Moro Canoe

Many unidentified ships have been found in the Philippines. In researching one vessel that was found in the Philippine’s waters, I have learned a lot about the culture of maritime life in the region. Morris K. Jessup donated the ship model I have been analyzing as a present to the Peabody Museum at the 50th anniversary of Professor Putnam coming to Harvard. It was collected by the United States Philippine Commissioner in the Louisiana Philippine Exposition (1904). The “model of sailing boat” came with a hand written ledger, containing the words “moros” and “zamboagna”. Because the ledger gave these two words, we were able to use this evidence to support the theory that this model is a vinta boat and came from Zamboanga City in the Philippines island of Mindanao, where the Moro people reside.

The canoe-like vessel seems to be carved out of one hollow piece of wood, containing a sail, and two out-riggers. Outriggers are thin, long, solid hulls used to stabilize an inherently unstable main hull. The outrigger is positioned rigidly and parallel to the main hull so that the main hull is less likely to capsize. The sail is a square shape, that seems to be colorful, but has faded over time. The main hull has intricate purple wooden fixtures added to it as if for decoration, or potentially aerodynamics of

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the canoe. Along with the boat were a wooden plank inside (the usage is unknown), and one single wooden ore.

Since conveniently given the ledger, which has led to the Moro people in the city of Zamboanga, Mindanao, Philippines, we were able to narrow down the type of vessel this most likely is. The Moro people represent a Muslim community in the Philippines. The "Moro" term came into use during the Spanish colonial period, drawing upon a term used centuries earlier to refer the Muslims of al-Andalus in southern Spain known as the "Moors" during the Reconquista and applied to the native Muslims within conquered islands. The majority of the Moro people reside in Mindanao, and with the ledger, we can narrow down to the city of Zamboanga. Zamboanga is a highly urbanized city, being the commercial and industrial center of that region. Throughout history, they have been known for their fishing and seaweed industries. After researching a lot into the Moro people in Zamboanga, I found that the “vinta” boat was very significant in the culture in this region, even being the mascot/symbol for many schools in that region. When I looked more into the vinta, I found almost a complete match in the model I am researching and the picture and descriptions of the vinta boats used by the Moro people of Zamboanga. The vinta boats, also called a “lepa-lepa,” are Filipino boats made by the Sama-Bajau and Moro people. It has a square

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shaped sail with vibrant and assorted colors to represent the colorful culture and history of the Muslim culture. These boats were used for inter-island transport of people and goods. Although there is little research on the vinta itself, the evidence given can help strongly support the theory that the model is a vinta boat built by the Moro people in the city of Zamboanga. Since the actual model of the ship was donated as a gift in the early 20th century, it would make sense to claim this vessel as coming from the 19th century. Zamboanga City had a huge fishing industry and since the vinta boats were often used to gather fish and seaweed, it is plausible to conclude that this vessel was used as a fishing and transportation boat. Because of the double-outrigger, the vessel was able to mobilize quicker in deeper waters than just a canal, making fishing a bit more lucrative. Because of the importance of the vinta in early Philippine history, the vinta boat has remained a major part of Mindanao culture, still having vinta boats today.

Works Cited


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