

The Quincentennial of the First Circumnavigation of the World in Retrospect

*Rene R. Escalante**

Department of History, De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines

Abstract: In 2021, many countries in different continents commemorated the 500th anniversary of the first circumnavigation of the world by the Magellan-Elcano expedition. This is a great achievement of humanity that many people wanted to remember and draw inspiration and wisdom. The Philippines actively participated and spearheaded numerous activities despite the problems brought about by the Covid 19 pandemic. The commemorations were led by the National Quincentennial Committee (NQC), in partnership with the private institutions and international organizations.

This paper narrates and explains the activities and projects undertaken by the NQC and its partners. It discusses the values, themes, perspectives, and advocacies that were developed in the course of the commemorations. Central in its discussion is the recognition and promotion of Lapulapu as a national hero. There was also a deliberate attempt on the part of NQC to correct the long standing prejudice that Filipinos were uncivilized and savages before the coming of the Europeans. The paper ends with a discussion of the activities of the Philippine Catholic Church in the relation to the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the introduction of Christianity in the Philippines.

Keywords: Quincentennial of the First Circumnavigation of the World; Magellan-Elcano Expedition; National Quincentennial Committee; Lapulapu, Battle of Mactan and Sto. Niño de Cebu

* Rene Escalante can be contacted at rene.escalante@dlsu.edu.ph.

Introduction

On September 6, 2022, the worldwide commemoration of the quincentennial of the first circumnavigation of the world ended. The said date also marked the 500th anniversary of the arrival of the *Victoria*, the only ship of the Magellan expedition¹ that returned to Spain under the command of the Basque sailor Sebastian Elcano. In the Philippines, the National Quincentennial Committee capped the Philippine commemoration on April 27, 2022 in Lapu-Lapu City attended by President Rodrigo R. Duterte as guest of honor. The date likewise coincided with the 501st anniversary of the victory of the Filipinos in the Battle of Mactan. Now that the hype and the euphoria are over, it is timely to analyze and reflect on the significance and gains of this milestone commemoration.

There were three groups that actively commemorated the quincentennial of the first circumnavigation of the world. The first group consisted of the countries from where the expedition originated, and the other countries which came in contact with the voyagers. Portugal and Spain led the commemoration. They were joined by Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Guam, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The second group was composed of the Philippine Catholic Church and other Christian denominations because the arrival of Magellan in the Philippines was also considered as the beginning of Christianity in the country. Lastly, the third group included the different agencies of the Philippine government under the Duterte administration that spearheaded the activities and programs, which this paper discusses, to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the first circumnavigation of the world.

The worldwide commemoration of the first circumnavigation of the world was motivated by the national interest of the countries that wanted to memorialize this historic achievement. Portugal, for instance, centered their activities on Ferdinand Magellan, the captain general of the expedition, because he was a Portuguese. Spain, on its part, paid more attention on Sebastian Elcano, the captain of the *Victoria*, the only ship that returned to Spain. Similarly, Malaysia focused on Enrique de Malacca, the slave-interpreter of Magellan who helped the explorers connect with the local inhabitants of the Philippines. The Indonesians did not focus on any personality. Instead, they highlighted the importance of their spices because for them, it was the incentive that enticed the King of Spain to fund the Magellan expedition that resulted in the first circumnavigation of the world.

¹ Spanish and Portuguese scholars have different names for the expedition. The Spaniards called it Elcano expedition to honor the Basque sailor Sebastian Elcano (captain of the *Victoria*). The Portuguese refer to it as Magellan expedition, to recognize Ferdinand Magellan, the captain general of the fleet who originated from Sabrosa, Portugal. Since both of them have important roles in the journey, this paper will call it Magellan-Elcano expedition.

The National Quincentennial Committee (NQC)

The first circumnavigation of the world is a major event in the history of mankind because it debunked the old belief that the world is flat. It also expanded the European knowledge of world geography. The journey also proved that the Americas are separate continents from Asia. Moreover, Pacific Ocean became part of the world map and new navigational routes were integrated in maritime travel books. Because of its significance, Laurence Bergreen, author of *Over the Edge of the World*, called the Magellan expedition “the most important maritime voyage ever undertaken.”² Hence, many countries sponsored various activities to commemorate this great accomplishment of mankind.

In the Philippines, the preparation for the commemoration of the first circumnavigation of the world started in 2018 when former President Rodrigo Duterte issued Executive Order No. 55 (Series 2018).³ It was the response of the President to the request of the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP) under the leadership of Chairman Rene R. Escalante and strongly endorsed by former Sen. Edgardo Angara. The executive order created the National Quincentennial Committee (NQC), the interagency body tasked to oversee the quincentennial commemoration. The original member agencies of the committee were the Office of President, National Historical Commission of the Philippines, Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Tourism, and the Department of Budget and Management.

On 28 January 2019, the President issued another executive order which amended and enhanced the original one.⁴ It shifted the Eurocentric focus to one that was Filipino-centric, multi-disciplinary, communicative, and transformative. It also designated Executive Secretary Salvador C. Medialdea and NHCP Chairman Rene R. Escalante as Chairman and Executive Director of the NQC respectively. The new executive order also increased the committee members from six to twelve. The new member agencies under Executive Order No. 103 (Series 2019) are the Department of Public Works and Highways, Department of Education, Department of National Defense, Presidential Communications Operations Office, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, and the Presidential Adviser for the Visayas.

² Laurence Bergreen, *Over the Edge of the World: Magellan's Terrifying Circumnavigation of the Globe*. (New York: Harpers Collins e-book, 2003), 2.

