

*Research Article*

## *Animismong Pilipino: Revisiting the Ancient Philippine Animistic Religion*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Animism, the belief that everything in nature has a soul or spirit of its own, is the primordial religion of the people in the Southeast Asian region prior to the coming of the dominant world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. Southeast Asian societies have a popular conception of cosmology which divided the world into three regions: an sky-world, an earth-world, and an under-world; all were inhabited by large numbers of ancestral and natural spirits. This paper discusses the ancient Philippine animistic religion and examines why such a system of beliefs survived despite the tremendous campaign of the Spanish colonizers to eradicate its influence among the Filipino natives. In examining this ancient religion, the study utilizes select primary sources written by the Spanish chroniclers themselves. Finally, this paper aims to offer an alternative interpretation of the Philippine animistic religion – not as a pagan religion or simply animism but as a “cosmic religion” to describe the basic stance the early people in the Philippines during the pre-Hispanic era had adopted toward the mysteries of life.

*Keywords: animism, anito, Bathala, baylan, cosmic religion*

## INTRODUCTION

The word animism is derived from the Latin word *anima*<sup>1</sup> which means soul, breath, or life. The *Encyclopedia of World Environmental History*<sup>2</sup> defined it as “the belief either that all natural things and phenomena are alive, or that they possess an innate soul or spirit.” Everything, including animals, plants, seas, rivers, mountains, rocks, trees, and even the planet itself, together form a global community of living spirits, infinitely and perpetually connected to a larger, universal spirit; all of which deserve respect. As a belief system, animism can be considered as the primordial religion of the people in the Southeast Asian region prior to the coming of the dominant world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. In his study, Alfred W. McCoy (1982:143) disclosed that the Southeast Asian societies have a popular conception of cosmology which divided the world into three regions: a sky-world, an earth-world, and an under-world; all being inhabited by large numbers of ancestral and natural spirits. As viewed by the Southeast Asians, particularly by the people of the Malay region – of insular Southeast Asia, the spirits of the remote sky-world are often benign while the earth- and under-world spirits, which are in constant contact with human society, are actively or latently malignant. However, it is not the object of this paper to discuss Southeast Asian animism as it merely focuses on the ancient Philippine animistic religion especially prior to and during the Spanish colonial period.

In interpreting the ancient Philippine animistic religion, only five (5) select primary sources written by the Spanish chroniclers such as that of Miguel de Loarca (1582), Juan de Plasencia, O.S.F. (1589), Pedro Chirino, S.J. (1604), Francisco Colin, S.J. (1663), and Francisco Ignacio Alcina, S.J. (1668) will be used as they comprise accounts of the early Spanish colonial period. To facilitate the narration, the author consulted and utilized the translated version (Spanish to English) of James Alexander Robertson and Emma Helen Blair, *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898*, a multivolume compilation of documents published from 1903-1909. Also used was the book of Francisco Ignacio Alcina, S.J., *Historia de las Islas y Indios de Bisayas Vol. III* (“History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands”) translated, edited, and annotated by Cantius J. Kobak, O.F.M. and Lucio Gutierrez, O.P. and was published by the University of Santo Tomas Publishing House in 2005.

The general objective of this study is to evaluate the Philippine animistic religion and understand why such belief system survived despite the tremendous campaign of the Spanish colonizers to eradicate its influence among the natives. Based on this general objective, these are the specific objectives:

- To describe the notion of divinity among the early Filipinos as mentioned in selected Spanish accounts;

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<sup>1</sup> See *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Random House, Inc., 1998), 82.

<sup>2</sup> Shephard Krech, J.R. McNeill, and Carolyn Merchant, ed. “Animism” in *Encyclopedia of World Environmental History* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 55-56. Accessed at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280311337Animism>, November 18, 2019.

- To interpret Philippine animism as exemplified by the role of the *baylan/babaylan* or *catalonan*;
- To explain why such belief system continues to exist; and
- To discuss animism as a “cosmic religion” of the early Filipinos.

To respond to these objectives, this study is divided into three parts: early Filipinos’ notion of divinity, animism as exemplified by the role of the *baylan/babaylan* or *catalonan*, and the conclusion.

### THE NOTION OF DIVINITY

The animistic beliefs of the early Filipinos can be accessed through the primary documents written by the Spanish chroniclers themselves such as: 1. Miguel de Loarca’s *Relación de las Islas Filipinas* (“Relation of the Filipinas Islands,” 1582); 2. Father Juan de Plasencia’s *Las Costumbres de los Indios Tagalos de Filipinas* (“Customs of the Tagalogs,” 1589); 3. Father Pedro Chirino’s *Relación de las Islas Filipinas* (“Relation of the Filipinas Islands and of What Has There Been Accomplished by the Fathers of the Society of Jesus,” 1604); 4. Father Francisco Colin’s “Native Races and Their Customs,” 1663; and 5. Father Francisco Ignacio Alcina’s *Historia de las Islas e Indios de Bisayas* (“History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands,” 1668).<sup>3</sup> English translation of the Spanish documents will be used to ease our understanding of the texts.

From the accounts of Spanish chroniclers, the early Filipinos were animists. Like other people of ancient societies, Filipinos had a notion of a powerful being (or beings) who was responsible for the creation of the earth and of everything on it. They worshipped nature spirits, gods of particular localities or activities, and even their own ancestors. Francisco Ignacio Alcina, S.J. (1668), a Jesuit missionary in Visayas, particularly in Samar and Leyte, discusses at length the knowledge of the Bisayan Filipinos about God and divinity. Alcina discovered that God has varying names in each locality.

As a result, the first cause (let us call it so, in the manner of the gentiles) or what they judged as the beginning of all things, they called *Malaon* in their language. This [*Malaon*], in turn, means ‘The Ancient One’ and corresponds to the name that is given to God in the Apocalypse; namely, *Antiquus dierum*...This *Malaon*, according to what I have been able to gather from all that I have treated, discussed and communicated with them, was the One Whom they acknowledge as the most exalted and most powerful. (Alcina 1668 in Kobak and Gutierrez, trans. ed. and annot. 2005: 219)

This One whom they called *Malaun* in the region of Ibabao and acknowledged as supreme, they also called *Makapatag*, which means ‘he

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<sup>3</sup> There were other friars and colonial officials who also wrote about the religious views of the early Filipinos during the early part of the Spanish period like Lieutenant Governor Antonio de Morga (*Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, 1609) and Juan Delgado, S.J. (*Historia General*, 1751). Most of what we know about Philippine history (including Philippine animistic religion) during the first century of the Spanish colonial period were derived from their accounts.

who sets everything in order and makes everything equal,' a name by which they gave to understand the equality of the divine justice. (2005: 221)

In Samar, which is the opposite coast of Ibabao, and on the west, just as Ibabao is on the east of that island – and similarly in other places – they commonly called their god *Badadum*; that means, 'The Happy One' and the One Who bestowed happiness and good things ... [What more] He was even called by another name as *Makaubus* (although others in Samar referred to Him differently). Who without having an end, saw the end of all things. This, also, agrees with the *Alpha* and *Omega* of the *Apocalypse*. (2005: 221-223)

Not only did Alcina describe the Supreme Being, the Creator, the "Alpha and the Omega" which the natives called in various names, he also criticized their belief in other gods known as *diwata*. Alcina writes:

What we call God, they designated by the term *Diwata*.<sup>4</sup> However, as to this name, which in its origin and force of this language means the true God, so too *anitu* [means] 'a sacrifice made to God.' Hence, from this is derived the term *paganitu*, "to sacrifice," as we shall see later... [As a result, therefore], they began to promote the term *diwata* among themselves, which we today use to differentiate it from the others with which they called Him; thereby leaving the term *diwata* for their gods. (2005: 223-225)

In the above statement of Alcina, we notice his misconception of the natives' belief on the *diwata* (*anito*), which he equated to the Supreme God. This misconception, however, is not surprising since Alcina interprets the Filipinos' belief in God/gods/goddesses using his Trinitarian Christian lens of divinity– One God in Three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit-- each Person being the one eternal God and in no way separated. Unknown to this Jesuit missionary, the *diwata* – the gods/spirits that the early Filipinos worshipped are classified into two: the nature spirits such as the celestial bodies, rivers, seas, mountains, trees, animals, and stones to name a few; and the ancestor spirits known as *nuno* or *humalagad* (*umalagad*), from *alagad*, a follower or voluntary assistant venerated as personal guardian or companion. Some of these *humalagad* were said to have been born as snake twins from the same womb as the persons they were destined to protect (Scott 1994: 80-81). However, Jean-Paul G. Potet (2017: 21) did not share with the idea that these spirits had two classifications. For him, there were three spirits (*diwata* or *anito*) who were worshipped by the Tagalogs: the supreme god's delegates, the resident spirits, and the dead. The supreme god's delegates were the spirits who ministered to the living and each had a duty. Some were in charge of the fields while some were in charge of seafarers. Moreover, Potet claimed that these delegates were not angels or messengers (as in the Semitic world) but governors sent by *Bathala* to administer the domains allotted to them (23). Resident spirits were those *anitos* residing and ruling the sacred places or trees (26) while

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<sup>4</sup> In Philippine mythology, a *diwata* (derived from Sanskrit "devata") is a type of deity or spirit. The term *diwata* is traditionally used in the Visayas, Palawan, and Mindanao regions while the term *anito* is used in Luzon regions.

the dead spirits were the *anitos* of their ancestors (28). For all of these spirits, the Tagalogs made offerings of holocausts, food, liquor, and gold jewels (29). He also disclosed that *Bathala*, the Tagalog supreme god was also known by two other names that define his attributes: *Maylupa*, which means “the Lord of the Earth” symbolized by the crow (*uwak*), and *Maykapal* or *Kumapal*, which means “Shaper of the Universe” or a “Creator” (22). Perhaps, Potet was thinking of the existence of deities other than the nature and ancestor spirits who actually dwell in the heavens as he categorically labelled them as “governors” sent by Bathala to minister to humans.

