

= Eskaya people =

The Eskaya , less commonly known as the Visayan @-@ Eskaya , is the collective name for the members of a cultural minority found in Bohol , Philippines , which is distinguished by its cultural heritage , particularly its literature , language , dress and religious observances . After the Eskaya first came to public attention in 1980 , these cultural practices were the subject of intense speculation on the part of local journalists and amateur historians who made diverse claims about the ethnolinguistic status of the Eskaya people . The unique Eskayan language and writing system in particular has been a source of fascination and controversy . Some journalists argued that the Eskaya were historically displaced from the Middle East , while others suggested that the community was a cult speaking an invented language . According to Eskaya mythology , the language and script was created through divine inspiration by the ancestor Pinay who based it on the human body . Suppressed by the Spanish colonists , Pinay 's language was said to have resurfaced under the leadership of Mariano Datahan (ca . 1875 ? 1949) , a veteran of Bohol 's republican army . Although the historical existence of Pinay cannot be confirmed , more recent studies that combined linguistic analysis with oral history and genealogical research provide evidence that the Eskaya language was most likely created and disseminated within a generation by a charismatic individual . Today , the Eskaya are officially classified as an Indigenous Cultural Community under The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 (Republic Act No. 8371) . A number of reports have suggested that Eskaya linguistic and cultural education has been in steady decline since the mid @-@ 1980s , although promising revitalisation efforts have also been documented .

= = Area = =

Most members of the Eskaya community inhabit a mountainous area that intersects the municipalities of Duero , Guindulman , Pilar , and Sierra Bullones in the once @-@ forested region of Bohol 's southeast interior . The original Eskaya settlement in Biabas (Guindulman) , was established in 1902 . In 1951 , the second township of Taytay (municipality of Duero) was founded by Fabian Baja in accordance with Datahan 's directions . Significant Eskaya populations are now also found in the nearby townships of Canta @-@ ub , Lundag , Tambongan , Cadapdapan , and Fatimah . In 1996 , the Eskaya community was awarded a certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim by President Fidel Ramos . An official census of the Eskaya population has not yet been made . One report estimates that in 1991 there were 130 Eskaya families living in Bohol .

= = Language and script = =

The Eskayas speak a Boholano dialect of Cebuano in daily life . Boholano @-@ Bisaya is the dominantly used language among the languages spoken by the members of the Eskayan tribe . This variety is used in their close familial interactions , in their conversations with their neighbors in the community , in their transactions in the barangay , school meetings , social gatherings , church rituals and in the trade and commerce . However , they are better known for an auxiliary language , known as Eskayan , or Ineskaya , which is used for prayers , songs , and formal speeches . Lexically , Eskayan shows no clear relationship with any known language (however , considered to be an encryption of Cebuano) although there is strong but inconsistent Spanish influence . A striking feature of the language is its unusual phonotactics .

The Eskayan writing system takes the form of a syllabary of over 1 @,@ 000 characters , all modeled on parts of the human body including internal organs . This unique script has been compared variously to Phoenician , Etruscan , Hebrew , and even the undeciphered script of the Butuan paleograph . While there are no mother @-@ tongue speakers of Eskayan , it is taught to both adults and children in volunteer @-@ run cultural schools . The Eskayan language and script has been the object of ongoing controversy .

= = Religion = =

Under the direction of Mariano Datahan , the group converted en masse to the nascent Philippine Independent Church in about 1902 . Community members revere the entity Suno which is conflated with the Santo Niño , and in addition to weekly church services they are served by appointed spiritual leaders known as biki and beriki . The biki , or bishop , is responsible for performing harvest ceremonies and other rituals such as house blessing . Before a house can be constructed , a ritual is performed in which a spiritual leader asks the permission of the spirits . If permission is not granted , the builder must select a new site . The Eskaya also retain spiritual traditions once widespread in lowland Boholano rural communities .

= = Eskaya society = =

The teaching of Eskayan in the volunteer schools is one of the few remaining cultural practices of the Eskaya community .

Formerly , Eskaya men would wear shirts made of piña raffia with a Chinese @-@ style collar , black breeches , and cotton berets . Women wore piña dresses with bulging sleeves similar to the Spanish @-@ influenced Boholano style (mostly in Biabas) and covered their hair with cotton habits (mostly in Taytay) . Traditionally , women were not permitted to cut their hair short nor wear trousers , and drinking and dancing were universally prohibited . For the most part these customs have been discontinued , however traditional dress is sometimes worn on Sundays and special occasions .

At weddings the parents of the bride offer the couple a glass of water and a comb . The comb is dipped in the water and run through the hair of both bride and groom . Rice is then showered on the couple , connoting plenty .

Until recently , the Eskaya practised a form of communal farming in which a portion of land was tilled for the benefit of the whole community .