³ “Executive Order No. 55, (S. 2018)” Constituting a Steering Committee for the Commemoration of the Quincentennial of the Arrival of Ferdinand Magellan in the Philippines, the Victory of Lapu-Lapu in the Battle of Mactan, and other Historic Events that Happened from 1510 to 1522.” <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2018/05may/20180508-EO-55-RRD.pdf>

⁴ Executive Order No. 103, (S. 2019) ”Reconstituting and Strengthening the National Quincentennial Committee, and Amending Executive Order No. 55 (S. 2018) for the Purpose.” See <https://nqc.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EO-103.pdf>

The NQC commenced its operations on 28 May 2018 after NHCP Chairman Escalante designated the Commemorations Section of the NHCP Historic Sites and Education Division as the lead unit. Months later, the NQC Secretariat was formed and provided special office space in the NHCP Central Office in Ermita, Manila. The members of the Secretariat came from the different divisions of NHCP, namely the Historic Sites and Education Division, Historic Preservation Division, and the Research, Publication and Heraldry Division.⁵ In January 2020, the NQC Secretariat was elevated into a division-like unit under Ar. Reynaldo Lita, head of the Historic Preservation Division. It was clear at the outset that after the commemorations, all members of the NQC Secretariat would return to their mother units and whatever assets and collections were acquired in the course of the NQC operations would be turned over to the NHCP.

During the inaugural meeting of the NQC, there was one question that the members mulled over. The issue was whether it was prudent for Filipinos to spend an enormous amount of taxpayers' money to commemorate the coming of Magellan which ultimately resulted in the colonization of the Philippines. One member of the committee shared the experience of the Americans in 1992 when they commemorated the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in their continent. Some groups ridiculed their government for glorifying the arrival of Columbus which for them led to centuries of slaughter, environmental destruction, and the obliteration of their indigenous cultural practices. A Guatemalan scholar had the similar view and wrote: "These 500 years have meant nothing but misery and oppression for our people. So, what do we have to celebrate?"⁶ The NQC members took the matter seriously because they didn't want a repeat of what happened in Central America. Learning from the Columbus' quincentennial experience, the committee resolved the controversial issue of the "commemoration" by adopting a Filipino-centric viewpoint in the activities and projects to be undertaken.

The NQC decision to veer away from a Eurocentric outlook made the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the first circumnavigation different from the 400th commemoration led then by Trinidad Pardo de Tavera. In 1921, the main discourse of the Tavera Committee centered on the "discovery of the Philippines by Magellan." The NQC members considered this assertion problematic because it connotes that prior to 1521, the Philippines was unknown to the international community. This claim might be true to the Europeans but not to the peoples in the Asia-Pacific region who had been trading with Ancient Filipinos for several

⁵ The members of the NQC Secretariat were Reynaldo S. Lita (Head), Ian Christopher B. Alfonso, Gerwill I. Cruz, Josef Alec D. Geradila, Mark Kiven Oriendo, Ayesha H. Sayseng-Apostol, Genissa O. Villegas, Dan Paul Awarayan, Juvelyn Nierves, and Ernestine Aurea Quijano.

⁶ Garry Abrams, "Sea of Troubles: Celebrations: The 500th anniversary of Columbus' voyage is raising waves of controversy over whether the trip was for good or ill." *Los Angeles Times*, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-04-01-vw-1284-story.html>

centuries. Moreover, the Tavera committee glorified Magellan so much and reduced the local personalities as mere audience and protagonists. After a series of meetings and exchanges, the NQC members decided to commemorate not the arrival of Magellan but the achievement of science and humankind in circumnavigating the world. Furthermore, the committee opted to use the word commemoration instead of celebration to avoid the misconception that the government was at the forefront of celebrating the coming of Magellan. Similarly, it was agreed that the activities and projects would focus on Lapulapu and other local personalities who figured prominently in the story of the first circumnavigation.

Finally, the NQC highlighted the achievements of precolonial Filipinos and corrected the century-old depiction of them as savages, barbaric, and uncivilized. The committee presented substantial pieces of archival and archeological evidence that show that Filipinos had already achieved a certain level of civilization that could be considered at a par with or even better than that of our neighbors. It also sponsored webinars and lectures showcasing the ancient Filipino traditions of boat building, tattooing, mat making, as well as burial practices, body ornaments, and bladed weapons which served as proofs that indeed our level of civilization was already remarkable as early as the 16th century.

Logo, Theme Song and Guiding Principles

The first few months of the NQC's existence were devoted to preparing and planning the activities and projects. Committee members came up with marketing collaterals that could be used for communicating and promoting the events to the public. Extensive research was conducted on how previous commemorations were done and international benchmarking was also undertaken. These were means to ensure that the commemoration would be relevant, meaningful, inclusive, and less polemic.

One of the marketing collaterals that NQC prioritized was the Quincentennial Logo. The logo was important because it would be used for communication and branding purposes. After almost three months of deliberations, the NQC officially launched the Quincentennial Logo on December 21, 2018.⁷

The logo is loaded with symbolisms and meanings. Its most conspicuous element is the number "500." The upper part of the digit "5" is presented as stylized cross to symbolize Christianity, one of the major legacies of the Magellan-Elcano expedition. Next, the number zero at the center bears the silhouette of the iconic Lapulapu Monument. It conveys the message that the chieftain of Mactan is the main character that is being memorialized. The other zero appears like a ring

⁷ There were more than 20 proposed logos that the NQC considered and the one designed by Mary Lyn Dioso and Relly Coquia, resident artists of the NHCP, was selected as the official logo of the commemorations.

signifying the completion of the first circumnavigation of the world. Under the two zeros are two long waves, depicting the meeting of our ancestors and the expedition in Philippine waters. The other three small waves in the number “5” represent to Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, the three major island groups that comprise the Philippine archipelago. The use of blue motif has two meanings. The first is to showcase Philippine maritime heritage and the second is to highlight the oceans that the expedition circumnavigated for the first time.

