

The Death of Gold in Early Visayan Societies: Ethnohistoric Accounts and Archaeological Evidences

Victor Estrella¹

Abstract

There are few literatures about gold in Philippine societies in the last one thousand years. Much of what we know about it comes from historical sources. And there is little information when we delve deeper into how early Filipinos viewed gold. This paper surveys available sources to explain the use of gold in early Philippine burial practices especially among the Visayans. Since burial sites comprised most of the archaeological sources, the study is also concerned with how mortuary analyses could provide evidence for ethnohistorical and ethnographic accounts. Focusing on early Filipinos' concept of death and the afterlife, this paper argues that gold was deemed important at the time of death. The significance of gold, although explained using ethnohistoric records, is realised as well, in terms of archaeological analysis, through the concept of agency. The paper introduces the concept of object-soul in archaeology, an animist explanation why certain materials were buried together with the dead. The study proposes that funerary objects, like gold, were conceived as having soul, thus undergo the same separation and transition that happens to the deceased. The paper also puts forward the idea that because of its value, unique properties, and life-long entanglement, gold compels the early Visayans to include it in human burials.

¹Graduate Student, University of the Philippines - Archaeological Studies Program
Email: estrella_vic@yahoo.com

Introduction

Since 2002, the first week of May, though quite humid and dry, is among the busiest time for the people of the sleepy town of Oton, one of the oldest in the province of Iloilo located in the Visayas (Figure 1). Just before the start of the rainy season, townspeople prepare for an annual event. Men and women, especially the school children from every part of the locality craft costumes and rehearse dance routines. They gather and celebrate in the streets. The costumes were quite distinct. Every single participant creates an interesting mask accompanying the attire. They make sure that the mask is glittery, shiny, and most importantly it resembles gold. The feast is called the Katagman Festival. It is an ordinary fiesta with an extraordinary commemoration, since it is a celebration of their glorious past symbolised by a mask that had been used by earlier inhabitants of Iloilo as a facial cover for the deceased. In 1967, a death mask was excavated by the National Museum in Barangay San Antonio (Hernandez 2008; Jocano 1975; Roces 1968; Tiongco 1969).

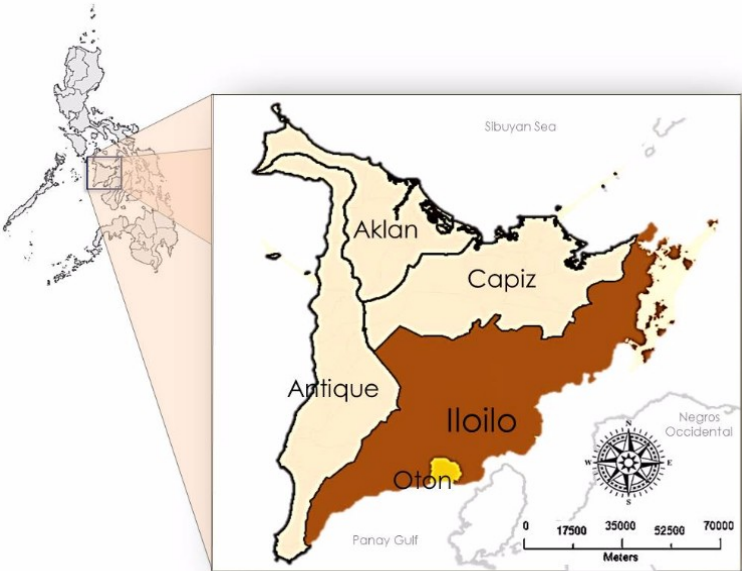


Figure 1: Map showing the location of Oton in Iloilo, central Philippines

The gold nose-disc and gold eye-mask are believed to be from the late 1300s to the early 1400s BCE based on the associated grave goods. The locals deemed this object worthy of high esteem and celebration since their locality became known for this. From a past death practice, the gold mask became the source of engagement for an exhilarating festivity.

The gold facial covers used in funerary rituals, which are usually attributed to sorrow and dread, are used in the fiesta, as costumes in dances of excitement and glee. For people not coming from the locality, this might be a source of perplexity. But, it is not only during the Oton festival one could notice the apparent paradox gold exhibits. In fact, Bernstein (2004:7) reveals in *The Power of Gold: A History of an Obsession* that “gold is a mass of contradictions”. Its properties alone, posit cunning ironies. To wit, gold is a metal, yet it is easy to work with that even the earliest humans moulded fascinating objects out of it through mere hammering (Alexander 2011; Austin 1921; Gimeno 2008; Rapp 2009; Rose 1898).

Gold is so dense that a 1 cm cube weighs about 19 grams. Also, the metal in its natural state has a bright colour, different from the other metals, yet it is highly resistant to disparaging oxidation (Venable 2011). Arguably, it is so ancient, that the earliest people had used it before, yet, gold’s radiance never faded. As much as it is a material with its properties contradicts some of the natural physical principles, the various connotations it entails contradict as well. And, as Bernstein (2004:8) summarises;

Nations have scoured the earth for gold in order to control others only to find that gold has controlled their own fate. The gold at the end of the rainbow is ultimate happiness, but the gold at the bottom of the mine emerges from hell. Gold has inspired some of humanity's greatest achievements and provoked some of its worst crimes. When we use gold to symbolize eternity it elevates people to greater dignity –royalty, religion, formality; when gold is regarded as life everlasting, it drives people to death.

But of all the paradoxes gold entail, the ironic ways the early inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago employed this particular material in life and death baffle me the most as an enthusiast. I would always ask myself: why bury such highly valuable object? In this paper, I attempt to answer this question, emphasising how the early inhabitants of the Visayan polities interacted with the material in life and even in death. Its materiality is therefore discussed in this paper, with the aim of providing a theoretical context in which to consider gold in burial practices.

