

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

The Port of Pantaon

Francisco Mallari, S.J.

Philippine Studies vol. 35, no. 4 (1987) 451–474

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

The Port of Pantaon

FRANCISCO MALLARI, S. J.

In the early nineteenth century, Fray Francisco Aragonese, the Franciscan Provincial, reported that Camarines province on the Bicol peninsula was the poorest in the islands. It had rich natural resources and fertile fields but was seriously handicapped by the lack of an adequate maritime outlet and its exposed southern coast, on which Muslim raiders in quest of captives and loot in inland pueblos and settlements frequently landed with impunity.¹ Its only outlet to Manila and other provinces was the port in Pasacao, a slumbering *visita* on the southern coast bordering pirate-infested Ragay Gulf. Through this port, the main bulk of province imports and exports passed. A royal warehouse of cables was located here when the Alejandro Malaspina scientific expedition conducted studies in Bicol in 1792.² The port, however, was not only extremely uneconomical to merchants but also highly dangerous to shipping.³

Incoming goods were transported on mounts or human backs to Pamplona, the midpoint to which passengers and freight destined for Nueva Caceres were conveyed. But this four-to-five-mile Pasacao-Pamplona road, considered "the most important road in the province," was never completed over the years up to Feodor Jagor's visit to Bicol in the nineteenth century.⁴ The

1. PNA *Memoria de Camarines Sur*, fols. 24-24b. This manuscript is unexplainably in the bundle marked Ereccion de Pueblos, Sorsogon. For abbreviations in subsequent footnotes see p. 474.

2. MN Ms. 312, fol. 81.

3. PNA *Memoria de Camarines Sur*, fols. 17b-19, AFIO D-10/22, fol. 1.

4. AFIO D-10/22, fol. 7. F. Jagor, *Viajes por filipinas* trad. del Aleman por Sebastian Vidal y Soler (Madrid 1875), p. 169. In the nineteenth century, this road was considered an example of waste for lack of a strong leadership. MN Ms. 2237, doc. 5, fol. 55.

bridges over numerous streams were almost always dilapidated. Large boulders and tree trunks for their repair stretched across the road for years.⁵ Some nine hundred to one thousand corvee workers annually worked on repairs with much suffering and even loss of life.⁶ On rainy days, the road was miry and slippery but, on sunny days, dusty and rocky so that in either season travel was a torture for pack animals as well as native porters. A popular observation blamed the Franciscan friars for the bad roads. The people thought they seemed not to care, since they were always carried on a *talabon* (a local version of a sedan chair) or a *hamaca* (a hammock litter) in travelling.⁷

It was probably the tormenting travel and disproportionate fee that turned the Pasacao inhabitants (numbering about two hundred in 1823) from overland portage to other forms of livelihood. Generally, they did not engage in agriculture or commerce. Most took up stevedoring supplemented with fishing and hunting wild carabaos and deer.⁸ Merchants were, therefore, hard put to find carriers for their merchandise to Nueva Caceres, especially in January to May which were busy months given to trapping fish in corrals.⁹ The difficult passage, in the wet season, discouraged merchants from having their merchandise transported unless the pack-animal drivers or porters guaranteed its safety. In case of slight damage, the carriers paid but, if considerable and beyond their means, they were known to have abandoned their cargo and escaped to the hills.¹⁰ To make up for the poor pay, pack-animal drivers did not scruple to resort to occult compensation. At any opportunity, they rifled their loads. They were past masters at opening wooden boxes and resealing them. They picked the locks of hide and rattan containers and syphoned off alcoholic beverages from barrels and bottles secured with sealing wax.¹¹

5. Jagor, *Viajes*, p. 168.

6. PNA EP-A 1800-1858, fol. 190. PNA EP-CS 1797-1855, fols. 258-258b.

7. The scientist, Luis Nee, of the Malaspina expedition who travelled in 1792 from Sorsogon to Manila via Albay and Camarines mentioned transport by carabao and cart. MN Ms. 312, fol. 80v. PNA EP-CS 1797-1855, fol. 149. Jagor, *Viajes*, p. 168. AFIO D-10/22, fol. 426. PNL HDP Camarines Sur, IV-29, p. 71.

8. AFIO D-10/22, fol. 3.

9. PNA EP-CS 1797-1852, fol. 284. PNA *Memoria de Camarines Sur*, fol. 91b.

10. AFIO D-10/22, fol. 426.

11. *Ibid.*, fol. 428.

The Pamplona-Naga road was a little different. In the later part of the nineteenth century, from barrio San Gabriel before the pueblo of San Fernando, one could hire a carromata to Naga for ₱2, a horse for 6 *reales* and a guide for 4 reales.¹² The trip from Naga to Pasacao, back and forth, took three days on foot, an unbearable journey in seasons of excessive rain for porters who plodded on a muddy road with a load on their backs. On one such occasion, a greedy *Alcalde Mayor* paid the carriers of his palay a *real* instead of the required two reales plus a ration of rice.¹³ Accumulated abuses, like that, gave rise to the accusations that only *alcaldes* benefitted from the port of Pasacao at the cost of human suffering.¹⁴

The port in Pasacao was not even ideal for sailors. Good potable water was scanty and harmful for its calcareous content which induced intermittent fever.¹⁵ It was not a very healthy place. July and August were months of high incidence of fevers, and there was no infirmary or hospital for the sick.¹⁶ Medicinal water that was slightly sulphurous with curative effects was available, but it was about a mile away in thermal springs between the *sitios* of Balogo and Mainit. The inhabitants used this spring water for the cure of rheumatism and skin diseases, and mixed it with potable water for the relief of abdominal disorders. The most salubrious water spouted from a spring called Busay.¹⁷

Neither was the port safe for ships. The anchorage was rather deep but small and dangerous.¹⁸ Its ebb tides were very irregular, and sunken shoals were close to the shore. If a ship had to lie at anchor for a long time, it waited for high tide and entered a small river half a mile from the anchorage in the sitio of Balogo,¹⁹ and tied up under the shadow of a weather-beaten, weakly fortified *castillo* that stood vulnerably open to assaults from any quarter.²⁰

12. Adolfo Puya, *Camarines Sur: descripcion general de esta provincia* (Manila, 1887), p. 130.

13. MN Ms. 1662, doc. 64, fol. 218b. AFIO 92/22, fol. 1. Regulations and penalties on hiring Indios as *cargadores* are in PNA EP-CS 1781-1883, fols. 257-257b.