Filipinos are known to be music lovers and every time the nation holds a major event, they would normally compose a theme song. It happened during the commemoration of the centennial of Philippine independence and the visit of Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis. To continue this tradition, the NQC commissioned a theme song to serve as background music for all shows and programs. The theme song project was first offered to National Artist for Music Ryan Cayabyab, and then to Jose Mari Chan, Dr. Renato Lucas of the National Music Competitions for Young Artists (NAMCYA), and Ogie Alcasid of the Organisasyon ng mga Pilipinong Mang-aawit (OPM). All of them for various reasons turned down the offer. The OPM suggested to propose the project to the Philippine Popular Music Festival or PhilPop, which conducts regular music bootcamps nationwide.

Chairman Escalante designated Mr. Ian Alfonso to liaise on behalf of the NQC with the PhilPop. After a series of meetings, PhilPop Executive Director Dinah Remolacio accepted the project as part of the PhilPop Bootcamp Program. The NQC financed the cost of producing eight songs and the PhilPop conducted bootcamps nationwide. It also provided professional support to the composers and singers of the eight winning theme song entries.⁸ The first bootcamp was held in Batangas on 28 May 2019 and the second and third bootcamps happened in Tagum City and Dagupan City, respectively. Many known musicians joined the bootcamps including Ryan Cayabyab, Jim Paredes, Noel Cabangon, Trina Belamide, and a few others.

During its 11th regular meeting in Butuan City on 21 November 2019, the NQC chose the song “Bagani” as the official Quincentennial theme song. “Bagani” is a local Manobo term that refers to a “warrior-hero” or a great man who has contributed something for the betterment of the community. The NQC found the theme song very fitting and relevant because it promotes the Filipino’s heroic image, which is the message articulated in the commemorative activities. Also, the NQC leadership directed Mr. Ian Alfonso to get the consent of the Manobos for the use of the word “Bagani” to shield the NQC from possible accusation of cultural appropriation. With the help of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) Region 13, permission was obtained from the Manobo datu.

⁸ The NQC allocated two million pesos for the project. One million two hundred thousand was the share of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) and the remaining eight hundred thousand pesos came from the budget of the NQC.

Bagani was the bootcamp entry of Roel Rostata and its final version was arranged by Jungee Marcelo and sung by Anthony Castillo. It was formally launched on 14 December 2019 during the 500-day countdown. The inaugural version was sung by World Championship of Performing Arts medalists Vingenr Tan, Ronna Jenn Lofranco-Cañete, John Wallace Tubalde, and Erneville Vinculado. Background music was provided by the Cebu Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Maestro Jiovanni Tabada. Two months after its launching, “Bagani” was streamed by PhilPop for free on Spotify and iTunes. In March 2020, the NQC approved the request of PTV 4 to use “Bagani” as its station ID. Lastly, the NQC and PhilPop agreed to make the other songs composed during PhilPop Bootcamps available for free in all streaming platforms.⁹

To effectively perform its function as clearing house and implementor of quinentennial activities, the NQC came up with themes and guiding principles that served as their bases in deciding which project and activity to undertake or to set aside. After a thorough deliberation, the NQC chose a provoking theme - VICTORY AND HUMANITY for the commemoration. The Battle of Mactan is the event referred to by the word VICTORY in the thematic phrase. Because of the battle’s significance, the NQC made it the pivotal event of the government-sponsored quinentennial commemorations. In addition, the committee members regarded the anniversary of the battle as an excellent platform to elevate the level of recognition of Lapulapu from being a local hero to a national hero.

Humanity was chosen to highlight the contribution of the Filipinos in the first circumnavigation of the world. It has reference to an event that happened in Samar, the first stopover of the expedition in Philippine territory. Its historical basis rests on a famous passage in the account of Antonio Pigafetta, the chronicler of the Magellan-Elcano expedition.

We ate biscuit, which was no longer biscuit, but powder of biscuits swarming with worms, for they have eaten the good. It stank strongly of the urine of the rats. We drank yellow water that had been putrid for many days... and often we ate sawdust from boards... The gums of both the lower and upper teeth of some of our men swelled, so that they could not eat under any circumstances and therefore died... Had not God and His blessed mother given us so good weather we would all have died of hunger in that exceeding vast sea.¹⁰

⁹ As per contract, PhilPop was only required to produce eight songs but in their final submission, they gave nine songs. Aside from Bagani, the titles of other songs submitted were “Mactan,” “Samu’t Saring Ilsa,” “Kahayag,” “Bayanihan,” “Tatak Pinoy,” “Dalan,” “Alab ng Puso” and “Baka Bukas.”

¹⁰ Antonio Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage Around the World*, trans. James Alexander Robertson (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906), 83, 85.

Pigafetta wrote this entry in his diary three weeks before they sighted the island of Samar. By the time they anchored in Philippine territory, most likely their situation was far much worse than what he described above. If one will continue reading Pigafetta, one will discover that the local residents gave them fish, a jar of palm wine, bananas, and coconuts.” They also provided the newcomers a safe and quite place where they could rest and recover from the debilitating journey.¹¹ This account of Pigafetta clearly shows the magnanimity of the Filipinos which may be considered as their major contribution to the expedition. If they drove the foreigners away from their island or worse, if they displayed hostile attitude towards them, the expedition might have ended in Samar and the first circumnavigation of the world would not have been completed.

There were four relevant catchwords which the NQC derived from the main themes and integrated in their activities and programs. These were “unity,” “magnanimity,” “sovereignty,” and “identity” which were regarded as positive values and important ingredients in nation-building. “Unity” was chosen because the NQC noted that the first circumnavigation of the world succeeded because of the unity and cooperation of the personalities behind the expedition. Unity was also the reason why Lapulapu and his warriors defeated Magellan in the Battle of Mactan. “Magnanimity” was highly regarded because this was the contribution of the Filipinos to the first circumnavigation. As mentioned earlier, if the people of Samar did not extend assistance to weak, weary, and starving crews of the expedition, the outcome of the journey might have been different. “Sovereignty” was another essential value reflective of the spirit behind the triumph of the Filipinos in the Battle of Mactan. Lapulapu and his men showed to the invaders that the Filipinos were ready to fight and risk their lives to defend their right to self-determination. Though not directly related to the first circumnavigation or the Battle of Mactan, “Identity” was pertinent to the advocacy of the NQC to correct the portrayals of our ancestors as exotics, uncivilized, and savages. The NQC members believed that if practiced or adopted by contemporary Filipinos, these values will have positive effects on our society.

