

# Exploring Balanghai through its Significance and Impact to Butuanos: A Social Science Perspective

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## Abstract

*The research "Exploring Balanghai: Its Significance and Impact to Butuanos" aims to examine the cultural and historical significance of Balanghai, a pre-colonial artifact discovered in Butuan City, Philippines, and its impact on the Butuanos. The findings of this research will provide insights into the importance of Balanghai in the local community's cultural identity and its impact on the city's tourism industry. The results will also inform the development of strategies for preserving and promoting the significance of Balanghai to the Butuanos. The study will also analyze the impact of Balanghai on the city's tourism industry and the extent to which it has contributed to the promotion of Butuan's cultural heritage. Additionally, the research will explore the role of the local government and other stakeholders in preserving and promoting Balanghai and its cultural significance.. Overall, this research will contribute to the understanding of the cultural and historical significance of Balanghai and its impact on the Butuanos, as well as the importance of preserving and promoting cultural heritage in the Philippines.*

**Keywords:** Balanghai, Cultural Heritage, Philippines, Butuan.

## INTRODUCTION:

RENOWNED as the Philippine's National Boat, Balangay traces back its history to that of the pre-colonial era. It has become the first wooden watercraft excavated in Southeast Asia. The Balangay provides proof of the early Filipinos' maritime expertise and skill in boat-building during the pre-colonial times. Also known as the Butuan Boat, which is considered the oldest, the Balangay was first mentioned in the Chronicles of Pigafetta# about the first time they came upon the Philippine islands in 16th century. (Salinas, 2019). The first wooden watercraft discovered in Southeast Asia was the balangay. The settlement of Austronesian peoples in the Malay archipelago and the Philippines was made possible in large part by these vessels. It was used for cargo and trading, in which Butuan, Agusan de Norte, Philippines was a central trading port. Today, the Balanghai Festival in Butuan is a celebration of the first people who settled in the Philippines.

In the year 1976, nine Balangay boats were found in Butuan City, three of which have been excavated and have been found to have existed dating back in the year 320, 990, and 1250 C.E. An article written by science journalist Timothy James Dimacali and published by GMA News in 2013 tells about a massive balangay "mother boat" unearthed in Butuan. In the outset, the article says that this recent discovery 'promises to rewrite Philippine maritime history.'. Accordingly, the boat is estimated to be around 800 years old, the plank vessel may be centuries older than the ships used by European explorers in the 16th century when they first came upon the archipelago later

named after a Spanish king, Las Islas Filipinas. The find also underscores theories that the Philippines, and Butuan in particular, was a major center for cultural, religious, and commercial relations in Southeast Asia. (GMA News, 2013).

On the year 1976, the ancient wooden boats were accidentally dug in Butuan, Philippines. After the said event, an American historiographer, who was based in the Philippines asked the National Museum of the Philippines to do a research about this. In an article entitled “Barangay: sixteenth-century Philippine culture and society,” aside from discovering another version of the word, the word “barangay” which is used to describe the smallest political unit of Tagalog society, this American historiographer also mentioned about the orthography conflicts as Spanish and Filipino alphabet are different. He said “I have re-spelled them in accordance with normal Philippine usage. Thus, I have changed “c” and “qu” to “k” as appropriate . . . and “i” with “y” before or after vowels”. The exchange of material products across wide stretches of water contributed to the development of densely populated, highly nucleated coastal settlements that served as meeting places for various groups. The maritime trade, which flourished in the Philippines during this period, included local exchanges among settlements, the movements of people across bodies of water and the retail distribution of trade ware ceramics throughout the archipelago (UNESCO, 2022).

#### **DISCOVERIES OF BALANGHAI:**

According to historian William Henry Scott, Balangay boat has been used primarily as cargo and fishing ship by the Ibanag people. Used mainly across the Cagayan River system, it has for some occasions, been used as coastal trade ships reaching as far as Ilocos region. (Scott, 1994). In the Southern Philippines, Balangay were primarily inter-island trading ships, cargo transports, and warships. Large balangay boats, especially the Butuan boats, are commonly equipped with large double-outriggers which support paddling and fighting platforms, and has come to be known locally as paraw.

