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« So that the people may know: Two Statements on 'Huluga' issue

Musings from Lonestar State: "I'm missing you, CDO" »

[Mr. Elizaga replies on the Statement of the UP-ASP Cagayan de Oro Project](#)

In an email sent last August 17, 2007, Mr. Elson T. Elizaga replies, point by point, the Statement of UP-ASP posted earlier in 'Your VOICES' (see entry, "So That the People May Know: Two Statements on 'Huluga' Issue"). This is a follow-up post.

**All is fair here. CDOKAY sees it as a healthy debate.**

(ASP statements are in *italics* and Mr. Elizaga's replies are in **bold** text)

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*Statement of the Members of the  
University of the Philippines-Archaeological Studies Program  
Cagayan de Oro Project*

*August 14, 2007*

*We write in response to the specific statement in the Philippine Daily Inquirer article entitled "Cagayan de Oro's Lost Treasure" (PDI August 12, 2007 p. A17). It was stated by the writer, Ma. Cecilia Rodriguez, that the Heritage Conservation Advocates (HCA) called our archeological report a "mock report".*

**The HCA does not call the ASP report a "mock report". The phrase I used during the interview with Ms. Rodriguez was "debatable and not scientific". This is my opinion. Other HCA members might have a different view.**

**My reasons for describing the ASP report as "not scientific":**

**1) The report does not mention the midden discovered by Dr. Erlinda M. Burton on August 5, 2003. At the time of the discovery, ASP archeologist Lee Anthony Neri and Clyde Jagoon were present at the midden site. This midden is only about 20 meters away from the ASP excavation in 2004. It is known also to the National Museum.**

**2) The ASP report ignored the fossils and artifacts found by HCA in 2003, such as the whale harpoon.**

**3) The ASP dug only on top of Obsidian Hill, which is heavily eroded. Burton said the cliff had eroded. There is a need to have a geomorphologist, said Burton, to study the site. I don't know if ASP brought a geomorphologist during their research.**

**4) ASP jumped to conclusion when it stated that Huluga Open Site is not the Himologan site described by the Spanish missionaries in 1622. Even if ASP is correct, Huluga is still**

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**an archaeological site that deserves protection under Philippine Law. I would welcome the discovery of the “real Huluga”, if that is the case, but it wouldn’t refute the fact that Huluga is an archaeological site.**

*The UP-ASP team was invited by the Historical Commission of the city of Cagayan de Oro, (CdeO) to help improve our basic knowledge of CdeO’s early history.*

**HCA has no copy of the HISCCOM invitation to ASP. We also have no knowledge that the City Council ever made a discussion and resolution to invite ASP. HCA has no copy of the ASP project proposal to HISCOMM, which should contain the proposed project cost. HCA, however, has a copy of the draft contract between ASP and City Hall. In short, the deal made by ASP with City Hall was largely secret. The amount of P450,000 paid to ASP was not even revealed. I had to get information about it myself.**

(Follow-up email on August 18):

**In my email yesterday, I wrote, “We have no knowledge that the City Council ever made a discussion and resolution to invite ASP.”**

**I just checked my archive and found this information:**

**“On January 19, 2004, the City Council — monopolized by members of the mayor’s political party– enacted an ordinance authorizing the mayor to hire the ASP for the research and excavation of Cagayan de Oro ...”**

**Monopolized because all councilors, the vice-mayor, and the mayor were members of the same political party that time, PaDayon Pilipino.**

*We reviewed the literature, followed protocol, secured the proper authorization from the National Museum of the Philippines, and conducted our research work from October to November, 2004.*

**ASP didn’t follow archaeological code of ethics when it made a secret negotiation with then mayor Vicente Y. Emano, didn’t consult local historians, anthropologists (one happens to be an archaeologist also), and other people interested in heritage conservation. It didn’t ask permission from Edna Dahino and the Gales family to dig in Obsidian Hill. One Gales member drove about 10 kilometers from her government office to rebuke the group.**

A reinvestigation of the Huluga site was done, as well as new site surveys. At Huluga, we were interested to know if systematic investigation of the archaeological site can support the idea that there was a dense, permanent settlement on the hill top of Huluga that could represent the remains of the earliest site of Cagayan de Oro settlement.