Promoting Lapulapu as a National Hero

It is unfortunate that very little is known about Lapulapu’s personal life. No one knows when and where he was born. There is no document that could give information on whether he had wife and children. Likewise, historians have no idea what happened to him after the Battle of Mactan and all are clueless as far as his death is concerned. Pigafetta was also silent as to Lapulapu’s actual participation in the Battle of Mactan. Contrary to many renditions of the Battle of Mactan, there is no first-hand account that states that it was Lapulapu who delivered the fatal blow

¹¹Ibid., 99.

that killed Magellan. But being the chieftain who led the defense of Mactan, credit is given to Lapulapu based on the principle of command responsibility.

The Philippine government regarded the quincentennial of the Battle of Mactan as a golden opportunity to memorialize Lapulapu and popularize his contributions to nation-building. Of all the events that happened in 1521, the 27th of April or the 500th anniversary of the Battle of Mactan, was considered the D-Day of the quincentennial commemoration. Prior to this momentous event, the NQC organized three commemorative countdowns that aimed to prepare the Filipino people for the big day. The 500-day countdown began on 10 December 2019 and the main venue was in Lapu-Lapu City with Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat as guest of honor. Eighteen other LGUs joined the countdown and conducted their activity in their respective historic sites. On 27 April 2020 and 17 January 2021, the NQC sponsored commemorative activities in Lapu-Lapu City and Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) head office compound to mark the 365-day and 100-day countdowns, respectively.

Despite the strict health and safety protocols still in effect on 27 April 2021, the NQC and its partner agencies still managed to hold activities nationwide to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Battle of Mactan. Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea was the guest of honor in Lapu-Lapu City where he was joined by Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles, Senator Christopher Lawrence Go, NHCP Chairman Rene Escalante, and other national and local officials. The whole-day affair in Lapu-Lapu City started with the traditional flag raising and wreath laying ceremonies in the morning, followed by the unveiling of three historical markers namely, the quincentennial marker for Lapu-Lapu City, the revised NHCP marker for the Battle of Mactan and a new biographical marker for Lapulapu. After the military parade and the air show of the Philippine Air Force, the program proper ensued, capped by the traditional reenactment of the Battle of Mactan. Around six o'clock in the afternoon, people were back in Lapu-Lapu Park for the quincentennial dinner party sponsored by the LGU of Lapu-Lapu City. There was also a cultural show hosted by 2018 Miss Universe Catriona Gray. The evening celebration ended with a 15-minute fireworks display.

Three decades ago, Lapulapu was featured in the Philippine one centavo coin. With the decline of the purchasing power of the peso, the coin gradually disappeared in circulation. Through the initiative of the NQC, the Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas issued a new five-thousand Piso-bill with Lapulapu as the featured hero. This is the highest denomination in Philippine currency that is considered a legal tender of the BSP. There is also a pending bill in Philippine legislature to rename the Cebu-Mactan International Airport terminals 1 and 2 as Lapulapu Domestic Airport and Lapulapu International Airport, respectively. This move aims to further popularize Lapulapu particularly to tourists who will visit Cebu via this airport. Lastly, President

Duterte issued an executive order directing all government agencies and the private sectors to use the word “Lapulapu” (without the hyphen) when referring to the first Filipino hero.¹² The EO wants to revive the correct spelling of the hero based on the original manuscript of Pigafetta.¹³ It will also distinguish the Mactan hero from the famous fish that most Chinese restaurants offer as delicacy. All these endeavors were undertaken to ensure that Lapulapu’s heroism will remain in the consciousness of the Filipino people.

To put Lapulapu on a par with Luzon-born heroes like Rizal, Bonifacio, and Aguinaldo, the NQC proposed a new monument of Lapulapu for a memorial shrine and museum dedicated to his honor. This is to fulfill the provision in Republic Act No. 5695 that requires the building of a “Liberty House” to enshrine “the important personages, places, and events, including laws, customs, and traditions in the history of this nation before and during the coming of Magellan.”¹⁴ The proposed structure is 30 meters long and has the typical stretch of an ancient Visayan ruler’s *balay*. Its construction would be eco-friendly and would not entail land reclamation because it would be built on stilts by the shore of the present Liberty Shrine. It shall function not only as a museum but a hallowed place where the memory of Lapulapu and other heroes of the Battle at Mactan shall be preserved for posterity.

Like a ruler’s *balay* which serves as community center, the Lapulapu Memorial Shrine and Museum will be multi-functional. Its wings shall house two galleries where artifacts and artworks will be displayed. Its rear side will function as an amphitheater for the annual reenactment of the Kadaugan sa Mactan. The *hagdan* (Cebuano word for ‘stairway’) at the *pamulong* (‘decorated façade’) will serve as stage or platform for civic events. The *atup* (‘roof’) is another prominent feature of the proposed structure. Based on the legends drawn on the maps of Cebu by Pigafetta, its roof design draws inspiration from a native *sakayan* (Cebuano for ‘boat’). It symbolizes our common maritime heritage as an Austronesian or ancient maritime people. It also embodies the lordship of Lapulapu in the sea as a noted *mangayaw* (‘sea raider’). The left part shall serve as the prow, while the other side as the stern. Both shall bear plumages as a sign of victory in ancient Visayan boat-making tradition—the *sombol* on prow and *tongol* on stern. Perpendicular to it is the *katig* (‘outrigger’), which was our ancestors’ contribution to the boat-building technology of humankind. The invention of *katig* enabled our ancestors to sail across the Pacific 2,000 years before Magellan arrived in the Philippines. *Katig* in the design is intentionally outstretched and appears like wings of a bird. It symbolizes freedom (*kagawasan*) which is valued so much by early and present-day Filipinos.

