

# Moriones Festival

**TAGALOG, MARINDUQUE ISLAND PROVINCE, CENTRAL PHILIPPINES.**

*This is a street performance done by the Tagalog of Marinduque province. It is a Christian Lenten season practice.*



© Renato S. Rastrollo (Boac, 2000)

“Roman centurions” in the parade of moriones in their scowling-faced cowls during a Good Friday performance of the beheading of the centurion, Longinus, in Marinduque island.



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(left) The glaring head masks belong to the Moriones, who dramatize the passion of Christ during the Lenten season, as they mingle among the madding crowd in the streets of Gasán in Marinduque province. (right) The Roman executioner holding his axe and the “beheaded” flower-bedecked cowl of Longinus.

FROM HOLY WEDNESDAY to Easter Sunday, male penitents from the towns of Gasán, Mogpog, Boac and Santa Cruz march the streets wearing personal variations of the Roman soldier dress. A distinct feature of the dress is a *morion* (mask), which is a painted wooden head cover consisting of a frowning face and a Roman helmet. On Good Friday, the masked penitents (*moriones*) dramatize the *kalbariohan* – portions of the story of the Passion of Christ. It is a street play similar to the *cenaculo* or *sinakulo* and starts at high noon. On Easter Sunday, the moriones stage the *pugutan* – the beheading of the Roman centurion, Longinus – who suffered this fate at the hands of the Roman soldiers because of his conversion to Christianity.

A morion participates in this ritual as a vow or as a form of penance. The reasons for doing it varies for each person – thanksgiving for being cured from an ailment (either the morion himself or a member of his family), petition for good health and bountiful harvest, or simply devoutness in the faith.

By donning the mask and the uniform of a Roman soldier, a morion believes that he participates in the passion of Christ. With Holy Week in the Philippines falling usually during the summer months (March or April) with temperatures ranging from 30-32 degrees Celsius (86-89.6 degrees Fahrenheit) and the humidity at about 71%, it is extremely difficult for a morion to walk around the town the whole day for about five days.

The features of a morion mask help when the penitent walks around the streets, either on his own or as part of a group. Like in any play, a group of moriones simulates a sword duel and general mayhem. Being incognito, they are subjected to taunts from passersby, specifically children, who they scare off in turn with grunts. Aside from a sword, a morion usually holds a pair of wood sticks called *kalutang* which he beats as he walks around the streets. The sound made by the *kalutang* signals that a morion is roaming around in the vicinity.

The traditional form of the *pugutan* was a free-ranging search and chase of Longinus through the streets of the town, up the trees and so on, until he is finally caught. Before being executed, he declaims a prayer from the *Pasyon Generis*. The mask of Longinus always has one eye closed.

Morion masks are called different names depending on size and design: there is the *Morion Bastos*, *Morion Tanga*, *Morion Bungo*, *Morion Taas Panga*, *Morion Bingi*, *Morion Taas Binti* and others.

In the 1970s, the town of Gasán introduced changes to the performance through a scripted play by the writer, Celso al. Carunungan, that now uses a stage, taped dialogue and background music. Now, there are re-enactments of biblical scenes. Other contemporary changes have been added.