

Ramblings - Water Diviners and Other Beliefs

Two days ago, my friend Wolfgang called from his farm to say he had the reputedly best water diviner in the province at his place doing a survey, and that perhaps I would also like to avail of such services. While our farms have water piped in from the municipal water district, it is slow and expensive. Wolfgang is lucky in that he has another source, a rice irrigation canal from a river nearby. For a nominal fee to the gov't agency, he draws water from the canal and pumps water up the hill to his farm. But he has fears that the canal is on the verge of collapse, and the dry spell due to El Niño would be disastrous to his commercial vegetable farm, hence the water diviner to see if he can dig a deep well.

Our situation is different. We need water mainly for some veggie plots and for washing down a few cows, and nothing we have is commercial in scope. The 1" dia municipal water line is inadequate at times of high usage, so I was considering building a large surface tank or pond as a reservoir. It would also serve as a dipping pool in warm weather. Whether the eventual water source would be municipal water, or a deep well, I had to first make a cost analysis. If the water diviner could pinpoint how deep a well to dig, and the possible water flow, then my calculations would be more accurate.



Manny, the diviner, was totally out of context from my pre-conceived notions: he came in a well appointed jeep, with a walkie-talkie strapped to his waist. However, the water divining rod he had was, as expected, a Y-cut branch. He said it was from a guava tree for its flexibility so when it vibrates when it senses water, it wouldn't shatter as a harder wood might. He didn't offer it to me to hold, though Wolfgang said he did feel some vibrations when he held it over what apparently was a water vein in his farm. Manny had pointed out exactly

where, down to the 102 ft depth and the possible water flow. Unfortunately, at our farm, it was zilch, so he said. Maybe it was coincidence but Manny could trace a portion of the buried water pipes in our area, starting from where the faucet was. And he did tell of testimonials from high gov't officials for his past prowess. Turns out he was an agricultural graduate now working for some sugar planters. He was in between supervising the loading of 40 trucks of cane for the sugar mill, no wonder the jeep and the walkie-talkies. Sugar prices are now very high and sugar planting is lucrative.

Yet, one of the farm hands swear that our large balet tree cannot be that large without a easy source of water underground. And on the neighboring farm about 300 meters away, they have a deep well. So should I believe the water diviner? Incidentally, that farm also had a large balet tree which was felled by the owner. He died suddenly soon after, and the belief was that he displaced and displeased some elementals. Whether true or not, I don't intend to fell our tree.

So while on the subject of stange beliefs, let me recount some recent incidents. Photos below show a chicken sacrifice.



We had just finished constructing our farm rest house, and Nitoy, our relative and farm boss, who has proven to be a shaman of sorts, insisted on the "Padugo" ritual. This involved sacrificing two chickens with their blood sprinkled around the premises, then cooking them (without salt), and then laying them on a table with banana leaves and with candles at each corner, plus a few eggs and rice. Next photo shows him circling the table with a smoldering coconut husk which had some incense-like ingredients. Then the almost silent incantations for a few minutes, waiting for the "spirits" to react and accept the sacrifice. After the all clear sign was made, we guests had to partake of the food. Not surprisingly, Wolfgang, in the fourth photo, was familiar with all these. He recounted about how his wife's folks had had similar rituals on some of their farm projects, and that the shaman actually called out and went off to the far corners of the area to call on the "elementals." Then, he said, as a good measure, they also had the regular priest blessing. This is exactly what happened to us, too. A nephew priest came around a few days later and sprinkled holy water all around the place. For the non-initiated, wouldn't that be a strange ritual, too?

But some beliefs get stranger yet. A few years ago during the previous Mayor's administration, the city council started building a resort at what many consider was a god-forsaken place among the mangrove forests some 8-9 kilometers out of town, on a narrow road that often gets waterlogged at high tide. But the main attraction was that there was a rare hot spring in the area. The plan was to build a swimming pool (photo on right), then clear up more of the area for the usual tourist trappings, eventually improving the road, etc. So the then-mayor had some of the large trees cut. And lo, the hot water spring dried up. Not only that, the mayor got very sick, lost the election, and eventually died. Everybody then said that the "duendes" (dwarfs) in the forest were displeased, and turned off the water tap, and did the mayor in. This hot spring resort is now a white elephant. Believe it or not!