14. PNA *Memoria de Camarines Sur*, fols. 20-20b.

15. AFIO D-10/22, fol 3.

16. PNA *Memoria de Camarines Sur*, fol. 91b.

17. *Ibid.*, fol. 89b. AFIO D-10/22, fols. 2-3. Puya, *Camarines*, pp. 60-61.

18. Rafael Diaz Arenas, *Memorias historicas y estadisticas de filipinas* (Manila, 1850), Cuaderno 6, p. 6.

19. A vine called *balogo* which bears fruits in pods abounds to this day in Balogo. Juice extracted from the vine is used like soap for laundering clothes. PNL HDP Camarines Sur, IV-29, p. 8.

20. MN Ms. 312, fol. 81. AFIO D-10/22, fols. 1-2.

By the nineteenth century, the condition of the sandbar and the river had considerably deteriorated. It was navigable at high tide only for cargoless small vessels, and at low tide only for small bancas. Worse yet, at the season of southwesterly storms, the port was very exposed, completely devoid of shelter for ships.²¹ In dire need, an islet called *El Refugio*, less than two miles seaward, could serve as a haven but afforded only little protection.²² In a report to Governor General Mariano Folgueras, on 10 September 1817, which is admirable for its conciseness and polished smoothness, Alcalde Mayor Iñigo Gonzales Azaola was not pleased with the port. An inspection trip impressed on him the bad state of the sandbar and the river. He exerted efforts to find out if there was any better cove or port above or below Pasacao capable of holding sizeable ships.²³ Not long after, a person well acquainted with Camarines informed him that in the administration of Governor General Felix Berenguer de Marquina (1788-1806), a government decree ordered a reconnaissance of the port of Pantaon on the river Macabogos south of Pasacao.²⁴

THE PORT AT MACABOGOS

Obviously encouraged, Azaola sought further information from parish priests and some natives who had been in Macabogos. Their reports were positive. Macabogos had a good port with a safe shelter for ships. Its future establishment and settlement, which the inhabitants of the District of Iraya longed for, would redound to the general welfare of the province. With buildings erected for the storage of requisitioned abaca and manufacture of cordage, the onerous obligations suffered by the people in transporting this fiber would come to an end.²⁵

21. PNA EP-CS 1817-98, fols. 1, 7.

22. PNA EP-CS 1797-1852, fol. 284.

23. PNA EP-CS 1789-1833, fol. 41. Pantaon has been invariably called Pantao or Pantaon. The name Pantaon appears in maps drawn by the following Spanish officers who visited the place: Antonio Siguenza, *Plano geografico e hidrografico de la provincia de camarines, Año 1823*. AGI Filipinas 134; Jose Ma. Peñaranda, *Carta de las provincias de camarines sur y norte de la de albay, 1834*. MN LXX-1; Anon, *Croquis de parte de la provincia de camarines sur . . . Año 1832*. MN LXX-31, but Pantao in Federico Vargas, *Plano esferico del seno de guinayangan o de ragay. . . Año 1830*. MN LXX-15.

24. PNA EP-CS 1817-98, fol. 1.

25. Ibid., fol. 1-1b. In 1813, the district and vicariate of Iraya included the pueblos of Libon, Polangui, Oas, Ligao, Guinobatan, Camalig, Cagsawa and Budiao. AGI Ultra-

Compelled by the public interest, as he claimed, Azaola decided to see for himself the port and the river of Macabogos.²⁶ Early in the morning of 21 August, with the *gobernadorcillo* of Oas and several men, he sailed from Pasacao. After an eight-hour trip by oar on a becalmed sea, his party reached the river at ten in the morning. Wasting no time, he reconnoitered the river and the port which was at the river's mouth. It was defended by two artillery pieces. In front lay a small bay or cove which was shut off from all winds except from the north-north-west. Surrounded by hills of tangled foliage and a forested wilderness, it offered ideal terrain for defense. It was fed by two small rivers whose waters covered a bed of sand and silt, eighteen fathoms deep in the middle, four fathoms close to shore and about six feet at its mouth at high tide. In his estimate, with the multitude of reefs and shoals denying easy approach to the bay, and the erection of two forts on the surrounding hills and another one at the mouth of the river, the defense of the port and the inland inhabitants would be assured.

After his survey, Azaola proceeded up river to Oas. Before his eyes, the untapped resources and potential wealth of his province unfolded. By the banks of the river, he beheld a broad expanse of cogonal plain large enough to sustain, with the support of a fishing industry, a population of two thousand tributés. Close by stretched virginal forests of fine wood suitable for construction and shipbuilding, like *sibucáo*, ebonywood and *molave*. Then after half an hour on foot, he came upon the river Taysan, a tributary of Lake Bato, one to four fathoms deep and navigable up to its source.²⁷

At the right bank of the lake and its main outlet (the Bicol river) were the two pueblos of Minalabac and Milaor that relied for their defense against Muslim incursions on the castillo in Pasacao.²⁸ He saw immense rain-swept grasslands, crisscrossed

mar 683. For a study of the abaca industry in Bicol in the 19th century, see Norman G. Owen, "Kabikolan in the Nineteenth Century: Socio-Economic Change in the Provincial Philippines" (published Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1976).

26. All information in this paragraph were taken from PNA EP-CS 1817-98, fols. 1b-2, 7. In Antonio Siguenza's map, the cove is not exactly opposite the mouth of Macabogos river. The river is some distance up. See MN LXX-32D.

