

## CONTEMPORARY MANGYAN SCRIPTS

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This paper<sup>1</sup> intends to present some observations concerning a few ethnic groups belonging to the so-called Cultural Minorities in the Philippines.

On the one hand these groups, on the basis of their socio-economy and education, could be classified as "primitive"; on the other hand, they display mental, intellectual and aesthetic capacities of the highest caliber—one of them being the use of an intricate writing system as the instrument of expressing and preserving a rich and beautiful literature.

I am referring here particularly to some tribes of the Mangyans living on the island of Mindoro who still employ a script that several centuries ago was not uncommon in many parts of the Philippines.<sup>2</sup>

From various writers we know about the existence of the so-called Philippine Syllabaries in the historic past. They are now the subject of Paleography, because with a few exceptions they have disappeared in the Philippines and have been replaced, under Spanish influence, by the Western Romanized Script.

The exceptions of today are the scripts or syllabaries used by the Tagbanwa and maybe other tribes on Palawan Island;<sup>3</sup> and the scripts in use among some Mangyan Tribes on the Island of Mindoro.

The late Professor Otley Beyer remarked (1918:23): "among the Pagan hill people of Negros, the same type of writing was fairly common less than 80 years ago." It seems, however, that no trace is left anymore of this type of writing.

There is a limited bibliography available on the Philippine Scripts in general,<sup>4</sup> because its existence was noted as early as the 17th Century by Pedro Chirino in 1604. A bibliography dealing with the syllabaries of Mindoro, however, would be very thin indeed, and probably not occupy more than one page.

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<sup>1</sup>The original lecture on which this paper is based was delivered to the Linguistic Society of the Philippines on February 19, 1971, at the Moot Court, Ateneo de Manila University, Padre Faura Campus, Manila. It has been revised and augmented for this publication.

<sup>2</sup>Pedro Chirino, S.J., wrote (1604): ". . . son tán dados todos estos islenos á escribir y leer, que no hay casi hombre y mucho menos muger, que no lea y escriba en letras propias de la isla de Manila . . ."

<sup>3</sup>Colin E. Tweddell makes mention (1970) of the Batak tribe of northern Palawan as being versant with the syllabic script.

<sup>4</sup>Various authors are mentioned, among others, by Cipriano Marcilla y Martin (1895); Fletcher Gardner (1943); Juan Francisco (1966).

The first mention of the Mindoro scripts is by Paterno in his book *Los Itas*. A syllabary and some Tagalog sentences in Mangyan script can be found there, without, however, any commentary. One wonders moreover what a Mangyan script is doing in a book dealing with the Aetas.

Padre Marcilla, in his book *Estudio de los Alfabetos Filipinos*, presents two texts in Mangyan writing. He describes how he acquired them from Dr. Pardo de Tavera, who allegedly had these samples in his possession as early as 1889. These texts are apparently written by a Mangyan (or Mangyans). The language used, however, is Tagalog and not the (Hanunoo) Mangyan dialect.

The first persons, to my knowledge, who seriously started collecting and studying the Mangyan scripts, were the German anthropologists Meyer, Schadenberg and Foy. They published their findings in 1895 in the Bulletin of the Royal Museum in Dresden, now Eastern Germany. Blumentritt and Miller made passing mention of the Mangyan writing in 1896 and 1912 respectively, but not until 1939 was there any additional serious study on this matter. It was Fletcher Gardner, with the assistance of the Maliwanag Brothers from Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro, who published a large collection of Mangyan songs (called Ambahan) and short essays written by a Mangyan man.<sup>5</sup> Tracings from each original bamboo inscription accompany the transliteration and translation of the texts. Unfortunately, there are quite a few mistakes and faulty translations<sup>6</sup> in the three volumes published.

Dr. Harold Conklin, a well-known anthropologist in the Philippines, published a popular account on the Mangyan script in a 1949 issue of "Pacific Discovery", and in the same year wrote in the "American Anthropologist" as part of his preliminary report on fieldwork in Mindoro: ". . . The only pagans who write are the Hanunoo (Mangyans, AP) and the neighboring Buhid. Although they are quite unalike linguistically, they both use the same syllabary. No other pagan group on Mindoro possesses or gives any indication of ever having possessed a knowledge of a similar form of writing." Harold Conklin's statement will be discussed later on.