**This is a valid purpose. But the decision to exclude the midden and found relics in 2003 is questionable.**

*Unfortunately our systematic excavation could only tell us that there was human habitation, but it was not likely that the hill top was ever extensively populated for any period of time. On the other hand, through the surveys we conducted, we were able to find denser archaeological deposits just north of Huluga along the Cagayan de Oro River. These sites can also be candidates for the location of the old settlement of Cagayan de Oro, for they also fit the description of the landscape written in early Spanish accounts. In the course of our study, we also recovered stone tools that belong to a very old technological tradition. If more examples of these tools are found in their original context, they can tell us that humans, and most likely pre-modern humans ( i.e..Homo Erectus), were present in the Cagayan de Oro landscape. This can possibly push the history and heritage concern of the region by tens of thousands of years.*

**ASP should be congratulated for this discovery. The site should also be protected and preserved. This finding, however, should not decrease the importance of other archaeological sites, which by law also deserve protection.**

*All of these findings are detailed in our site report and in a special edition of our peer-reviewed archaeological journal, Hukay (Volume 7, 2005). The site report contains the complete account of*



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*our methods, data, illustration, interpretations, limitations and the future prospects for the study of CdeO's early history. We cannot understand, therefore, the statement coming from a member of the HCA that calls our report "mock" and that "the ASP team should themselves be investigated for bungling an important scientific study".*

**Not only ASP, but the National Museum (where some ASP members also work) should be investigated. The National Museum mysteriously stopped its promised plan to file a case against Emano in November 2003. In January 2004, HCA discovered that ASP and the National Museum had made a deal with Emano to have ASP dig in Cagayan de Oro.**

*We wonder how the members of the HCA, specially Elson Elizaga can tell a mock report from a real one, when they have not done analysis of archaeological raw data or written an archaeological report at all.*

**I don't write archaeological reports. I'm not an archaeologist. But anyone who knows the five steps of the scientific method can tell.**

*The most that a member of HCA has done is a very preliminary report on an excavation of the site way back in 1975.*

**This report was written by Burton.**

This, despite the fact that excavation have been conducted by certain HCA members as late as 2004, without securing authorization from the National Museum and without a properly disseminated site report.

**After observing the destruction of Huluga, and seeing the damage on the midden site, Burton sent a request to the National Museum to secure a permit to do excavation in Huluga. The National Museum, however, replied only after three months, and told Burton to send found artifacts and fossils to the museum in Butuan City. Government offices are required by law to reply to letters within 15 days.**

**I took photos of some of the pits dug by Burton and her students in 2004.**

*We will be more than happy to read a report, of any sort, that gives us an idea of the archaeological context/merit of all the artifacts and investigation that they have done (and proudly placed on the web) at the Huluga site all these years. In fact, ethics that practitioners of archaeology should write and share reports, or they are no better than your average treasure hunter.*

**I'm sure Burton can write a report of the findings. The information I got so far was plain, clay pottery shreds were found.**

*The way we see it, the damage that our scientific report can only have done is on the spirit of the HCA members who are holding uncritical belief in a self-proclaimed truth that the Huluga hillside is the location for the earliest settlement linked to present Cagayan de Oro. We see the value of this archaeological site within the fundament fact that it is a known heritage site of Filipinos and not because of the claim that it is the "oldest" or the "original". We therefore will not blindly accept a belief for settlement origin when the archaeological evidence does not support it.*