Islands of Gold

Naturally-occurring gold was never new in the Visayas. In fact, it is quite an abundant resource in the whole country. Recent assessment reveals that the Philippines is second to South Africa in gold production per square kilometres (Villegas 2004). Particularly in the islands of the Visayas, its coastal and riverine areas were historically documented to be one of the places where gold can be abundantly found (Morga 1609; Santiago 2005). Many of the gold artefacts were deemed to be sourced from placer gold-rich rivers of the islands, from where the early inhabitants patiently panned dusts and nuggets. Sutherland (2007) advises that rivers play an important role in these kinds of activities. Bennett (2009:100) agrees that most of the gold in the prehistoric and early historic periods would have been sourced out from alluvial sediments through panning since this method only requires few “capital investments in equipment and no specialist technology”. This is further supported by the idea that there were no historically-documented lode ore sources within the group of islands, in contrast with those larger gold-mining and processing activities in Luzon and Mindanao. A map, showing these large gold-ore sources, appears in Figure 2.

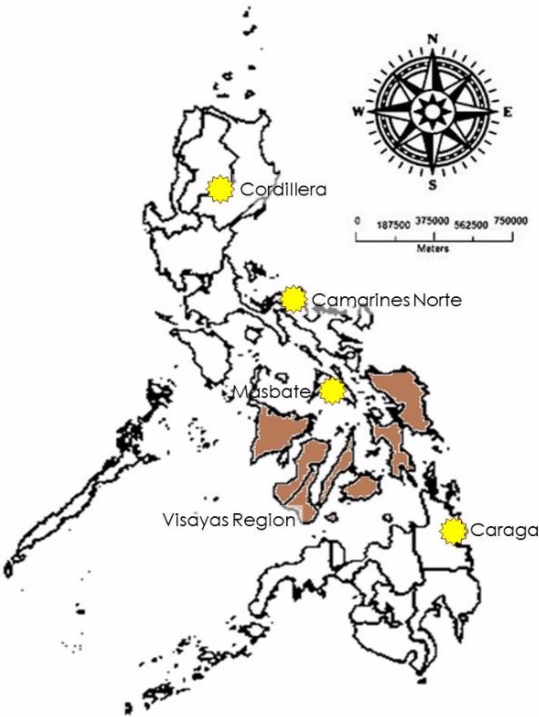


Figure 2: Historically-documented gold-ore deposits in the Philippines. The shaded islands belong to the Visayas.

Bennett (2009) emphasised the abundance of such deposits in Luzon and in Mindanao. While Morga (1609) enumerated placers and mines at Paracale in Camarines and Butuan River in Mindanao. Beyer (1947) supported this account, however identifying two gold mines in the archipelago being in the Bontok, Lepanto and Amburayan sub-provinces and in Camarines Norte as evident with gold mine workings and tools. In other cases, these areas within certain towns or provinces had a good grasp of this metal and became important sources of gold. This is attested by Santiago (2005:59) who claims that Iloilo, formerly referred to as Arevalo at the advent of Spanish colonisation, was linked to the “gold routes”. Accordingly, the route connected the gold mines in Luzon through Paracale in Bicol, coursing southward “to foster and infuse the inter-island and Chinese trade in the Visayas” (Santiago 2005:59). And in this case, the islands of Cebu and Panay dominated this illustrious trade.

Gold of the Dead

Grave or burial sites in the Visayas are one of, if not the major, sources of gold artefacts (Scott 1984). Scott (1984) further maintains that it is partly due to the fact that burial sites exhibit an array of variations, especially with the grave goods. In addition, there are more burial sites than settlements documented (Scott 1984). Remarkably enough, gold is distinguished within the archaeological record although difficult to recover *in situ*. Among the most celebrated gold artefact found in burial sites, is the death mask in Oton, in the province of Iloilo. The mask was recovered in Barangay San Antonio, towards the 1970s (Hernandez 2008; O’Connor and Harrisson 1971). The site is believed to be a protohistoric port settlement locally referred to as Katagman. Katagman is located between the Iloilo and Batiano rivers and the settlement was one of the oldest and most important seaports during the late 1300s to the early 1400s BCE (Hernandez 2008; Jocano 1975; O’Connor and Harrisson 1971; Roces 1968). The people were coastal traders as viewed from the associated tradeware goods and they are as well, among the few people recorded to have used gold facial covers in burials (see Minkenhof 1951; O’Connor and Harrisson 1971). The death mask is composed of two parts; the eye-piece, measuring 13.3 cm in length and 2.5 cm in width, and the nose piece, measuring 16.3 cm in width and 5.5 cm in width. It weighs 13.09g (Miksic 2011). Looking closely, the death mask might have been done out of the process of simple gold sheeting through hammering and open work (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Eyes and nose covers found in Oton, Iloilo in 1967. Photo © National Museum (2014) (Source: <http://www.nationalmuseum.gov.ph/nationalmuseumbeta/Collections/Archaeo/Deathmask.html>).

However, applying the intricate designs would have taken the artisan extra effort for repoussage and chasing techniques (Esguerra 2013; O'Connor and Harrisson 1971). Both covers have decorations that combine realistic human features and curvilinear motifs. A similar object was found in the neighbouring island of Cebu. In the city's Plaza Independencia, in a "rescue archaeology" (Cuevas and Bautista 2009), a death mask was also recovered, but, unlike the one recovered in Iloilo, the gold mask in the Plaza Independencia is less intricately etched (Figure 4). The facial covers, in contrast with the Iloilo pieces, are simpler, not only with the techniques used in the manufacture, but also with its designs. It follows the natural contours of the facial orifices, with rudimentary edging as decors. The head of the project, Nida Cuevas, in an interview, articulated that the gold death mask was found together with skeletal remains, Thai "guan" celadon, Vietnamese, and Chinese ceramics (Parco 2008).