The latest thorough study on Mangyan writing known to me, is in Dr. Juan Francisco's monograph on "Philippine Paleography" published in manuscript form in 1966 at the U.P. Quezon City. It is presently being printed in a revised edition.

After this survey of the rather meager bibliography on the Mangyan Syllabaries, I would like to present my own observations on the Mangyan script or rather scripts, as I found them in use among some Mangyan tribes in the southern part of Mindoro.

<sup>5</sup>Fletcher Gardner (1943:15) writes that . . . "Luyon, the writer of the specism is apparently an old woman . . ." (underlying mine, A.P.), but I never found this name (Luyon) used by a woman; only by men.

<sup>6</sup>Fletcher Gardner (1940, vol. 2:53): One amusing example can be found in no. 153. The short, three-lined poem is an excerpt of a courting dialogue, with the girl asking the courting boy: "Who is this person, playing the guitar? Maybe from the seashore?" Rendered in the Mangyan language, the proper transliteration is: "Atay hintay pag-uman, tig binagasbas kaywan? Bilang taga-baybayan?" Gardner reads: Atay hintay paguman tigbi na gasbas ta kay Juan (sic!) bilang taga bay-bayan", that is translated as: "Whatever noise is shame to John (sic!) is counsel to the people of another town." The attached asterisk bears as footnote! \*Free translation (sic!)

✓ Talking about the Mangyans, I think it is good to be somewhat specific, since there are about six different ethnic groups in Mindoro that fall under the general classification as "Mangyans."<sup>7</sup> Out of these different groups, there are actually only two linguistically distinct Mangyan tribes who still use the Indic derived script. These are the Hanunoo-Mangyans and the Buhids.

The Hanunoo-Mangyans occupy the southern part of Mindoro, roughly comprising the municipalities of Mansalay and Bulalacao in Oriental Mindoro, and San Jose in Occidental Mindoro.

Towards the north of the Hanunoo-Mangyans, but only in the Province of Oriental Mindoro, approximately within the municipalities of Mansalay, Bongabon and Bansud, live the Buhid.<sup>8</sup> This tribe, however, I would like to subgroup into the Northern and the Southern Buhid, on the basis of the two different syllabaries that are in existence among them.

Here, for the sake of convenience, I will call the two different scripts of the Mangyans the "northern" and the "southern" scripts.<sup>9</sup>

The Northern Script is being used only by the northern Buhids, whereas the Southern Script is being used by both the Southern Buhid and the Hanunoo-Mangyans alike.

Before dealing with the characteristics of the two scripts, I would like to give first some cultural background information in connection with the Mangyan scripts in general. The description cited is taken from Panaytayan, but could be taken, for that matter, from any other Mangyan settlement.

Panaytayan is a Hanunoo-Mangyan settlement situated in the hills of Mansalay about two hours walk from the town. Anybody who comes in contact with these Mangyans, cannot fail to notice the practical use they have of the script.

He will notice the bamboo containers, called "luka", where the Mangyan keeps his tobacco leaves, his lime for betelnut, or other sundry items. Most of the time, the outer surface of the container will be covered with the fine scratches of the Mangyan script. The characters of the script are rather pointed and without roundings. It surely developed this way because of the shape of the bamboo which they used as their writing pad.

The script seems to be omnipresent on their woven buri-palm-leaf baskets, their home spun dresses, their miniature guitars and violins, the bow-and-arrow sets used for hunting. It can be seen on the posts and walls of their houses, on the young bamboo shoots along the trail, or rudely cut with the bolo in "big capitals" on a fallen tree trunk.

In short, the writing is so evident in a Hanunoo-Mangyan community that it takes occasional visitors by surprise. The first comment on the script mostly heard from the visitors is that it looks like Chinese! It seems that anything that looks strange and exotic and difficult to comprehend is classified as Chinese! Of course, the main difference between the Mangyan Script and Chinese is that many Chinese characters, like Egyptian hieroglyphs, are logograms or ideograms (signs representing a certain word or idea), whereas the Mangyan Script is a syllabic writing with characters that are classified as phonograms (signs representing certain sounds).

<sup>7</sup>Harold C. Conklin (1949<sup>1</sup>:269) mentions: . . . "nine main ethnographic or tribal groups . . .", whereas Tweddell (1970) mentions six groups.

<sup>8</sup>See also Harold C. Conklin (1949<sup>1</sup>) for geographical descriptions of mentioned tribes.

<sup>9</sup>Shortened N.S. and S.S. respectively.

