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## Defenses of Bicol Towns in the Nineteenth Century

FRANCISCO MALLARI S.J.

The eighteenth to the early nineteenth century was a stirring time in Bicol. The defenseless coastal settlements and pueblos of the region were reeling under the devastating attacks of Muslim raiders who sailed annually in swift, shallow-draft and well-armed ships on their pillaging and slave-raiding expeditions when the southwest monsoon blew. They set out from the mangrove-fringed inlets of Iligan Bay and Illana Bay, the fortified raiders' lairs of Tunkil, Balangingi and Jolo, the remote islands of Pilas, Panguturan, Basilan and northern Borneo and, with greater frequency, from their raiding advance posts in Masbate, Burias and other outlying islets.<sup>1</sup> The intensity and destructiveness of their raids in the late eighteenth century alone, in the diocese of Nueva Caceres, stand out in Bishop Manuel de la Concepcion y Matos' report to the Spanish Sovereign, on 29 June 1758. He described the raids as the worst over the years. He cited ten towns and two missions completely destroyed, ten churches looted and burned, about 8,000 indios captured or killed, one priest killed, two captured, and the capital, Caceres, under alert one night for a raid.<sup>2</sup>

On 28 January 1799, the Manila government sent an enquiry to pueblo heads. In response, each pueblo in Albay held its *junta* or council consisting of *principales*, *cabezas de barangay* and *pueblo-people*, presided over by the *gobernadorcillo*, in the pre-

For abbreviations, see p. 209.

1. PNA Mindanao/Sulu, 1770-1897, folios 2b, 56-56b. PNL HDP Masbate, No. 58, p. 1; No. 60, p. 2. Thomas Forrest, *A Voyage to New Guinea & the Moluccas From Balambangan* (London: G. Scott, 1779), p. 302.

2. Domingo Abella, *Bikol Annals* (Manila: n.p., 1954), I. 105-06.

sence of the parish priest, to propose necessary measures to pursue and check Muslim hostilities. One *visita* and twenty-seven pueblos submitted the proceedings of their *juntas*.<sup>3</sup>

### DEFENSIVE WEAPONS

The reports on defensive weapons in hand inspired compassion and admiration. There were no mutual defense agreements as yet among the pueblos and *visitas*. Firearms, like large caliber cannons and muskets, were scarce for lack of funds. Some of those available were unserviceable either from damaged parts or shortage of balls and gunpowder.<sup>4</sup> The pueblo of Tambongan had only one musket — a very damaged one. Libog owned three stone *baluartes* (forts) without cannons except a falconet that had no balls or powder. The pueblo of Sorsogon, a strategic place guarding the Strait of San Bernardino, possessed guns but no powder. Malinao was in the same predicament, and its embattled people had to meet well-armed raiders with campilans, spears and poisoned arrows. Mobo in Masbate, Bulusan and Tabaco had the second largest cast-iron cannons in the province, three 6-pounders, but all were useless. Two suffered from an enlarged priming hole, the third had no munitions. With reason, Mobo's report called attention to its "so deplorable condition."<sup>5</sup>

In 1772, the Governor General had distributed arms and ammunition to beleaguered pueblos. Baleno, one of the frequent targets of raiders in the island of Masbate, received 8-pounder cannons, the largest in the province, with a good supply of balls; Gubat, four cannons, four falconets, balls, canister shots and powder; Palanas one 2-pounder with fifty balls, a box of powder, four muskets with 200 cartridges; and Malinao, eight muskets.

3. PNA EP-A 1799-1864, vol. 2, fols. 2-56b.

4. The production of gunpowder was usually out by contract between the government and private individuals or commercial firms. Rafael Diaz Arenas, *Memorias historicas y estadisticas de filipinas* (Manila: Imprenta del Diario de Manila, 1850), Cuaderno 13, p. 8. Francisco Leandro de Viana, Attorney-General of the Audiencia of Manila in 1756, observed that the Philippines should really not be importing gunpowder and other war material on account of the abundance of raw materials. He blamed the Spaniards' lethargy. Maria Lourdes Diaz-Trechuelo, "Philippine Economic Development Plans, 1746-1779," *Philippine Studies* 12 (April 1964): 217.

5. PNA EP-A 1799-1864, vol. 2, fols. 13, 26b, 36, 48b, 54.

But in a series of dubious moves that insinuated the insidious arms trade between government officials and Muslims, several pueblos lost their arms to public officials. *Alcalde* Juan Duran took away Lagonoy's four muskets on the pretext that he would have them repaired at the Royal Armory in Manila but never brought them back. Over the years, various *alcaldes* took away Malinao's muskets for their damaged locks or triggers without returning them. Bulusan, which warded off raiders with the help of other weapons and 6 muskets, lost those muskets. For unknown reasons, *Alcalde* Duran took away four and Alejo Rodriguez, a visiting official, two. So precious were firearms that the ownership of a bronze cannon became the object of an emotion-packed dispute between Casiguran and Juban after both became independent pueblos.<sup>6</sup>

Fortuitous incidents also caused further losses. Going by boat to Mobo in Masbate for the elections, the *Teniente* of the visita of Palanas and his escorts were involved in a sea mishap, dropping two muskets in the sea and leaving only two bad ones for that small visita where firearms were then as valuable, if not more, than the inhabitants' daily rice and fish. In a subsequent conflagration in the same visita, the rest of its munition supply was destroyed. Bacacay, too, reported its complete shortage of arms and powder due to annual invasions.<sup>7</sup>

