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The Sulu Zone, 1768-1898

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Book Reviews

THE SULU ZONE, 1768-1898. THE DYNAMICS OF EXTERNAL TRADE, SLAVERY, AND ETHNICITY IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF A SOUTHEAST ASIAN MARITIME STATE. By James Francis Warren. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981. xxxvi, 390 pages.

European-authored books on the history of the Muslim Filipinos from Spanish times to the present have, by and large, looked only at the politico-religious history of "Moro piracy" and slave-raiding on the Spanish-ruled Christian parts of the Philippines. Writing from a Muslim Filipino point of view, on the other hand, Cesar Majul in his *Muslims in the Philippines*, has placed this history within the framework of the "Moro Wars" — the resistance of Muslim Filipinos to Spanish political and religious imperialism, and insisted that the Sulu sultans, being traders themselves, did not favor piracy. The book under review here moves out of these oversimplified frameworks in several ways, as indicated in its title and subtitle. In doing so, Warren has explored British, Dutch, Spanish, American, Indonesian, and Philippine national and religious archives. From this mass of documents, a large part of them hitherto untouched, he has written a book which not only gives a totally new perspective to this period of Sulu history, but opens up a number of other areas for further investigation, touching not only Sulu but other parts of the Philippines and other aspects of Philippine history.

First of all, as the title indicates, he studies the "Sulu zone" — that is to say, not merely the Sulu archipelago, but the wider area of client peoples subject in one way or another to the Taosugs of Jolo, as well as those powers interacting with the Sulu state through complex trade relationships. Secondly, Warren explores the nature of Sulu as a "segmentary state," one "composed of sub-units which are structurally and functionally equivalent at every level of the political system." In this type of state, the territorial sovereignty was recognized most strongly at its center in Jolo town and its vicinity, while shading off in the more distant areas to a kind of ritual hegemony, strengthened at times by the intermarriage of Sulu datus with the indigenous leading families of other ethnic groups. Thus the effectiveness of the sultan's con-

trol depended a great deal on his personality and his ability to manipulate factions among the datus and form alliances. In this his wealth and statesmanship counted more than the prestige of his position to maintain effective authority in his realm. It is within this framework that the economic activity of the sultan and aristocratic datus took on importance.

THE DIVISIONS OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into three parts: (1) patterns of trading, 1768-1898; (2) patterns of slave-raiding, 1768-1898; and (3) a description of the institution of slavery as it existed in the Sulu sultanate, one made vivid by a collective biography based on accounts given by escaped slaves to Spanish or Dutch authorities. At first glance, each of these three parts might form a monograph by itself. But they are intimately connected by the thesis running through the book.

The Trading System. The rise of Sulu from its earlier position as one of many small trading states throughout the eastern part of insular Southeast Asia to becoming the major state still independent of European control was, so to speak, a by-product of the increasing British demand for Chinese tea. The English East India Company having been cut off from the inland trade of India in 1767 (hence apparently the starting point of 1768 for the book, though this is not made clear), soon found itself faced with bankruptcy from the continued flow of silver into China in exchange for tea. No longer being able to supply sufficient trade goods for the Canton tea market, they turned to Sulu as a source for goods, desired by the Chinese — *tripang* (sea slugs), edible bird's nests, wax, pearls, and other sea and forest products. In exchange, the British supplied the Taosugs with opium, arms, and ammunition. The modern ammunitions served the Taosugs not only to strengthen their own military position and to extend the range of their subject and client territories in north Borneo, but for trade as well to the Ilanun and the Balangingi Samals. These two ethnic groups found their medium of exchange for the purchase of arms in the slaves they gathered all through insular Southeast Asia, but especially in Spanish Philippines. By the end of the eighteenth century they ranged throughout Philippine territory, even rounding the northern coast of Luzon to raid the eastern coastal villages and towns on their return trip to the south. These thousands of slaves not only served as a medium of exchange with the Taosugs, but were also incorporated into the originally small Balangingi population, so that before Balangingi was destroyed in 1848 by the Spaniards, Warren estimates that nine-tenths of the "Balangingi" were ultimately of slave origin. Through this complex series of trading relationships, by 1800 the Taosugs had succeeded in making Sulu the redistributive center of a trade network covering all of Southeast Asia.

Slave-Raiding. In the absence of any effective counter-measures taken by the Spaniards in Manila — at least partly explained by the profitable trade simultaneously going on between Manila and Jolo — the slave raiders devastated the Visayas and northern Mindanao. Indeed, they came to the point of creating a “Balangingi lake” in the inland seas of the Visayas, as they established semi-permanent settlements in Mindoro, Capul, Burias, Masbate, and Catanduanes, from which they harassed also the south of Luzon and the Bikol region to such an extent that whole villages permanently disappeared. Left to themselves by the government, and without firearms for several decades, the Christian Filipinos under the leadership of the friar parish priests gradually built a series of forts, watchtowers, and fortified churches to defend themselves. Not a few friars led the military campaigns themselves for the defense of their flocks. Even when the government finally agreed to provide some powder and arms, much of this was actually sold by corrupt *alcaldes-mayores* to the Iranun and Balangingi raiders. It is not hard to see that increasingly the people of the harassed provinces looked to the friars as their only leaders and protectors and saw the government of Spain as nothing more than the exactor of tribute and forced labor.

