the other hand, the studies on gold might be reduced to these kinds of study. In doing the latter there is a great chance of neglecting the active role of this dynamic material. Archaeological inquiry though, is starting to look at this, but, has this hesitant attitude.

Furthermore, the paper suggests that more than the knowledge and skills however, one could study the conscious effort of the early Filipinos in asserting their identity through the crafts they make. Fortunately, this could be investigated and be done historically and archaeologically. As earlier synthesized from these data, the prevailing artistic and technological traditions in gold were prevalent during those time but the early Filipinos did not mind them. Miksic (2013:70) proposed two different but closely intertwined explanations. Firstly, according to him, is that the people were consciously imitating the designs and techniques for aesthetic purposes only with no religious intention or whatsoever. Secondly, they were aware of Indian iconographic conventions but blatantly disregarded them. In any other cases, there is this intentional

overlook at this great tradition that could be investigated archaeologically, probably in the light of studying past identities. After all, as consistent with the archaeologist John Miksic (2013:70) "Philippine artisans were deliberately maintaining a traditional ethnic identity rather than volunteering to join an international cultural sphere. The perpetuation of traditional styles in the Philippines cannot be seen as the result of ignorance; rather they are evidence of a conscious decision to maintain ethnic and cultural identities"

VI. CONCLUSION

The paper has explored the archaeological evidence with a more summary exploration of the ethnohistorical and anthropological literature in order to provide a theoretical context on the presence and deliberate inclusion of gold objects in death and burial in the Visayas during the last one thousand years. This period in the development of the Philippine archipelago is referred by Ramon Villegas (1998:236-237) as the "golden age" because of increasing cultural developments.

Deduced from the archaeological record, gold items found in the various burial sites in the Visayas were objects of trade and were considered luxury goods, products of an "intense focus on maritime commerce" (Junker, 2000:279). We are reminded that the Visayas region was marked by relentless contact between local and foreign trade and commerce. In fact, among its earliest reference in the history of trade in the world comes the Chinese records in the accounts of its official dynastic histories such as the *Sung Shih* (宋史) or the Sung History (960-1279 CE), and Chu ju-kua's (趙汝, 1225) *Chu fan-chih* (諸蕃志) or the *Account of the Various Barbarians*, which concerns itself with the records of economic transactions with neighbouring cultures since it was written by the Superintendent of Maritime Trade in Chuan-chu Province in Southern China (Scott, 1983). Since economic in nature, the relations took note of the people's awareness of the importance of gold as a commodity and

medium of exchange. In fact, the Chinese refers to this as *Huo-chiin*. As Wang (1972:32) suggested *huo* means goods or money and *chiin* means gold, thus, the term appearing mostly in the records related to the Philippine islands might indicate trade-gold. Therefore, gold's appearance in the graves might have started and flourished during this last one thousand years, during the time span referred to as the protohistoric period, evidently because of the association of this kind of materials with other items of Southeast Asian and Chinese contacts.

On the other hand, we were informed by the vast ethnohistoric records that gold objects are very important in the Visayan death and burial since they serve as passes to the afterlife. Since death is seen by the early inhabitants of the Visayas as a transitory phenomenon that entails long journeys and judgement at the middle that separates people from further climbing up the summit for those people who are worthy and descending into the place for the unworthy (Demetrio, 1966:386), different objects were conceived indispensable during these transformations. By and large, gold is one of them. In point of fact, the records noted that a certain *Bararum*, the keeper who meets the dead in the afterlife, most often than not, fails to admit people less adorned with gold. Very discriminating indeed, but this belief, might have dictated the living to include gold in their deceased loved ones' graves. Furthermore, these earliest accounts emphasized the various objects that go along with the dead in the afterlife. After all, death for them is never the end of life, but instead, just another rite of passage, wherein they will need some objects to continue their existence.

It is therefore argued that gold objects were conceived as having souls. Material things with value determined by the people, perhaps through their distinct properties, materialities and attributed meanings, were believed to undergo the same separation and transition alongside with the dead. While the physical remains of the deceased were buried and left to deteriorate, so too the materials. This is in connection with the

early Visayan belief that their souls shall leave the carnal realm and do enter the spiritual world. More importantly, the object-soul is with the dead people wherever they go. For the indigenous Malay population, the soul of the object is its "diminutive but exact counterpart" (Skeat, 1900:52). For the Ifugaos of the north, according to (Barton, 1930:194), the soul lies on the desirable qualities and attributes of an object. On the other hand, the Bogobos of Mindanao see it as the "spiritual substratum or essence" of the objects (Benedict, 1916:53). However it may be defined by a culture, object-soul is the abstracted part of an object. It is the form of an item that is created and maintained in a person's mind. The essence, spirit or any abstraction came from the distinctive natures of an object, its materiality, ascribed value or simply from an attached memory. In any other cases, the object is seen as having life, takes part of the everyday living, and even dies. Therefore in death, it is symbolically or ritually killed as well, through breaking and burning, by any destructive or additive transformation, or simply seizure of use. Conversely, more than mere containers of essences, spirits or any abstractions, the concept of object-soul disagrees with the idea of a conventional passive object in an animist perspective. Instead, it should be looked as an active means by way the value of an object dictates the people through its important not only for the dead since these objects will be needed to the afterlife, but also for the living because the need to include and compelled them to procure, provide and display these materials.

Over and above, gold as an object is a curious mystery. It could be a symbol of antagonism (White, 1974:46) at the same time a protagonist. It might really have a soul since, following Bernstein (2004:280) numerous thirsts for power, glory, beauty, security and more importantly, immortality have been enthused by this mysteriously cunning object. And for millennia, no other object in this world parallels its ability to command so much regard. Whereas the living strives to acquire them while alive, the dead is dying also to have it in its grave. Its power lies most probably with the gold's

incomprehensibility of properties and materiality causing the early inhabitants of the Visayan region to regard it as having a soul, elevating it comparable with a human.

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