Another Jesuit missionary, Pedro Chirino, had a further revelation on this belief of the early Filipinos. In his *Relación de las Islas Filipinas*, Father Chirino lamented on what he considered idolatrous and evil practices of the Tagalog and Bisayan natives.<sup>5</sup> Handed down from the songs of the early Filipinos, his account specified areas in the ancient animistic beliefs of the peoples of the Philippine Islands:

In these barbarous songs, they relate the fabulous genealogies and vain deeds of their gods – among whom they set up one as the chief and superior of them all. This deity the Tagalos call *Bathala Mei kapal*, which means “God the creator or maker;” the Bisayans call him *Laon*, which denotes antiquity... Their idolatry is, in a word (as with many other nations), an adoration and deification of their ancestors, - especially of those who distinguished themselves through valiant deeds, or cruelties, or obscene and lewd acts. It was a general practice for anyone who could successfully do so to attribute divinity to his old father when the latter died... In memory of the departed ones, they keep their little idols – some of stone, wood, bone, ivory, or a cayman’s teeth; others of gold. They call these *Larauan*, which signifies, “idol,” “image,” or “statue;” and in their necessities they have recourse to these, offering to them barbarous sacrifices. They also worshiped, like the Egyptians, animals and birds; and like the Assyrians, the sun and moon; they attributed moreover, a sort of divinity to the rainbow. The Tagalos adored a blue bird, as large as a thrush, and called it *Bathala*, which was among them a term of divinity. They also worshiped the crow (as

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<sup>5</sup> Tagalog natives are a major ethnolinguistic group in the Philippines. They have a well-developed society due to their cultural heartland, Manila, being the capital city of the Philippines. Most of them inhabit and form a majority in the Metro Manila, CALABARZON (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon) regions of southern Luzon, as well as a plurality in the provinces of Bulacan, Bataan, Zambales, Nueva Ecija, and Aurora in Central Luzon and in the islands of Marinduque and Mindoro. Bisayan natives (*Visayans* or *Mga Bisaya*; local pronunciation: [bisaja]) on the other hand, is an umbrella term for the Philippine ethnolinguistic groups native to the whole Visayas, the southernmost islands of Luzon and most parts of Mindanao. Those particularly within the Visayas broadly share a sea-based culture with strong Roman Catholic traditions merged with cultural elements through centuries of interaction and inter-migrations mainly across the seas of Visayas, Sibuyan, Camotes and Bohol, and in some secluded areas merged with ancient animistic-polytheistic influences (i.e. Folk Catholicism). Most Visayans are speakers of one or more Visayan languages, the most widely spoken being Cebuano, followed by Hiligaynon and Waray-Waray. Many have, at some point in their lives, migrated to Metro Manila and its surrounding provinces out of necessity brought about by the negative effects of economic centralization in the Philippines.

the ancients worshiped the god Pan and the goddess Ceres). It bore the name *Mei lupa*, which signifies “master of the soil.” There was no old tree to which they did not attribute divinity; and it was a sacrilege to cut such tree for any purpose. What more did they adore? The very stones, cliffs, and reefs, and the headlands of the shores of the sea or the rivers; and they made some offering when they passed by these, going to the stone or rock, and placing the offering upon it. (Chirino 1604 in Blair and Robertson (BR) Vol. XII 1903-1909: 263-265)

The Jesuit Francisco Colin in 1663 had a similar account with Father Chirino regarding this belief system of the early Filipinos, but the documentation had additional information on the natives’ worship of the blue bird, crocodile, nature, and of their ancestors. From his *Labor Evangelica*, Colin reported:

Among their gods is one who is the chief and superior to all the others, whom the Tagalogs call *Bathala Meycapal*, which signifies “God” the “Creator” or “Maker.” The Visayans call him *Laon*, which denotes “antiquity.” They adored (as did the Egyptians) animals and birds; and the sun and moon, as did the Assyrians. They also attributed to the rainbow its kind of divinity. The Tagalogs worshiped a blue bird as large as a turtle-dove, which they called *Tigmamanuquin*, to which they attributed the name *Bathala*, which, as above stated, was among them a name for divinity. They worshiped the crow, as the ancients did the god Pan or the goddess Ceres, and called it *Meylupa*, signifying “master of the earth.” They held the crocodile in the greatest veneration, and when they saw it in the water cried out, in all subjection, “*Nono*,” signifying “Grandfather.” They asked it pleasantly and tenderly not to harm them, and for that purpose offered it a portion of what they carried in their boat, by throwing it into the water. There was no old tree to which they did not attribute divine honors, and it was a sacrilege to think of cutting it under any consideration. Even the rocks, crags, reefs, and points along the seashore and rivers were adored, and an offering made to them on passing, by stopping there and placing the offering upon the rock or reef.

They also adored private idols, which each one inherited from his ancestors. The Visayans called them *diuata*, and the Tagalogs *anito*. Of those idols some had jurisdiction over the mountains and open country, and permission was asked from them to go thither. Others had jurisdiction over the sowed fields, and the fields were commended to them so that they might prove fruitful; and besides the sacrifices they placed articles of food in the fields for the *anitos* to eat, in order to place them under greater obligations. There was an *anito* of the sea, to whom they commended their fisheries and navigations; an *anito* of the house, whose favor they implored whenever an infant was born, and when it was suckled and the breast offered to it. They placed their ancestors, the invocation of whom was the first thing in all their work and dangers, among these *anitos*. In memory of their ancestors they

kept certain very small and very badly made idols of stone, wood, gold, or ivory, called *licha* or *larauan*. Among their gods they reckoned also all those who perished by the sword, or who were devoured by crocodiles, as well as those killed by lightning. They thought that the souls of such immediately ascended to the blest abode by means of the rainbow, called by them *balañgao*. (Colin 1663 in BR Vol. XL, 1903-1909: 69-72)

Moreover, the Franciscan missionary, Juan de Plasencia<sup>6</sup> made a description of these animistic beliefs of the early Filipinos showing their reverence to the celestial bodies, to their dead ancestors (brave warriors known as *bagani*), and to the nature spirits including the dangerous crocodiles. Plasencia narrated:

They also worshipped the sun, which on account of its beauty, is almost universally respected and honored by heathens. They worshiped, too, the moon, especially when it was new, at which time they held great rejoicings, adoring it and bidding it welcome. Some of them also adored the stars – especially the morning star, which they called *Tala*. They knew, too, the “seven little goats” [the Pleiades] – as we call them – and, consequently, the change of seasons, which they call *Mapolon*; and *Balatic*, which is our Greater Bear. They possessed many idols called *licha*, which were images with different shapes; and at times they worshiped any little trifle, in which they adored, as did the Romans, some particular dead man who was brave in war and endowed with special faculties, to whom they commanded themselves for protection in their tribulations. They had another idol called *Dian masalanta*, who was the patron of lovers and of generation. The idols called *Lacapati* and *Idianale* were the patrons of the cultivated lands and husbandry. They paid reverence to water-lizards called by them *buaya*, or crocodiles, from fear of being harmed by them. They were even in the habit of offering these animals a portion of what they carried in their boats, by throwing it into the water, or placing it upon the bank. (Plasencia 1589 in BR Vol. VII, 1903-1909: 186-189)

What is common from these Spanish accounts (Alcina 1668, Chirino 1604, Colin 1663, and Plasencia 1589) is a revelation that ancient Filipinos revered the celestial bodies (sun, moon, stars), the nature including the dangerous crocodiles, and their dead ancestors. This is understandable since the animistic Filipinos believe that “they” are semi-gods/goddesses providing them foods and protecting them from harm. Ancient Filipinos made offerings to the sun and moon, rain, thunder, and lightning as the “gods” who gave them rice. They offered sacrifices of good will to these “gods” during the planting

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<sup>6</sup> Juan de Plasencia, who entered the Franciscan order in early youth came to the Philippines as one of the first missionaries of that order in 1577. He was distinguished in his labors among the natives for gathering the converts into reductions (villages in which they dwelt apart from the heathen, and under the special care of the missionaries), for establishing numerous primary schools for his linguistic abilities – being one of the first to form a grammar and vocabulary of the Tagal language. He died at Lilio, in the province of La Laguna in 1590. For more details, see Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898* Vol. VII (Cleveland: A. H. Clark & Co., 1903-1909), p. 185.

season and again during thanksgiving in one form or another during the harvest season. Hand in hand with nature worship was the ancestor or “*anito*” worship. Animistic Filipinos considered their dead ancestors as the guardians of the fields, the seas, the rivers, and the mountains vis-a-vis with the nature spirits known as “*diwata*” (Arens 1956: 2).