Figure 4: Eyes, nose and mouth covers found in Cebu City in 2006. Photo © Cuevas, Bautista and the National Museum (2009).

Further south in the island of Cebu, in Boljoon, another gold assemblage was found. This 16th-century grave site remarkably revealed a glimpse of early Cebuano burial customs through the different mortuary aspects, and more importantly through burial goods (Gerschwiler 2009). Within this assemblage, an astonishing 2.2 m gold chain was found on the left side above the ribs, clasped by a male individual (Bersales and Dela Torre 2008a). Also, in the grave of a 35-49 year-old female in a supine position yielded carnelian and gold beads, and while further exploring the same grave, three gold pendants were found. One pendant shows a human face, whereas the other two exhibit zoomorphic designs. Notably also, Bersales and Dela Torre (2008b) found a gold earring in another burial near the right lobe of a probable adult male. These finds were accompanied with Zangzhou-type of ceramics, plain white powder box, brass beads, iron objects and implements and a fragmented earthenware cooking pot.

Other gold artefacts documented archaeologically in burials in the Visayas include those recovered through the efforts of the University of Michigan Philippine Expedition headed by Carl E. Guthe. The yields comprised of gold items, usually ornaments, from the towns of Pangol and Carcar in the province of Cebu, Loay in Bohol, Vallehermoso in Negros Oriental, and Suluan Island in Samar (Guthe 1927). The yields in Bohol in particular were documented by Solheim (2002) in his study of metal age pottery in this part of the archipelago.

They were more often than not, found together with some ceramic objects that range from green, grey, and white Sung, dark-glazed jars, Celadon or green-glazed, blue and white, black and white ceramics, to stonewares and earthenwares. Iron, brass and copper implements, with a couple of beads and shell ornaments were also found associated with these goods, amounting to about hundreds of artefacts in sites in Negros and Bohol (Beyer 1947).

Lastly, the province of Samar, towards the east of the Visayas group of islands has sites as well which yielded gold artefacts. Gold ornaments were also present in “porcelain-age” burials in the localities of Motiong, Lawaan, Basey, Catubig and Guian (Beyer 1947). Feodor Jagor (1975) in 1860 reported a gold ring of the hollow tube type found in a cave burial in Giwan, whereas Ralph S. Frush, an engineer working on a road extension, found few ornaments of this material in the barrio of Motiong. To assess the distribution, a map showing the gold-yielding burial sites in the Visayas appears in Figure 5.

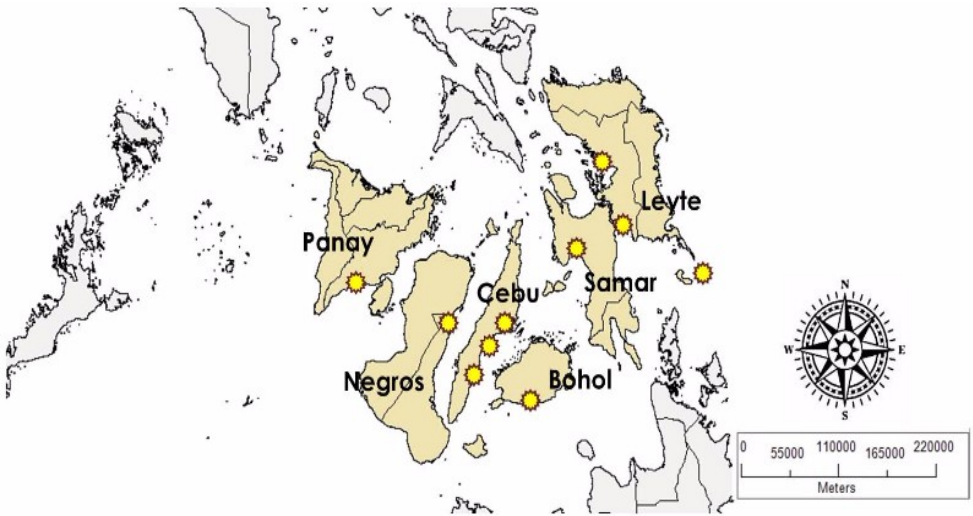


Figure 5: Archaeologically excavated burial sites in the central Philippines with gold artefacts.

The burial assemblages where gold artefacts were found in this part of the archipelago suggest that the gold items appear and widely used when trade intensified from the last millennium. Figure 6 exhibits that ornamentals were the most common type of finds; gold objects that embellish, thus, enhancing the appearance of the deceased.

The kinds of items being buried together with the dead are limitless. The variety of burial goods in the world suggests that every single burial might include different kinds of objects for different reasons. As Piggott (1969, quoted in Ucko 1969) asserts, there is a strong tendency that burial goods are socially selected, according to reasons and conditions that until this very moment remain not yet deciphered. Carr (1995) claims that “philosophical-religious beliefs” are central to past burial practices more importantly to objects they included therein. Therefore, grave goods placed in the tomb will in no sense represent a random sample. Needless to say, only those objects with certain value are usually included since nobody would want to deck out a deceased loved one with things easily found everywhere else or with a lot of unnecessary items for no good reason.