Port pueblos were sometimes lucky recipients of ship skippers' largess of guns or munitions when a war vessel put in to obtain water. It happened in Casiguran and Juban. The depleted ammunition supply of Casiguran was replenished with donations of powder and bullets by the Commander of the ship *Magallanes* and three boxes of powder by the Commander of the frigate *Lucia*, Don Francisco Riquelmi. Also Juban received the same amount of powder from the Commander of the frigate *Cabeza*, Ventura Barcaestigui. Three of Donsol's bronze 1- pounder were donated by the famous "scourge of pirates," Jose Gomez. But there is no gainsaying that losses due to human as well as natural causes considerably reduced each pueblo's defensive capability.<sup>8</sup>

6. Ibid., fols. 6, 22b, 26b, 39b, 40b, 42b, 56. To deter public officials from misappropriating arms and munitions, the *Tribunal de Real Hacienda de Manila*, on 10 May 1799, issued 14 instructions to *Alcalde* Mayor Manuel de Garay of Albay which he ought to observe regarding the war material in his province. PNA VP-A, vol. 11, fols. 1-6.

7. PNA EP-A 1799-1864, vol. 2, fols. 6, 34b.

8. Ibid., fols. 42b, 45, 53b. One big advantage of the Muslims was they made their own gunpowder, as seen by Fray Joaquin Sancho, a missionary of Paniqui who was cap-

Rarely did a pueblo possess a cannon or musket or shot or gunpowder of its own. It was either the property of the King or Alcalde, or Church or Curate, or another pueblo. This arrangement proved disadvantageous in an emergency. The guns with their munitions were not always mounted at the baluarte or deposited in a public armory that was easily accessible at a moment's need, but in the homes of the owners. For instance, the report of the pueblo of Albay professed ignorance of the number of muskets and balls, quantity of powder and other stores in hand because the *Alcalde Mayor* who was in charge had them all. Only when there was a report of enemies did he distribute the muskets and munitions. Sometimes, however, the Alcalde or the parish priest was out of town, or necessity would compel a pueblo to take back a cannon or muskets it had loaned to another pueblo.<sup>9</sup>

Most pueblos possessed a sufficient number of bladed weapons, and in the hands of Bicolanos, they were deadly. With only arrows and campilans, Sorsogueños reduced the frequency of raids in their pueblo. But some, like Bato in Catanduanes, were so poor that only a few inhabitants could afford to procure bladed weapons. They, therefore, supplemented their deficiency with poisoned arrows, *bagacay* stems (a variety of bamboo) sharpened to a lance point, *palma brava* clubs (a variety of palm), stones and "con el favor de Dios", they battled the raiders and triumphed. Over the years, with only these weapons, the inhabitants of Tiwi, Albay captured more than a dozen Muslim raiders not counting the dead whom they sent to Manila through the *Alcalde Mayor*.<sup>10</sup>

The petitions for weapons ring with a tone of piteous urgency born of years of seemingly irremediable and unrelenting torment at the hands of the Muslims. Of the twenty seven pueblos and one visita, only the pueblo of Albay did not ask for arms and ammunition. The arms in its possession, including those of private individuals, its report claimed, were sufficient for defense purposes.<sup>11</sup> The other pueblos invariably asked for cannons, falconets, musk-

ured in 1779 in Aparri. UST AR Libros: Tomo 67, fol. 158. PNA EP-S 1769-1799, fol. 15.

9. PNA EP-A 1799-1864, vol. 2, fols. 2, 11-11b, 14, 20, 30b, 40b, 42b, 46, 48b, 51.

10. Ibid., fols. 8, 24-24b, 26b, 36, 45, 48.

11. All information in this paragraph and the subsequent paragraphs was taken from PNA EP-A 1799-1864, vol. 2, fols. 2-2b, 7, 18, 20, 22, 24b, 30b, 34b, 36, 39-39b, 40b, 42b, 45, 46b, 49, 53-53b, 54b.

ets and ammunitions.

The number of artillery pieces and firearms sought varied. It ranged from one to five cannons, three to six falconets and four to twelve muskets per pueblo. The reason for the need of arms also varied. For lack of effective defense, many inhabitants abandoned Mobo pueblo. To grant its request for arms and ammunition at the soonest, its report implied, would entice its dispersed people back to the community. Because of its isolation from other pueblos in time of raids, Virac, Catanduanes needed two more cannons and twelve muskets. Besides installing guns in its baluarte, Tiwi would also mount a cannon at the church tower and friary for more firepower. More guns would help Viga, Catanduanes and other riverine pueblos to fortify river mouths through which the raiders frequently came in. A couple of cannons in its baluarte could reenforce Bagacay's defenses against yearly raids, but poverty forced it to petition only for muskets and munition.

Unlike the other pueblos, Bacon, Gubat, Casiguran, Juban, Bulusan and Sorsogon asked for more guns of heavier caliber. One can only surmise that their more exposed positions to raids, (they were close to the Strait) was a compelling motive. In addition to providing for the defense of its inhabitants and farms, Sorsogon had the added duty of rendering prompt assistance to the galleons and King's frigates in time of need which was not an easy task for the rescuers. Many times in the past, for lack of arms, they had run the risk of capture, and many dispatches were delayed because a raiding vessel was rumored to be nearby.