On the other hand, Miguel de Loarca, a soldier and one of the earlier Spanish conquerors and settlers in the Philippines, commented on the hierarchy of the early Filipino deities with their respective functions:

According to the religion formerly observed by these *Moros*, they worshipped a deity called *Batala*, which properly means “God.” They said that they adored this *Batala* because he was the Lord of all, and had created human beings and villages. They said that this *Batala* had many agents under him, whom he sent to this world to produce, in behalf of men, what is yielded here. These beings were called *anitos*, and each *anito* had a special office. Some of them were for the fields, and some for those who journey by sea; some for those who went to war, and some for diseases. Each *anito* was therefore named for his office; there was, for instance, the *anito* of the fields, and the *anito* of the rain. To these *anitos* the people offered sacrifices, when they desired anything – to each one according to his office. (Loarca 1582 in BR Vol. V, 1903-1909: 171-173)

It should be made clear that early Filipinos worshipped God through the lesser divinities – the *diwatas/anitos*<sup>7</sup> (nature spirits and ancestral spirits) as intermediaries which they considered secondary gods on earth. The natives offered sacrifices to these *diwatas/anitos* and not to *Bathala (Malaon/Laon)* because, for them, *Bathala* was a great Lord and no one could speak to him. He lived in the sky, but the *anitos* who were also of divine nature as *Bathala* came down to earth to talk with them, to minister, and to intercede for them (Jocano 1998: 183-185). Table 1 summarizes the various names of Philippine divinities to help us better understand the concepts and meanings of these

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<sup>7</sup> The inhabitants of precolonial Philippines worshiped *diwatas* and believed them to be deities created by the one true God to help administer his creation. The term “*diwata*” applies to both male and female deities (e.g., *Diwata Barangaw*, who is the male god of rainbows). The *diwatas* are depicted as superior in beauty, in knowledge, and in fighting skills. They are prayed to and given offerings to grant requests and to answer prayers. In modern concept, due to the Spanish destruction of most of the precolonial Philippine culture, the rank and image of a *diwata* from goddess was turned into enchantress or nymph, being beautiful with preternatural allure that lives in the forest and trees. In Philippine mythology, a *diwata* (derived from Sanskrit “*devata*”) is a type of deity or spirit. The term *diwata* is traditionally used in the Visayas, Palawan, and Mindanao regions while the term *anito* is used in Luzon regions. *Anito*, also spelled *anitu*, refers to ancestor spirits, nature spirits, and deities (*diwata*) in the indigenous animistic religions of precolonial Philippines. It can also refer to carved humanoid figures, the *taotao* or *licha*, made of wood, stone, or ivory, that represent these spirits. *Pag-anito* refers to a séance, often accompanied by other rituals or celebrations, in which a shaman (Visayan: *babaylan*, Tagalog: *katalonan*) acts as a medium to communicate directly with the spirits. When a nature spirit or deity is specifically involved, the ritual is called *pagdiwata*. The act of worship or a religious sacrifice to a spirit is also sometimes simply referred to as *anito*. The belief in *anito* is sometimes referred to as animism in scholarly literature.



religious terms, their origin (locality), and the corresponding chroniclers (both Spanish and non-Spanish) who cited them.

**Table 1: Names of Philippine Divinities**

<b>1. Supreme Divinities Term/Concept (Meaning)</b>	<b>Philippine Locality/Ethno- linguistic Group</b>	<b>Cited by (Chronicler/Writer)</b>
<i>Malaon/Malaun</i> (Ancient One)	Visayas	Alcina (1668); Chirino (1604)
<i>Laon</i> (Antiquity)	Visayas	Colin (1663); Chirino (1604)
<i>Makapatag</i> (God of Order, Justice/ same as Malaon)	Visayas	Alcina (1668)
<i>Badadum</i> (The Happy One, same as Malaon)	Visayas	Alcina (1668)
<i>Makaubus/ Makaobus</i> (God without End, All-seeing God)	Visayas	Alcina (1668)
<i>Bathala/Badhala/Bathala Mei kapal/Meycapal</i> (God/Creator)	Tagalog/Luzon	Colin (1663); Plasencia (1589); Chirino (1604)
<i>Batala</i> (God/Creator)	Moro	Loarca (1582)
<i>Malyari/Malayari</i> (God the Almighty/Creator)	Zambales/ Zambal, Luzon	Perez, Domingo O.P. (1680)
<i>Lumawig</i> (God/Creator)	Bontok and Kankanaï groups of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1955)
<i>Kabunian</i> (God/Creator)	Ifugao of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1955)
<i>Tungkung Langit</i> ("Pillar of the Skies"/ God/Creator)	Sulod of Central Panay in Western Visayas	Jocano, F.L. (1958)
<i>Captan</i> (God/Creator)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Eugpamulak/Pamulak Manobo</i> (God/Creator)	Bagobos of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1913)
<i>Tagbusan</i> (God/Creator)	Manobo of Mindanao	Garvan, J.M. (1931)
<i>Magbabaya</i> (God/Creator)	Bukidnon of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1956)
<i>Tigianes</i> (God/Creator)	Gianges of Cotabato, Mindanao	Jocano, F. L. (1968)
<i>Diwata-sa-Langit</i> ("God of Heaven"/ God/Creator)	Subanun of upper Zamboanga, Mindanao	Jocano, F.L. (1968)
<b>2. Lesser Divinities Term/Concept (Meaning)</b>	<b>Philippine Locality/Ethno- linguistic Group</b>	<b>Cited by (Chronicler/Writer)</b>
<i>Idianale/ Lacapati/Ikapati</i> (patrons of cultivated lands and of husbandry)	Tagalog/Luzon	Plasencia (1589)
<i>Dian masalanta</i> (patron of lovers and of generation)	Tagalog/Luzon	Plasencia (1589)
<i>Varangao</i> (god of the rainbow)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Sisiburanen</i> (god of the underworld)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Maklium-sa-t'wan</i> (lord of the plains and valleys)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)

<i>Maklium-sa-bagidan</i> (lord of fire)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Maklium-sa-tubig</i> (lord of the sea)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Kasaray-sarayan-sa-silgan</i> (lord of the streams)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Magdan-durunuum</i> (lord of the hidden lakes)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Sarangan-sa-bagtiw</i> (lord of storms)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Suklang-Malayon</i> (guardian of happy homes)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Sidapa</i> (goddess of death)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Abyang</i> and <i>Alunsina</i> (goddesses of the sky)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Makaptan</i> (god of sickness)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Ynaguinid</i> (goddess of war and poison-making)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Macanduc</i> (god of war and plunder)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Lalahon</i> (goddess of fire and volcano)	Visayas	Loarca (1582)
<i>Acasi</i> (god of health and sickness)	Zambales/ Zambal, Luzon	Perez, Domingo O.P. (1680)
<i>Manglobar</i> (god of powerful living)	Zambales/ Zambal, Luzon	Perez, Domingo O.P. (1680)
<i>Mangalagar</i> (god of good grace/good guardian angel)	Zambales/ Zambal, Luzon	Perez, Domingo O.P. (1680)
<i>Aniton Tauo</i> (lord of the winds)	Zambales/ Zambal, Luzon	Perez, Domingo O.P. (1680)
<i>Dumagan</i> (god of good harvest)	Zambales/ Zambal, Luzon	Perez, Domingo O.P. (1680)
<i>Bulol</i> (gods of household)	Ifugao of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1930)
<i>Gatui</i> (divinities of practical jokes)	Ifugao of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1930)
<i>Tayaban</i> (god of death)	Ifugao of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1930)
<i>Bakayauwan</i> (good spirits of the mountains)	Ifugao of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1930)
<i>Munduntug</i> (evil spirits of mountains)	Ifugao of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1930)
<i>Makalun</i> (messenger of the gods)	Ifugao of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1930)
<i>Mahipnat</i> (great spirits of sacred places)	Ifugao of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1930)
<i>Bibao</i> (spirits of ordinary places)	Ifugao of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1930)
<i>Halupi</i> (spirits of remembrance)	Ifugao of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1930)
<i>Fili</i> (guardians of property)	Ifugao of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1930)