These valued items perhaps include those objects employed in their everyday pursuits, making it almost a virtually household, ornamental, and devout item. More than anything else, the people looked at the some materials like articles of gold, as something relevant, giving them a different and a higher value over other common objects. According to Renfrew (1986) the concept of value is very complicated, however one important idea is that, it is something assigned by an individual or by a group and it may be assigned because of an array of reasons and potentials.

After all, among the earliest exploited metals, gold is with quite a distinction (Guerra 2003; Rehren and Pernicka 2008; Schoenberger 2013). Apparent with the burial sites in the Visayas being examined in this paper; gold is an inclusion. It is essential since it was largely part, not only of the people’s pursuits, but also a central feature of the different stages in the development of their life and consciousness as will be explained further in the succeeding sections of this paper. Consequently, the presence of such material might suggest a reason that could be rooted somewhere else within the society. The most important question however, is for what reason or reasons did these items buried with the dead?

Table 1: Comparison of burial sites with gold artifacts in the Visayas

ARCHAEOLOGICALLY-DOCUMENTED BURIAL SITES IN THE VISAYAS												
Province	Iloilo			Cebu			Negros Or.		Bohol		Samar	
Town	Oton	Boljoon	Cebu City	Pangul	Carcar	Vallehermoso	Loay	Suluan Is.	Moliong & Lawaan	Bayey, Calubig	Giwan,	Cave
Type of Burial Site	Open Pit	Open Pit	Open Pit	Open Pit	Open Pit	Open Pit	Open Pit	Open Pit	Cave	Cave	Early Jar	Cave
Burial Size	26	26	45	01	13	03	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	60 +	unidentified
Facial Covers	Eye and Ear Death Mask	None	Complete Death Mask	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None
Gold Finds	None	2.2m-Chain, Earrings, 3 Pendants	A pair of Earrings	23 small pellet-type beads & tiny rings of twisted wire	Green, grey, white (sung ceramic) dark-glazed jar, stoneware, iron implements, stone specimen, bead and shell ornaments	Green, grey, white, brown-glazed, dark jars, unglazed stoneware, iron, copper bronze, glass stone, shell bracelets	4 ornaments	specimen	Few Ornaments	Gold ring of the hollow tube type		
Associated Burial Goods	Tradeware ceramics	Zangzhou-Type of Ceramics, Iron Implements,	Thai Bluish-green "guan" Celadon, Vietnamese and Chinese Tradeware ceramics, jars and earthenware	Blue and white "pineapple" type of jarlet	Green, grey, white (sung ceramic) dark-glazed jar, stoneware, iron implements, stone specimen, bead and shell ornaments	Green, grey, white, brown-glazed, dark jars, unglazed stoneware, iron, copper bronze, glass stone, shell bracelets	4 ornaments	specimen	Iron implement thick unglazed earthenware			
Assoc Deed	Age	Adult	Adult	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified
	Sex	Male, Female	Female	Female	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified
	Specification	Inhumed, Flexed	Artificial Cranial Reformation	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	Skeletal specimen	unidentified	Disintegrated	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified
Date Excavat	1872	2008	2006, 2008	1920	1922-1924	1922-1924	1922-1924	1922-1924	unidentified	unidentified	unidentified	1860
Excavating Agency	National Museum	USC, National Museum	USC, ASP, National Museum	Private	University of Michigan Philippine Expedition	University of Michigan Philippine Expedition	University of Michigan Philippine Expedition	University of Michigan Philippine Expedition	Private	Private	Private	Private
Excavation Team	Alfredo Evangelista & F. Landa Jocano	Amalia dela Torre, Jose Bersales	Nilda Cuevas, et.al	Major Milkiewicz	Carl E. Guthe	Dean Worcester, Carl E. Guthe	Carl E. Guthe	Carl E. Guthe	Ralph S. Frush	Feodor Jagor		

Figure 6: Table showing burial sites with gold artefacts in the Visayas region

When Gold Dies

The vast ethnohistoric records written by the Spanish chroniclers throughout the three centuries of their colonisation in the Philippines recorded a rather detailed description of the early inhabitants of the archipelago during these times. Especially during the initial institutionalisation of colonial system between the late 16th and 17th centuries, many chroniclers were commissioned to report on how the people of the new colony lived and died. Probably because of their interest, they noticed the deliberate use of gold not only by the Visayans but by most of the population of the archipelago. It is now worth looking into the different ethnohistoric accounts of early Visayan and Tagalog communities as gold objects were part of everyday living of these people.

During a mother's pregnancy, Plasencia (1589) noted about the need of the pregnant mother to give her master half of a gold *tael*, the currency during that time, because of her risk of death and for her inability to labour during the pregnancy. When the child was born the mother take it to the river to bathe, cut the infants umbilical cord, wash it well, dry it, and turn it over to the father to place it in a bag containing small pieces of gold (Boxer Manuscript 1595). Children were reared with gold objects through ornaments such as necklaces, rings, most especially, earrings or circlets of gold (Colin 1663). Necklaces, collars of bead or gold, leg and arm bands comprise these ornaments. Also, at this point as Harrison (1964) and Scott (1994) claim, penis pins, *tugbuk* in the Visayan language or *palang* in the larger Malay world, inserted in childhood, was introduced. This pin of brass, ivory, or gold is aimed for greater stimulation of their sex partners. Gold, among other forms of beautifying the teeth was considered all the more effective, and, more than enough to differentiate themselves from animals. At marriage, the soon-to-be husband is deemed to pay to his future wife dowry, as Loarca (1582) observed, the sum of 100 *taels*, in gold, slaves and jewels. Besides, as supported by Alcina (1668) the Boxer Manuscript (1595) it is not only during the time of betrothals that people wear their gold in the Visayas, but also when the *maganito*, or sacrifice, is held not only for a sick man, but also for the harvest in their fields, each one wears all the gold and precious stones he own. The manuscript (Boxer Codex 1595) also mentioned gold, being displayed in wreaths at the event a party wins warfare and abled to bring back some prizes, and these were pendant feathers of gold. Finally, may be because of gold's resilience to time, objects made from the material were being passed on from one generation

to another as inheritance (Plasencia 1589). Consistent with the chroniclers' records, gold is perplexingly very crucial in virtually every aspect of human life, only to be disposed with the dead. Delving deeper into the ethnohistoric accounts about the population's belief might further enlighten us with this act.