**I'm not certain also that Huluga is the oldest and original settlement of Cagayan de Oro. When I was interviewed on-air by Nits Arancon of DxJR in 2003, I told him that there could be older archaeological sites in Cagayan de Oro, way ahead of ASP's suspicion that Huluga may not be Himologan. But again, any present or future discovery will not decrease the value of Huluga as an archaeological site. The law does not say that archaeological habitation sites or camp sites with relics should be destroyed.**

**Burton, on the record, told me she knows what a camp site is, and strongly states that Huluga is not a camp site, but a settlement site.**

*There is so much to learn about our collective past in the Cagayan de Oro landscape. Much*

*more study is needed; the potentials are really looking good. We fully support and join the appeal to all institutions in the position to stop the continuing destruction through quarrying of the Huluga site. We also show our solidarity to those sensitive to the heritage of Cagayan de Oro that were maligned by the HCA, and support any effort to end the HCA's selective and arrogant claims as protectors of Cagayan de Oro's Heritage and of our collective heritage.*

**HCA members never claimed to be protectors. The HCA is a private advocacy group. It has no legal authority to protect and preserve. These duties are assigned by law to the National Museum (and I think also to the local government). Which is why when Helen Dahino asked me what to do with her claimed portion of the hill this month after a landslide, I told her "We can only tell you what the law says. We have no authority to tell you what to do. We can only make requests."**

*We are concerned that such an important issue such as heritage protection is being hijacked by a narrow-thinking group. Their outright dismissal, rather than engagement, of a new data seems to miss the fact that diverse interest can cover under a heritage protection position. We are also of the mind that as more data and knowledge are put to light through sustained study of the Cagayan de Oro past, reality will definitely be more exciting than fiction.*

**HCA has no informal nor formal dismissal of the ASP report.**

**My view — and this is not the HCA view — is the ASP archaeologists who came to CDO to dig in 2004 and the National Museum that approved this project should be investigated, by the Senate if possible, 1) for making deals with Emano, 2) for violating the archaeological code of ethics, 3) for making what appears to be a report meant to please Emano, 4) for not recommending the protection of Huluga and other archaeological sites, 5) for using a treasure hunter as guide, 6) for not asking permission from claimed landowners of Obsidian Hill, and 7) for jeopardizing the reputation of ASP as a science institution and the University of the Philippines as a reputable school.**

**The HISCCOM and Emano should also be investigated for using the ASP report as basis for the continuous "development" of Huluga, and for tolerating treasure-hunting made by a City Hall employee only about 100 meters from Kagayan-an Resort, which is managed by a member of the HISCCOM.**

**I encourage the ASP and the HISCCOM to request a Senate inquiry on this issue, and to include Burton, her students, and myself in the investigation. We can handle that.**

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3 Responses to "Mr. Elizaga replies on the Statement of the UP-ASP Cagayan de Oro Project"



Allan Cortez says:

September 3, 2007 at 3:26 am

It is actually quite revealing (and somehow entertaining, would it be not so sad) that certain people who always claim to be on the "right" and "good" side, are using half truths and non truths to get their issues delivered. For example, the PDI article says clearly "mock report", but in his reply Mr. Elizaga now states cowardly that he never said that. It is sad that the issue was always politicized by Elizaga's group not respecting democratic decisions of the Filipino people (i.e. the population of Cagayan de Oro). He fumes that the "City Council — monopolized by members of the mayor's political party— enacted an ordinance authorizing the mayor to hire the ASP" and "didn't consult local historians" (i.e. him). The mayor and the city

councilors were duly elected in democratic elections and had therefore the mandate to negotiate this contract. It is again so said that some of our countrymen cannot accept the result of elections and then try to resort to character assassination (not only to Emano, but also to other members of the city council).

I am just so happy that Cagayanons are getting more mature as shown in recent elections and did not buy the character assassinations of Mr. Elizaga and Co. . Emano was voted as Vice Mayor with more than 60 % of the votes.