¹² “Executive Order No. 152 s. 2021,” <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2021/12/06/executive-order-no-152-s-2021/>

¹³ Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage Around the World*, 171.

¹⁴ Republic Act No. 5695, <https://thecorpusjuris.com/legislative/republic-acts/ra-no-5695.php>

The open structure enables sea breeze to flow freely. It will also allow tourists to enjoy the scenic view of the mangroves and the shores of Mactan. Ridgepoles are also in the interval of five, embodying the usual number of *togbong* (Cebuano for ‘ridgepole’) in the common *balay* of ancient Visayan rulers. Five also symbolizes the 500th anniversary of the Battle of Mactan. The rafters are crossed in the *togbong* intentionally to faithfully capture the *saragunting* (‘rafters extending beyond the ridgepoles’) of the ancient Visayan *balay*. *Saragunting* have designs to mimic the intricately ornated prows of our ancestors’ *sakayan* (usually depicting the head of *bakunawa* or the native Visayan concept of sea serpent responsible for the astronomical phenomenon known as *laho* or eclipse). The *dingding* (‘wall’) will be wrapped with manufactured frames with designs inspired by ancient *pusor* or a macramé of woven rattan, the patterns of which are still evident in some humble *balays* in the Visayas. It just unfortunate that at the time the NQC ceased its operations, this project remains unfunded.

Enriching Philippine History, Culture, and the Arts

To make the commemoration educational and research-oriented, NQC undertook initiatives to enrich Philippine historiography and promote historical research. One of the projects of the committee was the retrieval of extant primary sources that could provide historical details about the first circumnavigation. During the preparatory period, the NQC members found out that very few eyewitness accounts of the first circumnavigation of the world survived in history. The most authoritative and detailed narrative among them was written by Antonio Pigafetta, the Italian chronicler of the expedition. Because of the importance of his work, the NHCP management decided to secure a high-resolution digital copy of the extant manuscripts of Pigafetta’s account. The NQC supported this initiative and funded the retrieval of archival materials about the Philippines from different libraries and archives abroad. The committee acquired certified true digital copy of the four surviving manuscripts of Antonio Pigafetta’s *Relazione del primo viaggio intorno al mondo* (1524-1525) (First Voyage Around the World).¹⁵ The first two manuscripts which are in French came from the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris (Manuscript 5650 and Manuscript 24224). The third copy in Italian is from the *Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana* in Milan (Manuscript L 103 Sup) and the fourth copy came from the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library in Yale University (Manuscript 351). The last one is also known as the Nancy Codex, another French version of the Pigafetta’s account.

¹⁵ The first English translation of Pigafetta’s account came out in 1874, the second one in 1906, and the third one in 1969. See Antonio Pigafetta, *The First Voyage Round the World by Magellan. Translated from the accounts of Pigafetta, and other contemporary writers. Accompanied by original documents, with notes and an introduction*, ed. and trans. Henry Edward John Stanley (London: Hakluyt Society, 1874); Antonio Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage Around the World*, trans. James Alexander Robertson. (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906); and Antonio Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage Around the World*, 2 vols. trans. and ed. R. A. Skelton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969).

The NHCP also collected extant copies of the accounts of the other survivors of the expedition and those who interviewed them. These include “The Account of a Genoese Pilot,”¹⁶ Francisco Albo,¹⁷ Fernando Oleivera,¹⁸ Giovanni Battista Rammusio,¹⁹ Maximillianus Transylvanus,²⁰ and a few other minor contemporaneous accounts. The NQC also obtained a digital copy of the papers of American Philipinologist James Alexander Robertson which is currently deposited in the Edward Ayer Collection of the Newberry Library in Chicago. Robertson’s papers are important to the NQC because he was one of the translators of Pigafetta’s account. The Ateneo de Manila University on their part gave NHCP digitized materials on the quadricentenary of the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan in 1921. These materials are found in the Rizal Library’s Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera Collection.²¹ The NQC researchers studied historical writers and their works in the course of the preparation for the milestone commemorations. The most prominent writers were Laurence Bergreen,²² Edward G. Bourne,²³ Francis Henry H. Guillemard,²⁴ Lord Henry Edward Stanley of Alderly,²⁵ Peter Schreurs,²⁶ and Samuel Elliot Morrison.²⁷ They were used extensively in charting the course of the journey of the expedition in Philippine territory. They served also as bases when the Mojares panel revisited the contentious first Eastern Sunday mass in the Philippines.²⁸ The NQC turned over all these materials and published works to the Serafin D. Quiason Resource Center in the NHCP Central Office and may be accessed free of charge by interested researchers.

The NQC did not end their engagement with the community of scholars by merely providing them primary sources that they could use to enrich the narrative of

¹⁶ Antonio Pigafetta, *First Voyage Around the World* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1969), 157-160.

¹⁷ Antonio Pigafetta, *The First Voyage Round the World by Magellan. Translated from the accounts of Pigafetta, and other contemporary writers*, trans. and ed. Henry Edward John Stanley (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1874).

¹⁸ Fernando Oliveira, *The Voyage of Ferdinand Magellan*, trans. Peter Schreurs. (Manila: National Historical Institute 2002).

¹⁹ Pigafetta, *First Voyage Around the World*, 145-146.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 111-130.

²¹ Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera has extensive materials on this topic because he headed the group that commemorated the 400th anniversary of the first circumnavigation of the world.

²² Bergreen, *Over the Edge of the World: Magellan’s Terrifying Circumnavigation of the Globe*.

²³ Edward Gaylord Bourne, *Discovery, Conquest and Early History of the Philippine Islands*. (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1902).

²⁴ See Antonio Pigafetta, *First Voyage Around the World* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1969), 149-157.