The difference is even more evident when we think of the number of characters needed for expressing the language. To read a Chinese newspaper you have to know at least a basic 3000–4000 characters, but a syllabic script uses a limited number of characters.

The Old-Greek Linear-B Syllabary (deciphered by Michael Ventris and reported by Chadwick [1961] is certainly a rare exception with its 87 characters, because the average number of characters of any given syllabary is between 30–40 characters.

The Mangyan Syllabaries with 18 basic characters for the Northern Script and 17 basic characters for the Southern Script belong certainly to the “easy-to-learn” writing systems. It is true that the Philippine syllabaries to which the Mangyan scripts belong, have been tagged not infrequently as “alphabets” by eminent researchers, like Marcilla, Marche, Pardo de Tavera and also Fletcher Gardner. I would, however, call them syllabaries because each of their characters or signs represents a full syllable consisting of a vowel alone or consonant and vowel.

As I mentioned above, the Mangyan scripts employ a limited number of basic characters, three of them representing the vowels ‘a’, ‘i’, ‘o’ and the rest are syllables with the value of a consonant plus ‘a’. These characters all stand for *open* syllables, so even when *closed* syllables have to be expressed, like: ‘bang’, ‘bal’, ‘bat’, etc., it will all be written with the same character for ‘ba’. This might appear confusing, and in reality it very often is. It is simply left to the intelligence of the reader to figure out from the context which final consonant has to be supplied, if any at all.

Misspellings and misunderstandings in the reading of the script are therefore very common, and any Mangyan reading a message will give generous allowance for this imperfection in the back of his mind. What Fletcher said (1943:2) of the Philippine Syllabaries, that they are easy to write but difficult to read, is equally applicable to the Mangyan scripts.

I remember an amusing incident, where a Mangyan who wanted to borrow some money, handed me a piece of bamboo expressing his wish. (Of course, he could have told me his request in a quicker and clearer way, but he preferred to “tell” me in writing.) The characters of the first line read: A KO MA TA PA SA I YO, meaning evidently in his “trade Tagalog”: “Ako’y magtapat sa iyo (na wala na akong pera) . . .”, but to tease him, I read: “Ako’y matapang sa iyo”! (I’m violent against you). The Mangyan, of course, protested that he did not mean that.

It should be noted here, therefore, that the Mangyan Syllabaries, like their relatives among the ancient Philippine Scripts, have NO means of expressing the final consonant. It is true, that the Old Tagalog Script used by Padre Francisco Lopez<sup>10</sup> in his “Belarmino” (published in the 17th Century) employs as diacritic mark a small cross appended to a character which annuls the vowel and permits the word to end in a consonant. However, the use of diacritic marks in this way, is considered an innovation introduced by Padre Lopez for the easier reading of the Ilokano Catechism. Apparently the Mangyans never felt the need for introducing a similar aid for the efficient reading of their scripts.

There is also no indication whatsoever that the Mangyan Scripts ever possessed a similar consonant indicator, but it is interesting to note, that the Indic Scripts (considered the forebears of the Philippine Syllabaries) employed an accurate system of expressing the final consonant. It was done by diacritic marks, like the “Anusvara”, by adding the

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<sup>10</sup>Thus according to Marcilla (1895:38).

requested consonant in "mini-size" character to the syllable itself, or by making this final consonant, as the first one of the next cluster of syllables, one on top of the other. In an arrangement like that, it was understood that the characters (basically ending in "a") should be read as consonants only, with the vowel value only going with the last character.<sup>11</sup> That is the way still in use by the Scripts of the modern languages in India, like: Hindi and Mahrati, as it was done by the Old Sanskrit and Pali.

However, to go back to the Philippine Scripts, it is a good thing that the Mangyan Scripts, like the ancient Philippine syllabaries, retained the diacritic marks for expressing syllables with the vowels "i" and "o". The Mangyans call this mark "kulit" (the "kudlit" of Tagalog). It is a short horizontal line. When placed *over* the basic character, it becomes a syllable ending in "i". When it is placed *under* the basic character, it becomes a syllable ending in "o". Though by principle, these "kulits" should be separated from the basic character, often they become attached to it, and form a single unit. In some instances these "single units" look like new characters where the original basic character can no longer be recognized.<sup>12</sup> These vocalizing diacritic marks are clearly inherited from the Indic Scripts mentioned and the known syllabaries of Indonesia, but whereas these Indic Scripts use a battery of diacritic marks to express the more than ten different vowels of their language, the Mangyan Scripts (in line with the Philippine syllabaries) have only two diacritic vowel marks left.<sup>13</sup> I hasten to say, however, that it is sufficient to express the vowel values of the Mangyan languages concerned.