<i>Libligayu</i> (spirits of sickness)	Ifugao of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1930)
<i>Binudbud</i> (spirits of the feasts)	Ifugao of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1930)
<i>Hipags</i> (spirits of war)	Ifugao of Mt. Province, Luzon	Barton, R.F. (1930)
<i>Bangun-bangun</i> (deity of universal time)	Sulod of Central Panay in Western Visayas	Jocano, F.L. (1958)
<i>Bahulangug</i> (deity of seasons)	Sulod of Central Panay in Western Visayas	Jocano, F.L. (1958)
<i>Ribun-linti</i> (god of lightning and thunderstorms)	Sulod of Central Panay in Western Visayas	Jocano, F.L. (1958)
<i>Sumalongson</i> (god of the rivers and seas)	Sulod of Central Panay in Western Visayas	Jocano, F.L. (1958)
<i>Santonilyo</i> (deity of good graces)	Sulod of Central Panay in Western Visayas	Jocano, F.L. (1958)
<i>Munsad Burulakaw</i> (god who had direct power over men)	Sulod of Central Panay in Western Visayas	Jocano, F.L. (1958)
<i>Muropuro</i> (goddess of the spring, rivers, and lakes)	Sulod of Central Panay in Western Visayas	Jocano, F.L. (1958)
<i>Labing Daut</i> (goddess in charge of rain-clouds)	Sulod of Central Panay in Western Visayas	Jocano, F.L. (1958)
<i>Tibang-Tibang</i> (goddess in charge of keeping the balance of earth)	Sulod of Central Panay in Western Visayas	Jocano, F.L. (1958)
<i>Malaki t'ohu K'waig</i> (hero of the head of waters)	Bagobos of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1913)
<i>Toglai</i> and <i>Toglibon</i> (spirits of Bagobo ancestors who gave the people their language and custom)	Bagobos of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1913)
<i>Tulos-ka-balat</i> (spirit of sacrifices)	Bagobos of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1913)
<i>Mandaragan</i> and <i>Darago</i> (patrons of the men-of-war)	Bagobos of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1913)
<i>Tarabumo</i> (god of agriculture)	Bagobos of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1913)
<i>Kakiadan</i> (goddess of rice)	Manobo of Mindanao	Garvan, J.M. (1931)
<i>Tagamaling</i> (goddess of other crops)	Manobo of Mindanao	Garvan, J.M. (1931)
<i>Taphagan</i> (goddess of harvest)	Manobo of Mindanao	Garvan, J.M. (1931)
<i>Inaiyau</i> (manipulator of the winds and storms)	Manobo of Mindanao	Garvan, J.M. (1931)
<i>Umouiui</i> (god of clouds)	Manobo of Mindanao	Garvan, J.M. (1931)
<i>Sugudun/Sugujun</i> (god of hunters and trappers)	Manobo of Mindanao	Garvan, J.M. (1931)
<i>Libtakan</i> (god of sunrise, sunset, and good weather)	Manobo of Mindanao	Garvan, J.M. (1931)
<i>Mandait</i> (spirit of the souls)	Manobo of Mindanao	Garvan, J.M. (1931)
<i>Yumud</i> (watergod)	Manobo of Mindanao	Garvan, J.M. (1931)
<i>Ibu</i> (queen of the afterworld)	Manobo of Mindanao	Garvan, J.M. (1931)

<i>Makalidung</i> (founder of the world)	Manobo of Mindanao	Garvan, J.M. (1931)
<i>Apila</i> (god of wrestling and sports)	Manobo of Mindanao	Garvan, J.M. (1931)
<i>Domalongdong</i> (deity of the northwind)	Bukidnon of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1956)
<i>Ognaling</i> (deity of southwind)	Bukidnon of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1956)
<i>Tagaloambung</i> (deity of eastwind)	Bukidnon of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1956)
<i>Magbaya</i> (divinity of the westwind)	Bukidnon of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1956)
<i>Tagumbanwa</i> (guardian of the fields)	Bukidnon of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1956)
<i>Ibabasag</i> (patroness of pregnant women)	Bukidnon of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1956)
<i>Ipamahandi</i> (goddess of accident)	Bukidnon of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1956)
<i>Tao-sa-sulup</i> (god of material goods)	Bukidnon of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1956)
<i>Tigbas</i> (god of good government)	Bukidnon of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1956)
<i>Busao</i> (god of calamity)	Bukidnon of Mindanao	Cole, F.C. (1956)
<i>Todlay</i> (god of love)	Gianges of Cotabato, Mindanao	Jocano, F. L. (1968)
<i>Todlibun</i> (goddess of marriage)	Gianges of Cotabato, Mindanao	Jocano, F. L. (1968)
<i>Tagma-sa-dagat</i> (lord of the sea)	Subanun of upper Zamboanga, Mindanao	Jocano, F. L. (1968)
<i>Tagma-sa-yuta</i> (lord of the earth)	Subanun of upper Zamboanga, Mindanao	Jocano, F. L. (1968)
<i>Tagma-sa-mangga-bungud</i> (lord of the woods)	Subanun of upper Zamboanga, Mindanao	Jocano, F. L. (1968)
<i>Tagma-sa-uba</i> (lord of the rivers)	Subanun of upper Zamboanga, Mindanao	Jocano, F. L. (1968)
<i>Tagma-sa-langit</i> (god and protector of the sick)	Subanun of upper Zamboanga, Mindanao	Jocano, F. L. (1968)

### ANIMISM AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE ROLE OF THE *BAYLAN/BABAYLAN* OR *CATALONAN*

Societies, then and now, has its own belief systems and religious rituals that serve as guideposts for viewing and understanding the cosmos. Each has its own religious leaders who guide the people of their faith, perform rites and ceremonies, and act as links or mediums between humans and their deity/deities. In the early Philippine communities, the *babaylan/baylan* or *catalonan* had been recognized to be a person whose office was somehow linked with a call or a vocation coming from the gods and the spirits. Aside from being a priestess/priest, the *babaylan* (*baylan*, *babalian*, *bailan*, *balian*, *catooran*, *daetan*,

*diwatero*, or *mamumuhat* in the Visayas and Northern Mindanao) or *catalonan* and *anitera* (Tagalog and Northern Luzon) also played the role of a shaman, healer, teacher, prophet, and seer. Loarca labeled the *baylanes* as shamans, healers, prophets, and priestesses (or priests) who performed the rituals for the offering of prayers and sacrifices to the gods. With a bit of interchanging *baylanes* (priestesses) and *paganitu* (ritual/ceremony), Loarca recorded:

These sacrifices are called *baylanes*, and the priestesses, or the men who perform this office, are also called *baylanes*. The priestesses dress very gaily, with garlands on their heads, and are resplendent with gold. They bring to the place of sacrifice some *pitarillas* (a kind of earthen jar) full of rice-wine, besides a live hog and a quantity of prepared food. Then the priestess chants her songs and invokes the demon, who appears to her all glistening in gold. Then he enters her body and hurls her to the ground, foaming at the mouth as one possessed. In this state, she declares whether the sick person is to recover or not. In regard to other matters, she foretells the future. All this takes place to the sound of bells and kettledrums. Then she rises and taking a spear, she pierces the heart of the hog. They dress it and prepare a dish for the demons. Upon an altar erected there, they place the dressed hog, rice, bananas, wine, and all the other articles of food that they have brought. All this is done in behalf of sick persons, or to redeem those who are confined in the infernal regions. When they go to war or on a plundering expedition, they offer prayers to *Varangao*, who is the rainbow, and to their gods, *Ynaguinid* and *Macanduc*. For the redemption of souls detained in the inferno above mentioned, they invoke also their ancestors, and the dead, claiming to see them and receive answers to their questions. (Loarca 1582 in BR Vol. V, 1903-1909: 133)

Plasencia, on the other hand, noted that among the Tagalogs, aside from the priestesses or priests, which he named *catolonan*,<sup>8</sup> there were other religious functionaries in the early Filipino communities he believed were evil by nature. They are as follows: *mangagauay* (witches who deceived by pretending to heal the sick), *manyisalat* (almost the same as the *mangagauay*), *mancocolam* (whose duty was to emit fire from himself at night), *hocloban* (another kind of witch, of greater efficacy than the *mangagauay*), *silagan* (another type of witch who ate human liver), *magtatangal* (*manananggal* – a half-bodied monster who eats viscera by nightfall), *osuang* (*aswang* – equivalent to sorcerer or a witch murdering people by eating their flesh), *mangagayoma* (who made charms for lovers out of herbs, stones, and wood, which would infuse the heart with love), *sonat* (equivalent to “preacher” who could predict the salvation or condemnation of the soul), *pangatahojan* (soothsayer), and *bayoguin* or “cotquean,” a masculine woman doing the works of the *baylan* or priestess (Plasencia 1589 in BR Vol. VII, 1903-1909: 192-194).