The pueblos also made it clear where the weapons and ammunitions would go. Probably prompted by the disadvantages in the practice of depositing them in the convento or town hall or Alcalde's residence, the pueblos explicitly stated that they would be placed in their baluartes.

#### BALUARTES AND CASTILLOS

With their distressing experiences over the years, the Bicolanos determined to improve on their defenses. If the government would not help them they would help themselves. For greater defensive power, they erected baluartes which were either slit trenches on hill tops or blockhouses of stone masonry or wooden logs or palm trunks which took more than three months to construct when the

materials were all prepared.<sup>12</sup>

Erected according to plan, their sites were chosen to meet pressing strategic needs. In fact, a close study of these defense mechanisms, a product of the time's concept of static defense, reveals some interesting facets of the Bicolanos' socioeconomic life, a people characterized in Spanish chronicles as passive, cowardly, stupid and indolent.<sup>13</sup>

Bicolanos in this period were engaged not only in other industries but also in rice and livestock production. This is apparent in their reports stating their need for arms and iterating their purpose in an almost resonant refrain, "to protect our town and cultivated fields," "to protect our grainfields and animals." They reported Muslim raiders slaughtering their cattle and obstructing rice planting and harvesting because the people had to flee to the hills to escape capture. The raiders also came, the pueblo of Juban reported, to loot their tilled fields and animals. And when their ricefields were left untilled or pillaged, or their animals looted or killed, the collection of taxes was delayed.<sup>14</sup>

To protect their crops, the Bicolanos, therefore, put up baluartes in areas where there was a concentration of cultivated lands, in many cases only one league away from the town-proper. Thus, besides a baluarte in the town-proper, Gubat, the best defended pueblo in the whole province, built four baluartes in the *sitios* of Tagdon, Danglong, Ariman and Bacacay where most of its farmlands were located. Casiguran, which owned much arms and powder, built three baluartes in its rice-growing sitios of Cavit, Maohan and Boton. Bulusan built one in the town-proper and two others in the farming visitas of Macabare and Tabog.<sup>15</sup> To protect its industries, like the Royal Cordage Factory that produced rigging and cables for the Acapulco galleons, Sorsogon erected forts of stone and paling fences under the direction of *Capitan* Pedro Gaztambide. Besides its baluartes, Bacon enclosed its church, friary, schools and cemetery with a stone wall inside which the towns-people ran for shelter in time of raids.<sup>16</sup>

12. PNA EP-A 1799-1864, vol. 2, fol 24b. James Warren, *The Sulu Zone, 1768-1898* (Singapore University Press, 1981), p. 174.

13. AFIO D-10/22, Ms. 1823, fol. 436.

14. PNA EP-A 1799-1864, vol. 2, fols. 10, 11, 18, 20, 45.

15. *Ibid.*, fols. 11, 16, 18-18b, 39b, 40b, 42b.

16. Mariano Goyena del Prado, *Ibalon* (Manila: General Printing Press, 1940), pp. 184, 186. Montero, *Historia de la pirateria*, 1:323.

Baluartes, however, were not invulnerable bulwarks of security. Gate, a visita of Bulusan, which ironically was defended by baluartes, was periodically plundered to extinction. Setbacks like that were almost inevitable especially when baluartes, no matter how imposing or menacing, were reduced by shortage of ammunition to harmless structures of stone or wood. Sorsogon, for one, should have been one of the best fortified pueblos because of its proximity to the Strait and the prosperous shipyard of Bagatao island, but it was crippled by a shortage of powder. Its two baluartes guarding the farmlands of the visita of Capuy were courageously manned by picked men who had nothing to repel a hostile attack except rocks and arrows. Libog's three stone baluartes armed with only a small falconet, which had neither balls nor powder, counted on nothing better than arrows and bladed weapons.<sup>17</sup> The pueblo of Malinao constructed six wooden baluartes on its beach at a well proportioned distance from each other. The baluartes did not mount any guns, for the only two falconets of the pueblo which had no powder supply were kept in the town hall. These wooden forts were merely employed as artifices to intimidate the Muslims and as sentry posts to watch for raiders and sound the alarm at their approach.

Like Malinao, other maritime pueblos also built baluartes on their beaches. The pueblo of Albay erected two on its seashores, one on the northern end, the other on the southern end, so that their guns had interlocking fields of fire. The pueblo of Caramoan adopted the same pattern for different reasons. Muslim *pancos* always attacked the northern port to make a landing, and the King's revenues were brought to the southern port prior to its transport to the capital. The biggest pueblo of the province, Tabaco, put up nine baluartes made of palm trunks but being gunless, they served at best as deceptive devices, at worst as over-sized amulets against seaborne disasters.

The strength of religious influence, not to mention the local Padre's, is obvious. These baluartes bore hagiographic appellations, like the four baluartes of Baleno, Masbate which were named *Baluarte* de San Pedro, San Agustin, San Nicolas and Santa Rosa.<sup>18</sup>

17. PNA EP-A 1799-1864, vol. 2, fols. 36, 39b, 48b.



From the names of the saints used, a knowledgeable person can also easily tell the Religious Order to which the local Padre belonged.