These unintentional finds were reported to Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro, and from 1975 to 1977, personnel and students from Xavier University and Mindanao State University conducted a number of archaeological digs. Linda Burton created a report on the earlier discoveries and these excavations (1977:95-112). The cemetery sites revealed several burials with substantial grave goods, including porcelain artifacts from the Yuan and Ming periods (13th–14th centuries) (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries). Middens and a village area were both found. The material culture excavated here included sherds, iron slag, ornaments and animal and marine remains. The finding of undisturbed graves containing expensive imported china, increased the number of illicit excavations made to steal from graves nearby. The things that employing test trenches and sounding rods, many of the pot searchers destroyed a large amount of the Despite the area's historic potential, a handful of timber boats were discovered preserved in the mud and silt of the estuary. These were not valuable for sale, therefore to the National Museum were recorded (Cembranon, 1999). The discovery of these warships at Butuan is not surprising given that pre-Hispanic era was a well-known trading port, and this region, termed the A significant source of gold was Caraga (Scott, 1994; Hontiveros, 2006). The Agusan River delta is an area of extensive deposition of sand and silt. The evolution of the estuary has been traced in detail by a recent geophysical report (Javelosa, et al. 2002).

The Butuan sites have found about nine balangay vessels, dating from the 10th to the 13th century CE. The same edge-pegged style of construction, which is typical of Southeast Asian boat-building techniques, was used to build all of the found boats. The planks are constructed of hardwood, are one continuous piece, and have been shaped. Notably, there is no fundamental shift in the technology of boat building between the earliest and most recent balangays, demonstrating that the methods employed to manufacture these boats remained virtually intact over the 400 hundred year span of discovery. In fact, in the Philippines today, the technical know-how and expertise needed to produce balangays is still passed down from generation to generation. In Luzon (UNESCO, 2022).

This wooden boat was discovered in 1979 at a depth of around two meters in North Eastern Mindanao, close to the city of Butuan. The craft is made of planks and is united by carved-out planks that are bordered with pins and dowels. It is a beautifully crafted boat for long-distance travel that was created without the use of blueprints and passed down from generation to generation using an old method that has been preserved and is currently used by boat builders on Sibutu Island. It is estimated to be three to four meters wide and fifteen meters long. The "Balangay" can accommodate 25 people and is powered by a sail made of buri, nipa fiber, or padding. At present, nine "balangays" have been confirmed to exist. Today, "Balangay 1" is buried at the Balangay Shrine Museum in Ambangan, Libertad, which is five kilometers east of the city center. As a result, the Butuan Museum is in charge of overseeing and protecting the "Balangay" excavations and any other items discovered there. Three of these boats were discovered by the National Museum; the remaining vessels are still submerged in water at various locations in Butuan City. The excavation site was flooded while more excavating and research were being done. Archeologist at the National Museum, Dr. Mary Jane A. Bulonia, the item is advantageous for conservation in that state primarily because it will degrade quickly if it is exposed without proper conservation.

#### **ARCHITECTURE OF BALANGHAI:**

The National Museum of the Philippines, in its article entry on the website, it has dedicated a special feature on the Butuan Boat. Interestingly, NMP recognizes the significance the Butuan [Balangay] boat has played in the course of Philippine history and that of the City of Butuan.

