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The Transforming Ethical Practice in Philippine Archaeology

Pamela Faylona

2010. Madrid, Spain: JAS Arqueologis S.L.U. 193 pp.

Review by Al Parreno

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Given the growing interest for archaeology in the country, the author emphasised the need for ethics in the study (p2). As the book said,

the author's aim is to "especially raise the concern to formalise a standard for the ethics in Philippine archaeology" (back cover). It implies advocacy whose goal is to convince the readers for the need for a Code of Ethics (back cover). To do this, it raises three main points: 1. It narrates the development of Philippine Archaeology (pp. 21-34); 2. It talks about the application in Philippine museums (pp. 35-48); 3. It tells the public perception of archaeologists (pp. 49-62).

To argue her points, the author dug into the past of Philippine Archaeology. She then presented a methodical narrative of the development of the discipline. Aside from the main chapter dedicated to this, the author presented in Table 1 a meticulous research on literature on Philippine Archaeology. It is what its title says, "The Content Analysis of the Historical Literature of Philippine Archaeology" (p. 159). In arguing for the application of standards in the Philippines, the author studied several museums and their processes in displaying artefacts. The author summarised her findings on the handling of artefacts (Table 2, p. 171). As basis for comparison or benchmark, the author used the Ford's Management of Archaeological Collection Guidelines. It both provides a basis (the Ford's Guidelines) and in a table shows how museums are applying them.

Again in support of her main thesis, the author wanted to capture the historical perception of Philippine archaeology. In order to capture this impression, the author shows a narration of historical press releases. This is summarised in Table 4 which cohesively points to newspapers and periodicals showing "Popular Philippine Archaeology Literature." To show the "transformation", the author likewise summarises the Practice of Archaeology in the Philippines" which she divides into the Integration Phase, the Assimilation Phase and the Recognition Phase.

The supporting arguments for ethical practices in the Philippines are well researched. Taken away from the context of ethics, the research on the supporting arguments alone provides very rich material on Philippine Archaeology. Taking the pertinent parts, the chapters of the book can be woven into other authoritative books as well. The different chapters supporting her thesis can very well be entitled as "The History of Philippine Archaeology" or "Public Perception of Philippine Archaeologists" or "The Practice of Philippine Museums."

By collating a comprehensive discussion of articles and sources on Philippine Archaeology, she shows a good basis to argue the impression

made by the public. Quantifying perception is a difficult task, especially when the period sought to be discussed covers a good many years. This task, the author was able to objectively do using strong basis – public releases.

And in the end, after going through a rich discussion on the Philippine state of archaeology, it elaborated on the need for ethics. To further support its main advocacy, the author included as Annex the different Code and Standards of various countries and organisations. A sample proposal was made which narrates certain standards by which Filipino archaeologists should look into (p. 78).

But as stated, the petition for the creation of an ethical standard is not the whole strength of the book. That is the value add, the “one more thing.” Its other strength lies in the discussion of the arguments which collaterally tells the readers the changes in Philippine Archaeology. For that alone, it is worth reading, keeping and studying.

In the creation of a Code of Ethics however, a comparison to other established profession in the Philippines will provide good guidance. As the discipline develops, a look into existing Philippine professions can serve as basis. And whether we like it or not, as correctly pointed out by the author, behaviour is limited by among others, culture, politics and economy (p. 76). With this, a discussion on existing legal prohibitions and standards by law and economic limitations on the practice of archaeology would have made the study more exhaustive. The laws of course will largely govern our ethics. The question that will always pop up in the discussion of ethics is: “In developing them, are we violating international and local law?”

In the end, the author raised awareness for the need for ethics. And with the written proposal for a Code of Ethics, it opens the discussion now for its use.

The author has already laid down the need.

All in all, the book correctly gives readers, as the title implies, the “Transforming Ethical Practice in Philippine Archaeology.” The strength of the book therefore is twofold. It provides a basis for the discussion on the need for ethics. Secondly, it likewise tells us the evolution of Philippine Archaeology.

The book is not only an advocacy. It is a wonderful reference.