When the Muslims shifted their attacks from well-fortified centers to defenseless, isolated settlements in lonely coastal stretches, the Bicolanos fortified them with *baluartes*. Tiwi set up two in visita Naga and one in sitio Dancalan, a place the nemies usually stormed, "capturing and killing many persons, the old and the children." Quipia erected one in its visita Marigondon which effectively defended the people and their cultivated fields. But it was difficult to keep men to man these isolated *baluartes*. To make such onerous and risky service more attractive, Donsol petitioned for its thirteen *baluarte* sentinels to be exempted from tribute.<sup>19</sup>

Less costly in time and energy to build was the *castillo* or watchtower but just as much relied upon for security. Unless it was of stone masonry, it was "four badly fastened posts supporting a straw roofing," or like a fragile "dovecote" which the Muslims effortlessly razed by shooting a flaming arrow to its roof.<sup>20</sup>

Camarines Bicolanos also found the *castillo* an effective asset to their defense. After the Muslims burned the *castillo* in visita Calampinay, pueblo of Libmanan, a general council of principales led by *Capitan* Santiago Arambulo agreed to build a replacement in the same visita with a complement of four sentinels. They had previously erected one in visita Cobcoban by the sea, which took them three weeks of communal labor. The town-proper itself of Libmanan had *castillos* as part of the palisades ringing it and in places where the Muslims were likely to pass when they disembarked to assault the pueblo.<sup>21</sup>

Ligao sought the Governor's approval, on 18 January 1810, to erect two *castillos* or *baluartes* at the exposed and defenseless southern beach of Marigondon and Panganiran through which Muslim raiders entered to raid Ligao and the collateral pueblos

18. All information in this paragraph and the subsequent paragraphs, unless otherwise indicated, was taken from PNA EP-A 1799-1864, vol. 2, fols. 20, 22, 26b, 30b, 34, 56.

19. *Ibid.*, fols. 24b, 51, 53b.

20. PNA EP-A 1800-1858, fols. 45, 184b. PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fol. 33b.

21. PNA EP-CS 1781-1833, fols. 262b-263; 1797-1852, fol. 110b.

of Guinobatan and Oas. Lapping this beach were the waters of a bay that was an ideal haven for regular-size vessels. From this bay, a river cut inland which sheltered Muslim raiders. Ligao inhabitants who resorted to this bay to fish or gather *balatan* (sea slugs or sea cucumbers) and to nearby forests to hunt wild game or collect pitch, wax, ebony-wood, span-wood and other useful forest products, fell prey to these raiders.

The Marigondon-Panganiran beach was in the jurisdiction of Quipia and Donsol, but so pressing was the need of Ligao that its officials took the initiative to fortify it and added in their request two 6-pounder cannons, twelve muskets with the necessary powder and munitions and exemption from tribute of the Castellán and twelve soldiers who would defend the baluartes. The Ligawēños hoped not only to check enemy hostility but also populate the area with wandering people then located at Cagoncognan, nearby mountain. Because of its wide tillable plain, it would be a convenient site for a future pueblo, Fr. Manuel Royo of Ligao wrote in his endorsement. In fact, it seemed to have been the site of a former village destroyed by the Muslims in 1636. Ligao's petition was granted on condition that the arms requested should not fall into enemy hands to augment enemy strength.<sup>22</sup>

To protect its gold mines, Mambulao in Camarines built its own castillo near the Ancla de Oro mines only after a dubious event, which folk informants in that town swear to. Apolinaria de los Reyes, a wealthy lady better known as Doña Ponay, sent to the Queen of Spain three gifts: a hen, a dozen eggs and a tray, all three made of gold. Her Majesty reciprocated with several cannons for the pueblo. With artillery on hand, the logical thing to do, the people decided, was erect a castillo.<sup>23</sup>

The eruption of Mayon in 1814 aggravated the defense problems of the surrounding pueblos which suffered so much loss in lives and property. The penniless Padres who took it on themselves to be both the spiritual as well as military leaders of their respective pueblos had to maintain their existing baluartes or build additional ones. It was said of the Padre of Guinobatan that he was in dire straits and forced by the constant threat of Muslim attacks to purchase cannons with corresponding supplies and

22. PNA EP-CS 1781-1833, fols. 301-302, 305-305b, 307b-308.

23. PNAL HDP Camarines Norte, No. 25, pp. 1-2.

munitions for the two baluartes at Panganiran and another one at the pueblo.<sup>24</sup>

If Bicolanos made use of gunless baluartes as deceptive devices, the Muslims had also their own bag of tricks. Describing Muslim forays, the Sorsogon report said, "Muslims came with banners and deceptive displays of fleets." When a raiding fleet maneuvered to close in for a landing, the raiders detached manned auxiliary vessels, like small *barotos* and *sampans*, from capital ships and deployed them with the rest of the fleet, thereby doubling or tripling the original fleet to cow the defenders into submission or flight. This is one of the reasons why any report of large numbers of raiding pancos of any given place is highly suspicious.<sup>25</sup>

If the raiders penetrated the coastal or riverine defenses of a pueblo by overwhelming or burning a baluarte, another obstacle, the last, stood in their way — the church. In Bacon, whenever Muslim vessels were descried, the people assembled at the town hall where the muskets and other supplies were deposited. It is not known, however, whether or not they made their stand there or rushed with their arms to the four baluartes of the palisade surrounding the friary and the church, the only haven in a Muslim attack. In Bato, Catanduanes, the church was uniquely located outside the town-proper. It stood at the foot of a mountain encompassed by a wooden palisade with two baluartes. The people erected another palisade with four baluartes outside the town-proper, affording them two shelters against enemy assaults. Gubat's church was enclosed by a stone wall running in a triangular form with four baluartes and a castillo facing the sea. Within this wall, the inhabitants ran for refuge. No walls enclosed Sorsogon's church where its inhabitants used to flee during attacks but wooden baluartes surrounded it.<sup>26</sup>