*THE Butuan boat is an edged-pegged plank type of boat. The planks were made from hard wood like 'doongon' (Heritiera littoralis). Built to withstand long-distance voyages, the boat can seat 25 people. Early merchants purchased goods from foreign traders and sailed the small waterways redistributing the commodities to remote communities in the archipelago. The presence of glass beads and metals in the sites where the boats were discovered shows that Philippine coastal communities were active in Asian maritime trade during that time. Evidence of a flourishing maritime trade placed the early Filipinos' seamanship and boat-building skill on equal footing with other Asian countries."*



Figure 1. BALANGHAI. Source: National Museum of the Philippines

Balangay boats discovered in Butuan appear to have had similar designs. They are very similar to the descriptions in Alcina's manuscript. (1668). He says that this indigenous culture includes all the main crafts. had widespread construction techniques. He describes the parts and construction techniques in both Spanish and the indigenous Visayan tongue using a variety of technical words. The cutting of the keel, stem, and stern posts, or "la quilla y las dos rodas de proa y popa," marked the start of construction. Figure 1 depicted the "tablas," or strakes. Old site map (left) and a Google Earth image (Bautista, 1988). For reference, note the river forks and the highway curve. To form the curved ends known as "lubag," these strakes were cut. suitable hull curvature Always cut to the full length of the hull, the strakes. The size and shape of the strakes determined the beam of the vessel and the shape of the hull. On the inside of the planks were left rounded protrusions or lugs, "tambuko", with holes for the hull fastenings. Inner ribs called "agar" were lashed to the hull using the "tambukos" to hold the vessel together. The strakes were joined and attached to keel by wooden battens or dowels which fitted into holes carved by an auger. The number of strakes determined the height of the freeboard. Oars of appropriate lengths were selected based on the height of the freeboard.

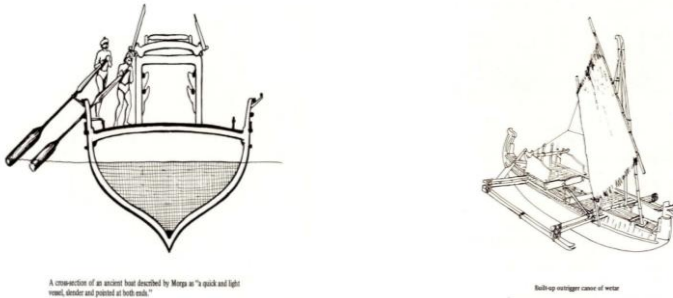


A caracoa-type boat, with rowers on the outriggers.



An artist's conceptualization of a "Balanghai," "Balday," or "Balangai" as an ancient boat possibly of Malay design that could carry from 60 to 90 persons as shown.

Figure 2. Descriptive Design of BALANGHAI



**Figure 3. Architectural Model of BALANGHAI**

The ship was typically left to season for one or two months, according to Alcina. months, after which the hull's dowels were examined. With "baruk," a palm extract, the strakes were caulked. The "usus" procedure of lashing was then used to stress the hull. To "cegar las junteras," or "pamuta" in Visayan, the dowels were secured in place with wooden plugs. Outrigger poles and "katig" (connecting timbers) were then added to the vessel. The outriggers could support platforms, particularly those for fighting or transporting people. For operating the sails or transporting people or cargo, a central hull platform called the "burutlan" was utilized. The passengers were frequently shielded from the sun or rain by a makeshift awning made of palm leaves. The vessels either had a single mast or a tripod mast, which could be raised or lowered quickly.

### **BALANGHAI Recognition as Historical Artifacts**

Studies have been conducted about the Balangay boat. In a study conducted by Roderick Stead and Dr E Dizon, it is worth noting that the researchers have thoroughly considered the Balangay boat of "Butuan area of Northern Mindanao [as] 'the most important find in pre-colonial maritime archaeology throughout island South East Asia.'" It further adds that the boat has been 'well known from the accounts of early Spanish visitors to the Philippines, such as the Pigafetta journal of Magellan's voyage.' No wonder that the modern-day discovery and excavation of this highly-esteemed boat has, so far, been considered as 'the most important archaeological contribution to our understanding of the maritime heritage of the Philippines in the last forty years.' (Stead & Dizon, 2018).

