

RAJAH HUMABON

(Ca. 1521)

King of Cebu

The *Chronicle of Pigafetta* gives a glimpse of the life and people of the Philippines during the 1500's. One of the datus or rajahs described in these chronicles is Humabon.

Also known as *Hamabar* or *Humabad*, Datu Humabon was regarded as the "wisest and bravest man on the island" of Sugbu (Cebu), the "king and lord over eight chieftains and over 2,000 lancers." It was he whom Magellan met when he arrived in Cebu in 1521. His was a flourishing kingdom, whose jurisdiction extended over the whole island. He was chieftain of the confederation of barangays and known as their supreme ruler. Cebu was then an entrepot, with a flourishing trade with Siam (Thailand), China, Borneo, etc. This was evident in the ornaments that adorned the bodies and clothes of its people, as well as in the fine china used in its royal houses and court.

When the Spaniards arrived in Cebu in 1521, they found Humabon at his royal residence, which stood on an open plot opposite the landing place. Magellan came face-to-face with Datu Humabon, whom most accounts described as short, fat, and brown-skinned, his broad face having high cheekbones and a flat nose, and his arms tattooed with purple and red geometric patterns that extended to his torso. He wore a yellow silk turban, a scarf embroidered with a needle about his head, and a loincloth. A necklace of large pearls hung from his neck, two large gold earrings with precious gem bedecked his ears, and gold rings girded his thick fingers.

Magellan's real mission, which was to sail on to the Moluccas, was sidetracked once he entered Philippine waters. Christianization became a priority, almost as much as colonization for trade and resources. Magellan lost no time in impressing on Humabon the greatness of Christianity. Captivated by its teachings, Humabon decided to convert, making him the first native chieftain to embrace Christianity.

On April 14, 1521, Humabon - along with his wives, relatives, courtiers, and practically the entire populace of Cebu - was baptized by Father Valderama. He was named Carlos, in honor of King Charles I of Spain, while his principal wife was named Juana, after King Charles' mother, Johanna. Magellan also gave her an image of the child Jesus as a gift, and had a large cross, erected, to mark the baptismal site.

On April 28, another native chieftain, Lapu-Lapu, in the Battle of Mactan, vanquished Magellan. This made Humabon lose faith in the Spaniards and turn into an avenger - *the first Filipino to avenge the honor of women*. He hatched a plot to kill all the Spaniards who remained on the island, to avenge their rape of Cebu's women during their entire stay.

Humabon invited the Spaniards to a banquet. The unwary guests led by Duarte and Barbosa, two new fleet commanders, soon found themselves at the mercy of Humabon's warriors. Learning of the massacre, the Spaniards remaining in Cebu immediately left the island.

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