Considering the lack of a final consonant, the lack of spacing between words (there are no commas, no periods, no capitals), and the frequent (but tolerated) mistakes of the writer omitting a syllable here and there, it is quite a mental exercise to read with fluency a written text in either of the two Mangyan Syllabaries. That the Mangyans manage to do so, should certainly make us respect and admire the intellectual capacities of these peoples.

In the Mangyan scripts in general, a single character stands for a single syllable with a fixed consonant and vowel value, but there are certain characters with a dual function. The Buhid Mangyans, who have the letter "F" in their language, will use the character for "P" to express the syllable "FA". The Hanunoo-Mangyans when writing the letter "R" will use the character for "L", because there is no separate character available for that.<sup>14</sup> However, I must hasten to say that this confusion with "la" and "ra" only exists in the Southern Script, because the Northern Script *does* have a separate character for "ra" etc.

<sup>11</sup>A similar division of the written word if applied to the English sentence: "This is good", would read like: "Thi si sgoo d!". That is still used by the Scripts of the modern languages in India like Hindi and Mahrati, as it was done by the Old Sanskrit and Pali.

<sup>12</sup>It is my belief that the characters for "I" (or "E"), and "U" (or "O") in the Philippine (+ Mangyan) Syllabaries, are originally the basic sign for "A", with the "kudlit" addition for "I" ("E") and "U" ("O") respectively. This arrangement can still be found in the Buginese (Makassarese) scripts of South Celebes and the Redjang and Lampung scripts of South-Sumatra, Indonesia.

<sup>13</sup>The ones for "I" ("E") and "U" ("O")

<sup>14</sup>In some cases, however, these Mangyans try to make a distinction between "ri" and "ro" and "lo". However, this seems to be an "invention" of the Mangyans to exclude misspellings. Moreover, there are several different ways to make this "distinction".

concerning the direction of writing the script, from left to right, the other way around, upwards or downwards, etc., Fletcher Gardner devotes a whole chapter to this supposed problem, calling it the "Axis of the writing". I don't think that there are any difficulties at all, if it is considered that the Mangyan writes in a direction AWAY FROM THE BODY. A very practical reason for this, is certainly to avoid being hurt by his sharp "pen"; in his case, a pocketknife or sharp bolo. Whether the person will write from "left to right" or from "right to left", depends completely on whether the person is right- or left-handed.

In the first case, the writing progresses from left to right along the length of the bamboo; in the second case, when the person is a "kaliwete" or left-handed, his script will be written in the reverse, a mirror-image script that reads from right to left. The reason for this is obvious: because the left-handed person also writes "away from the body".<sup>15</sup>

The direction of the script, however, is of no importance to the Mangyan, because anybody among them can read a text, whether he sees it straight in front of him, or upside-down, or in mirror-image script. This interesting mental faculty is also becoming apparent now among the Mangyans who started to learn the Roman script. They are often seen reading a book upside down without having the least difficulty in understanding the text or even the pictures. The horrified Tagalog teacher, of course, upon seeing this, will teach the Mangyan pupil how to hold a book in the conventional way!

The question might be asked how it happened that this kind of script could survive until the present day, among these primitive peoples, whereas it became extinct among the other groups in the Philippines? Some of the reasons might be the following:

- 1) there was NO OTHER SCRIPT that could easily replace it, as happened with the ancient Philippine Syllabaries;
- 2) it is an efficient means of communication;
- 3) it is an effective way of memorizing an extensive poetic literature.

As to the *first* reason, Spanish influence had little, if any effect at all, on the Mangyans and their culture. Unlike in other parts of the Philippines where the much easier alphabetic writing in Roman Script gradually replaced the more difficult and often confusing syllabic script, notwithstanding the statement of Chirino (1604) that "there is scarcely a man, and much less a woman, who cannot read and write in letters proper to the Island of Manila".