27. PNA EP-CS 1817-98, fol. 2.

28. It seems that the *castillo* was not much of a deterrent. In spite of the *castillo*, on 7 December 1774, Iranuns raided the *visita* of Talisay in Minalabac, killing, wounding and capturing some 70 to 80 persons. AFIO 92/23, fols. 13-13b. For stronger secu-

by rivers and rivulets, appropriate for tillage. With the copious water available, the grasslands could be converted into productive farmlands, yet there they sprawled, idle and unsettled. He learned that dread of the Muslims kept people away from those fertile lands. They preferred to settle on the left side of the lake and the river, both of which served as natural barriers against Muslim attacks.²⁹

At various times in the past, Muslim raiders had ranged inland through the Macabogos river. In the previous year, they had sowed panic in the interior pueblos of Oas, Ligao, Libon, Polangui and Bato. From a visita of Bato, on the right bank of the lake, the raiders captured thirty-six persons.³⁰ Azaola thought that they could not have insolently penetrated five to six leagues inland for captives, and the fertile intervening lands could have been populated, if there were only as much as "a miserable wooden watchtower" to hold up the Muslims at the Macabogos river. Even the coastal areas were uninhabited for fear of surprise raids, despite the rich marine resources and the sandbanks and shoals teeming with fish, *balate* (sea cucumber) and shells.

Azaola then drew up a rosy picture for Governor Folgueras to consider. He assured the governor that if allowed to establish the port at Pantaon and freely granted the eight cannons (six or eight-pounders) needed for the three planned *castillos*, together with powder and shot, he foresaw the erection of three pueblos and many others. Assured of protection from hostile attacks, the people would cross to the right side of the lake and the river to cultivate the bounteous farmlands which dread of the Muslims had forced them to abandon and leave untilled. He based his prediction on the fact that in no time at all after the inhabitants of Budiao, a pueblo destroyed by Mayon's eruption, learned of his exploratory trip, they presented themselves and asked for his permission to establish themselves in the new lands. The inhabi-

city, it was suggested that Minalabac's two *visitas* should be merged into a pueblo. But on 25 November 1783, the Minalabac town-proper itself was attacked. The raiders razed three houses and carried into slavery eleven girls, four women and two men. AFIO 97/10, fol. 1. PNA EP-CS 1781-1883, fol. 19.

29. PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fol. 2b.

30. All information in this paragraph and the subsequent paragraphs, unless otherwise indicated, were taken from PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fols. 2b, 3-3b, 4, 4b, 5, 11, 13-14b.

tants of other pueblos did the same. Moreover, the many vagabonds inhabiting the entire coastal area down to Sorsogon, who were living outside the pale of the law and the clutches of Muslim raiders, would leave their old ways if guaranteed protection from captivity. They would live with the newly formed communities, especially at the shore lands for accessibility to their livelihood. They were *balateros* (balate gatherers) which was a profitable employment, but fear of the Muslims forced them to exist far from the control of Crown and Cross.

Azaola said the majority of the people of the District of Iraya who foresaw a propitious future in the establishment of the port also presented themselves to him and offered to man the castillos and organize a squadron of fighting ships similar to Nueva Caceres' in the northern seas. He found it hard to describe to the governor the fervent expectations of the people of Iraya who yearned for the end of all the abuses they had been suffering in the transport of government requisitioned abaca and other articles. With the ease with which they could sail in and out of the port, their life would improve, for commerce would flourish.

Azaola was a master of human psychology. In persuasive rhetorical tones, he assured the governor of the perpetuation of His Excellency's memory among the Bicolanos for his benevolence and concern for their welfare. Azaola also unabashedly talked of the future glory in store for him when the people would enjoy the prosperity promised to them by a virgin land and a bounteous sea.

If the governor would grant the number of cannons and munitions he solicited, Azaola promised that in a short time, at the very river of Macabogos, the fighting ships would be constructed for the defense of the coast and harassment of the Muslims up to Punta Arenas. He was sure he could realize his objectives in less than a year, if the conditions he had laid down were followed. Furthermore, on the establishment of the port of Pantaon, there would be no need to abandon the Pasacao port which defended the capital and the pueblos of Milaor and Minalabac. Much benefit would result from its maintenance, since with a little wind, the new port would be only two or three hours away. The province would have two outlets for commerce. When the new lands were opened, population would increase. Balate and shell-gathering would prosper. The Muslims would be deprived of sheltered lairs

from where they could set out to assault interior settlements. To sum up, Azaola proposed a project to populate and fortify the port of Pantaon by land and sea.

High ranking officials in Manila recommended to the governor approval of Azaola's proposal with the stipulation that the people should not be forced to settle in the new lands or compelled to construct the fighting ships. On 29 October 1817, Folgueras authorized Azaola to execute his plans, utilize every necessary means and report any impediments.

In the following years, however, the project was not realized, much less started. When Azaola received the governor's approval and orders, the Bishop had started the construction of his Episcopal Palace and Cathedral Church in Nueva Caceres. The Pre-late had engaged the services of all the towns of the province: some in cutting timber, others in carrying rocks to the wharf or limestone to the kilns and still others in cutting giant trees to build vessels for transporting building materials. The trees were so huge that more than a thousand persons were needed to haul each one to the river banks, a task impossible for draught animals to perform.³¹

Azaola also had to look after the communications of some pueblos which were completely isolated and had no other means of communication than crocodile-infested rivers with strong currents. He had to provide safe passage for the people of the *cabecera* and irrigation for land enough to support a pueblo of a thousand tributes but which was barren and held by hostile *cimarrones* who assaulted any passersby. He constructed a wooden bridge across the Bicol river separating the capital from Milaor, Minalabac and San Fernando. It was an incredible span in the eyes of the natives, for it measured fifty-two *varas* long. Azaola derived satisfaction from seeing the elderly and the women cross over and see the capital which, though not faraway, they had not seen in their life-time for lack of opportunity or means.

One other obstacle also impeded Azaola from carrying out the project. He felt he had to spend time on what he believed had to be done in advance to fortify Macabogos, namely, the opening of

31. All information in this paragraph and the succeeding ones, unless otherwise indicated, were taken from PNA *Memoria de Camarines Sur*, fols. 35-38.

a canal through the enormous plain of Oas and Libon to join the closest side of Lake Bato to Macabogos.

Azaola's sincere and humble admission of failure somehow mitigated its gravity. He endorsed the next Alcalde, Jose Felix Gaztelu, as the man who would bring the project to completion. He was a public servant possessing the good judgment demanded by the enterprise. Azaola also recommended the proposals of the new alcalde and Fr. Francisco Aragoneses and wrote once again in glowing terms, as he had done before, of the beneficial results from the finished project. In his new position as General Assessor, his word carried much weight in the higher echelons of government.