The fate of a Visayan soul after death is narrated in Ignacio Alcina's (1668) *La Historia de la Islas e Indios de Visayas*. Accordingly, the soul is said to go to a place called *Sayar*, where a *diwata* or a deity, Bararum, governs. His primary duty is to call and announce to all the relatives the death of a person. The dead arrives in his or her coffin and welcomed by the relative who is engaged with generous feasting. Loarca (1582) asserts on the other hand, that instead of coffins, *balangays*, wooden boats, are used to transport the dead to *Sisiburanen*, a high mountain in Borneo. The *diwata* will then recognise and should recognise the dead person because of the gold and other ornaments adorning him/her.

As much as gold objects were used tangibly as offerings to or as materials for the idols as noted by Loarca (1582), Plasencia (1589), and Chirino (1604), they also believe that spirits around them patronise gold objects the reason perhaps why they have to constantly include such materials in their offerings. Nevertheless, gold objects appear as well, in death and burial. According to Chirino (1604:170) "during the internment, valuables like gold rings, chains bracelets, clothing, porcelain and other goods were buried with the dead, especially if he was of a high rank".

When Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri (1704), a renowned Italian traveller, visited the Philippine archipelago in 1697, he noticed the same practice of leaving gold bracelets and other ornaments in graves and burials. The people believed that if they depart rich they will be well received in the other world, but coldly if they go poor. Perhaps far from not letting the dead souls pass at all, but the use of gold might be a marker of wealth and status, even in the afterlife. The Boljoon Site in Cebu might provide archaeological data when Bersales and Dela Torre (2008a; 2008b) found four grave goods among the late 16th century human burials. Among these goods were gold beads, gold pendants of human and zoomorphic design, and gold earring. Scott (1992, 1994), reviewing ethnohistoric accounts, also noted about placing the gold in the mouths of the corpses in the Visayan population, and laid with them many articles of value such as other forms of ornaments and vessels. Tangible evidences of this practice are the funeral facial covers recovered in Cebu

and Iloilo earlier discussed here.

We can deduce from the chroniclers (Alcina 1668; Chirino 1604; Loarca 1582) that death, as viewed by the early Visayans, is a transitory phenomenon in which the deceased goes from one known geographical unit (i.e., mortal world) to another. Therefore, death and dying are considered to be a movement from one dimension to another. More importantly, it entails separation and transformation since the afterlife is a renewed existence, "different from life here, yet, strangely enough, somewhat similar to life on earth" (Demetrio 1966:386). The difference between this mortal life and afterlife however, could be seen in symbols of long journey over waters usually towards trees, caves or mountains, the judgement or separation at the centre, and the further climb up the summit for the just and descent into the place for the wicked, evident from their past conceptions.

Likewise in a modern investigation, the Sulod society confirms this belief of death. Sulod is a group of people living in the interior highlands of Panay. These people are among the indigenous population of this part of the Visayas and therefore deemed an important source of testimonies about death and the afterlife. For them, "death is not the end of everything" (Jocano 1964:52), thus, when the person dies, he or she assumes a different form and continues to exist as a separate personality. Quite similar to the early Visayan ethnohistoric reports cited earlier in this paper, death therefore is seen by the members of the society as a rite of passage.

Death according to the field work of Jocano (1964) in Sulod society is perceived as a process of passing a narrow door. The door is so narrow that one pulls itself hard to pass through only to be welcomed or eaten by the *mahikawon* or evil spirits, depending whether the living relatives pacified them or not through funerary rituals. The entity which passes through the door is the person's soul, conceived as a smoky appearance of the body, finely dressed; just like physical remain of the dead. It goes to the stars in the heaven, *Muruburu*, to bathe, to be properly welcomed to the realm of the dead (Jocano 1964). Like the accounts of the Spanish chroniclers (Alcina 1668; Chirino 1604; Loarca 1582), separation is what feared the Visayans the most when thinking about death. Even though it is seen as a whole new existence in another dimension, the thought of not coming back, rejection to the other world, and breaking of the bond with the kin, terrify the people. This could be the reason why complex

ceremonies and rituals were performed by the living relatives to ease their anxiety. These burial performances were never complete without the material things, particularly gold, that accompany the dead.

Moreover, from the ethnohistoric records, emphasis was provided to the material objects that go along with the dead. This includes the coffin or the boat for that matter, clothing, and of course ornaments of gold, to name a few. One, therefore, cannot separate material things with the person even in death. According to Demetrio (1966:364), this belief is probably the primary reason why the Visayans “deck the dead out with material things” like curious items made out of precious stones and metals for burials. The account tells us further that in some cases, the keeper of the world of the dead fails to recognise those who carry little or no items with them, and this scenario is what early Visayans also fear the most at death. Material things therefore are believed to have travelled also to this new dimension, the realm of the dead, just like the deceased person. Therefore, the objects go through a similar transformation which the physical material remains buried with the physical remains of the person, while a sort of soul accompany the soul of the deceased.