In all these reports of improvisations to the Manila government,

24. PNA EP-CS 1799-1820, fol. 265b.

25. Warren has an interesting comment on this. He says: "The figures reported by Friars and officials on the overall size and composition of raiding flotillas can be deceptive. The Spanish terms, *vinta*, *panco* or *joanga* were frequently used to refer to any raiding craft. . . irrespective of its construction and use. The largest raiding flotillas rarely exceeded forty vessels. Their numbers were often inflated because each vessel either carried or towed an auxiliary dugout canoe for inshore operations. These crafts were labelled *kapkap*, *baroto* or *vinta* by astute Dutch and Spanish observers. Thus, forty *prahus* with their tenders become eighty plus." Warren, *The Sulu*, footnote on p. 171.

26. PNA EP-A 1799-1864, vol. 2, fols. 8, 48b.

only four pueblos successfully kept their arms operative — Albay, Bacon, Quipia and Donsol. Only two claimed sufficiency in arms to repel invasions — Albay and Pandan in Catanduanes, a heartening circumstance for the latter, since in time of emergency or raid its distance precluded any relief.<sup>27</sup>

The Muslims continued to avoid well-fortified towns-proper and preyed on defenseless visitas or settlements for captives. Favoring them was the burdensome responsibility imposed on the visitas to send a weekly quota of men to the central town for military duty. With their able-bodied men away, the visitas were vulnerable to marauders. For safety, the inhabitants had to abandon their visitas. Commissioner Theodoro de Navas wrote, on 12 July 1806, to his close friend, Antonio Luarenciano, a gobernadorcillo, asking that Danglod and Tierra Alta, two off-shore visitas in Gubat, be exempted from the weekly military levy. These visitas were already laid waste and to take away their fighting men would expose them further to other fatal mishaps, like fire, robbery, and another Muslim raid. Instead of sending the levy, Navas requested that it should stay and guard the palay and abaca owned by the Alcalde Mayor. The excuse worked effectively.<sup>28</sup>

Some time in 1809, word reached the well-known fighter, Pedro Estevan, that Bacacay in Albay was under siege. In barotos loaded with his sons and trusted men, he sailed to the rescue. They came upon the raiders robbing and ravaging the rice fields. Estevan and his men must have fought fiercely and deftly, for the Muslims retreated to their pancos and sailed away, leaving behind two pancos destroyed and a number of dead. For the deliverance of their pueblo, the collective body of principales of Bacacay awarded Estevan various farmlands in the sitio of Pili where he decided to stay "always ready to engage himself in the service of the King and welfare of the province."<sup>29</sup>

#### THE PRICE OF DISUNITY

The long lull in between raids and the disunity in a pueblo often proved harmful. Twelve sentinels used to man the baluarte

27. Ibid., fols. 2-2b, 16, 46-47, 51-52, 53-54.

28. Ibid., fols. 253-253b.

29. PNA EP-A 1772-1856, fols. 279b-280, 283b.

in sitio Cobcoban, Libmanan, which was built in 1807. It contributed greatly to a languid and quiet existence for the Libmanenses in their farms as well as in the town-proper. At the end of gobernadorcillo Melchor de los Reyes' term, a clash of opinions between the people and their new local head, and the absence of raids led to neglect and complacency. Against the people's wish, the weekly twelve to fifteen guards gave way to only two. The gobernadorcillo saw no necessity for a big number until the season of southwesterlies when raiding ships scoured the seas. The customary repair job on the baluarte was stopped and the fort left to the care of the inhabitants of sitio Patiaya under whose custody a watchtower was destroyed by the Muslims. And to the consternation of the Libmanenses, the gobernadorcillo stripped the baluarte of its cannons and brought them to the town-proper.

Then one dark night in 1810, a pack of pancos slid in on the sandy beach. A body of Muslim warriors swarmed ashore. Still undetected, they crept to the baluarte and reduced it to smoldering embers. Departing from the general pattern of their attack, they sallied forth to the town-proper of Libmanan. Caught in their sleep, the drowsy people could only take to flight. With no resistance in their way, a part of the invading force proceeded to Sipocot. On the way to another visita, the raiders killed one, wounded several and took captives from the sitios of Bigaan and Biguito, netting altogether ninety-two Christians. Alcalde Francisco de Velasco reported to Manila that only daybreak saved the inhabitants of Libmanan from capture which is, indeed, incomprehensible, since flight is best aided by darkness.<sup>30</sup>

Reporting their situation to the province executive, the Libmanenses summed up in a few words the effect of Muslim raids: "the many and grave harms done to our life, our families, our homes as well as our few possessions, farmlands and plantations are already intolerable . . . ." Some of them did not have anything for their upkeep after the Muslims had taken the palay from their fields with some cattle and carabaos. They could only fume in frustration at their gobernadorcillo who forbade them from pursuing or attacking the Muslims outside the town-proper. He made them stay within the graveyard of the church and wait for the raiders to enter the town-proper. Some Libmanenses, however,

