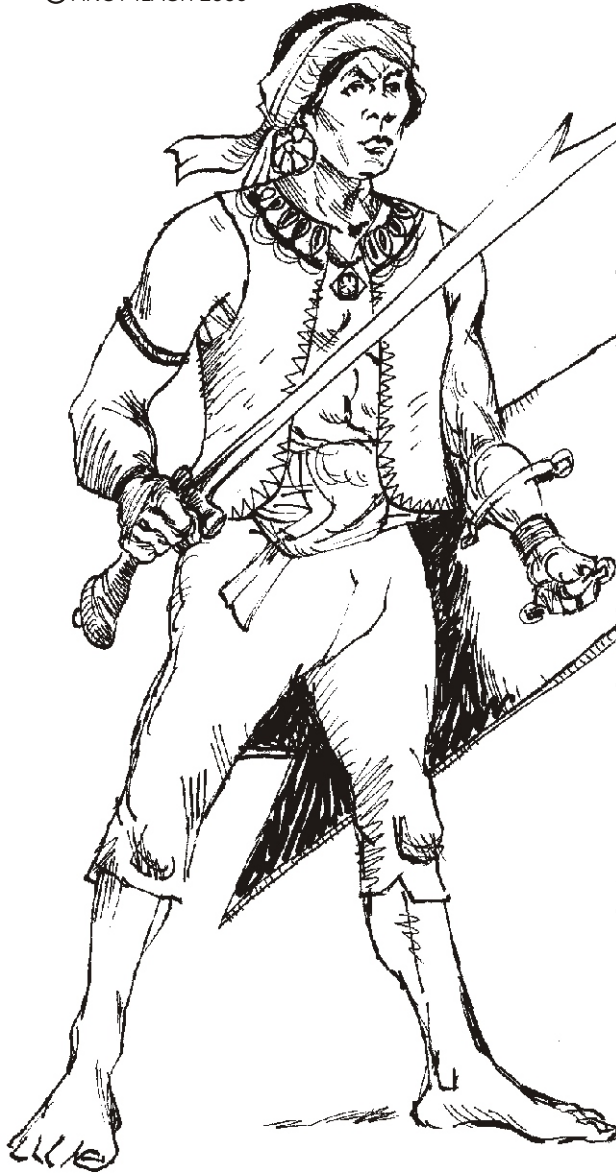


## LAPU-LAPU'S DECISION



It was late in the dry season when Humabon's messenger brought news of the strange visitors and that I was commanded to attend a feast in honor of their arrival. While visitors from other lands were common, I had heard rumors that these men were very different from the traders of Ch'in and Arabia; that they came in odd shaped boats and claimed they had sailed around the world from a land called Espana; also, that their skin was pale with brown and yellow hair and eyes the color of the ocean; and they dressed in heavy drab-colored fabrics covered in shells of metal armor.

I thought of other reports I had received concerning these visitors. Their outright disrespect for our ways and ignorance of our rituals made me wary of their motives. Their simple intentions of establishing trade with our people also made me suspicious. And then to be commanded by Humabon - as if I owed fealty to him- and as if these men were "maharlika"- made me angry. Yet, I continued to listen quietly as the messenger continued.

As the message took on a different theme and shifted to the king these men owed allegiance to and their god whom they called Christ I became uneasy. In disbelief I listened as it was described how the visitors believed their god was the "one true god" and that our gods were false. They had been sent to convert our people to their religion and claim our lands as part of a kingdom far across the seas. When I heard that Humabon had submitted to their demands, renounced Bathala in their ritual of baptism, accepted the sovereignty of their king on behalf of all the people, including Maktan, the fire in my heart went ablaze. And my anger turned to rage.

The messenger having delivered his message waited expectantly for my reply. I looked at him and had to remind myself that he was only the messenger and repeated the words of Humabon. I mastered the beast I felt raging to be released and reached inside for the peaceful wisdom of my ancestor spirits which has guided and protected my people and came to a decision. Thus I told the messenger: return to Humabon and tell him that Maktan was not his to make decisions for, that we would never accept these visitors as friends, their king as our own, or their god in our rituals, and no matter what powers they claimed to possess we would fight if they tried to force us and we would win.