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<sup>8</sup> Also known as *catalonan*, the Tagalog priestess which is derived from the Tagalog term *catalo* or *katalo* which signifies “in good terms with.”

The call to *babaylanism* (priesthood) must come directly through a sudden fit of trembling and insanity as was the case of the *babaylanes* among the early Bisayans. Alcina revealed this phenomenon in his accounts:

Among the women..., we have already stated before that they were accustomed to go about well-dressed and heavily adorned with gold. In this manner, they went to the *nunuk* (balete tree) where the *diwata* (supposedly) dwelled; for it was there that he selected them at his pleasure while they held their intimacy with him. Through these (intimate unions), they were initiated. The external sign was that he communicated to them a kind of madness, or they feigned that he did so. They made many grimaces, producing a blank stare in the eyes, plunging into a rage at times just as it was sometimes in the case of the ancient Sibyls and the Vestals. All this was now meant to be an indication that she was possessed by the *diwata*. She, then, began to narrate some stories and to say that he was speaking to her and giving her knowledge about what was going to happen. Then she said: *Gintitingan aku*, which means to say, "the diwata has just spoken to me." With these demonstrations, some of them certainly produced by the devil, others feigned by them so as to gain prestige and be acknowledged as a *katuuran* [truthfulness] – they gained the reputation, as we have already stated..., of being such and thus began to perform their office. (Alcina 1668 in Kobak and Gutierrez 2005: 261)

*Babaylanes* (*babaylan*) were shamans, given to seizures and trances in which they spoke with the voice of *diwata* or other spirits and acted out conflicts in the spirit world, brandishing spears, foaming at the mouth, and often becoming violent enough to require restraint. They came to their calling through attacks of illness or insanity which could only be cured by accepting the call, and then attached themselves as apprentices to some other *babaylan*, frequently a relative (Scott 1994: 84). They could either be male or female, or male transvestites, but were most commonly women. Alcina found out that although Bisayan women dominated the religious leadership, there were also men who became priests, and they were called *asug* – effeminate men performing the role of the *babaylan* (257). Among the Tagalogs, they were termed *bayog* or *bayoguin* as reported by Plasencia (1589 in BR Vol. VII, 1903-1909: 194).

As stated earlier, Loarca informs us that sacrifices among the early Bisayan Filipinos were held only during sickness, during planting season, or during war. He also reported the same nature of sacrifices offered by the Tagalogs:

The mode of sacrifice was like that of the *Pintados*. They summoned a *catalonan*, which is the same as the *vaylan* among the *Pintados*, that is a priest. He offered the sacrifice, requesting from the *anito* whatever the people desired him to ask, and heaping up great quantities of rice, meat, and fish. His invocations lasted until the demon entered his body, when the *catalonan* fell into a swoon, foaming at the mouth. The Indians sang, drank,

and feasted until the *catalonan* came to himself, and told them the answer that the *anito* had given to him. If the sacrifice was in behalf of a sick person, they offered many golden chains and ornaments, saying that they were paying a ransom for the sick person's health. This invocation of the *anito* continued as long as the sickness lasted. (Loarca 1582 in BR Vol. V, 1903-1909: 173).

In 1640, a Dominican friar Diego Aduarte, commented on the sacrifices made by the natives of Northern Luzon:

They employed more priestesses, or *aniteras*, than priests, though they had some of the latter – a wretched class of people, and with reason despised on account of their foul manner of life. The devil entered these *aniteras* or sorceresses, and through them, by their agency, he gave his answers. By these priestesses the Indians performed their superstitious rites and sacrifices, when they wished to placate their *anitos* or obtain anything from them. If anyone fell sick, the *aniteras* immediately came, and with oils and a thousand performances they persuaded him that, if he would believe in what they did, they would cure him. Then in his sight they performed and displayed a thousand fantastic things; and the devil so earnestly strove to give them credit that at times he made the people believe that the soul had left the body, and that the *anitera* had restored it by the power of her prayers and her medicines. Whenever the sick man recovered, they attributed the recovery to their own efforts; while, if he died, they were plentifully supplied with excuses and reasons to avoid the blame and to throw the responsibility upon someone else.... Before sowing their fields they used to celebrate three solemn feast-days, during which all the men gave themselves up to dancing, eating, and drinking until they were unable to stand; and after this came that which commonly follows – namely, giving loose rein to the flesh. The women did not drink, for this was very contrary to their customs as they are laborious; but they made up for it as well as they could, and in the dances and all the rest they did as well as the men. (Aduarte 1640 in BR Vol. XXX, 1903-1909: 286-287)

The Jesuit Colin in 1663, described a sacrifice for a sick person:

The sick person was taken to the new lodging (built especially for the purpose of this sacrifice). Then preparing the intended sacrifice – a slave (which was their custom at times), a turtle, a large shellfish, or a hog – without an altar or anything resembling one, they placed it near the sick person, who was stretched out on the floor of the house on a palm mat (which they use as a mattress). They also set many small tables there, laden with various viands. The *catalona* stepped out, and, dancing to the sound of gongs, wounded the animal, and anointed with the blood the sick person, as well as some of the bystanders. The animal was then drawn slightly to one side and skinned and cleaned. After that it was taken back to

its first location, and the *catalona* there before them all, spoke some words between her teeth while she opened it, and took out and examined the entrails, in the manner of the ancient of soothsayers. Besides that the devil became incarnate in her, or the *catalona* feigned to be himby-grimaces, and shaking of the feet and hands, and foaming at the mouth, acting as if out of her senses. After she had returned to her senses, she prophesied to the sick person what would happen to him. If the prophecy was one of life, the people ate and drank, chanted the histories of the ancestors of the sick person and of the *anito* to which the sacrifice was being made, and danced until they fell through sheer exhaustion. If the prophecy was one of death, the prophetess bolstered up her bad news with praises of the sick person, for whose virtues and prowess she said the *anitos* had chosen him to become one of them. From that time she commended herself to him and all his family, begging him to remember her in the other life. She added other flatteries and lies, with which she made the poor sick person swallow his death; and obliged his relatives and friends to treat him from that time as an *anito* and make feasts to him. The end was eating and drinking, for that marked the termination of their sacrifices. (Colin 1663 in BR Vol. XL, 1903-1909: 75-77)

Even much earlier in the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Antonio Pigafetta, an Italian explorer and geographer who served as Ferdinand Magellans' chronicler, recorded how the early Bisayans performed their animistic ritual where the hog or swine was consecrated as an offering or sacrifice. Addressing the King of Spain, Pigafetta reported:

In order that your most illustrious Lordship may know the ceremonies that those people use in consecrating the swine, they first sound those large gongs. Then three large dishes are brought in; two with roses and with cakes of rice and millet, baked and wrapped in leaves, and roast fish; the other with cloth of Cambaia [Cambay or Khambhat in Gujarat, India] and two standards made of palm-tree cloth. One bit of cloth of Cambaia is spread on the ground. Then two very old women come, each of whom has a bamboo trumpet in her hand. When they have stepped upon the cloth they make obeisance to the sun. Then they wrap the cloths about themselves. One of them puts a kerchief in her hands, and dancing and blowing upon her trumpet, she thereby calls out to the sun. The other takes one of the standards and dances and blows on her trumpet. They dance and call out thus for a little space, saying many things between themselves to the sun. She with the kerchief takes the other standard, and lets the kerchief drop, and both blowing on their trumpets for a long time, dance about the bound hog. She with the horn always speaks covertly with the sun, and the other answers her. A cup of wine is presented to her of the horns, and she dancing and repeating certain words, while the other answers her, and making pretense four or five times of drinking the wine, sprinkles it upon the heart of the hog. Then she immediately begins to dance again. A lance is given to the same woman. She shaking it and repeating certain words, while both



of them continue to dance, and making motions four or five times of thrusting the lance through the heart of the hog, with a sudden and quick stroke, thrusts it through from one side to the other. The wound is quickly stopped with grass. The one who has killed the hog, taking in her mouth a lighted torch, which has been lighted throughout that ceremony, extinguishes it. The other one dipping the end of her trumpet in the blood of the hog, goes around marking with blood with her finger first the foreheads of their husbands, and then the others; but they never came to us. Then they divest themselves and go to eat the contents of those dishes, and they invite only women [to eat with them]. The hair is removed from the hog by means of fire. Thus no one but old women consecrate the flesh of the hog, and they do not eat it unless it is killed in this way. (Pigafetta 1525 in BR Vol. XXXIII, 1903-1909: 167-171)