Gold and its Object-Soul

Gold objects therefore, were inclusions deemed by the early Visayans to accompany their deceased relatives. Based on ethnohistoric accounts (Alcina 1668; Chirino 1604; Loarca 1582), that also appears in the archaeological record discussed earlier in this paper, gold was part of the bundle. They are, therefore, part of the separation and transition process, in which according to the belief of the people, the objects go as well to the realm of the dead. They understood that material goods are transported together with the dead in the afterlife, but certain objects are important in order for the dead to be accepted, since the deceased is initially assessed by the appearance, by how he or she has been groomed, dressed or prepared. Gold, more than anything else in this case, is a significant ticket.

This belief could initially be looked into through the lens of past animistic practices. Scott (1994) acknowledges that the early Visayans worshipped nature spirits personified in entities. He noted that specific natural occurrences were believed to be caused by invisible forces. In view of that, early inhabitants in this part of the archipelago revered prescribed landscape and other natural forms. Lorenzo-Abrera (1992), conversely, talks about *anting-anting*, or amulets made out of an array of

materials from the environment.

She observed that among the pre-colonial Visayans, gold objects, especially ornamental rings, served as a sort of amulets that either guide or defend its owner. Accordingly, when people sleep, their soul goes out of their body through body openings, say through their mouths, noses, ears, and eyes, as well as through the hands and the feet. At the event that the body is empty, it is most vulnerable to evil spirits wanting to find a host. The gold ornaments consequently serve as defenses that fend away evil spirits through its radiance. The evil spirits are afraid of the brightness projected by the gold ornaments, and are therefore forced to go, leaving the body and soul without any malign impurities (Chua 2012).

Abrera (2007) explored the ethnographic accounts of the indigenous people of the archipelago in trying to look into the early Filipino's belief that certain objects, in the case of her research, boats, have souls. A brief review of them is provided in this part of the paper to demonstrate parallel beliefs. Seemingly, this belief in the object-soul is evident not only with the Visayan population, but also observed by the different ethnographers all over the region.

Walter William Skeat's documentation of indigenous Malay population in 1900, among the earliest, revealed that the people believed in soul of animals, plants, and even minerals. The soul was conceived as a "diminutive but exact counterpart of its own embodiment, occasionally at least, to assume the shape of some animal or bird" (Skeat 1900: 52). For the purpose of the study, a particular emphasis is given to the animist theory of the Malay world that incorporates the belief in souls of inert objects. These include stones, weapons, boats, food, clothes, ornaments, and minerals. Specifically, the Malays have a distinct reference to gold. In fact, Malays looked at gold-soul taking the form of a deer or locally called *kijang* in abstraction (Skeat 1900).

In Mindanao, Laura Benedict (1916), in her documentation of the Bagobo group, noted of the population's belief about *gimokod*. *Gimokod*, is the "spiritual substratum or essence" of an object (Benedict 1916:53). When a person dies, a couple of objects are laid with the deceased to rest believing that the *gimokod* of the object roam around whereas the physical material left in the burial stays with the physical remains of the dead (Benedict 1916). Every object is deemed to have its own soul and, only what is buried can go together with the dead to the world of the dead, that is why the object is figuratively killed through the burying and seen

as transforming with the deceased (Benedict 1916).

The Sama of Cagayan Tawi-Tawi has a similar belief as observed by Eric Casiño in 1976. The Jama Mapun, what the people themselves prefer to be called, believe that things in nature have their own spirit, might it be animate or inanimate. Casiño (1976) furthers that because of this belief the population grown a special reverence to certain weapons, to daily articles, and especially to rice.

Way up north, the Ifugaos of the Cordilleras believe in a *linauwa*. Translated by Roy Barton (1930: 141) as “soul stuff”, he recorded that the Ifugaos conceive all things around them as having souls. His report also states that the soul of an object dictates the desirable qualities and attributes of the object; say the soul of a knife is its capability of taking and holding an edge whereas the soul of rice is its productivity. In addition, Barton (1930: 142) reveals that magic could “augment or abate” the soul, therefore the qualities, of an object.

Another group in this Northern part of the archipelago believes in this idea of regarding inanimate objects with animate attributes. According to Cole, who documented the Tinguians of Luzon in 1915, these people have interactions with objects and things. In fact, he observed that the people acted as if objects around them hear and talk to them, noting some members of the group conversing with spears and jars. The group even executed different rites against garments and other objects, so that people can inflict harm to these object’s owners (Cole 1915). The people perhaps believe that they can instruct things, and the objects in return, can follow their instructions.

Early inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago therefore, like the general population of the Malay world, have this kind regard to the soul, which a member finds in virtually everything around. Abrera (2007), looking into the context of the use of boats in pre-colonial Philippine society, states that the belief in a soul elucidates the presence of an array of materials within a grave. And, these objects’ souls accompany the dead to the afterlife, going beyond their normal function in the society (Abrera 2007). In the case of the indigenous boat, its soul is revered in an array of activities, such as from cutting a tree, from which the boat will be built, conducting rituals, before, during and after its use, and even at its disposal. Ultimately, Abrera (2007) asserts that because the people believe that objects, particularly boats, have soul, they are qualified to accompany the deceased to the afterlife.