30. PNA EP-CS 1791-1891, fols. 193b-194; 1797-1855, fols. 104-105.

daringly slipped out and pursued them. Catching up with some stragglers, they killed two with a *campilan* wrested from their quarry, then returned home and asked pardon from their gobernadorcillo.<sup>31</sup>

After the raid, though the people were still shaken and mourning their losses, the gobernadorcillo ordered them to set up palisades around the town-proper. The undesirable work was physically taxing and the recent disaster emotionally draining so that the populace appeared extremely worn out and resentful. Their misery intensified with the nagging anxieties and ill-treatment at the hands of their pueblo head. For some failure in their work, he ordered a number to be chastened with twenty five lashes each at the public square. Then he directed each barangay to construct a castillo at the edge of the palisades. Convinced that the castillos would be useless structures of wood, for in case of attack the enemy could inflict damage on them before the defenders could man each castillo, the people disobeyed the directive and told the province executive that they would not recognize or render obedience to their pueblo head whose unreasonable methods had brought disaster to them.<sup>32</sup>

Disaster struck again in 1810. In Libmanan's northern territory, by the sea, extensive and almost inhabitable lands sprawled. Rice could not grow, for annual typhoons flooded the land with sea water. At one time, the sea rose and swept away four persons and more than 500 heads of cattle. Raiding hordes used to land there for pillage and booty. Iranuns came in 1810, plundered the area and sailed away with more than ninety captives.<sup>33</sup>

In the same year, along the horse-shoe shaped shores of San Miguel Bay, starting from the visita of Tambo, sweeping down the loop, a fleet of pancos pounced on various communities as far as the island of Catanduanes, "killing, capturing, robbing and leaving several places depopulated, like the visita of Colasi and the well-known pueblo of Libmanan . . . ." Of about 100 persons taken, the women received the most insults. The Muslims stripped them of their *tapices* or broad sashes, converted them into sacks, filled them with palay and made each woman carry a sack.<sup>34</sup>

31. PNA EP-CS 1781-1883, fols. 104b-105.

32. *Ibid.*, fols. 105-106.

33. PNA EP-CS 1791-1891. vol. 2, fols. 253-253b.

34. AAM Box: Gobierno de Opispados Sufraganeos, 1697-1893, Folder: 1741-1918, n.p.

Three years later after the Iranuns were decisively repulsed at Zamboanga, they ranged through Bicolandia waters and seized several trading vessels off the coast of Camarines, then steered into San Miguel Bay and assaulted the port of Cabusao. Their timing could not have been more propitious, as the Castellan of the fort was away. The Provisionary Teniente of Libmanan with three or four companions guarding the port made for the hills. Some people from Tabuco manned the fort and defended it valiantly, forcing the raiders to retire with a few captives. This incident spurred Tabuco to press its long-standing claim on Cabusao, the principal port of Camarines, against Libmanan's pretension which Libmanan could not pursue after its irreparable losses sustained in 1810.<sup>35</sup>

In the face of Muslim invasions, there were Bicolanos who did not always flee. Weary of constantly fleeing and lugging their belongings and children, they stayed put and fought the Muslims. Thus, instances were not wanting when they battled the encroaching Muslims with whatever weapons they had, like bolos, campilans, knives, *palma brava* clubs, bows and arrows and even rocks. To hide their dwelling places and make entrance into their village difficult, in places like Bato in Catanduanes, Indan in Camarines and Rawis in San Miguel, Albay province, inhabitants planted thorny bamboos around the village so thickly that humans or animals could not pass through, while in Pandan, Catanduanes, the people planted *pandan*, a variety of shrub-like tree whose trunk and leaves bristle with vicious spines.<sup>36</sup> Those who had to dwell far from the pueblo because of their live-stock, plantations or cultivated fields, set up their dwellings, however few they were, as close as possible to each other in a cluster-defense formation to give them a better chance for defensive cooperation.<sup>37</sup>

Along the paths to their village, the Bicolanos ingeniously scattered "star-thistles" or reed spikes which were injurious to unshod feet. And as their need for deliverance from the frightening Muslim menace grew with no immediate prospect of succor from any human agency, the natives resorted to the comforting

35. PNA EP-CS 1791-1891, fols. 194-194b. Montero, *Historia de la piratería*, 1:371.

36. PNL HDP Albay II-3, p. 509. HDP Catanduanes, p. 3. HDP Camarines Norte, No. 25, p. 1. HDP Camarines Sur, IV-29, p. 80.

37. AFIO 94/49, fol. 173.

promises and mysteries of their folk religion. Forms of communal prayers often included the invocation, "From the Muslim fury, deliver us, Lord." Even now, almost every town treasures a story of a supernatural favor or a prodigious intervention of its patron saint seen in diverse human form, like a knight in glittering armor mounted on a spirited charger, battling and routing single-handedly an invading force of Muslims or like an extraordinarily beautiful lady at the beach from whom the raiders ran away never to come again.<sup>38</sup> For instance, inhabitants of Da-anlungsod in Guiom, Masbate, a frequently raided sitio, installed the image of San Roque on an elevated spot visible from the sea. Those who remember the "prodigy" claim that Muslim raiders never returned as the image inspired fear in them.<sup>39</sup>