The *second* reason is clear from the function of writing itself, that the Mangyans have adapted in their own way. When a Mangyan wants to send a message to a distant relative, he can do so by sending a piece of bamboo with the desired communication scratched into it by a knife. For this reason the Mangyans have developed among themselves a kind of postal service that is extremely effective and costs nothing. If, for example, a Mangyan likes to send a note to his relative who lives 10 kilometers away in the interior mountains of the Island, he will attach the bamboo letter to a stick along the common trail that leads in the general direction of its destination. Any Mangyan who passes by and sees the letter, will pick it up and read it. (It seems there are no secrets in the mountains!) If this Mangyan happens to go in the direction of the addressee, he will take the bamboo-letter along, at least up to the point of the trail that leads in the desired direction. He will then leave the letter behind in the same way as he found it, i.e., on a stick along the trail. Another anonymous Mangyan postman will be passing by and taking the letter along in

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<sup>15</sup>Many left-handed Mangyans are actually ambidextrous.

the right direction until it finally reaches the person to whom it is addressed. The whole postal service might take from one to three days.

This means of communication was frequently practised in the past, but less so nowadays. The "letters" now often do not reach the addressee, because they are being "disturbed", taken or thrown away by passing lowlanders, who wonder what it means: this piece of bamboo on a stake along the trail!

Fortunately there are still many opportunities left for communicating with bamboo letters. I myself often receive this kind of messages, asking for medicines or other things. Paper is now gradually replacing the bamboo.

The *third* reason for survival of the script is by no means the least, because most of the writings on the bamboo containers are copies of the traditional poems or songs that are still very much alive among the Mangyans. It might be an "urukay", a song of eight syllables heavily interspersed with old Bisayan expressions. But most of the time it will be the "Ambahan", a song with a heptasyllabic meter and final rhyme in all the lines. This song-poem is extensively used in connection with courtship and serenading, often in a symbolic way.

I believe that it is due to the existence of the Indic-derived script as part of the Mangyan culture, that this form of literature is still very much alive nowadays, and is known by about 80 per cent of the Mangyans, old and young alike. The reverse, however, of this statement is also true: that the Ambahan-lore certainly accounts for the almost 70 per cent of literacy among the Mangyan population of Southern Mindoro. This is all the more amazing if we consider that there is no established method or system of instruction in learning to write the syllable characters. If a Mangyan now knows the script, it is mainly because he was interested in it. He learned it by observing, copying and asking from the experts until he became an expert himself.

Incidentally, the Ambahan literature with its almost infinite possibilities and variations, has so intrigued me that I started collecting and studying them for the past years. It seems that the almost 2,200 Ambahans I have collected and studied in the meantime are only a fraction of the immense Ambahan literature available.<sup>16</sup>

After this rather lengthy explanation about syllabic writing, that can be applied (to a certain extent) to both the Northern and the Southern Mangyan Syllabaries, I will try now to point out the differences between these two Mangyan Scripts. Even if they undoubtedly belong to the same group of syllabic writings found in the Philippines, there are several external differences between the two Mangyan Scripts, that justifies their classification into distinct Syllabaries. The Mangyans themselves will be the first ones to testify to that.

When a Hanunoo-Mangyan would be confronted with the Northern Script, at a first glance he might think that he could easily read it. But upon closer examination he will have to admit that he cannot. The reason is not because of the difference in the language used in the script: Buhid versus Hanunoo-Mangyan. The reason is simply, that certain characters are completely different from the Southern Script he is used to, and other characters, although they look the same, are completely different in consonant and vowel value.

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<sup>16</sup>A mimeographed publication is available with more than 250 Ambahans, translated and arranged around the life-cycle of the Mangyans. Vide: Postma (1970).

Actually, the fact that there are two distinct Mangyan syllabaries existing in Mindoro, might not yet be known officially to the linguistic world (or to whatever field the study of writing systems belong). As mentioned above, Dr. Harold Conklin asserted that there was only one kind of syllabary existing among the Hanunoo-Mangyans and Buhid alike (1949<sup>1</sup>). As far as I know, there is no official record yet about the existence of a second Mangyan script, different from the one known already.

It goes to the credit of the German team of Meyer, Foy, and Schadenberg that they suspected the existence of more than one syllabary in Mindoro, and the same can be said of Fletcher Gardner (1943), but lack of comparative and convincing material never gave them the opportunity to prove it beyond a doubt.

It gives me a great pleasure to present here some evidence that there is a second type of Mangyan script of Mindoro; that which I have referred to already as the Northern script. This script is different from that known so far, and which I have described as the Southern Script.