Returning to the Visayan region itself, the similar notion of soul stuff could be closely described in consonance with the concept of *dungan*. *Dungan* or *talirungan*, a Hiligaynon term, can actually mean an array of ideas ranging from “life worth, alter ego to spiritual twin” (Seki 2004:38), but it is loosely translated in the area as “soul” (Magos 1992:47). It should be distinguished, however, against *kalag*, another Hiligaynon term which speaks of the “spirit that leaves the body after death”, comparable to the Tagalog *kaluluwa* (Abrera 2006). It is therefore, the “soul of a living person” or the “essence of life and existence” since it is that “thing which gives animation and vitality to a person” (Magos 1992:48-49). The notion is chiefly an attribute of a person (Aguilar 1997; Magos 1992; Villan 2013a). In point of fact, Vicente Villan (2013a:65) in discussing his “tripartite view” of Ilonggo’s *loob* (*buut*), places *dungan* together with *kalag* and *lawas* within one of its pivotal parts that are greatly related with the biological and physiological characteristics of a person. But then again, *dungan*, moving beyond the tangible body, is the person’s *lakas ng loob* or potency (Villan 2013b). Yet, there are times when the *dungan* leaves the body: during the person’s death (Magos 1992), through the presence of a person with a greater *dungan* (Villan 2013b), or when malign spirits manipulate and imprison it to the unseen world (Aguilar 1997). In effect, the Ilonggos believe that there is a constant struggle for them to preserve their *dungan* in their everyday interactions with the world.

Seki (2004:38) adds that the concept of *dungan* thrives within lowland social relationships in the Panay Island, resulting to a “soul competition, or a mythic reality of a cosmic struggle” among the community. Accordingly, what he considers as a “folk notion” is associated as well with the society’s view of a relational power not limited to humans but also emanates from virtually all things based on the people’s everyday interaction (Seki 2004:38). More importantly, *dungan* translates to agency, enabling the creation of relationships among people and perhaps between people and things. In the case of the notion of objects’ *dungan* in the Visayas, the people thought of certain things as also composed of essence or soul that could go to the afterlife with them when they die, compelling them to include such materials in their burials. Burial goods like gold therefore have a certain degree of power to dictate its inclusion in the grave. Indubitably, gold may not be the single most important object to be included in graves, various kinds of objects can be observed in burial sites in archaeological excavation, and thus should be considered en masse.

Considering these ethnographic parallels, one could agree with the existence of such idea of an object-soul in the past. In the case of gold, might it be found in its natural state, or crafted to become among the most stunning ornaments and face covers, accompanying the dead in burial would mean an object to be carried in the afterlife. Yet, this is just a part of the story. What I investigate in this paper and I believe another part of this view; is that the early Visayans thought that certain materials, say gold, have their own soul. Thus, having a soul for themselves, materials were supposed to have died and transformed to a similar form, just like the soul of the dead. This may not be directly recorded in the ethnohistoric accounts of the Spanish chroniclers, who hurriedly encapsulated every practice and belief to a more familiar and safe term of animism, or whose Christian faith barred them to think the presence of other belief systems. Contrariwise, the indigenous population, the foreign chroniclers had observed before, may have believed in the view that the soul of the object takes a similar transformation in order to penetrate the realm of the dead. The physical material, like gold, is buried although the people may have known its resistance to decay. This burying act should symbolise the death of gold as well as mark the start of its transformation and further the passage of the material to the afterlife.

Object-soul, as a formal concept, first appeared in the literature when it was used by Edward B. Tylor in 1871. In his monumental book *Primitive Culture*, he describes object-soul as the personality ascribed to things. Accordingly, this “theory of souls” is part of an encompassing notion of animism, in which “inanimate objects, rivers, stones, trees, weapons, and so forth, are treated as having intelligent beings, talked to, propitiated, punished for the harm they do” (Tylor 1871:477). Concurrently, Hume (1757) in his *Natural History of Religion*, and Comte (1830), also discussed animistic practices.

Hume (1757: ii) asserts a universal propensity of humans “to conceive all being like themselves, and to transfer to every object those qualities with which they are familiarly acquainted”. Comte (1830:30) agrees and noted that these beliefs are “primitive tendency to conceive all bodies soever, natural or artificial, as animated by a life essentially analogous to our own”. Tylor (1871:478) observes, in citing the ethnographies of Algonquin of North America, Fijians of the Pacific, and the Karens of Burma, that these people thought of objects to have essences similar to human beings. As a result, certain things are being offered with the dead “to the service of the gods” (Tylor 1871:479).

On the other hand, beyond mere accompaniments of a dead person's soul in the afterlife, these objects, in this suggested perspective, have a rather active role in the society of the living, which enables the object to have a certain degree of "potency" (Gilmore 1919:14). Thus, the objects have a direct and/or indirect command over the people who create and use them. The role was active in the mortal world, or simply, in the society of the living, more than in the realm of the dead.

The object-soul therefore is deemed to be the abstracted element of an object. It is the meaning of an item that is created and maintained in a person's mind, perpetuated through his or her belief. The essence, spirit or any abstraction came from the distinctive natures of an object, its relative value (Renfrew 1986), hailed qualities or simply attached memories. This is where the Visayan concept of *dungan* impeccably fits the explanation. Certain objects like gold, due to its value, its rare properties and its continuous entanglement with the people's lifelong experiences, were regarded to have a *dungan*, or an essence.

The soul stuff turns out to be not exclusive to the living person but rather attributed to significant objects around them, as well. Gilmore (1919:14) further characterises the concept of animism in the context of belief in object-soul, claiming that any object, in this kind of belief system, might it be tangible or intangible, as possessing emotional, volitional, and actional potency like that he himself possesses. Things, of whatsoever sort, he may consider the subjects of feelings –likes and dislikes, appetites or disinclinations, affections or antipathies, desires and longings; of will – to help or injure, to act or refrain from acting; and of the power to act according to the promptings of these feelings and the determinations of will.