#### GOVERNMENT APATHY

Ranking prelates tried to call the King's attention to the tragic plight of His Majesty's subjects, like Bishop Manuel de la Concepcion y Matos of Nueva Caceres who wrote to the King, on 29 June 1758, "bemoaning the state of utter defenselessness of his diocese against Muslim attacks despite his efforts to obtain military help from the Manila authorities. . . ." <sup>40</sup> In addition, well into the eighteenth century, there was the government's reluctance to arm a populace that was gradually becoming expressive of its resentments. The *Consulado de Manila* in fact, recommended the confiscation of arms and the prohibition of powder or arms sale.<sup>41</sup> Explaining the government policy, Santiago Patero wrote:

There are many difficulties in arming all the pueblos so that they can defend themselves when attacked: the first, is to train and supply with ammunition a subjugated people; and the second, in the final analysis, being peasants devoid of order, leader and courage, at the least surprise,

38. PNL HDP Albay II-3, pp. 147-48, 476, 497, 536. HDP Camarines Norte, No. 25, pp. 1, 3. HDP Camarines Sur, I-26, p. 10; IV-29, pp. 3, 15, 67. HDP Masbate, No. 58, pp. 1, 2; No. 59, pp. 1-2, 66-67, 80-81. On the Superficial Christianization of Philippine society, see John N. Schumacher, "The Depth of Christianization in Early Seventeenth-Century Philippines," *Philippine Studies* 16 (1968): 535-39. I wish to thank Fr. Schumacher for his generosity in going over this article and offering suggestions for its improvement.

39. PNL HDP Masbate, No. 59, pp. 1-2.

40. Abella, *Bicol Annals*, p. 106.

41. AMA MF 78, Respuesta del Consulado de Manila, 1788.



they flee wherever they can, abandoning their arms and ammunitions which fall into the hands of the enemies. In this manner, the Muslims have seized many cannons.<sup>42</sup>

Specifically referring to the Bicolanos, Jose Ma. Peñaranda, a military officer who made an inspection tour of the Bicol region, and became the most progressive-minded Alcalde Mayor of Albay province in 1834, recommended bladed weapons for the ordinary native, not muskets, a weapon which, according to him, easily broke down. As a matter of fact, in almost every pueblo he visited, he found the muskets out of commission. The Bicolanos had little care for their arms. The bow and arrow, he said, were much more effective in their hands while the muskets would be good for the retired service men.<sup>43</sup>

Peñaranda's observation raises some speculations on the small number of arms petitioned. Why did a pueblo ask for only four or twelve muskets, one or four cannons and not more? Most probably because the cost was defrayed by community funds and many pueblos were poor. Maybe only a few muskets were needed to fight the Muslims who were reputed to have much respect for firearms. The most plausible reason was the ignorance of the Bicolanos in the use of firearms. They were simple farming and fishing folk dragged into a conflict not of their own making but of their imperialist masters. It was not true that they were leaderless and cowardly. Instances previously cited showed they fought bravely under their own leaders.

Fortunately for the Bicolanos, with the apathy, of the Manila government, not to mention the Alcaldes Mayores' corrupt practices, a pueblo's security was taken care of, if it had a priest with the ability to lead and a populace with the courage to fight. Instructed by his Bishop to be the protector and consoler of his people and to attend closely to their temporal and spiritual government for peace and defense against the Muslims, the Spanish Padre became the inspiring leader of his flock with an influence far-surpassing that of any civil official.<sup>44</sup> Thus, it seems that peo-

42. Santiago Patero, *Sistema que conviene adoptar para acabar con la piratería* (Madrid: Imprenta de Miguel Ginesta, 1872), p. 7.

43. MN Ms. 2284, fols. 93-93b; Ms. 2237, fol. 73. Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine*, 51-55-56. PNA EP-A 1800-1858, fols. 185-185b.

44. AAM Folder 1741-1918, fols. 93-94b, 111.

ple in an organized parish fought better than those without a priest. As proof of his prestige, the Padre's signature or endorsement of a pueblo's plea or report added much weight to it.

Furthermore, the Padre untiringly exhorted his people to fight for King and God, to defend themselves and their faith, so much so that the faithful came to see only one common enemy, the Muslims, whom they dreaded exceedingly. But even without the Padre's exhortation which sometimes bordered on black propaganda, the Bicolanos would have hated and dreaded the Muslims just the same, if only for the savaging of their lands and enslaving of their families.

When the people were fainthearted, the Padre himself went into battle. Where prudence counselled flight, he led them to hiding places. Some priests were not lucky. On record are Religious who were captured and killed. But the Spanish Padre did not waver. He participated actively in the pueblo defense, like the Friar who took command of Panganiran's defense and the Padre of San Jacinto who directed the firing of the local fort's batteries.<sup>45</sup> Though a village could not support him, but its location was strategic for defense, the Padre stayed on. Otherwise the inhabitants would abandon it and Muslims would occupy it.<sup>46</sup> Such self-sacrificing gestures were infectious. Jose Buhay, Cabeza de Barangay of Batuan in Ticao island, was said to have offered himself willingly as a captive to spare his people.<sup>47</sup>

Digging deep into their lore of construction of fortifications which they had acquired from their forebears who fought the Moors in the old country, the Spanish Padres either passed on their skill to the Bicolanos or personally supervised the establishment of defense structures of wood or stone masonry, such as the wall, the palisade, the fortress-like church, the baluarte and the castillo, using threats, entreaties and their own money to procure materials, labor, cannons and munitions.<sup>48</sup>

45. Montero, *Historia de la piratería*, 1:370; 2:381.

46. UST AR Folder "Nueva Caceres", tomo 6, doc. 21, fol. 166.

47. PNL HDP Masbate, No. 60, p. 74.

48. PNA EP-CS 1799-1820, fols. 265-266. Diaz Arenas, *Memorias*, Cuad. 12, p. 4. AFIO 281/2, fols. 54-55. Brickmaking was important in the construction of churches and fortresses. The Camarines Bicolanos were ignorant of brick-making until the Religious taught them by their own hands. Anon, *Reseña sobre el hospital diocesano de Nueva Caceres* (Establecimiento Tipografico de Santo Tomas, 1875), p. 8.