Without a doubt, one of the most significant maritime Southeast Asian pre-colonial era archaeological sites. The significance of these discoveries was instantly acknowledged, and the quick actions by the The first two vessels were dug up and preserved by the National Museum commendable. The National Maritime Museum has significant exhibits on these vessels. Both the Regional Museum in Butuan City and the Museum in Manila. The initial boat is of fact, the "Balangay Shrine's" main focus is right now. There have been three different balangay boat reproductions since 2009.

constructed in the Philippines Several journeys were made in the Philippines and using the first replica to show the design's seaworthiness in South East Asian waters (discussed with Daniel Calo, a crew member). This ship will be maintained and kept on permanent display in Manila. The Masawa Hong Butuan, the third vessel, was constructed in Mindanao and is presently anchored in the Agusan River, close to Butuan (visited by the site visit team in 2011). The House Committee on Basic Education and Culture was compelled to pass a measure designating "Balangay" as the oldest boat in the nation and the Philippine National Boat due to the significance of "Balangay" in every Filipino's mind. The "Balangay" has been designated as the National Boat of the Philippines, according to a proposal that was approved by the House Committee on Law Revision. The proposal contained in House Bill 4879, which was written by Representative Lawrence Lemuel H. Fortun (1st District, Agusan Del Norte), was approved by the committee chaired by Rep. Marlyn Primicias-Agabas (6th District, Pangasinan). The proposal aims to ensure that future generations of Filipinos will recognize the invaluable contribution of their primogenitors in developing the nation's maritime tradition and in passing on the values of unity, coherence determination and bravery through the celebration of the 'Balangay' as the Nation's National Boat.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF BALANGHAI TO BUTUANOS**

Balangay, having been regarded as Philippine's National Boat, has truly been significant in the field of Maritime history. It really 'deserves a rightful place in the consciousness of every Filipino.' This moves Filipinos to value the role the boat has had in developing Philippine's thriving history, something each should take great pride of. To implicate its significance in more depth, the National Boat has given Filipino people an identity that is truly unique and has thus far reflected the bearing Philippine's geographical location has as something distinctive – that the people have long been engaged in Maritime activities due to the archipelago's ideal characteristics.

The significance of boats in various places around the world is always given importance. CARAGA region in the Philippines is no exemption. Having been known as 'the cultural heritage' of the City of Butuan, the boat has traced back Butuan's maritime activities far prior the sailing of the Chinese foreigners. Highlighted in House Bill 7070, Balangay's importance as "as a testament to, and symbol of the country's rich ancient maritime history" is truly remarkable!

As the 13th campus of the Philippine Science High School System located in the City of Butuan of the CARAGA Region, PSHS CARAGA Region has embraced the remarkable 'trademark' of the Balangay [Butuan] Boat. The campus has in effect 'rekindled the spirit' of maritime consciousness of students as stakeholders. Also, to the Butuanons and to the Filipino people, this initiative of PSHS CARAGA is very promising for it would pave the way to establishing back the almost 'faded' part of Philippine maritime history. As Agusan del Norte Representative Lawrence Fortun puts it: "declaring [balangay] as country's national boat will ensure that future generations will recognize" how all the efforts of our forefathers passed on today's generation "the values of solidarity, harmony, determination, courage, and bravery." Featured at the heart of the campus, the school echoes the role of the boat in honor of Butuan's rich culture and history. The Balangay Boat has now become the 'new campus landmark' inaugurated just recently during its 8th Founding Anniversary.

## CONCLUSION

The historical memory of human communities is preserved through cultural heritage. Heritage is what we have left behind from the past, what we use today, and what we pass on to future generations. It adds to national identity and has scientific and cultural value, which improves the country's reputation. The significance of 'Balangay' boat as cultural heritage in our country is a great factor in our country's tourism development. We must comprehend the nature and significance of this cultural legacy in order to develop and promote the "Balangay" boat and ensure effective execution in promoting the heritage to others. Cultural legacy like "Balanghai" can actually be found in the foods we eat, the clothes we wear, the faiths we practice, and the talents we pick up. Sometimes the components of a culture are palpable and easy to touch; other times they are intangible. All of these things that have occurred in the past have had a significant impact on and contribution to our current civilization. It molds who we are as well as the community in which we live.

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