= = Literature and mythology = =

Eskaya literature was first dictated for transcription by Mariano Datahan whose words were recorded by personal scribes . These texts ? which comprise local oral history and regional folklore ? have sometimes been referred to by journalists as the karaang mga libro or " old books " . The transcribed oral literature is mostly written in both Cebuano and Eskayan ; one is reported to be in Spanish . The Eskaya stories are fundamental to the community ? s understanding of itself , particularly its origins , belief systems , and practices . One legend tells of how the group first arrived in Bohol from Sumatra . Their first leader , Dangko , had twelve children who settled near Antequera before moving east . Various other Eskayan legends recount the stories of Boholano kings and heroes ; a few of these stories even make reference to actual historical figures such as Jesus Christ , Datu Sikatuna , Ferdinand Magellan , and Francisco " Dagohoy " Sendrijas . As part of their cultural education , students must transcribe five of these texts into lined textbooks at the Eskaya schools .

The Eskaya writings mentioned by researchers are as follows : Abedeja , Ang Alpabeto sa Katsila , Ang Damgo ni Hurayhaber , Ang Lingganay na Ugís , Ang mga hiyas ug Caague ni Mariano Datahan , Ang pagtulun @-@ an sa Bisayas , Aritmetica , Askormos Meneme , Atekeses , Bisayan Declarado , Daylinda , Grinada , Kwadra , Pamatasan , Pinay , Pinulungan , Rangnan , Simplet , Suno , Tumao and Unang Tao sa Bisaya sa Bohol . Identical texts sometimes go by different names and larger texts may subsume smaller ones . Brenda Abregana , a former curator of the Bohol Museum , has mentioned a folded book of esoteric knowledge written in Spanish but its existence has not been established .

= = History = =

Although the Eskaya had been known to people living in the vicinity of Bohol ? s southeast

highlands prior to World War II , it was only in the early 1980s that they came to wider public attention when government agricultural advisers toured the province to introduce Green Revolution policies . Local journalists and researchers have since suggested various theories on the origins of the Eskaya but there is still no broad consensus on the subject .

As far as documented evidence is concerned , genealogies attest that many of the predecessors of those living in the communities today originally came from the town of Loon on Bohol ' s western coast ; Mariano Datahan is reported to have arrived at the site of present @-@ day Biabas at the turn of the nineteenth century ; The Philippine Independent Church in Biabas was established in 1902 ; Datahan wrote a letter to President Manuel Quezon in 1937 ; and the resistance hero Col. Esteban Bernido records a meeting with Datahan in Biabas in 1944 . A project to document the history of the Eskaya community via the Eskayan language is presently being undertaken at The Australian National University .

= = Theories and controversies = =

The Eskaya community has been the object of ongoing controversy , particularly with regards to its status as an indigenous group and the classification of the Eskayan language . Intense speculation in the 1980s and 1990s on the part of journalists and lay historians generated a number of theories that continue to be elaborated without resolution .

It has been argued variously that the Eskaya are a remnant of the original indigenous settlers on Bohol ; that they migrated to Bohol from Sumatra in the seventh century A.D. ; that they are descendants of the resistance groups that fought under Francisco Dagohoy ; that they are a cult or secret society ; or that they are a conscious reconstruction of an imagined pre @-@ colonial society .

Some of the more unusual proposals are that the Eskaya people are a Semitic proto @-@ Christian tribe ; that they possess the lost book of Enoch ; that they are descended from the builders of King Solomon ' s temple ; that their existence proves the imminence of a second Messiah in Bohol ; or that they guard esoteric secrets .

Likewise , the Eskayan speech variety has been associated with languages as disparate as Hebrew , Greek , and Etruscan . Recent studies have revealed that the syntax of Eskayan is virtually identical to that of Boholano @-@ Visayan , lending weight to the theory that Eskayan is actually an auxiliary variety of this language .

= = Film project = =

In an article written by Nickie Wang for the Manila Standard Today on 25 March 2009 , Boholano actor Cesar Montano mentioned that he was interested in producing a feature film on the Eskaya . The following month , Montano announced a working title for the his project , Eskaya : The Quick Brown Fox , and discussed his casting preferences which included the possibility of A @-@ list Hollywood actors like Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise , with Manny Pacquiao in the lead role . The story concerns a wealthy , influential American who is wrongfully implicated in a crime . To prove his innocence he tracks the only witness to the crime into the forests of Bohol where he encounters the Eskaya tribe .

= = Beach Resort = =

There is a beach resort in Panglao named after the Eskaya tribe called Eskaya Beach Resort & Spa .

= = Additional reading = =

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Eskaya Resource Folder

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Hector Santos " The Eskaya Script " in A Philippine Leaf . US , January 25 , 1997 .

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Angelo O. Tubac (2013) Lexical Retrieval in L1 , L2 , L3 , and L4 of the Bilingual Eskayan Tribe in Tay @-@ tay , Duero , Bohol . Unpublished Masteral Thesis . University of San Carlos . Cebu City .