I understand that Dr. Burton is from Xavier University, whose motto is “the truth shall set you free – veritas liberabit vos”. If Elizaga’s group is really concerned about the issue and not about politics, it should go back to the facts and the truth.

I hope the accusers have the courage and the heart to apologize.



**Elson T. Elizaga** says:  
**September 16, 2007 at 2:42 pm**

ON “MOCK REPORT”: The article written by Ms. Cecil Rodriguez of the Philippine Daily Inquirer contained errors. This is admitted by Rodriguez in an email to me and in a statement sent to [heritage1@googlegroups.com](mailto:heritage1@googlegroups.com), which is the egroup of the Heritage Conservation Advocates (HCA).

Let me repeat that I didn’t describe the ASP publication as a “mock report”. That would have been kind. What I said was worse: “Debatable and NOT scientific”. Rodriguez and Geefe Alba from Business World have an audio record of my original statement.

ON DEMOCRACY: The election of a person to a government office does not exempt him from scrutiny. When a government official is perceived to be at fault, he has to be examined. Even if he is seen as upright, he has to be checked regularly. Why? Because we pay tax.

In 2003, the HCA filed a case against former mayor Vicente Y. Emano and his contractor UKC Builders, Inc. before the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB). EMB decided in our favor. Currently, Emano is facing numerous suits because of financial anomalies repeatedly discovered by the Commission on Audit (COA). If Emano is convicted in court, current law provides that he should be jailed. Execution is no longer an option.

ON VIOLATION OF THE CODE OF ETHICS OF ARCHAEOLOGY: See <http://elso.elizaga.net/archaeoethics.html>.

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**More from Mr. Elizaga. This was sent to CDOKAY last August 28, 2007**

Our organization, the Heritage Conservation Advocates (HCA), issued a manifesto of protest against Emano in 2001 when he was still planning to destroy the Huluga archaeological site. HISCCOM was silent. It also didn’t protest when Emano bulldozed Huluga in 2003.

That year, HCA filed a case against Emano and his contractor UKC Builders, Inc. This year, HCA informed the public about the quarrying and treasure hunting in Huluga. We had a meeting with new mayor Constantino Jaraula, who called us “authorities”. He is for heritage preservation. HISCCOM has only issued propaganda.

Under pressure, Emano and HISCCOM commissioned the University of the Philippines-Archaeological Studies Program (UP-ASP) in 2004 to produce a report that would attempt to decrease the archaeological value of Huluga. This goal is indicated by three major acts:

First, UP-ASP violated archaeological code of ethics by not consulting local historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and the archaeologist Dr. Erlinda Burton, who used to work with the famous British-Kenyan archaeologist Louis S.B. Leakey. UP-ASP didn’t even consult the

people who claimed ownership of the land excavated by UP-ASP.

Second, UP-ASP ignored a midden known to UP-ASP and the National Museum since 2003. A midden is an ancient garbage site, extremely critical to archaeological work. UP-ASP also ignored the fossils and artifacts found on Huluga surface by HCA in 2003, such as the whale harpoon head, which as a National Museum accession number of X-1991-Q2-484. For a detailed discussion of this issue, put "elizaga trash archaeology" in google. My article is in mindanews.com.

Third, UP-ASP made a confusing conclusion when it declared Huluga as "a habitation site, but unlikely a settlement site". These terms are SYNONYMOUS in archaeology. One only has to check the online reference-wordsmith.com by lexicographer, linguist and Registered Professional Archaeologist Dr. Barbara Ann Kipfer.

Instead of filing a case against UP-ASP for doing unethical and unscientific work disadvantageous to the people of the Philippines, HISCCOM wallow in ignorance, and keep repeating the UP-ASP gobbledygook like a bloated parrot.

Elson T. Elizaga

***ann magnuson pretty songs*** says:  
**October 25, 2007 at 8:34 am**

**ann magnuson pretty songs...**

Thanks for the nice read, keep up the interesting posts.....

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