Slavery Described. Warren has carefully reconstructed not only the economic basis of slave raiding and the actual patterns it took, but has drawn a carefully nuanced picture of slavery in Sulu itself. Here the lot of the slave could vary considerably from the wretched fate of those, who being weak or old, could not contribute to the economy, and were sold to pagan peoples of Borneo for ritual sacrifice, to those who became totally integrated into the Taosug population and even rose to positions of wealth and power. Tagalog and Visayan *renegados* who had embraced Islam were frequently the leaders of Balangingi raiding fleets, where the knowledge of the regions being raided made them especially valuable. Many of the slaves, however, especially those newly captured, escaped to the European vessels anchored at Jolo, or managed to flee in small boats to the Spanish *presidio* of Zamboanga. Here, sad to say, the often endured at Spanish hands a captivity worse than that of Jolo, as they were kept for years as outcasts, exploited in forced labor, and unable to return to their former towns.

Only in the 1840s, spurred on by the fear of other European powers establishing themselves in the south, did Manila begin to take effective measures to stop the slave trade, first by destroying the Balangingi strongholds in 1848, and then by an attack on Jolo itself in 1851. With the advent of the steamship, the superior speed of the Balangingi *prahus* was nullified, and their raiding forces were gradually destroyed. The last half of the nineteenth century saw the gradual decline of Sulu, as Spanish, British, and Dutch fleets eliminated the source of slaves, and the Spaniards first blockaded Jolo, and

finally established a permanent garrison there in 1878, though without achieving control over the archipelago, or even the whole island.

Among the other important consequences of the slave trade was the changing ethnic composition of the Sulu sultanate over the period treated here. Even in the eighteenth century, slaves already constituted a large portion of the population. With the continued infusion of slaves in the nineteenth century, Warren concludes that before 1850 the slave population was already several times larger than that of the host society. Though many Filipino Christians clung to their religion and with varying success tried to escape, the greater number had been seized as children and grew up as Muslims. Others, the renegados converted to Islam, or the non-Christians from Borneo or elsewhere outside the Philippines, could, given the unique character of Taosug slavery, and depending on their own talents or abilities and the benevolence of their masters, be manumitted and thereafter be absorbed into Taosug society. When the continued inflow of slaves stopped after 1850, the descendants of those manumitted were continually being redefined according to the ethnicity of the host community. By the end of the century Sulu had become "a nation of birthright Taosug" though in fact the larger part of the population was descended originally from slave ancestors from Spanish Philippines.

Warren raises a number of other demographic or economic questions which deserve further research, for which his masterful picture of the dynamics of Sulu development provides a background. Such, for example, would be the effects of slave-raiding on the development of Philippine towns, on population growth and decline, on migration from one region or island to another during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Taking records of the diocese of Nueva Caceres as an example, he is able to show the change in the character of raiding as the *cabeceras* became well-fortified, so that the raiders concentrated on small barrios instead. This in turn led to the growth of large towns in certain areas with the abandonment of the unprotected barrios.

Another example could be found in the coordination of Warren's data with the evidence in the recent history of Negros by Fr. Angel Martinez Cuesta, O.A.R., which shows the large part in the rapid growth of the sugar industry played by the containment of slave-raiding by 1850. Local and regional history in many parts of the Philippines cannot help but be illuminated and given new directions by Warren's research.

A NOTE ON STYLE

It is unfortunate to have to note the rather large number of misprints, though somewhat excusable in a book of this size with sources in so many different languages. Less excusable is the consistent misspelling of a number

of Spanish and Filipino names or words, and one misses the Spanish accents and other orthographic marks. Minor errors are Samal for Samar (p. 343, n. 139), "religious corporations" instead of "religious orders" as a translation of "corporaciones religiosas," and the reference to Governor Basco y Vargas as "Vargas," rather than Basco. More serious is the erroneous location of Mamburao in Mindoro Oriental rather than Mindoro Occidental, both in the text and in the otherwise useful map of the slave-trading routes (pp. 166-67).

These blemishes are negligible, however, in proportion to the immense amount of research that has gone into this path-breaking work. The maps and tables, carefully constructed out of masses of disparate data, are valuable additions and aids to the main work. It is to be hoped that this book will be read by historians in the Philippines especially, no matter what their regional specialization. It will also be useful to all those seriously concerned with the background of Muslim-Christian relations in southern Philippines today.

John N. Schumacher, S.J.

LAGUNA IN AMERICAN TIMES; COCONUTS AND REVOLUCIONARIOS. By Lewis E. Gleeck, Jr. Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1981. x, 156 pages.

Lewis Gleeck's numerous contributions to the history of the American presence in the Philippines are well-known to all interested in twentieth-century history. Though continuing to use the American period as the framework of his story, the indefatigable researcher has now turned his attention to the history of the Filipinos during that period. He proposes a series of provincial histories, of which the book under review is the second (the first having dealt with Nueva Ecija).

Gleeck has generally drawn his facts from reliable sources, many of them not too easily available, though at times the historian would want more precise footnoting. However, the organization of the book by topics does not make for easy reading. Nor does it, in my opinion, lead to an accurate historical picture to treat political affairs, agriculture, industry, the provincial elite, etc. in separate chapters. Although the author occasionally refers to related topics in previous chapters, there is little sense of interaction or interrelation among the topics mentioned. The overall effect is to provide a work of reference on the history of a province rather than a provincial history. But the lack of any index or even of a table of contents will make consultation for reference difficult.

The weakest chapter in the book is that entitled "Friars, Lessees and Shareholders." Concerning the friar lands properly so-called, Gleeck records