The concept of actional-potency however, re-emerged almost a century after and given a new light by Alfred Gell (1992, 1998) looking at object's effects on people. According to Gell's (1992:43) "technology of enchantment", the production of certain materials are conceived not in individual ability to create these things, but the ability of the group of people to consensually create purposes for the materials.

Agency now becomes the "casual consequences objects have on the course of human activity, and includes animate objects as well as the performances characteristics of material things" (Brown and Walker 2008:298). Although forwarding the same ability of collectively creation of purposes, the concept of the object-soul, on the contrary, shifts the focus

on the certain degree of action provided by a group of people to an object, perhaps due to its material properties.

In any other case, the object is seen as having life, takes part of the everyday living, and even dies. Therefore in death, it is symbolically or ritually killed as well, through breaking and burning, by any destructive or additive transformation, or mere seizure of use. For the indigenous Malay population, the soul of the object is its “diminutive but exact counterpart” (Skeat 1900:52). For the Ifugaos of the north, according to (Barton 1930), the soul lies on the desirable qualities and attributes of an object. On the other hand, the Bogobos of Mindanao see it as the “spiritual substratum or essence” of the objects (Benedict 1916:53).

However it may be defined by a culture, object-soul is the abstracted part of an object. It is the form of an item that is created and maintained in a person’s mind. The essence, spirit or any abstraction came from the distinctive natures of an object, its materiality, ascribed value or simply from an attached memory. Emphasis on the notion of *dungan* in Ilonggo culture, or the “essence of life and existence” (Magos 1992:48-49) is extended herein to incorporate its conception in objects, particularly in gold, to provide an appropriate context for the Visayan’s use of this metal in death and burial. The Visayan concept of *dungan* therefore explains that gold objects such as earrings, bracelets, necklaces, and masks were regarded to have a *dungan*, or an essence since gold has a high value in the society, it exhibits infrequent properties and continuously entangle with the people’s lifelong experiences.

However, all of these metaphors of the enchantment (Aguilar 1997:213) of the material could, in return, be viewed in the most recent scholarships as the product of non-human actors in a society. In fact, Gosden (2005:193-194) moved from anthropocentric to a more “object-centered” agency, in which objects “behave not from human intentions”. Rather, “things create people” and they employ people’s skills, knowledge and even beliefs to bring out their own production and perpetuation, but of course, this has to be *en masse*, “through recognizable set of forms” (Gosden 2005:194).

Ingold (2010) follows by criticising past conceptions of agency as purely human-centered, contending that things from nature then have been hastily reduced to passive “objects’. His argument is reflected with how he formulated the title of his article, *Bringing Things Back to Life*. Ingold’s (2010:3) claims contradict the crowd by way of focusing on

“fluxes and flows” as the foundation of material’s life-processes instead of its materiality. Consistent with him, “we are obliged... to follow these flows, tracing the paths of form-generation, wherever they may lead” (Ingold 2010:3). By and large these recent convictions moved beyond the reductionist view on material things as receivers of agency, instead, the objects themselves have innate social power as humans do. This is especially relevant in my attempt to explain the inclusion of gold objects in protohistoric burials in the Visayas. After all, the concept of *dungan*, according to Magos (1992) and as I extended to encompass early Visayan belief on things having souls, translates to the object’s will power.

Conclusion

The paper has explored the archaeological evidence with a more summary exploration of the ethnohistorical and anthropological literature in order to provide a theoretical context of the presence and deliberate inclusion of gold objects in death and burial in the Visayas from the 10th to the 16th centuries CE. This period in the development of the Philippine archipelago is regarded as the “golden age” (Villegas 1998:236-237) noting the command of the people on the use of gold. However, the essence of the real “golden age” lies beyond the impressive cultural development (Agoncillo 1984; Jocano 1998) of the early Filipinos and elsewhere that entails, but not limited to, complex belief systems and worldview.

It is therefore argued that gold objects were conceived as having souls. Material things with value determined by the people, perhaps through their distinct properties, materialities, and attributed meanings, were believed to undergo the same separation and transition alongside with the dead. Whereas the physical remains of the deceased were buried and left to deteriorate, so too were the materials. This is in agreement with the early Visayan belief that their souls shall leave the carnal realm and do enter the spiritual world. More importantly, the object-soul is with the dead people wherever they go.

In any other cases, the object is seen as having life, takes part in the everyday living, and even dies. Therefore in death, it is symbolically or ritually killed as well, through breaking and burning, by any destructive or additive transformation, or simply seizure of use. Conversely, more than mere containers of essences, spirits or any abstractions, the concept of object-soul disagrees with the idea of a conventional passive object in an animist perspective.

Instead, it should be looked as an active means by way the value of an object dictates the people through its importance not only for the dead since these objects will be needed to the afterlife, but also for the living because the need to include them compelled them to procure, provide and display these materials. Because of the belief in this kind of animism, the early inhabitants in this central part of the Philippine archipelago, consciously or unconsciously revered gold as powerful, at least socially, since it dictated them to “kill” the object when they too, die. A case in point of “obligation object place upon us” as Gosden (2005:193) puts it. Beyond object agency, moreover, the focus should move from materiality towards, “things of flux and flows”–the key to their life-processes and command in the society (Ingold 2010:3).

Gold as an object is indeed, a curious mystery. It may really have a soul since, following Bernstein (2004:280), numerous thirsts for power, glory, beauty, security and more importantly, immortality have been enthused by this mysteriously cunning object. And for millennia, no other object in this world parallels its ability to command so much regard. Finally, whereas the living strives to acquire them while alive, the dead is dying also to have it in its grave.

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