²⁵ Lord Henry Edward John Stanley of Alderley. *The First Voyage Round The World By Magellan*. (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1874).

²⁶ Peter Schreurs, *The Location of Pigafetta’s Mazaua, Butuan and Calagan*. Manila: National Historical Institute 1999).

²⁷ Samuel Eliot Morrison, *The European Discovery of America: The Southern Voyages A.D. 1492-1616*. (London: Oxford University Press 1974).

²⁸ The panel of experts was headed by National Artist for Literature Resil B. Mojares. Its members were Dr. Francis M. Navarro, Dr. Danilo M. Gerona, Fr. Antonio Francisco B. de Castro S.J and Dr. Carlos Madrid Álvarez-Piñer and Dr. Jose Victor Torres who served as panel secretary.

16th century Philippines. As early as August 2019, the committee had already started organizing lectures and conferences where historians and other academics presented papers on some general themes. The Quincentennial Lecture Series gathered well-known scholars from different parts of the country. Topics of the lectures and webinars went beyond the circumnavigation. Scholars talked about the tattooing tradition of precolonial Philippines, the world of Lapulapu, early Visayan scripts and other unexplored topics in Philippine history. The lectures were supported by the academic community and some familiar personalities who participated were National Artist Resil Mojares, Ambeth Ocampo, Rolando Borrinaga, Jose Eleazar Bersales, Jose Victor Torres, and Danilo Gerona.

The outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic did not prevent the NQC from organizing lectures, conferences, and other academic activities. When house quarantine, travel restrictions, and limited contact were imposed, the NQC converted their activities and programs into webinars and online lectures. With the help of Radio TV Malacañang (RTVM), the webinars were live-streamed using the social media platforms of various government agencies and private institutions. The Countdown to 500 Online Lectures, the Quincentennial Commemorations Public Lecture Series, and the Philippine International Quincentennial Conference sustained the interest of the general public who were able to update their knowledge of history in the comfort of their homes.²⁹ A year after their launching, these activities gained a combined mileage of over 300,000 views.

The NQC webinars and other online activities served as platforms to educate the listeners and introduce new topics and perspectives about Philippine precolonial history.

Aside from historians and social scientists, the NQC also engaged the creative community by sponsoring art competitions. Using the 1961 Rizal Centennial as an inspiration, the NQC sponsored a painting competition which was open to all Filipino artists who are 18 years old and above. Its conceptualization and implementation were supervised by the members of the NCCA-National Committee of Art Galleries.³⁰ There were four themes which participants could depict in their entries. These were magnanimity, sovereignty, legacy, and unity. Participants were allowed to conduct their own research to capture meaningfully the theme that their artwork could develop. Though conducted at the height of the Covid 19 pandemic, the art contest attracted 434 participants. The first prize winners for each category

²⁹ There were many other webinars and online lectures that the NQC and its local and international partners organized. For a complete list of them, see National Historical Commission of the Philippines, (2022) “*National Quincentennial Committee Terminal and Financial Report*” (Manila: NHCP) pp. 200-205.

³⁰ They included NCAG Head Rayos del Sol, John Delan Robillos, and Dannie Alvarez of the Yuchengco Museum.

received PHP. 500,000.00 and the two minor winners for each category got PHP. 50,000.00. Their entries were subsequently showcased in a special gallery during the ManilaArt 2021 Exhibition. The long-term plan of the NHCP is to display them as permanent exhibits in the proposed Lapulapu Memorial Shrine and Museum.

Alongside the painting completion was the search for the best monument design for Lapulapu. The winning entry would be used as basis of the Lapulapu monument to be installed in the proposed museum honoring the heroes of the Battle of Mactan. Ambeth Ocampo, Patrick Flores, Jose Eleazar Bernales, and Laya Boquiren-Gonzales served as NQC consultants and judges in the selection process. There were more than 40 participants who qualified for the competition and the entry of Rex B. Sicat, an artist from Bambam, Tarlac, emerged as the grand prize winner. On April 27, 2021, he was recognized during the program proper of the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Battle of Mactan in Lapulapu City and awarded a cash reward of PHP. 500,000.00.

International Engagements and Commitments

The NQC's engagement with countries that commemorated the quinentennial of the first circumnavigation started two months before the creation of the NQC. On March 2018, the Spanish Minister of Defense and the president of the Junta de la Valladolid sponsored a three-day international conference on the first circumnavigation. (*Congreso Internacional de Historia Primus Circumdediste Melaves de la Primera Globalizacion*). Chairman Escalante led the delegation composed of Danilo Gerona, Francis Navarro, and Philippine Consul General Emmanuel Fernandez. Escalante took advantage of the occasion and shared notes with the delegates who were in charge of the commemoration of the first circumnavigation in their respective countries. During the conference's closing ceremony, King Philip VI of Spain hosted a Royal Banquet to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the signing of "*Capitulaciones de Valladolid*." This was the contract that King Charles I (later crowned Holy Roman Emperor Charles V) and Magellan signed on March 22, 1518. The contract stipulated that the Spanish King would finance the expedition to the Spice Islands that Magellan would organize. The two parties also agreed that in the event that the venture would be successful, both would receive a fair share of the profit.

Years before 2021, Portugal, Spain, Indonesia, and other countries in Latin America and Southeast Asia established an informal organization that would collaborate in commemorating the first circumnavigation of the world. They called it Global Network of Magellanic Cities (GNMC) and its members were the cities around the world that were part of the itinerary of the Magellan-Elcano expedition. Cebu City officials used to attend its meetings but after some years, they became

inactive. With the help of Philippine Ambassador to Lisbon Maria Celia Feria, the NQC became a member of GNMC on observer status. On July 15-17, 2019, NHCP Chair Escalante and Ian Alfonso attended the 10th Meeting of the GNMC in Jakarta and Tidore, Indonesia. Escalante signed the Tidore Declaration of the GNMC and expressed Philippine support to the projects and activities of the network. During the meeting, Escalante shared views with Mr. Jose Manuel Marquez of the Portuguese Commission for the 5th Centenary of Magellan's voyage, Dr. Hilmar Farid of the Indonesian Historical Society, and other officials and scholars who attended the assembly.

