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# Raiders of the Lost Buddha?

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By Walter Wright

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The mystery of a golden Buddha, which has haunted deposed Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos for 15 years, has been resurrected here this week with charges that Marcos and his wife, Imelda, are raiders of the lost treasure.

According to a claim filed with the Justice Department, the \$ 1.7 million in pesos and the \$ 6.5 million worth of jewelry impounded when the Marcoses arrived here in February originate with the missing, gem-stuffed golden statue and other riches unearthed 16 years ago in the Philippine mountains.

The treasure supposedly was gathered by Japanese Gen. Tomoyuki Yamashita, who led occupying forces in the Philippines during World War II.

In January 1971, Philippine treasure hunter and locksmith Rogelio Roxas, then 27, claimed to have found Yamashita's booty after 10 days of tunneling, guided by a map that he said he obtained from the Japanese.

Roxas said the only object he could remove before cave-ins blocked his way was a 2,000-pound, 28-inch, golden Buddha with a removable head.

Three months later, Roxas said, "government agents" bearing a search warrant signed by Marcos' uncle, Judge Pio Marcos, entered Roxas' home at 2 a.m. and took the statue, apparently on grounds that it was a national treasure.

Roxas went to court 15 days later to fight for the idol but, after seeing the object there, insisted that someone had substituted a Buddha made of brass without a

removable head.

In May 1971, Roxas told Filipino investigators that Marcos and his family were involved in the intrigue, alleging that Marcos' mother, Josefa Edralin Marcos, had tried in vain to buy the Buddha from him the day before government agents seized it.

Roxas' charges were made during an investigation led by some of Marcos' arch foes, including three Philippine senators who were to change the course of their nation's history.

Salvador H. Laurel's committee on justice launched an investigation aided by Benigno Aquino and Jovita Salonga. Today, Laurel is vice president of the government that succeeded Marcos, and Salonga heads the Philippines Committee on Good Government, which is battling in courts from Honolulu to Switzerland to recover Marcos' supposed "hidden assets."

Aquino was the opposition leader martyred when he was shot after returning to the Philippines from exile in 1983. His widow, Corazon, is now president.

Salonga's lawyers appeared in court here Monday in their continuing effort to gain possession of pesos, jewelry and gold impounded by U.S. Customs when the Marcoses arrived on a U.S. Air Force jet.

The goods are being held here pending an appeal of U.S. District Court Judge Harold Fong's order to turn them over to the Marcoses.

On Monday, Justice Department attorney John R. Seibert asked Fong to take possession of the goods and remove Customs from the dispute between Salonga's committee and Marcos.

Seibert said that the United States has no interest in that fight and that the Buddha

mystery threatens to complicate the case further. Fong did not indicate when he would rule on the issue.

Lacking standing to sue in the United States, Roxas has turned over his rights to the riches to a Powder Springs, Ga., company run by Felix Dacanay, a Philippines native and U.S. citizen. He calls his company the Golden Buddha Corp.

Last month, Dacanay wrote Attorney General Edwin Meese III asking that the Marcos millions be given to the corporation, which he calls "the rightful owner."

Dacanay claims that Marcos has told journalists that some of his money came from the Yamashita treasure.

A Marcos spokesman said yesterday that "our lawyers don't even consider Dacanay's letter a claim and have argued in court that there is nothing to it and that it has no effect on the Customs Service position in court." Marcos dismissed allegations as "foolish," the spokesman said.

If he were not chief of state, Marcos once told reporters, he would have slapped those who slandered his aged mother by accusing her of being involved in the mystery.

The whereabouts of the golden Buddha remains in dispute, with some Filipinos saying it was melted down and Dacanay saying it may remain intact, stored in a small coastal town in the Philippines.

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