

# SURIGAO TREASURE

In 1981, Berto Morales, a farmer employed as a bulldozer operator in an irrigation project in Surigao struck gold. He discovered a treasure trove of gold ornaments while bringing down a hill to collect filling materials.

The discovery, hitherto unknown to the public, is among the largest collection of Philippine archaeological gold in the country as well as in the rest of the world.

Recovered in association with 10th to 13th century Chinese ceramics, the gold ornaments show similarities in form and iconography with artifacts of other cultures in the region.

Experts believe the discovery will rewrite history.

Nothing of this scale and magnitude and magnificence has ever been seen before, says Dr. Florina Capistrano-Baker, former curator of the Ayala Museum, of the gold find.

Gold specialist Dr. John Miksic of the National University of Singapore describes the Surigao treasure as the single most important tangible heritage of the country.

Experts say jewelers today cannot imitate or even come close to the quality of the workmanship of the intricate designs of our ancestors gold.

Part of the Surigao treasure is the Sacred Thread, which is worn during ceremonies and weighs more than four kilos. Baker says the belt-like object is so heavy a mannequin broke because of its sheer weight.

PROBE reporter, Cheche Lazaro, searches for Berto Morales in Surigao. From then on, Lazaro uncovers that Bertos gold discovery takes many twist and turns -- involving threats to his life and family.

With the help of historians and experts, Lazaro reveals an amazing story about Philippines forgotten civilization before the Spanish colonization of the archipelago in the 16th century and how the archaeological gold artifacts associated with the pre-colonization period point to a sophisticated civilization -- something that will give us a sense of identity and pride as a people.

Supported by historical accounts about pre-colonial Philippines, the Surigao gold collection show that we were important players in the region 1,000 years ago and that gold was an important link between our country and the rest of our neighbors.