THE GAZTELU-ARAGONESES PROPOSAL

Buried under the accumulated dust of a decade, the Pantaon project was resurrected through the efforts of a cleric consumed by zeal for the well-being of the province.³² In 1826 the long suffering parish priest of Oas, Fr. Aragoneses, who had the bitter experience of witnessing his parish in Cagsawa wiped out by the Mayon eruption of 1814, took a deep interest in the project. He sent a Memorial to the new Governor General, Mariano Ricafort, outlining the prosperity consequent on the completion of the project.³³

Admittedly convinced, on the one hand, by the benefits Aragoneses mentioned and, on the other hand, by the personal virtues and philanthropic disposition of Gaztelu, Governor Ricafort recommended, on 24 March 1827, the execution of the project to the new Alcalde with the following new recommendations: the sentinels of the future castillo of Pantaon should come from the pueblo of Oas; the Castellan of the fort should be appointed from the *principales* of the same pueblo with the added office of

32. PNA EP-CS 1789-1838, fol. 42b.

33. PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fol. 13. PNA *Memoria de Camarines Sur*, fols. 40-40b. In the Franciscan archives in Madrid, there is a manuscript of 144 pages containing an eyewitness account of one of the most destructive volcanic eruptions in the Philippines written by Fray Francisco de Tubino, Curate of Guinobatan. It is indexed AFIO 281/2. Another eyewitness description of the same eruption including the extinction of the pueblo of Cagsawa is in Fr. Francisco Aragoneses, *Suceso espantoso y memorable acaecido en la provincia de camarines el dia primero de febrero de este presente año de 1814*. It is indexed AFIO 94/43. A copy is also available at the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid with the call number R-33, 365/3.

gobernadorcillo of Macabogos lastly, the settlers from the neighboring pueblos should be exempted from tribute for three years and the vagabonds from the coasts, for five years.³⁴ Ricafort ended with a note of bright expectations.

Concerned about the large number of settlers projected for the Pantaon region, the friar and the alcalde proposed, on 17 August 1827, the formation of another pueblo on the bank of Lake Bato in a sitio called Alongon, to serve as a convenient stopping point for travellers to Pantaon, especially for traders in need of transport for their wares. They asked for exemptions from tribute and other privileges for the future settlers of Pantaon. But the establishment of new pueblos and a new port would be of little use without good transportation for the people's products to the port. They, therefore, also proposed the construction of a road leading to the port.³⁵ There was a road but luxuriant thickets, undergrowth and quagmires covered it. About half-way down the road there was a slope that was difficult to get over and impassable on rainy days. To make this old road operative, the friar and the alcalde wanted rice rations for the workers and the necessary tools, at least two hundred mattocks, axes and as many "taquetaques."³⁶

Even the Bishop, Fray Bernardino de la Concepcion, did not sit idly by. No sincere shepherd could have done so after thousands from his flock had been either killed or taken into captivity by the Muslims. Together with Aragoneses, he offered to construct three *baluartes* for the defense of the port; two at his own expense; the third, at Aragoneses' and his parishioners'.³⁷ For better preservation of the baluartes, both clerics decided it best to entrust their care and defense to the pueblos of Oas, Libon and Polangui.

In support of their ideas, the General Accounting Office requested the governor to issue an order for the following: the delivery of the artillery, powder and munitions intended for the promised stone baluartes; the temporary mounting of the artillery on the

34. PNA *Memoria de Camarines Sur*, fols. 40b-41.

35. Ibid., fols. 43b, 45, 52b.

36. MN Ms. 2228; fol. 10v. PNA *Memoria de Camarines Sur*, fols. 47-47b. I have consulted references and asked some scholars what "taquetaques" were. No one could tell me.

37. PNA *Memoria de Camarines Sur*, fols. 43-43b. A *baluarte* was either a breastwork on a hill or a block-house of stone masonry or wooden logs or palm trunks with an embankment and a palisade. PNA EP-A 1799-1864, fol. 24b. James Warren, *The Sulu Zone, 1768-1898* (Singapore 1981), p. 174.

provisional wooden baluartes the pueblo of Oas offered to erect for the defense of the workers constructing the stone baluartes; the patrolling of the coastal waters by the *fahuas* (cannon boats) of the Anti-Contraband Force to rid the coast of Muslim incursions and protect the workers; and lastly, the withdrawal of two thousand pesos from the community funds for Aragonese's expenses, like the purchase of construction tools and rice rations for the workers.³⁸

The government did not accept the proposals entirely. It did not concede the exemptions from tribute without previous consultations and royal approval. A ray of hope for the Pantaon project appeared on 10 January 1828. Ricafort formulated and issued seven resolutions approving the recommendations and proposals. Deserving special mention was the appointment of Gaztelu and Aragonese's to commence and supervise the project till its completion, the approval of the two thousand pesos for Aragonese's funds and the two-year exemption from tribute of the settlers and workers in the new lands.

On 10 January 1829, as Muslim raids were reported, a worried Aragonese's wrote to Ricafort that the eight cannons with the necessary powder and munitions had not yet been shipped. But they could not be delivered since the stone baluartes where they were to be mounted were not erected. Aragonese's, however, argued that the baluartes would never be erected unless the artillery pieces were delivered first. In fact the promised provisional wooden baluarte was already finished and fortified with borrowed cannons and munitions that ought to be returned as soon as possible. Aragonese's, therefore, requesting even two or three of the eight to fortify the newly built fort for the morale of the Bicolanos. The rest could remain deposited in Pasacao where they were unloaded.³⁹

Almost within a month, Aragonese's received a negative reply. The subinspector of artillery whose concern for the defenseless pueblos was well-known refused the request. He had learned from experience that sending artillery to needy pueblos merely multiplied their woes. Natives ignorant of guns senselessly mounted

38. All information in this paragraph and the subsequent ones were taken from PNA *Memoria de Camarines Sur*, fols. 43b, 44b, 48b, 51, 52, 54-55.