The cooperative Bicolanos gradually learned and pooled their native talents. To warn the people of approaching raiders, they posted sentinels in their baluartes or castillos with various instruments for sounding the alarm or relaying warnings. In watch-towers or lonely coastal peaks, they struck a hollowed tree trunk or wooden gong (named in different places *balalong*, *batong*, *talotang*) or blew a *bodiong* which could be a big sea shell or a carabao's horn.<sup>49</sup> In Tabgon, the first lookout hoisted a big basket on top of Caglogo hill, then the next lookout hoisted another big basket at Bantayan hill which warned the people at the town-proper. At night, in barrio Bikal of the same pueblo, on a natural stone lookout called Sereniasan, rising 1,000 meters above the sea, sentinels burned basketfuls of cogon grass.<sup>50</sup>

The most common signal was the ringing of church bells. Many town histories in Bicolandia narrate how Muslim raiders vented their wrath on the bells by tearing them down from the belfry and dumping them into a nearby river or sea.<sup>51</sup> However, there were pueblos where the inhabitants, not the Muslims, either threw their church bells into the river or hid them in the belief that the sound attracted the Muslims.<sup>52</sup> The *telegrafista*, *cohetes* and other quite sophisticated signal systems were not employed before 1818. They were mentioned in the 1830s under the administrations of the celebrated Alcalde of Albay, Jose Ma. Peñaranda, and Alcalde of Camarines, Manuel Esquivel Castañeda.<sup>53</sup>

When the alarm was sounded, the women, children and the aged ran either to a designated hiding place or the church, and the men took up their arms to fight the invaders. An incident altogether different occurred in Lagonoy. The Padre threatened with excommunication anyone who did not lock his womenfolk and children in the church. But the Lagonoyans had not forgotten the recent annihilation of the entire inhabitants of Calolbon, Catanduanes who obeyed their *Capitan* and hid inside a cave. The Muslims

49. PNL HDP Albay, I-2, pp. 57, 265; IV-5, p. 241. HDP Masbate, No. 59, p. 18; No. 60, p. 1. HDP Camarines Sur, I-26, p. 2. HDP Catanduanes, pp. 31-32.

50. PNL HDP Camarines Sur, I-26, p. 2.

51. PNL HDP Masbate, No. 59, p. 54; No. 60, p. 68. HDP Albay III-4, p. 44; IV-5, pp. 260-61. HDP Camarines Norte, Daet, p. 4.

52. PNL HDP Camarines Sur, I-26, pp. 10-11. HDP Camarines Norte, p. 1. HDP Albay, LV-5, p. 430.

53. PNA EP-A 1800-1858, vol. 2, fols. 302-302b, 289b, 297-297b. PNA VP-A, vol. VII, fols. 12-12b. Montero, *Historia general*, 2:562.

came and set the mouth of the cave on fire, killing everyone inside either by suffocation or incineration. Ignoring their Padre's threat, the Lagonoyans sought refuge in neighboring Goa in Camarines.<sup>54</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Unfortunately for all the Bicolano's desperation to protect his hearth and home, the fraudulent practices of civil officials duty-bound to protect the very people they robbed stood as a disheartening drawback. When the raids intensified in the eighteenth century, contrary to its standing policy, the government distributed cannons and allowed the sale of munitions in the 1790s to provinces most attacked by raiders. The village Padre purchased arms for his people but almost always suffered shortages of munitions and gunpowder. And when he procured them, "government officials charged exorbitant prices for gunpowder to clerics [and] often ignored or rejected out of hand petitions from newly found villages and others that had been raided" to purchase arms and munitions.<sup>55</sup> By the nineteenth century, in supplying arms and powder, the government was relatively prodigal. The drawback lay in the Alcalde Mayor who made use of them for his own interests.

### Abbreviations used:

AAM = Archdiocesan Archives, Manila

AFIO = Archivo Franciscano Ibero-Oriental, Madrid

AMA MF = Ateneo de Manila Archives, Microfilm

MN Ms. = Museo Naval, Manuscrito, Madrid

PNL HDP = Philippine National Library, Historical Data Papers

PNA EP-A = Philippine National Archives, Ereccion de Pueblos – Albay.

PNA EP-CS = Philippine National Archives, Ereccion de Pueblos – Camarines Sur.

PNA EP-S = Philippine National Archives, Ereccion de Pueblos – Samar.

PNA VP-A = Philippine National Archives, Varias Provincias – Albay.

UST AR = University of Santo Tomas Archives

54. AF10 93/21, fol. 3v.

55. Warren, *The Sulu*, p. 177.