

In Search of the Moro Kalis: A Preliminary Historical Study on a Glorious Weapon of Olden Times

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Abstract: The kris or kalis is the sword associated with the Malay people. Aside from being a weapon, it is also a symbol of heroism in the South East Asian region. Throughout history, valiant Filipinos particularly from Muslim Mindanao, stood their ground and even died with the kris in their hands. Unfortunately, as a weapon it has become obsolete and in the Philippines, is largely forgotten and serves as a mere curiosity in museums and antique shops.

The kris nonetheless remains a significant symbol of Philippine culture and heritage. The craftsmanship involved in its manufacture should be a source of national pride. It is also a sword that played a role in the shaping of Philippine history. These are the reasons why the kris deserves scholarly attention.

There is a tendency to underestimate the value of the kris sword as a mere tribal weapon. Being tribal, people consider it primitive and crude. However, as discovered in this inquiry the kris sword was actually a weapon produced with a very high level of skill and knowledge of blade smithing. The panday who produced the kris swords were among artisans with the most advanced and highest level of skill in the region.

It was also found that historical events had a profound impact on the evolution of the Moro kris. The clash with the Spaniards transformed the Philippine kris from a stabbing to a slashing sword. It also led to the significant increase of size of the sword compared to those in Southeast Asian neighbors. Attempts to control its' use also led to uprisings such as the massacres of Bud Dajo and Bud Bagsak during the American period. The massacres would lead to a change in the method of kris manufacturing and the loss of traditional knowledge.

Using the historical method, this study evaluates the values facets of the kris and its role in Philippine history.