39. All information in this paragraph and the subsequent ones were taken from PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fols. 39-39b, 40-40b.

them on top of four posts vulnerably exposed to attacks and bare of any defensive embankment. In no time, the Muslims usually learned of the artillery's arrival. When they attacked, the instant artillerymen would fire a warning shot to alert the inhabitants nearby, abandon their guns and flee to the forests. This was the main reason why no matter how well meaning was the clerics' petition for eight cannons, the subinspector refused to supply them.

Fortunately with the creation of the new politico-military province of Camarines Norte under Captain Antonio Siguenza, the subinspector found an occasion to resolve the problem. He recommended the following: Siguenza should be in charge of the eight cannons so that he could inspect the fortifications and correct any defects; he should take with him a sergeant, a corporal and three artillerymen; and a certain number of men living near the forts should be chosen and given instructions at least on how to assemble and disassemble the guns and handle them with some intelligence.

Bad luck dogged the project. Some pueblos made representations that the absence of the tribute payers from their respective pueblos (they were working in Pantaon) caused the delay in the collection of tributes, and that the tilling season, the priority work of every native, was approaching. Giving way to the demand, Gaztelu suspended the work in September.⁴⁰

Bothered by the stoppage, Aragoneses informed Governor Ricafort of his activities since his arrival in Oas, like his continuous efforts to help bring prosperity to the inhabitants and finish the road connecting the pueblos of Buga and Macabogos to Pantaon. Pasacao by that time, Aragoneses reported, was already useless and totally isolated. Then he invoked the governor's paternal care for the inhabitants, requesting him to repeat his orders to Gaztelu so that he would do his part.

Ricafort responded by praising Aragoneses' zeal and dedication to the people's welfare. He reminded Gaztelu, on 23 January 1830, to take into serious consideration Aragoneses' suggestions, since the friar was very well informed, and also seek the bishop's decision on necessary measures for the prompt conclusion of the work.

40. All information in this paragraph and the subsequent ones were taken from PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fols. 51, 53-53b, 66-66b.

In various periods after the suspension of the project, cruel weather intervened until the end of January. Tempestuous winds spawning severe and ceaseless downpours lashed the region. Rampaging waters washed away the Macabogos road along the mountain slopes and completely carried away the bridge of choice timbers over a deep river in Marocmoc.⁴¹ All the accomplished work was wiped out. Everything had to be started over again.

Gaztelu set the wheels of the provincial government moving. He advised the gobernadorcillos of the pueblos of Iraya district to provide the Commissioners with men at the end of harvest time to start the work. Four hundred corvee workers working in turns would suffice. More than that would only cause confusion or draw away men needed in their pueblos for public and private works. Each town should send a number of men in proportion to the number of its tributes so that there would be a weekly shift of 400 workers.

Hoping to confer with Aragoneses on the project, Gaztelu was gladdened when the friar and the Bishop of Nueva Caceres, Juan Antonio de Lillo, arrived by land at the capital from Manila on 28 February 1830. To his later disappointment, he heard that the Friar was very sick at the Naga infirmary. On the morning of 6 March, the day Gaztelu received the governor's letter of 23 January, the hard-working man of God died.

Deprived of Aragoneses' wise counsels in so complicated a work, Gaztelu turned to the bishop for advice, in accordance with Ricafort's suggestion. The prelate apologized for his present inability to give suggestions due to his insufficient knowledge of the project.⁴²

Gaztelu then bared his feelings to Ricafort. For the Bicolanos to work more efficiently, he admitted the need for intelligent leadership. The commissioners could not be entirely relied upon. Their unsteady policies had vexed the workers in no small measure. After the death of Bishop Bernardo de la Concepcion, the two stone baluartes he had offered to put up still remained a mere plan, while the other which Aragoneses and the pueblo of Oas

41. All information in this paragraph and the succeeding ones were taken from PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fols. 16b-17, 51-51b, 52, 57.

42. All information in this paragraph and the succeeding ones were taken from PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fols. 54-54b, 57b, 58-58b, 59-59b.

volunteered to build had hardly been started, and when finished would be unfit to support the artillery.

A little after the arrival of the guns in Pasacao which took a multitude to unload and caused some damage to Gaztelu's smaller vessels, he reported the arrival in Macabogos of a sergeant, a corporal and three artillerymen who were till then unemployed. The guns designated for Macabogos would remain deposited in Pasacao as long as the three baluartes were not yet completed. Only then would the artillerymen start instructing the men in handling and caring for the guns to prepare them for future encounters with the Muslims. Gaztelu asked Ricafort to realize that the artillery and the supplies deposited in Pasacao were in danger of deteriorating, and that the artillerymen were useless, since he could not see when they would be able to start to teach. He ended by stating the amount of money he had added to make up for the deficiency in project funds.

THE GOVERNOR STEPS IN

Three months later, Governor Ricafort who was impatient to hear good news about the project, sent a rather forceful decree to Gaztelu and Antonio Siguenza, Alcalde Mayor of Camarines Norte, negating the excuses offered by Gaztelu for suspending the work. He thought Gaztelu should have foreseen the inconveniences and taken steps to remedy them without bringing the work to a standstill which resulted in the destruction of whatever had been accomplished.⁴³ He impressed on Gaztelu the necessity of carrying on the work and overcoming obstacles with timely decisions and indefatigable zeal until its completion.

From his usual detached attitude, Ricafort took a direct hand in running the project from Malacañang. To prevent the natives from turning cold, he first wanted the port to be populated. To do away with the principal impediment keeping the people from settling there, namely, terror of Muslim raiders, the three planned forts should be replaced with easily constructed, low-cost provisional redoubts just as invulnerable as stone forts, if properly fortified. He wanted the settlers brought together, as soon as

43. All information in this paragraph and the subsequent ones were taken from PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fols. 60b-61.

possible, under the protection of these redoubts. Meanwhile the government would find means to replace these redoubts with stone forts or keep them as they were.

To avoid any delay in the construction of the redoubts for lack of military know-how, Ricafort wanted Siguenza, on account of that official's proximity and knowledge, to proceed to Pantaon as soon as possible, draw up a sketch of the terrain and design the three redoubts. Ricafort wanted them made of earth, bundles of sticks and available materials. A vertical paling fence should be set up at the bottom of the moat and another horizontal one, if preferred, at the foot of the breastwork. He imagined these redoubts would perhaps be the best in all the coasts of the Philippines. The work could be continued through the instructions Siguenza would leave behind. In effect, Siguenza ought to come to an agreement with Gaztelu who should facilitate the corresponding assistance.