This was a solemn animistic ritual in Cebu<sup>9</sup> as recounted by Pigafetta wherein the site was adorned with green branches, palm-leaf cloths, and colorful blankets; and the offerings – red blossoms, roasted fish, rice and millet cakes wrapped in leaves, and a piece of imported Cambay cloth. Dancing, singing, invocation, conversing with the spirits as well as greetings to the sun, and conversing between the chief *babaylan* (priestess or shaman) and her assistants were common occurrences. Pigafetta tells us that the chief priestess in the rite for consecrating the swine, after the hog has been speared, took a lighted torch and extinguished it in her mouth. Although other animals may be offered during sacrifices like a turtle, a goat, a large shellfish, and a cock, yet the most important animal and one which was consumed fully was the hog or the pig. The use of rice-wine, *tuba* (coconut wine), roses, and aromatic herbs could be to induce a certain transport or ecstatic condition on the part of the *babaylan*. Undoubtedly, the song, the dancing, the beating of the gongs, the kettle-drum, the bells – all were means to induce the state of trance, during which the spirit was said to come and possess the *babaylan*. It was then that information regarding the cause of the disease, or the cure of it, who the thief of a lost animal or article was, and what course of action to take in order to avoid defeat or calamity – all these were known, seen, and heard during the period of possession (Demetrio 1973: 142-143).

Potet, likewise, commented on the clergy of the Tagalogs that are quite similar to these descriptions made by the Spanish chroniclers.

The Tagalog clergy was made up of priestesses (*katalúnan*), transvestite priests (*bayúgin*), and their acolytes (*alagád*). Bathalist priestesses were ordained (*bagát*), and their ordination was probably a coronation, the crown being called *básong*, *básumbásong* or *suwági*...As shamans, they fell into a trance to serve as channels for the deities, who spoke through their mouths. Their other main duties were to perform worship ceremonies to their spirits, the various ceremonies that marked the

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<sup>9</sup> Cebu, the first Spanish settlement, is a [province](#) of the [Philippines](#) located in the [Central Visayas region](#), and consists of a main island and [167 surrounding islands and islets](#). Its capital is [Cebu City](#), the oldest city and the first [capital of the Philippines](#), which is politically independent from the provincial government.

stages of life, propitiatory ceremonies to ensure success and prevent failure in ventures, and the cure of the sick. (Potet 2017:47)

The Tagalogs had a holocaust (author's emphasis), an animal sacrificed to a deity known as *bungóy*. During a sacrificial ceremony, the chief holocaust was a hog (*baboy*) – often called an “unclean animal” by Spanish chroniclers – or a rooster (*manok na kalakyan*).

The priestess or one of her acolytes killed the hog with a spear, or slit the throat of the rooster. Chicken (*manok*), cooked rice (*kanin*), fruit (*bungang-kahoy*), wine (*basi*), sugar cane wine, *tuba* (palm wine), betel leaves (*ikmo, itmu*), and areca nuts (*bunga, puro*) were also offered. The ceremony was followed by a revelry during which these victuals were consumed. (52)

It should be noted that the early Filipinos had their religious and spiritual leaders in the person of the *babaylans/catalonans*, who were dominantly women. Men were also accepted in the position of religious leadership as long as they act, dress, and behave as women did. Thus, we have *asug/asog* among the Bisayans and *bayog/bayoguin/bayugin* among the Tagalogs. The reports of the Spanish chroniclers also show that the *babaylan* who served as a religious leader, healer, shaman, prophet, and seer is also the repository of the lore and tradition of the community. Her/his special gift of mind, of heart and body, special experiences with the world of spirits, animals, and plants, her/his expressiveness in verbal and nonverbal communication, all made the *babaylan* a teacher and philosopher. The Spaniards, however, labeled her as a witch or sorceress (*hechicera*), a she-devil (*diablesa*), and priestess of hell and of demon (*sacerdotisa del infierno, del demonio*) as they had seen her performing the rituals and ceremonies during the time of sickness, planting and harvesting seasons, war, and other significant events in the community. Animistic beliefs were reinforced through these ritual performances officiated by the *babaylan*.<sup>10</sup>

As a shaman, the *babaylan* sees the world as one working entity – all things, all people, and all existences are connected. She believes in a multi-layered world consisting of the sky-world, the earth-world, and the underworld. These are testified to by the Spanish accounts of the natives' belief of the Sun as the sky-world's own *anito* symbolized by the fairy blue-bird *Tigmamanuquin*.<sup>11</sup> The chief sky lord of the early Filipinos, *Tigmamanuquin* is highly respected to the point that they also named him *Bathala*, the same name as that of their most powerful god. No wonder, in the Philippine

<sup>10</sup> The *babaylans* or *catalonans/katulunans* were the victims of the Dominicans' Inquisition.

<sup>11</sup> In Philippine mythology, the *Tigmamanuquin* (“Tigmamanukin”/ “Tigmamanukan”) was believed by the Tagalog people to be an omen bird. He was sent by *Bathala* to give hints to mankind whether they needed to proceed on a journey or not. The root word of “Tigmamanuquin”/ “Tigmamanukin” is “manuk” or “manok” which means “chicken” but during the Pre-colonial Philippines (as documented by early explorers in the 17th century), it had the more general usage for any bird, lizard or snake that crossed one's path as an omen. Such encounters were called *salubong* (“meeting” or “encounter”).

“Tigmamanok” is the term used by Potet to this Philippines fairy blue bird, (*Irena cyanogaster*) symbolizing the Tagalog Supreme God, *Bathala*. See Jean-Paul G. Potet, *Ancient Beliefs and Customs of the Tagalogs* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press, Inc., 2017), 31.

mythology of creation, a powerful legendary bird known as “King Manaul” cracks the bamboo shoot where “*Malakas*” (the first Filipino man) and “*Maganda*” (the first Filipino woman) came into being. In “Creation Myths among the Early Filipinos,” Francisco Demetrio, S.J. observes that the origin story of the island of Bohol [an island in Visayan region], projects birds as the savior of a woman from an ancient sky-dwelling people. This unnamed woman who fell from the sky was caught by *gakits* (wild ducks). As the story progresses, the *gakits* brought the sky woman to a huge turtle which turned into an island [now known as Bohol island] where she would live and become the first mother of the Boholanos (Demetrio 1968: 48).

From the lore of the people of Mandaya in Eastern Mindanao, birds do not only bear the name of their gods; they are the ones who possess the power of creation itself. The *Limokon* is a legendary bird who can speak to humans. It is said to have laid two eggs – one in the mouth of River Mayo, which hatched the first woman, while the other was laid near the source of the river and hatched the first man. Father Demetrio also discovered that the contemporary *Tagakaolo* ethnolinguistic group in South Central Mindanao believes that they descended from Lukbang, Mengedan and his wife Bodek. These three persons lived on a small island. Two children were born to Mengedan and Bodek: Linkanan and Lampagan. These two, in turn, became the parents of two birds, *Kalau* and *Sabitan* who flew away and brought back bits of soil which the parents moulded with their hands until they formed the earth. Other children were born and through them the world was peopled (54).

These stories give as a motif very common in myths connected with the creation of the world: the island, or the mountain (Eliade 1958: 375); the marriage of brother and sister; and the birds as the first offspring of the two incestuous beings. It is these birds which flew away and brought back the piece of earth out of which our earth was formed by their parents. Birds have a great deal to do in the folk beliefs of early Filipinos. Might it be that some species of birds like the *limokon* are looked upon as ancestors of humankind? For this reason, they are relied upon to have particular care for people, a care which they showed by supplying men with signs and warnings to alert them of incoming danger.

Birds’ capacity to fly and their dominant activities in the sky brought an awe to the Filipino primitive minds. As creatures visible in the “sky,” they were revered as powerful beings. In the words of Mircea Eliade (1958: 38-39), the “sky” as it is, shows infinity, transcendence, and power. No wonder, the Filipinos (the *Sulod* group of Central Panay in Western Visayas), like the other peoples of the ancient world, called their most powerful male *diwata* as *Tungkung Langit* (equivalent to *Bathala* of Tagalogs) which means “pillar of the skies” (Jocano 1968: 178). Therefore, the bird as a symbol of the sky-world is not merely a product of mythmaking of the Filipinos, but rather a product of their “reasoning” as they envisaged the cosmic order onto the plane of their own human experience.

