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An American in Manila: Early American-Philippine Trade

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AN AMERICAN IN MANILA

EARLY AMERICAN-PHILIPPINE TRADE: THE JOURNAL OF NATHANIEL BOWDITCH IN MANILA, 1796. Edited with an introduction by Thomas R. McHale and Mary C. McHale. Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph Series, No. 2 New Haven, 1962. iii, 65 pp.

Nathaniel Bowditch's chief claim to fame is *The New American Practical Navigator*, Newburyport (Mass.), 1802, which through innumerable subsequent editions became the seaman's indispensable vademecum. All over the world, in the days of sail and even afterwards, captains confronted with some dubious "fix" by a junior officer would utter the ominous words, "Hand me the Bowditch," much as Saint Cyprian used to say, pointing to Tertullian's rolls, *Da magistrum*—let's see what the Master has to say.

But before Bowditch became an oracle, when he was barely twenty-three, he shipped as supercargo on the *Astrea* of Salem, which dropped anchor at Cavite Harbor early in the morning of 2 October 1796. Methodical mathematician that he was, he kept a journal of the voyage, and it is the portion of that journal referring to his sojourn in Manila (2 October to 10 December), that is here presented by Mr. and Mrs. McHale. What the observant Bowditch noted down the McHales have enriched with an excellent introduction and copious notes.

In the late eighteenth century foreign ships calling at Manila usually did so on their way to Canton, in order to take in cargo which could be sold there and thus relieve them to some extent of paying for tea out of their limited store of silver currency. The Philippine products most in demand at Canton were rice, hides, and two Chinese delicacies: edible birds'-nests and edible sea-slugs. The *Astrea's* voyage to Manila, however, seems to have been made specially and not simply as a subsidiary to the China trade. What she wanted was chiefly sugar and molasses for the New England rum industry, whose usual sources of supply in the West Indies had been rendered precarious by the outbreak of war between France and England (1793).

She brought in trade American-made hats and compasses and Madeira wines; and this, as the editors point out, presents a problem. It was only recently, in 1789, that the port of Manila had been opened to European and American ships, and then only on condition that they brought Asiatic, not Western goods. Yet here was Bowditch not only getting his cargo past customs, but offering the governor-general and other high colonial officials first choice of his wines. They politely declined the offer, but by 28 November Bowditch could write in his journal that "our hats are all sold at about 1 dollar

per piece profit and nothing remains to be sold but about 7 or 8 Casks of Brandy and 6 bbls NE [New England] rum." It certainly seems as though the royal prohibition was more honored in the breach than in the observance.

As a matter of fact, this did not pass unnoticed by the officials of the Royal Philippine Company, in whose favor the prohibition had been imposed, and they protested vigorously. But since they had apparently neglected to provide these articles themselves, the merchants and citizens of Manila could reasonably reply that *someone* had to supply them with wines, hats, and even compasses.

Another problem is presented by the fact that the *Astrea* was met by an American resident in Manila, John Stuart Kerr, who was in business as a commission merchant. The point is that as a non-Spanish European Kerr had no business residing in the Philippines at all; it was against the law. But here again, the law was apparently applied in a quite flexible manner, for when the explorer Laperouse visited Manila in 1787 he was met by a French resident named Sebir. Moreover, Bowditch notes that "an English gentleman named Paramond came here small time past master of a vessel with design to establish himself to do business here and has taken a house for that purpose."

There was no nonsense about Bowditch. He was a young man with his way to make in the world, and he meant to do it as expeditiously as possible. He therefore had little patience with the easy-going Spaniards, whose "dronish disposition... keeps them from turning to the most profit this rich and fertile country." He is particularly resentful of the *siesta*: "At 12 o'clock they dine, after which they sleep till 3 o'clock, during which time very little business can be transacted except with the natives." That was one small comfort; "the natives do not sleep at noon"; however, "in other respects their customs is pretty much like the Spanish."

As for the British, the Americans' chief competitors in the Canton and East-India trade, Bowditch somewhat smugly observes that "the English commanders here live in stile rowling about in their Coaches. We Americans make use of what is called here the Coach of Saint Francis, viz., shoe leather, which is not quite so expensive, Shoes being here at about 60 or 70 cents per piece well made." No wonder the Honorable East India Company were not a little apprehensive that with the advent of these rather terrifying Americans, even the cooks of whose ships were capable of working out navigational problems, their days of dominance over the trade of Asia were numbered.

It is clear that considerable and wide-ranging research has gone into the explanatory notes, and little exception can be taken to them.

It may be pointed out that Francisco Leandro de Viana was attorney-general, but never governor of the Philippines (notes 27-28). It is true that the state monopoly of spirits, or the "wine monopoly" (*renta de vinos*), was placed under the direct administration of the colonial treasury in 1787, (note 29), but it was in existence much earlier, being farmed out to the highest bidder. One of the charges brought against Dawsonne Drake, the British governor of occupied Manila, was skulduggery regarding the "arrack farm". Nicolas Norton Nicols is cited (p. 11) as including *balete* among the Philippine exports of his time; but surely what he means is *balate*, the edible sea-slug (trepang, or beche-de-mer) so highly prized by Chinese gourmets.

Taken all together, introduction, text and notes, this is a most valuable contribution to Philippine economic history.

H. DE LA COSTA

PATRON OF THE GODS

JULIAN THE APOSTATE. By Giuseppe Ricciotti. Translated by Joseph Costelloe, S.J. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1959. vii, 275 pp.

With a few deft strokes—either in muted pastel or luminous oil—the expert portrait painter can reveal a man's soul. So, too, the historian-biographer can project his subject's character with pertinently detailed facts seen through an impartial eye. But where the character involved is seen in a web of contradiction, it takes more than an analytical mind and a brilliant style to do justice to the sketch.

Father Ricciotti possesses the keen insight, the lucidity and the impartiality necessary to present a balanced biography. He translates the complex character of Flavius Claudius Julianus, nephew of Constantine the Great and future Caesar (335-360) and Augustus (360-363), amidst the turbulent background of a desperate classical paganism beating itself out against a Christian-influenced world. The result is a sharp picture of a man to whom one cannot remain indifferent.

Julian the "Apostate," son of Julius Constantius (half-brother to Constantine the Great) and Basilisa, was born in Constantinople toward the end of the year 331. He was raised a Christian but the brand of Christianity he became acquainted with was Arian. His first real teacher was Mardonius, a learned slave who had been his mother's mentor.