Ricafort further ordered the instructions of the Bicolanos on the handling of the artillery started at once. Without waiting for the conclusion of the works, the sergeant and other instructors ought to start their instructions by mounting the guns in a provisional place.

Meanwhile the bishop did not rest satisfied with his apology to Gaztelu for his ignorance of the project. He took a trip to Macabogos and Pantaon to acquaint himself with the work.⁴⁴ His efforts served him in good stead. Gaztelu needed his advice on three recent adverse developments.

First, the commissioners for the construction of the Macabogos road had resigned. The bishop advised Gaztelu to accept their resignations out of justice, since they had already served the public good for more than two years without profit or salary at great inconvenience. He suggested the appointment of another three with a monthly salary of two pesos each for the duration of the work.

Second, the people of the different pueblos had expressed their reluctance to work on the project. The bishop told Gaztelu that the Macabogos road was sufficiently good. There was no

44. All information in this paragraph and the succeeding ones were taken from PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fols. 14-14b, 21b-22, 26-26b, 27-27b, 28b, 29-30, 47. Siguenza's map of the cove of Pantaon complete with soundings of its waters is easily available in Madrid under the call number MN LXX-32D and in Sevilla - AGI Filipinas 134.

need of further development. There were no settlers to use it anyway. Any improvement would only last a short time as the soil was too loose and swampy. It would be more beneficial to attend to the stonework of the two castillos of Macabogos and Pantaon, giving the responsibility for the first to Polangui and Libon and the second to Oas, leaving the other pueblos alone to their own duties. Those three pueblos would not mind, the bishop assured Gaztelu. They were the only pueblos exposed to Muslim raids in that region. As Cagsawa and Camalig had their own castillos at Budiao, and Guinobatan and Ligao had their own at Marigondon-Panganiran, equity demanded that Polangui, Libon and Oas should build the castillos of Macabogos and Pantaon, then maintain them afterwards. No doubt it was an onerous task. But the bishop thought they should have borne it a long time ago as the pueblos of Cagsawa, Camalig, Guinobatan and Ligao had done and continued to do.

Probably to soothe the disgruntled workers, the bishop further suggested that the monthly ₱2 for the commissioners and the nominal gratuity given the laborers from Oas, Polangui and Libon, should all be taken from the surplus of the project's appropriation to avoid delays. The master-builder directing the construction of the castillo should also receive ₱2 monthly.

The bishop offered other suggestions but his parting advice proved the most invigorating to Gaztelu's sagging spirits. The prelate told the quite frayed alcalde to take it easy. After the port area and outlying region had been secured from Muslim attacks by the construction of defensive structures and the population had been augmented by settlers freed from fear, the Bishop confidently predicted that Pantaon and Macabogos would be a frequented port like Putiao. He recalled that when the development of Putiao was initially planned by Fr. Aragoneses in 1815, it was also impugned, opposed and slandered like Pantaon.

It is hard to tell whether or not the bishop's counsels had any great impact on Gaztelu. On 13 September 1830, acting on Governor Ricafort's wish, Gaztelu asked Siguenza who was in Camarines Norte to undertake his work in Pantaon. Siguenza begged to wait till December or January, since it was still the rainy season, an inconvenient time to work in an open field. At an opportune time, he would take a banca from Sipocot to Bato from which he would be transported by hammock litter to Pantaon.

He requested Gaztelu to choose a competent person to accompany him to Pantaon, one capable of directing the work according to his plans. He also asked for fifty or sixty male laborers who would work under his observation for the few days of his stay in Pantaon. He specifically recommended a former *capitan* of Milaor named Mariano Tulin who had done various grading operations with him for a canal project between Pamplona and Pasacao and had accompanied him in 1823 when he was commissioned to draw a map of the port of Pantaon with soundings of its waters.

Then Siguenza wrote a frank and revealing letter to Ricafort. A good look at it reveals the basic constraint to the successful execution of the project. He reminded Ricafort that the obstacles Gaztelu ran into were those which he, Siguenza, had reported in 1823. They boiled down to the lack of a competent Project Director, a deficiency that led to absurdity and ridicule of the government.

A case in point, according to Siguenza, was the forgotten artillery pieces and other war material in Pasacao which he himself saw with his own eyes, and the detachment of veteran artillerymen loafing in Nueva Caceres for a year and a half without anything to do. He claimed no competent person would ever ask the governor for cannons for a rampartless fort or ask for artillerymen without artillery. The artillerymen were intended to instruct the peasants of Oas in handling the guns, who in turn would man the port's fortification. This would be an exercise in futility, Siguenza declared. The peasants would not only leave the fortification unoccupied but also allow the Muslims to destroy it and avail themselves of the artillery.

Without mincing words, he refuted Ricafort's order to begin instruction of the peasants by mounting some cannons on the unfinished fort. He asked the governor how in heavens it could be done when the guns were abandoned in Pasacao, the instructors were in Nueva Caceres and the peasants were in Oas, four days away from Pasacao. The draftees for instruction were mercenaries who had to look for their daily food and also needed a week just to come and return to their pueblos.

Agreeing with Ricafort that there was nothing easier for a military man of average education than to direct the redoubts according to plan, he nevertheless pointed out that if Ricafort would only look at the map of the port which he, Siguenza,

drew up, Ricafort would find the redoubts unnecessary, since the port was a natural fort. The distance between the two points (Sinlian & Cananhajan) of the arc of land forming the Pantaon port were within the range of four-pounder cannons. Besides the short distance from each other, these headlands, especially Cananhajan, were steep, rising more than six *varas*, by Burgos scale, above sea level. In Siguenza's mind, the simplest thing to do was fortify the two headlands enclosing the port. Juan de Salcedo and his fellow conquistador, Santiago de Libon, did that when they conquered Camarines and Albay. He said Salcedo converted Pantaon port into a shipyard where galleons plying the Manila-Acapulco run were constructed for many years after the destruction of the port of Cavite. It was a progressive shipyard until Muslim raiders burned it in the seventeenth century. Since then, for fear of Muslims, it had been left deserted.⁴⁵