Regarding the underworld, the *babaylan* viewed it as ruled by spirits resembling snakes and other reptilian-looking mythical beings such as dragons and crocodiles. The dragon, known as *Bacunaua* (also spelled *Bakunawa*) which according to Augustinian

missionary Alonso de Mentrída is a giant serpent that swallows the moon from the earth during eclipses.<sup>12</sup> The common assumption is that the belief in *Bacunawa* is an indigenous legend, and has been a part of ancient astronomy and rituals in the Philippines since people arrived in the region.<sup>13</sup> As a matter of fact, the ancient Philippine sword known as *Kampilan* was manufactured with a handle, craftly made of brass that typically ends in a V-shaped symbolizing the gaping mouth of the serpent and point to a round ornament where the eyes of the serpent could be seen. This makes *Bacunawa* as an important figure in Visayan and Tagalog mythologies (Potet 2017: 28). During the ancient period, many looked upon serpents and snakes as a miniature replica of mighty dragons whom they revered as guardians of the nature world. Though commonly viewed as a modern universal sign of evil and deceit, serpents used to be above all gods and not only among the most sacred animals in different belief systems. In Hindu tradition, the serpent is not only monstrous and maleficent but also at once the learned one and who is revered as a symbol of every species of learning (Clarke & Wake 1877: v). Buddhists still maintain a qualified veneration for this sacred animal as a part of their worship.

In every known society of the ancient world, the serpent formed a prominent object of veneration, and made no inconsiderable figure in legendary and astronomical mythology (vi). He is known to symbolize wisdom, fertility, beauty, and, like the bird, divine status was also accorded to him. As mentioned in the accounts of Plasencia, Colin, and Loarca, the serpents, like the giant reptiles such as crocodiles, also represent the underworld. Crocodiles, are also venerated since they are considered *nono* or *anito* that could cause harm if not treated well.

The earth-world (center of the cosmos) is represented by a tree. The Philippines and its neighbouring countries from the Southeast Asian region share a common belief that trees house different kinds of spirits and entities that can either be malignant or benign. Filipinos made offerings to particular trees that were thought to be the habitation of benevolent deities, or even certain ancestral spirits. Other trees were thought to house malevolent spirits, and care was taken to avoid sleeping under these trees. The *balete* (*baliti*) tree, also known as the *nunuk* tree, was considered one of the holy trees where the *diwatas* (gods and spirits) reside (Alcina 1668: 261). Trees were also regarded as the gateway that connects the three worlds (sky-world, earth-world, and underworld) and allows the inhabitants of each of these worlds to interact with those from the other worlds. This makes trees one of the oldest symbols of the *axis mundi* (world pillar or world center),

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<sup>12</sup> Alonso de Mentrída, *Diccionario de la Lengua Bisaya Hiligueina y Haraya de la Isla de Panay*, 1841. p. 38. Accessed at [www.google.com.ph](http://www.google.com.ph), July 28, 2017.

*Bacunawa* – Entendieron que era sierpe que se iba tragando la luna: la sombra de la tierra que la cubre en los Eclipses. Translated, “they believe it was a serpent (dragon) swallowing the moon from the earth that presents in eclipses”). *Binacunauahan ang bulan* (Hiligaynon) – moon has been swallowed. In Mentrída, *Diccionario*, p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> In reality, stories of *Bacunawa* are directly linked to the Hindu demi-god “Rahu,” from India’s Vedic Period (c. 1500 – c. 500 BCE) and was brought to Southeast Asia through trade and the expansion of the Indianized Kingdoms around 200 BCE. Evidence of “Rahu” being brought to Southeast Asia also exists in Javanese Mythology, Thai Mythology, and other Hindu influenced areas such as China.

the interconnection between heaven, hell, and our world. The religion of Manobos<sup>14</sup> tells of a pillar guarded by a python, which is linked with the notion of the Center of the Universe, where the first creation is supposed to have taken place. This could explain why the *babaylans* in ancient Philippine communities have a strong attachment to trees such as the *balete* as they partake in the role of a mediator between the three worlds.

What is surprising is that even to these days, such animistic beliefs and practices still exists among the Filipinos despite the tremendous campaign by the Spanish friars to eradicate its influence among the natives since the onset of their colonial regime. Several reasons might be attributed to this phenomenon. First, this belief system has not been totally lost due to the Filipino's practice of "eclectic syncretism"<sup>15</sup> by accepting and reinterpreting certain Catholic beliefs in an animist light. Prospero R. Covar (1975: 3) called this as "Folk Catholicism" or "Folk Christianity" – folks' accommodation and adaptation to Catholic/Christian faith to their local beliefs as shown by their veneration of idols, being superstitious, and love of *anting-anting* or magic. This view was supported by John Leddy Phelan (1959) that Spaniards did not absolutely hispanize the Filipino natives as they continue to practice their old belief system. Therefore, although the Filipinos embraced the teachings of Christianity, they contextualized them to make those teachings more relevant and meaningful to their lives. F. Landa Jocano explained this in the following statement:

It cannot be denied that the Filipino borrowed cultural traits from other people whom he came in contact with. But it is equally true that he did not borrow in toto. He was (and still is) highly selective in his borrowings. He modified what he has chosen from foreign traditions to suit his own way of thinking, believing, and doing things. Thus, while he outwardly shows the influence of the West in his behavior, he remains Oriental in his worldview. (Jocano 1975: viii)

This is also true with the experience of the Filipino natives in Southern Philippines who welcomed the Islamic faith and did not entirely leave their pre-Islamic beliefs. As disclosed by Michael J. Diamond and Peter G. Gowing (1981: 74), "Muslim Filipinos did not entirely discard their pre-Islamic customs and beliefs when they embraced Islam centuries ago. Islamic practices are practiced side-by-side with pre-Islamic practices in everyday life of the people, creating an interesting blend which has been called Folk Islam."

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<sup>14</sup> Manobo/Manobos simply means "people" or "person"; alternate names include Manuvu and Minuvu. The term may have originated from "Mansuba," a combination of man (people) and suba (river). Manobos are concentrated in Agusan, Bukidnon, Cotabato, Davao, Misamis Oriental, and Surigao del Sur in Mindanao, Southern Philippines. The Manobo usually build their villages near small bodies of water or forest clearings, although they also opt for hillsides, rivers, valleys, and plateaus. The communities are small, consisting of only 4 to 12 houses. They practice slash-and-burn agriculture.

<sup>15</sup> The selection of various belief systems/faiths and merge them to one's own. Filipinos had not been passive to external influences, rather, they absorbed those external influences and fashioned them according to what pleased or best accommodated to their liking.

Second, not all Filipinos were subjected to *reduccion* (a resettlement policy employed by the Spaniards which was designed for a convenient administration of the colonies)<sup>16</sup> nor they were colonized. Those communities,<sup>17</sup> especially in the uplands, (including the Muslim communities in Mindanao), which were not colonized, remained animistic in their beliefs. Babaylans who had escaped Spanish colonization were able to draw followers and continued their rituals in the mountains. Third, the Spanish colonial church was ineffective in converting the natives to Catholicism. The rampant corruption and abuses committed by the Spanish friars and church officials, and the prevailing discrimination against the Filipinos in the profession/vocation of priesthood, had created a negative image of the church, which drove the natives to go back to their ancient religious beliefs. Teodoro A. Agoncillo and Milagros C. Guerrero commented on this:

Disenchantment with Christianity was disseminated by the missionaries, the real precepts and meaning of which the converts never fully understood, and hatred for many priests who used the church not for spiritual and charitable purposes but to entrench the Spanish power in the colony, impelled some Filipinos to find another religion under native supervision. Movements initiated toward this goal – in reality rebellions with religious undertones – usually resulted in the murder of priests and the sucking of churches. (Agoncillo and Guerrero 1970: 122)

Undoubtedly, some resorted to religious uprising/revolt and developed millenarian ideals and aspirations. This is what happened with the group of Apolinario de la Cruz (1815-1841), who revolted against the Spanish authorities in 1841, and is popularly known as “Hermano Pule” of the *Cofradia de San Jose* in Tayabas, Quezon. The *Cofradia* (confraternity), as a religious organization is exclusively for pure-blooded Filipinos whom the Spaniards called as “Indios” [uncivilized natives]. The association adapted the Catholic liturgy for its worship. The leader, “Hermano Pule,” was proclaimed *Hari ng mga Tagalog* [“King of the Tagalogs”] and *Kristong Tagalog* [“Tagalog Christ”] by his followers. Atavism found its inclusion among the society’s tenet: namely, that all members [men and women] of the *Cofradia* were immune from danger if they wore “anting-antings” or “talismans,” and, should they face persecution, they would be aided by direct intervention from heaven (Lee 1971: 133-134). With the death of “Hermano Pule,” other religious groups followed with almost the same nature of being millenarian and indigenous.<sup>18</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup> The Spanish authorities enticed the natives to live inside a *pueblo* or town, near the churches, or within hearing distance of church bells (in Spanish: *bajo de la campana*).

