

## Muni-Muni...\*

\*Tagalog word meaning "random thoughts, musings, reflections"

Security has always been a problem when it comes to protecting archaeological sites in the Philippines. Oral tradition dictates that there are some places considered sacred or enchanted by people, because of the belief that spirits roam the area. There may be some truth to that. Ethnographic writings of early Spanish missionaries document the abandoning of houses of the dead for fear that evil supernatural beings abound in the area. Generally, burial grounds are taboo to trespassers. The utmost respect is given to the dead. But illegal diggings changed that. Profit was naturally prioritized over cultural heritage. The average person may not even know what culture and heritage means, more so put together. Ordinary townsfolks were paid hefty sums by foreigners as well as local collectors to guide them to such places. Treasure hunting was the common term for this type of digging. They were looking for treasures; treasures about the Philippines' past. Treasures that spell a difference between patriotism and commercialism. Coffins were pried open; jars shattered to pieces; skeletal remains scattered, burial remains desecrated all in the name of profit. Bone and shell pendants were made into personal talismans. Metal objects, glass beads, and tradeware ceramics found their way in the homes of rich collectors and antique shops; or even foreign museums. And most of the time, Filipinos don't have a clue as to their journey.

What is wrong with us? It is a matter of miseducation and orientation, greed, and basic needs. First, there is a need for the school system to incorporate in its curriculum basic definitions of culture, heritage, national, archaeological and cultural treasure, artifacts, sites; treasure hunting, illegal excavations; the significance and relevance of this to the present society; the advocacy for the protection, preservation and conservation of sites.

Greed for profit and greed for status symbols is the next thing that plague Philippine society. Owning a thing of the past is a fundamental status symbol among collectors: the older it is, the rarer it is, the more expensive it is ensures and reinforces one's position in society. And it brings him more joy if viewed in the privacy of his own home rather than in a museum where it can be enjoyed by many. Among common pothunters, it is greed for profit; it is easy money that brings big bucks specially if sold in the black market.

Lastly, it becomes a question of basic needs. Why? If the economy would just improve, coupled with the right information, people would not resort to illegal digging. The average educated person's perception about archaeological excavations and artifacts is no different from that of the pothunter's. This is the milieu we were brought up in.

What can we do about it? Sad to say, perhaps nothing. Even if information drives are done regularly, museum programs conducted for Filipinos in all levels of society, laws created, observed and regulated, if the government does nothing to uplift the living conditions in the country, artifacts would still continue to feed a hungry mouth.

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