One proposal that cropped up during the GNMC discussion was to have the Magellan-Elcano route inscribed in the registry of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This ambitious transnational project was welcomed by the members and NQC committed its support. Escalante reported this proposal to the NQC members, and a technical group was created to study and explore options on how to execute it in the Philippines. The technical group members conducted extensive research to identify the places which the expedition traversed. Moreover, the NHCP architects came up with a template marker for the sites. Installed in each site was a bas-relief depicting what transpired in the place with a short marker text narrating the event. Lastly, proper coordination with the host local government unit was made to determine the ideal site where the marker should be installed.

The template pedestal of the Quincentennial Historical Marker was of classical design with a globe on top of it. One could see the NHCP historical marker on the obverse side of it and the bas-relief on the reverse side. The pedestal, globe, and moldings were made of fiber resin and the NHCP marker followed the standard cast iron design. The bas-reliefs illustrating the historical events were made of bonded marble. Roderick Macutay was the lead designer of the bas-relief and Jonas Roces supervised the fabrication of the pedestal and the bas-relief. All the markers were crafted in Manila. After they passed the quality standard of NHCP, they were shipped to the places where they were installed. The NQC planned to unveil all the 34 markers on the 500th anniversary when the expedition reached these place, but there were cases when this did not happen because of the pandemic and the unavailability of the guests. The first marker was unveiled in Suluan, Eastern Samar on March 16, 2021 and the last marker was unveiled in Sarangani on October 28, 2021.

To ensure the active participation of the partner LGU's, the NQC announced that the three best sites of the Quincentennial Historical Marker would receive cash prizes. One guideline stated that the location should be near the sea or in a government property that has some historical significance. Out of the 34 sites considered, 27 complied with the guidelines. On December 17, 2021, the NQC announced the winners of the Best Site Development competition. The grand prize (PHP. 250,000)

went to the LGU of Dumaguete City. Maribojoc, Bohol and Tagima, Basilan were adjudged second and third best sites and received PHP. 200,000 and PHP150,000 pesos, respectively.³¹

On the academic side, the NQC collaborated with international institutions in organizing lectures and conferences where Filipino and foreign scholars presented their latest studies related to the first circumnavigation or about 16th century Philippines. For instance, the NQC partnered with the Philippine Embassy in Portugal in sponsoring the Magellan Lecture Series. It aimed to raise Portuguese awareness about the Philippines through shared history beyond just being part of the route of the first circumnavigation of the world. Some of the Filipino scholars who presented papers in Portugal were Rene Escalante, Felice Noelle Rodriguez, Danilo M. Gerona, Francis Navarro, Ambeth Ocampo, and Stephanie Marie R. Co. The Philippine Embassy in Spain organized a similar activity titled *Quincentennial Encounters: Cultural Conversations on the 500 Years of Philippine- Spain Relations*. The lecture series held at Casa Asia, Madrid provided a platform for Filipino and Spanish academics who shared their research outputs to the public. National Artist Kidlat Tahimik's mounted a provocative exhibition at the Palacio de Cristal in Madrid. Using Philippine indigenous materials, he worked on a number of galleries that featured milestone events in Philippine history from the 16th century to the present.

Collaboration with the Catholic Church

The constitutional provision on the separation of the Church and the State did not prevent the NQC from partnering with religious groups that commemorated the 500th anniversary of the introduction of Christianity in the Philippines. Culturally and socially, it is undeniable that Christianity is probably the most encompassing and long-lasting legacy of the Magellan-Elcano expedition to the Filipinos. If the NQC would set Christianity aside, the commemoration of the first circumnavigation would not be inclusive, comprehensive, and socially relevant. Hence, apart from incorporating the cross in the NQC logo, the committee also organized several activities to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Christianity's presence in the Philippines.

The government and the different religious organizations remained independent and extended no financial assistance to each other. But they collaborated in many activities. For example, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

³¹The members of the panel of judges headed by NHCP Chairman & NQC Executive Director Rene R. Escalante were DILG Undersecretary for Plans, Public Affairs and Communication Jonathan E. Malaya, DOT Undersecretary Roberto P. Alabado III DFA Office of Public and Cultural Diplomacy Asec. Eduardo Martin R. Meñez, and NCCA's National Committee on Art Galleries representative John Delan L. Robillos.

(CBCP) and the NQC joined forces in revisiting the issue as to where the 1521 Easter Sunday mass took place. Years before 2021, certain groups were claiming that the mass was celebrated in their locality. The most vocal of them were the proponents from Butuan City and from Limasawa, Southern Leyte. The NHCP created a panel headed by National Artist for Literature Resil Mojares to help the Commission settle the issue.³² The Commission also allowed the CBCP to have one representative in the panel and for the church historians to participate as non-voting observers.³³ The Mojares panel scheduled conferences in both Butuan and Southern Leyte that enabled the proponents to articulate their respective arguments. After almost a year, the Mojares panel reported to the NHCP that the evidences and arguments presented by the pro-Butuan advocates were not sufficient and convincing enough to warrant the repeal or reversal of the previous rulings of the National Historical Institute (predecessor of the NHCP).³⁴ Hence, the commemoration of the quincentennial of first Easter Sunday mass was held in Limasawa and not in Butuan.