It was in 1967 that I first heard about the existence of the Northern Script, but not until 1968, after a fieldtrip, was I convinced that indeed this script did exist. A typhoon was the reason that the fieldtrip had to be interrupted; and that I could not get enough material for comparing both scripts sufficiently.<sup>17</sup> In August 1970, I went again to the area, together with a Peace Corps Volunteer, and we made a survey about the extent of the Northern Script, collecting as many samples of the script as we could lay hands on.

Aside from the above-mentioned observations on the Mangyan scripts in general, the following are the differences between the Northern and the Southern Script:

- 1) The N.S. contains a total of 18 distinct characters, because the "RA" is expressed with a separate character; the S.S., with its 17 distinct characters, expresses the letter "RA" by using the character for "LA". There is no separate character for "RA", nor is there any indication that it ever existed.<sup>18</sup>
- 2) The N.S. is used in two variations called the "BIG TYPE" and the "SMALL TYPE", against the S.S. where the "BIG TYPE" variation is not known. Technically, however, it could easily be imitated.
- 3) The characters of the N.S. are more rounded in shape, and are more closely related to the ancient Philippine syllabaries. The characters of the S.S. are generally sharp and pointed in shape and bear less resemblance with the ancient Philippine syllabaries.
- 4) Only a limited number of people still know the N.S., but the Mangyans using the S.S. are not difficult to find and easily number more than 5000 persons.
- 5) The use of the N.S. appears to be limited to occasional writing only, but the use of the S.S. is practically unlimited.

The following is a commentary on each of these different traits:

*ad 1)* The N.S. with its 18 characters is still inadequate to express clearly every sound

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<sup>17</sup>An article announcing the existence of this Southern Script was published in a commemorative issue in honor of the late Dr. H. Otley Beyer, in "San Carlos Publications, Vide: Postma, 1968. However, certain views expressed there have been revised in this publication.

<sup>18</sup>Some Hanunoo-Mangyans from the area northeast San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, express the "RA" by a character different from the "LA".

of the Buhid language. I have mentioned already the use of the character for "PA" to express the letter "F", but the Buhid language has moreover some consonant clusters that cannot be properly expressed by the available syllable characters. The characters that come closest in sound are therefore selected, like the sound "MWA" is expressed by the character for "MA", and the sound "NYA" by the characters "NGA" or "NA".<sup>19</sup>

*ad 2)* The two variations of the N.S. depend mainly on the technique of writing. When the broad side of the bolo is used for engraving the characters, it will result in the "dak-dahulan" or "big" script. When the sharp tip of the bolo is used, the scratches in the bamboo come out fine and thin and it is called the "garugbutan" or "small" script. The occasion for writing the one or the other seems to depend on the mood of the writer or the writing material available.

*ad 3)* Of the characters of the N.S. more rounded in shape than the corresponding ones in the S.S., are particularly evident: the "ba", "ma", "nga", and "wa". The N.S. characters for "ba", "la", "ma", "na" and "nga" are much closer to the general Philippine Syllabaries than the corresponding ones of the S.S. In the N.S., moreover, the diacritic vowel-marks (kudlit) are more separated from the basic character and their position is more central when placed over or under the character. Certain exceptions (like "no") might indicate other borrowings.

*ad 4)* During our visit to five different settlements in the N.S. area, we collected the individual writing samples of 32 Buhid-Mangyans, mostly adults. From the information of the people we came to the conclusion that these 32 persons represented about 70 per cent of the total number of those who knew the script. The area wherein the N.S. is still extant might not be larger than approximately 25 square kilometer.

As mentioned, those using the S.S. number at least 150 times as many as the 32 of the N.S.; the area, moreover, wherein the S.S. is being constantly used occupies practically the southern portion of Mindoro, within at least three municipalities.

*ad 5)* Almost the only material whereon the N.S. could be found, was on the long bamboo tubes used for watercontainers. In fact, I bought two of these containers for a further study of the script. The other materials used for the N.S. were very perishable, like sugarcane, the rib of a banana-leaf and the leaf of a cactusplant. Quite a difference from the S.S. area. Anything from a budding dwarf coconut to a fallen treetrunk serves as their writingpad. And do not be surprised if the paper money you get for change at a store in Southern Mindoro will be covered with Mangyan Script! (The S.S. of course!)