The manning of the fortification should be entrusted to disciplined militia, not to the native settlers, Siguenza strongly suggested. The work on the fort and the road should be simultaneous. When the natives saw the port secured and a good road leading to it, there would be no need to force them to settle Pantaon and Macabogos, he optimistically predicted. The abundant fish, good anchorage and tillable lands were sufficient incentives.⁴⁶

Apparently encouraged by his colleague's frankness with Governor Ricafort, Gaztelu also penned a lengthy letter answering Ricafort's strong decree of 12 July 1830, but in the tone of a submissive subordinate and a refined Castilian. It was clear he was shaken by the less than mild rebuke for his alleged lack of action, foresight and zeal. Excusing himself from serious blame, he gave the principal reason for his past decision to suspend work. He

45. Pantaon was a flourishing shipyard and a busy port where the tributes from Albay and Camarines were located. On October 1616, eighty *caracoas* of Muslim raiders slipped through Burias Pass and stormed the shipyard. Accounts of the havoc they wrought vary in the works of the following: Jose Montero y Vidal, *Historia de la pirateria malayo-mahometana en mindanao, jolo y borneo* (Madrid: Imprenta y Fundacion de Manuel Tello, 1888), 1:153-54; Vicente Barrantes, *Guerras piraticas de filipinas contra mindanaos y joloanos* (Madrid: Imprenta de Manuel G. Hernandez, 1878), p. 10; Pablo Pastells, S.J., *Historia general de filipinas* in Francisco Navas del Valle, *Catalogo de los documentos relativos a las islas filipinas* (Barcelona 1930), VI, 387. There is disagreement on the location of the raided shipyard. Some writers situate it in the island of Bagatao at the mouth of Sorsogon bay; others, the southwestern coast of Camarines province.

46. PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fols. 30b-31.

claimed that the destruction of the finished works after his stop order was beyond the control of any human agency much less of any Alcalde. Every year the seasonal heavy rainfalls and destructive floods in that part of the region claimed animal as well as human lives and forced the living to repair roads, bridges and houses. He also explained the concourse of coasting vessels at the port of Putiao which, in the past he had suggested for development rather than Pantaon. He, therefore, implied the mistake in the choice of Pantaon.⁴⁷

Refuting his alleged lack of action and zeal in carrying the project to completion, Gaztelu declared that not even the active and zealous Aragoneses, were he alive and permanently resided in Oas, would have finished the project. The obstacles were by their very nature insurmountable. In brief, if Ricafort believed that he culpably wasted the project outlay, he was willing to indemnify it and abide by the governor's good pleasure.

It seems reasonable to suggest that recriminations and justifications would not exempt Ricafort or Gaztelu from censure for the failure of the project. In military parlance, they were commanders directing a battle from headquarters many miles behind the front line which they never visited. The commander-in-chief issued orders from Manila to his field commander in Nueva Caceres who relayed his own orders to his subordinates in Pantaon. The chain of command suffered from poor communication and both commanders' ignorance of Pantaon. They did not have a good grasp of the situation.

THE ENERGETIC ENRILE

On 23 December 1830, Pascual Enrile, an efficient and innovative public servant, succeeded Ricafort.⁴⁸ From Daet, Camarines Norte, Siguenza reported to him the result of his work in Pantaon. True to his word, Siguenza undertook his commission and stayed for about five days as the previous governor had wished. It was

47. All information in this paragraph and the next one was taken from PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fols. 17, 21, 25b.

48. Emma Blair & James A. Robertson, *The Philippine Islands* (Cleveland 1903) 51:55. Sinibaldo de Mas, *Informe sobre el estado de las islas filipinas en 1842* (Madrid 1843) 1:77. G. R. Rupett, an Englishman who visited the Philippines, wrote his impressions of Enrile's activities in MN Ms. 1667, doc. 6, fol. 80. AGI Filipinas 519.

long enough for him to make a sketch, trace the fort on the ground, enclose it with fascines, begin the moat and finish with 300 men the central battery named *La Trinidad*. He described in detail the structure and site of this fortification. It was a provisional one but the most durable and the first of its kind in the region. For the Bicolanos accustomed to the castillo which in Siguenza's own words looked like a "fragile dovecote," the fort became an object of admiration.⁴⁹

To avoid a repetition of the sack of Pantaon, Siguenza reminded Enrile not to entrust the fort with its artillery, munition and military stores to the peasants. Citing an example, he referred to the recent Muslim raid in Oas in 1830 where the raiders captured the five sentinels of the castillo not on account of the raiders' superiority in numbers and cunning, but because the defenders abandoned their post to escape, only to be trapped among the thickets. Lastly, he urged Enrile to organize a militia, if not of respectable citizens, at least of tractable persons knowledgeable in handling arms.⁵⁰

From reports like this, Enrile perceived the need for improved communications and defenses. Ably assisted by competent and enthusiastic military officers who would later on become *alcaldes mayores* of Bicol provinces, like Jose Ma. Peñaranda and Manuel Esquivel y Castañeda, he worked vigorously to build roads, bridges and fortifications and established a mail service linking Manila to most of the provinces including Northern and Southern Camarines.⁵¹ He pored over reports on the Pantaon project and saw two reasons for its unfinished state: first, the death of Fr. Aragonese, and second, the causes enumerated in Gaztelu's report of 3 April 1830. Convinced of its beneficial effects for the people, he decided that since Jose Fermin de Pabia, Commander of the Royal Navy, and Jose Garcia de Paredes, Sublieutenant of the Royal Corps of Artillery, would soon be in Albay, both should proceed to Camarines, make a survey, consult with the most

49. PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fols. 32-33b.

50. *Ibid.*, fols. 34-34b.