<sup>17</sup> Indigenous peoples like the Ifugao, Igorot, Kankanai, Mangyan, Tagbanua, Manobo, Bagobo, Bilaan, Ivatan, and Mandaya to name a few.

<sup>18</sup> Other religious groups followed after Hermano Pule’s *Cofradia*: *Guardia de Honor* of Julian Baltasar (“ApoLaqui,” 1872); *Pulajanes* and *Dios-Dios* in Samar and Leyte (Visayas, 1870’s); *Babaylanes* in Negros (Visayas, 1857-1927); *Santa Iglesia* of Felipe Salvador (“Papa Ipe,” 1894-1910); *Sakdalista* of Benigno Ramos, 1930-1945; and *Lapiang Malaya* of Valentin “Tatang” de los Santos, 1950’s-1960’s to name a few. Up to this day, animistic beliefs abound in different Philippine millenarian/religious groups such as the *Rizalistas* and the *Moncadistas*. The *Rizalistas* are those Filipino groups who believe that Jose Rizal, the Philippine national hero, is “God” or “Christ” himself [e.g. *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi*, “Church of the Banner of the Race;” *Bathalismo*, “Inang Mahiwaga” or “Mysterious Mother;” *Adarnista* or *Iglesyang Pilipinas*, “Philippine Church;” and *Iglesia Sagrada Filipina ng Sinco Vucales y Virtudes Tierra*

indigenization/localization of Filipino religious beliefs only shows how they, as a people, have contextualized foreign religions, (not only Catholicism/Christianity, particularly Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, but also Islam), from and within their own culture and worldview to make them more relevant and meaningful.

## CONCLUSION

This study revisits the animistic beliefs of the early Filipinos using select primary sources written by the Spanish chroniclers during the first century of the Spanish colonial period. If we go by the Spanish accounts, the early Filipinos were animists as they worshipped several spirits in nature, including their dead ancestors, with a solid recognition of the Supreme Being, the Creator. They had a *babaylan* (*baylan/catalonan*) who played a crucial role in their animistic practices serving as mediatrix between humans and supernatural beings. The *babaylan* believes in a multi-layered world consisting of the sky-world, the earth-world, and the underworld. As a priestess and shaman, the *babaylan* sees the world as one working entity – all things, all people, and all existences are connected.

Animism as a cosmic religion promotes the idea that human beings can create solutions and answers about life queries and mysteries. These mysteries relate to the cosmic forces [winds and cyclones, rains and sunshine, floods and drought, fire and heat], as well as to human concerns [planting and harvesting, health and sickness, life and death, marriage and politics]. It follows, then, that animism is a religion that sees the physical world as interpenetrated by spiritual forces, both personal and impersonal, to the extent that objects carry spiritual significance and events have spiritual causes. Thus, if there is an accident, or if someone is sick, there are spiritual reasons behind such things that must be taken into consideration. Otherwise, the cause behind the accident or the sickness cannot be fully understood or remedied (Halverson 1998: 59).

Historical and anthropological interpretations of animistic beliefs of the early Filipinos reveal that they were able to develop a logical thinking of the cosmic order in their everyday lives. Through the birds and serpents, the early Filipinos were able to make representations of deities and other supernatural forces governing the cosmic balance of the sky-world (upper world) and the underworld (lower world). Both birds and reptiles possess qualities beyond the comprehension of ancient people, inciting fear and awe in their eyes: the glorious flight of birds that made them one with the sky and the deadly yet

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*Santa de Jerusalem* to name a few. For more details, see the books of Marcelino A. Foronda, *Cults Honoring Rizal* (Manila: Garcia Publishing Co., 1961) and Prospero R. Covar, *Larangan: Seminal Essays on Philippine Culture* (Manila: Sampaguita Press, Inc., 1998). On the other hand, the *Moncadistas* are the followers of Dr. Hilario Camino Moncado, who established the religious sect "Filipino Crusaders World Army" (FCWA) in the 1930s and called himself its commander-in-chief or "Supreme Master." There were reportedly millions who believed in the supernatural powers of Moncado that the latter had established several headquarters all over the Philippines. Today, while the claimants fight for the properties of Moncado, the remaining followers, scattered in small groups all over the country, are guarding what is left of the legacy of their "Supreme Master," tangible or not, including the long-hair, long-beard rule.

graceful movement of a snake crawling in the crevices of the earth. Below the earth, it was believed that a large serpent/snake guarded the pillar supporting the earth. Two natural phenomena are said to be associated with the mythological snake: 1. an earthquake, which is the result of the giant serpent moving below the earth; and 2. the eclipse, when it is said to try to eat the sun or moon – a common motif associated with *Bacunawa*. Myths of primitive societies told that a sacred serpent (or a sea monster) guarded the sacred spring and the spring of immortality: the Tree of Life, the Fountain of Youth, and the Golden Apples (Eliade 1958: 165). In India, when women wanted to have children, they adored a cobra. From Buddhist times, snakes were held to be the givers of all fertility (167). On the other hand, the Mediterranean deities were represented with snakes in their hands [the Arcadian *Artemis*, *Hecate*, *Persephone*, just to name a few], or with snakes for hair like that of the *Gorgon* and *Erinyes* (168).

The early Filipinos believed that the storms and strong winds are caused by the flapping of the wings by the great bird (*Tigmamanukin* for the Tagalog, *Galura* for the Higaonon of Mindanao) – the spirit/god of the sky-world (Sitoy 1985: 4-5). This belief and veneration of birds has a long history in ancient societies. In ancient Egypt, aside from birds, there were many sacred animals associated with different gods and various cities, such as the Apis bull, a living manifestation of the god *Ptah* worshipped in the city of Memphis; the living crocodile, an earthly form of the god *Sobek* venerated throughout the Fayum; and the living falcon of Edfu, an incarnation of the god *Horus* (Scalf in Bailleul-Lesuer, ed. 2012: 36). Within the framework of the Egyptian creation myths, birds played a central role. In one narrative, a goose lays an egg on the mound which has risen from the primeval waters. From this egg, the sun god hatches in the form of a heron (Bailleul-Lesuer, ed. 2012: 131). Likewise, not only birds are depicted as symbols of gods in the myths and legends of ancient Mesopotamia, but also, rams, fishes, and bulls (Black and Green 1992: 16-19).

Mention has been made of the mystical tree (*balete* or *nunuk*) regarded as the gateway that connects the three worlds (the sky-world, the earth-world, and the underworld). The early Filipinos seemed to have a strong connection with the mystical aspect of trees – knowing that their lives highly revolved around the trees and forests which provided all their necessities. Moreover, due to the fact that trees reflect the same image of the life cycle (birth/germination and death/withering), it is no wonder that the early inhabitants in this archipelago were so fascinated by them. These elements and forces merge into the world of invisible powers that maintain the cosmic balance. For the cosmic believer, the vital rhythms of the natural world are manifestations of a mysterious, all-pervasive power presence. Everything is alive, interconnected, and interdependent – a part of one vast web of life that holds all things together in harmony. Experiences that emerge from this tradition tend to foster a great respect for the universe (McAndrew 2001: 2-14). It is clear that these actions were made to maintain the cosmic balance, the balance between the forces of good and evil. Lastly, this belief system that teaches that all things have spirit, is a source of respect and reverence for all of life. That this philosophy was already inherent in the Filipino indigenous mind and worldview long before the coming of the European colonizers on the Philippine Islands gives us an idea that the people in this



part of the globe were at par with the other ancient peoples who had mastered the movements and laws of nature.

Finally, animism as practiced by the early Filipinos, is not simply a pagan religion, but rather a “cosmic religion” that teaches that everything in this universe is interconnected, everything is alive, everything is interdependent, and each is part of one vast web of life that holds all things together in harmony. Worshipping nature and ancestral spirits and offering them sacrifices (foodstuffs, beverages, live fowls, and hogs) were believed to appease these supernatural beings and would assure worshippers protection from natural calamities (drought, pestilence, floods, earthquakes, and typhoons), good crops, health, and fortune. This is how the early Filipinos, including the peoples of ancient societies, had directed their actions to an envisaged cosmic order while projecting images of cosmic order onto the plane of their human experiences. Religious symbols and rituals enabled them to transcend the chaos that confronted them and overcame their deepest feelings of analytic, emotional, and moral impotence (Geertz 1973: 108). There is wisdom in the argument of Thomas Berry (1988: 87) which says that humans come into existence, have their present meaning, and attain their destiny only as integral part of the functioning of the earth and universe.

**Conflict of interest:**

None.

**Ethical Clearance:**

The study was approved by the institution.

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