In the N.S. area, the ambahan was certainly practised, but it did not seem to be as popular as among the Hanunoo-Mangyans of the S.S. Frankly speaking, however, it was very clear that because of the pressure of modern times and because of the Buhid-Mangyan's inability to catch up with it, they were economically and materially much poorer than their Southern Mangyan neighbors. It might be one of the reasons that these Mangyans simply had no time to spend on the Script culture; they were too busy with the "struggle for survival."

I have already somewhat pointed out the striking similarities of the Mangyan Scripts with the ancient Philippine Syllabaries. For comparative purposes I have brought together

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<sup>19</sup>It should be noted that the Old-Indic Scripts (as still many of the Indonesian writing systems today) do have a separate character for "NYA". It is hard to understand why it was not "borrowed" by the Philippine Syllabaries, since "NYA" is a common possessive pronoun ending in several Philippine languages.

in one chart the contemporary scripts of the Mangyans and Tagbanwa compared with some extinct scripts, like a Philippine Syllabary of the 17th century, and an old Indian script (found in Borneo) of the 5th century.

The similarities are evident: like the "o/u", "ba", "da", "ma", "pa", and "wa", but there are also the differences that cannot be easily explained, like the "ga", "la", and "ta". An interesting feature to be noted is the "ra" in these scripts. The S.S. and the Tagbanwa Script are using the character "la" for "ra"; the Old Tagalog syllabary does not have it. Probably the character for "da" or "la" was used for "ra". But the "ra" of the N.S. shows a striking resemblance with the "ra" of the Kutei-inscription. The difference in position is of secondary importance.

It is rather unfortunate that no ancient inscriptions have been found in the Philippines, just as they have turned up in great abundance in present Indonesia and India. This is probably because of the perishable materials used by the ancient Filipinos when writing on bamboo and the like. The same is still the case with the Mangyans and their bamboo-“library”.

One must remember that the Hindu and Buddhist influences with strongly developed kingdoms like Sri Vijaya, Kediri and Madjapahit did *not* reach the Philippines. These monarchies certainly furnished the cultural background of which the stone inscriptions of Indonesia are still the witnesses. So far, no ancient inscription in stone or on metal has been found in the Philippines, with the doubtful exception of the Calatagan-pot inscription that does not make sense in the eyes of the epigrapher, because of the inconsistent nature of the characters. It might well be a fake, and betray a common source with the inscribed stones that are persistently being offered for sale in certain curio-shops in del Pilar Street in Manila.

The oldest copies we have of the Mangyan Script are less than 100 years old. Among them are the ones presented in Marcilla's above-mentioned book. They appear to be Tagalog sentences in the S.S. The characters are still very close to the present day writing and don't give us any clues as to the development of the Mangyan syllabaries.

A thorough study of the Mangyan languages and their relationships might reveal some clues. Of importance are also a census of the Mangyan Scripts, their variations, distribution and use among the different age levels. By way of a start in this direction, I have collected so far about 400 individual samples of the two Mangyan Scripts, but since certain areas are not covered yet, no definite conclusions could be deducted from them.

On the origin of the Mangyan Scripts many things could be said, but since this would involve the Philippine Syllabaries as a whole and become rather complicated, I prefer to leave that topic untouched for now. Suffice it to say that the script was introduced to Mindoro, probably in separate waves by migrating Mangyans.<sup>20</sup> Peoples in various parts of Indonesia must have inspired the Mangyans to use and adapt it for their own purpose.<sup>21</sup>

Concerning the future of these contemporary scripts not much can be said with certainty. It is my opinion, however, that the N.S. is bound to become extinct in the near future. The unstable social and economical status of the Buhid tribe in that area does not give it much more chance to survive. Through the landgrabbing and pasture-owning low-

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<sup>20</sup>This was confined to the Mangyans of the Southern part of Mindoro, who belong to one language family. The Northern Mangyan tribes (Alangan, Iraya, etc.) belonging to a separate language

land Filipinos, the living conditions of the Buhid-Mangyans have become extremely difficult, if not impossible. However, as of now, there is still no noticeable lack of interest in their own writing among the Mangyan pupils of Panaytayan where four years of elementary education have been established.

A few final remarks. The Mangyans who so expertly utilize the old syllabaries show a high degree of intelligence and culture. They moreover have shown a mentality of being truly Filipinos, obstinately clinging to the good of their own traditional culture traits, and refusing to adulterate these with outward, foreign influences considered incompatible with their own identity. I am referring here of course to the native syllabaries that defied acceptance of another script.

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