

A CULTURAL PICTURE OF THE VISAYANS AS DERIVED
FROM THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS EDITED BY
EMMA BLAIR AND JAMES ROBERTSON

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School
University of San Carlos

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Anthropology

by

Leonisa L. Ramas

November, 1965

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The Thesis attached hereto, entitled
A CULTURAL PICTURE OF THE VISAYANS AS DERIVED FROM
THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS EDITED BY EMMA BLAIR
AND JAMES ROBERTSON

prepared and submitted by Mrs. Leonisa L. Ramas
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN ANTHROPOLOGY
is hereby accepted.

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Cebu City
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Diverse cultures and races are blended in the Philippines and the fusion has resulted in a national spirit. The present-day Filipino is the result of an odd admixture of Spanish and American cultures, superficially. Coursing beneath this overlay of influences, western and more or less Christian at the same time, which have left and are leaving a vast and important mark on the cultural and racial inheritance of the people, there have been other earlier ingredients that have gone to make up the culture of the people. These indigenous features of a way of life that persists in spite of a constant bombardment by, and a considerable taking over of, western culture and civilization have kept the Filipino basically within the sphere of the culture patterns of the Southeast-Asian peoples.

Probably at no time in history have men everywhere been as conscious of the need to know about the different peoples of the world as they are now. The Visayas is a pioneer region in this respect. Easily accessible and readable literature on the Pre-Spanish culture of the peoples of the Philippine archipelago invariably gives the over-all cultural portrait only in broad meaningless generalizations.

Ethnographic materials relative to some of the principal

islands of the Visayas, their completeness, accuracy and reliability varying with each writer, are, however, available, the most cited ones being the manuscripts of the encomendero Diegus Lopez Povedano entitled La Isla de Negros y los Costumbres de los Visayos y Negritos (ca. 1572); that of Francisco Ignacio Alcina, S.J., on Samar and Leyte (1668); and the five (1837-1839) manuscripts of Jose Maria Pavon Araguro. Relatively little has been written on the Visayan area, then and now, but in the monumental fifty-five volumes of The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898, edited by Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, is a rather extensive ethnographic collection consisting of invaluable original documents. Yet, no attempt has so far been made to assemble and organize these ethnographic data widely scattered in assorted excerpts and translations of relations, reports and correspondences covering the expanse of roughly three hundred years, from 1521 to 1898, of Spanish influence and control on Filipino cultural development. This thesis is a modest effort to put together these ethnographic data. It is hoped that this cultural picture of the Visayans, presented as a comprehensive whole, will form and help promote a more adequate foundation for historical, ethnological and other studies and possibly give them a wider dimension and greater depth.

To American scholars Miss Emma Helen Blair and Dr. James Alexander Robertson are due the undying gratitude of the

people of the Philippines and students, of the world at large, of the whole of man's culture, for arduously and painstakingly unearthing and presenting, sixty-odd years ago, hitherto unpublished and, more often than not, unknown historical and ethnographic source materials.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The task is primarily that of collating and synthesizing the accounts about the Visayans contained in The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898, by Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson. Sometimes the material is limited to cursory and fragmentary, but nevertheless significant and vital mention of the Visayans. This, in some cases, became the very key which enabled the writer to piece together some of the broken bits of cultural facts.

In this endeavor to portray the Visayans at contact (first with the Spanish and, ultimately, the whole western culture), documents, pertaining to the Philippines from the initial confrontation to a century after the Christianization and westernization of the natives gained momentum, are made use of. This spans the years from 1521, with special reference to the account of Pigafetta (Magellan's chronicler), to approximately the third quarter of the seventeenth century. Altogether, these years are contained in volumes I (1493) to XXXVIII (1683), inclusive. Recourse to the rest of the