The 500th anniversary of the first Catholic baptism in the Philippines was another event that the government and the Catholic Church observed jointly. The NQC members and the officials of Cebu City LGU attended a High Mass celebrated by the Papal Nuncio on April 14, 2021. The particular events commemorated were the baptism of Rajah Humabon and the giving of the Santo Niño image to his wife Juana. After the mass, the National Museum of the Philippines unveiled the marker declaring the Basilica of the Santo Niño de Cebu as a National Cultural Treasure. This was followed by the opening of the Santo Niño Exhibit by the NHCP. Aside from the Santo Niño de Cebu, the exhibit also featured various images of the infant Jesus that are enshrined and venerated in Tondo, Ternate, Pandacan, and Panay. The NQC highlighted the image of the Santo Niño de Cebu because it is regarded as the most popular and enduring legacy of the Magellan-Elcano expedition to the Filipinos.

Before 2021 ended, the NQC organized activities in Barcelona, Spain and in Lisbon, Portugal. These events centered on the Santo Niño de Cebu as a religious and cultural legacy. With the help of Philippine Consul General Ma. Theresa Lazaro, the NQC persuaded the administrators of the Basilica de la Sagrada Familia to hold

³² The other members were Danilo M. Gerona (Partido State University), Francis M. Navarro (Ateneo de Manila University), Carlos Madrid Álvarez-Piñer (Instituto Cervantes de Manila), and Antonio Francisco B. de Castro, S.J. (Loyola School of Theology, representing CBCP). Jose Victor Z. Torres (De La Salle University) was the panel's secretary-general.

³³ The observers who regularly attended the meetings were Fr. Milan Ted Torralba (CBCP Episcopal Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church), Fr. Emil Quilatan, OAR (Archivist, Augustinian Recollect Archives), Fr. Amado Tumbali, SJ (Archivist, Archives of the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus), Fr. Antolin Uy, SVD (historian), and Fr. Albert Flores (Archivist, Manila Archdiocesan Archives and Museum).

³⁴ The complete report of the Mojares Panel is in <https://nhcp.gov.ph/official-position-of-the-national-historical-commission-of-the-philippines-on-the-site-of-the-1521-easter-sunday-mass-2/>

an international mass on December 5, 2021 in honor of the Santo Niño de Cebu and to declare Barcelona as the home of the iconic image. Before the mass, there was a procession of five images of the Santo Niño inside the Basilica. The Apostolic Nuncio to Spain Archbishop Bernardito Auza was the main celebrant and the VIP guests included Archbishop of Barcelona Juan Jose Omella, Ambassador Philippe Lluillier, NHCP Chair Rene Escalante, Consul General Ma. Theresa Lazaro, and few other government officials. Despite the restrictions due to the pandemic, many Filipinos attended the big event. Those who were not accommodated inside the Basilica witnessed the proceedings virtually in various media platforms. After the events in Barcelona, the NQC team flew to Lisbon to grace the opening of the Santo Niño exhibit in the Museu de São Roque in Lisbon on 9 December 2021. It was organized by Philippine Ambassador to Portugal Celia Anna Feria and listed as one of the major 2021 QCP activities of the Philippine Embassy in Lisbon.

Epilogue

Let me end this paper by sharing my personal thoughts on Ferdinand Magellan and the relevance of commemorating the first circumnavigation of the world. For me, Filipinos should not spend so much time and resources trumpeting Magellan's discovery of a pioneering route going to Southeast Asia because it is already a well-known historical fact and Filipinos contributed very little to it. Instead, allow me to quote a passage from Pigafetta's account to identify the enduring legacy of Magellan to our country. This passage talks about an event that happened in Cebu which ultimately resulted in the conversion of Rajah Humabon and his subjects. Pigafetta wrote:

The captain told them that God made the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything else, and that He had commanded us to honor our fathers and mothers, and that whoever did otherwise was condemned to eternal fire; that we all descended from Adam and Eve, our first parents; that we have an immortal spirit and many other things pertaining to the faith. . . The captain-general told them that they should not become Christians for fear or to please us, but of their own free wills; and that he would not cause any displeasure to those who wished to live according to their own law, but that the Christians would be better regarded and treated than the others.³⁵

The person Pigafetta is quoting here is not Fr. Pedro Valderama, the chaplain of the expedition, but Magellan. This passage clearly identifies that the person who introduced Christianity in our country is not a member of the Catholic hierarchy

³⁵ Pigafetta, *First Voyage Around the World*, 35-36.

but the head of the expedition. For many Catholic Filipinos who comprise almost 80 percent of our population, Magellan is remembered not so much as a navigator, explorer, and colonizer. His enduring legacy was his role as an evangelizer who convinced the early settlers of Cebu to abandon their folk religion and accept Christianity. The image of the Santo Niño and the cross he erected in Cebu which people call “Magellan Cross” remain important national treasures that attract local and foreign devotees.

Apparently, the seeds of Christianity that Magellan planted in the Philippines fell on fertile soil. The Philippines today is known as the country with the biggest population of Catholic believers in Asia. For the last five centuries, the Catholic tradition remained part of the Filipino’s daily life and worldview. In the Philippines, churches were built in the heart of the cities; most national holidays are religious in nature; Filipinos start and end their communal activities with a prayer; many of our schools are run by religious orders and Filipinos regard the Pope as the most popular and influential world leader. If Magellan did not propagate Christianity and simply left our country after getting the provisions they needed, for sure the political and cultural landscape of the Philippines would be different.

Finally, let me go back to the question that I raised at the beginning of this paper, “Was it worthwhile to commemorate the first circumnavigation of the world?” For me, the answer is yes. The activities that the NQC spearheaded benefited our people one way or another. First, the glorification of the victory of the Filipinos in the Battle of Mactan boosted the dignity and morale of our people. Second, the attempt to revisit the way of life of our ancestors five centuries ago helped us understand our roots and hopefully appreciate better who we are now. Third, the quincentennial commemorations gave us opportunities to pay tribute to our countrymen and foreigners alike who contributed to the formation of our country as a sovereign state. Lastly, the activities undertaken in 2021 served as platforms to promote local tourism and market our indigenous products. The NQC’s decision to link its programs with countries that also commemorated the first circumnavigation resulted to other nationalities knowing more about our shared history.¹⁵

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