51. MN Ms. 2228, fol. 29b. Blair & Robertson, *The Philippine*, 51:55-56, de Mas, *Informe*, 1:77. One of the assignments Peñaranda accomplished under Enrile was a personal survey of Luzon provinces after which he made recommendations and drew up a plan for regular mail service from Cavite to Albay. AHN Ultramar: Filipinas, leg. 5155/2.

knowledgeable persons and report if the port of Pantaon could be sufficiently populated. To him it would be senseless to open a port permanently deserted by people as well as ships. They were to look also into other important matters that would help him decide whether or not to continue the project.⁵²

On 15 June 1832, Paredes wrote a negative report convincingly outlining his observations and recommendations.⁵³ On 13 February 1833, Peñaranda sent his own long *informe*. While not totally rejecting all the project promoter's proposals, he did not entirely endorse them, but recommended, under certain conditions, the completion of what had been started. Most conspicuously, he recommended the utilization of other ports, such as Putiao and Donsol, and not exclusively Pantaon. Previously Peñaranda had reported five or six Muslim *pancos* sighted in the waters of Marigondon, Pasacao and Pantaon and the impending attack on Pantaon.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the ferocious "Fishers of Men," as the Balangingi were aptly called, were reported already in Samar on their yearly slave-raiding sweep.⁵⁵

After bureaucratic consultations and reports of recurrent Muslim marauding, Enrile confidently issued orders. The Bicol region was then under the administrative direction of his former enterprising and trusted military officers who had served him efficiently and unwaveringly, Manuel Esquivel y Castañeda in Camarines Sur and Jose Ma. Peñaranda in Albay, both invariably referred to in documents as *Corregidores* or *Alcaldes Mayores*.

Enrile appointed Esquivel to take charge of fortifying the sandbar of Donsol. Of the eight cannons drawn from the Royal Artillery magazines in 1829 to fortify Pantaon, two were ordered mounted in Donsol, two in Pasacao, two in Cabusao, two in Pantaon and the remaining ordnance pieces in coastal areas in the province.⁵⁶ Four months later, on September 1834, he ordered Esquivel to finish the Pantaon project. The loyal, youthful alcalde readily complied after having presented pressing priorities other than the unprofitable Pantaon port where not a single vessel had yet docked. Both Donsol and Putiao, which were defended by

52. PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fols. 35, 36, 38.

53. PNA EP-CS 1797-1852, fols. 151-152b, 153b.

54. MN Ms. 2228, fol. 31v.

55. PNA EP-CS 1749-1848, fol. 177. Warren, *The Sulu*, p. 182.

56. PNA EP-CS 1789-1838, fol. 183.

baluartes and castillos, offered more security than Pantaon which was not only weakly fortified but also found to be entirely exposed to *collas* or southwesterly storms that were rough on deep-draught vessels.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, the final outcome of the Macabogos-Pantaon project may never be known unless someone chances upon the pertinent sources that escaped my limited research. In the light of what has been presented, however, one can safely say that it was an ambitious project by colonial standards. It involved Bicolanos, conservatively by the hundreds, and high officials of Church and State, a number of whom unselfishly gave a good part of their life for the socioeconomic benefit of the Bicolanos. Their labors did not completely go to waste. Ample documents attest to these officials' fruitful contributions in the development and growth of the Bicol region. Of the names that featured in the project, four easily deserve a niche in the Spanish history of Bicolandia: Manuel Esquivel y Castañeda, Francisco Aragoneses, Jose Ma. Peñaranda and Antonio Siguenza.

Gifted with inventiveness and ready access to the corridors of power, Manuel Esquivel y Castañeda did much to improve communications, peace and order and defense measures against Muslim marauders in Camarines Sur. Certainly as alcalde mayor of that province, one of his most outstanding achievements, to the lasting gratitude of present day Naga city residents, was his canal project that altered the erratic course of the Naga river, the site of fluvial processions honoring Our Lady of Peñafrancia.⁵⁸

As a former superior of the Franciscans, Fr. Aragoneses directed his men in their spiritual and temporal apostolates in Bicol. A highlight of his career, and undoubtedly the most tragic, was the day he helplessly watched lava and flaming rocks from Mayon volcano bury his people and their pueblo. To succor the survivors, he left for a begging trip to Manila, and on his return, led them in search of new settlement sites.⁵⁹ Driven by a dream of prospe-

57. PNA EP-CS 1897-1852, fols. 162-163. PNA EP-A 1800-1858, fols. 146, 184b, 387b.

58. MN Ms. 1740, doc. 1, fols. 1v-5.

59. PNA EP-CS 1817-1898, fols. 13-13b, PNA EP-A 1800-1858, fols. 75-78b.



erty and peace for his people, he proposed the development of the Macabogos-Pantaon project and died working for its realization.

After exemplary service as aide-de-camp, adjutant and military engineer under Pascual Enrile, Jose Ma. Peñaranda was justly rewarded by his appointment to the governorship of Albay province in 1834. In that position, he transformed Albay from a backward province into one of the most progressive. He built many roads, public buildings, bridges, industries and left behind well-developed agriculture. He was one of the few dedicated and honest governors before 1844. At his death, the grateful populace of Albay preserved his memory with a main thoroughfare bearing his name and a monument at the plaza of the provincial capital.⁶⁰

Though hampered by poor health and average intelligence, Antonio Siguenza left his mark in Camarines Norte. He helped the Northerners help themselves. He encouraged agriculture which was previously abandoned. He facilitated commerce by improving many roads. He erected fortifications and organized armed militias. He built a flotilla of fighting vessels to patrol the coastal waters and interdict seaborne invasions so that by 1830, he claimed that not a single sail of a marauding Muslim cruiser was sighted headed northward on forays of spoils and slaves.⁶¹

Abbreviations used:

AFIO	– Archivo Franciscano Ibero-oriental (Madrid)
AGI	– Archivo General de Indias (Sevilla)
AHN	– Archivo Historico Nacional (Madrid)
MN Ms.	– Museo Naval (Madrid), Manuscrito
PNA EP-CS	– Philippine National Archives, Ereccion de Pueblos, Camarines Sur.
PNA EP-A	– Philippine National Archives, Ereccion de Pueblos, Albay.
PNA EP-S	– Philippine National Archives, Ereccion de Pueblos, Samar.
PNL HDP	– Philippine National Library, Historical Data Papers.

60. MN Ms. 2284, fols. 93-93v. AHN Ultramar: Filipinas, leg. 5159. Eliodoro Robles, *The Philippines in the Nineteenth Century* (Quezon City 1969), p. 122. Blair & Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, 51:55-56. Jagor, *Viajes*, p. 100.

61. Ibid., fol. 40v. MN Ms. 2228, fol. 30v.