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Royal Land Grants in the Colonial Philippines (1571-1626): Implications for the Formation of a Social Elite

NICHOLAS P. CUSHNER and JOHN A. LARKIN

The following article is based on what the authors consider to be one of the more important documents thus far discovered on the early colonial Philippines. The document, found in the Lilly Library collection on the Philippines, is the copy of a list of all of the Royal Land Grants made by the colonial government between 1572 and 1626.¹ It is important for several reasons. For one, it reveals in detail a mechanism used to reward Spaniards and natives for services rendered the crown. The Spaniards received the lion's share of the amount of land given, but, also of great interest here is the relative paucity of grants made, that is, relative to the number and size bestowed on Spaniards in Peru and Mexico. This may well have been because the relatively few Spaniards who came to the Philippines, and their numbers decreased dramatically in the seventeenth century, were not at all interested in farming but in the get-rich-quick accessibility of the galleon trade. A second reason for the document's importance is the verification of the special role of the Pampangans in Spanish colonial affairs.² Pampangans *principales* were by far the main native recipients of Royal Land Grants. And lastly, but perhaps most important of all, the document demonstrates how a new set of determinants for class differentiation or ranking, based on land ownership, was introduced into the province of Pampanga, and to the rest of the Philippines. The authors suggest that the economic and social basis for the development of the elite class in Pampanga is thereby revealed. There is no positive indication that the landowning system in the

1. The list of grants, a copy made in 1698 of some original official government list, is found in a vellum-bound volume titled "Mandaloya," Lilly Library (Bloomington, Indiana), Philippine Mss. 1633-1720, fols. 152-169.

2. John A. Larkin, *The Pampangans: Colonial Society in a Philippine Province* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), also touches on this point.

Philippines grew out of these particular grants, but what is clear is that they helped to change the notion of land ownership. The extent of land given away by these grants is not so important as the idea they introduce, a new concept, that of private ownership of land, from which a whole series of devastating legal socio-economic practices spring.

In a non-industrial, agrarian society the mechanisms of land distribution are literally of vital importance. They not only determine who controls the source of wealth, the land, but they also determine who eats what, how much, and how often. The Spanish conquest of the Philippines introduced new mechanisms of land distribution which affected the social fabric of Filipino society. These mechanisms eventually created new controllers of the sources of wealth as well as new relationships between the land and its tillers. This article examines one of the mechanisms of land distribution introduced by the Spaniards, the Royal Land Grant. By examining the location, recipients, and social effects of these grants, we gain a better insight into the immediate post-conquest years, a period when new institutions, traditions, and social relationships were forming in Filipino society. Why these grants were awarded and their implications for the formation of Philippine colonial society constitute the focus of this article.

The distribution of conquered lands had a long precedent in Spanish history. One of the major incentives for the reconquest of Spain from the Moors was the promise of land to the captains and commanders of the Christian army. The practice was continued in America and the Philippines. Between 1571 and 1626 the Spanish governors of the Philippines, acting in the name of the king, made at least 208 grants of land to original participants in the conquest, government officials, ordinary Spanish citizens, and to Filipino *principales* who were considered deserving of a government reward. Table 1 shows the distribution pattern by governor.³

Following the land measurements used in New Spain, the size of the grant in the Philippines was described by the four terms, the *estancia para ganado mayor*, the *estancia para ganado menor*, the *caballería*, and the *cabalita*. The term *pedazo* was sometimes used to indicate an irregular plot of unknown dimensions. It

3. The three tables used in this article are derived from the grant list mentioned in footnote 1.

Table 1. Distribution of land grants, 1571-1626

Governor	Years	Grants	SIZE		
			Estancias	Caballerias	Cabalitas
Legazpi	1571-1572	15	4	7	4
Lavezaris	1573-1575	6	2	0	5
Sande	1576-1580	22	4	8	25
Gonzalo Ronquillo	1580-1582	8	9	4	18
Diego Ronquillo	1583-1584	6	4	7	23
Santiago de Vera	1584-1590	56	29	31½	4254
Pérez Dasmariñas	1590-1594	71	15	20	3809
Francisco Tello	1597-1602	16	14	14	811
Audiencia	1607-1608	2	2	0	0
Alonso Fajardo	1619-1621	5	3	2	1
Niño de Tavora	1626	1	1	0	0
TOTALS		208	87	93½	8950

contained anywhere from 20 to 200 *cabalitas* of land. The *estancia para ganado mayor* was an extensive piece of land, 5000 *pasos* square, intended for any type of horned cattle. The *estancia para ganado menor* was a smaller extension of land, 3000 *pasos* square, for pigs, goats, or horses. The *caballería* and *cabalita* were even smaller subdivisions. The former was set at 450 *varas* wide and 900 *varas* long (about 68 acres), while the *cabalita* was about half of this or about 34 acres. However, these official dimensions meant very little in the Philippines. Boundaries were usually determined by a series of topographical markers, a tree, a stream, a hill, that frequently bore little relationship to the official size. Boundaries were hazy and hence a source of much litigation.

Although *estancias* were distributed as early as Legazpi's time, Table 1 shows that over 50 percent of all *estancias* granted between 1571 and 1624 were distributed by Santiago de Vera and Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas in the decade 1584-1594. It might be inferred that this was the time when Spanish governors wished to establish a solid base for the colony composed of yeoman-like agrarian types, but this could be challenged by the fact that most of the grants during this decade went to Filipino *principales*.

Location of the grant and status of the recipient were closely

connected. Table 2 shows that most of the *estancia* and *caballería* grants were clustered in the jurisdiction of Tondo and the province of Cavite.

Table 2. Geographical distribution of Royal Land Grants, 1571-1626

Province	Estancias	Caballerías	Cabalitas
Cebu	4	7	2
Tondo	39	33	52
Cavite	15	20	24
Pampanga	8	8	7168
Bulacan	1	2	2
Laguna	1	0	3
Cagayan	3	0	8
Bataan	0	0	490
Pangasinan	0	0	2
Camarines	3	2	4

While all of the grants in Tondo were awarded to either Spanish army officials, civil servants, or Spanish *vecinos* of Manila, Santiago de Vera began awarding land to Filipinos. Diego Lasa, *principal* of Pampanga, was granted 200 *cabalitas* near Nueva Mexico; Miguel Mañago and Paguab were given 100 *cabalitas* each; Guillermo Maroco, a *principal* of Betis, was awarded one *caballería*; and Tambinaguay, a *principal* of Lubao, was also given one *caballería*. In 1588 and 1589 de Vera gave Pampango *principales* a total of 2230 *cabalitas* of land in Pampanga. de Vera's successor was just as generous. Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas gave to 53 *principales* a little over 3690 *cabalitas* of land in Pampanga. Table 3 shows the land granted to Pampango *principales*.

Table 3. Pampango *principales* awarded land grants, 1585-1603

Principal	Place	Size ^a
1585		
Don Diego Lasa	Nueva Mexico	200
Don Miguel Mañago	Nueva Mexico	100
Paguab	Nueva Mexico	100
Don Guillermo Maroco	Nueva Mexico	2 caballerías
Tambinaguay	Nueva Mexico	

Principal	Place	Size
1588		
Don Joseph Doro	Palomocan	1 pedazo
Don Diego Magganaya		
Juan Dayas	Candaba	1000
Sangalan		
1589		
Don Gonzalo Pambasic		
Vicente Macatuano	Arayat	1000
Juan Bayet		
Bacu (Maestro de hacer Artillería)		
Francisco Mallari	Panlimot	200
Diego Boboson		
Apaso		
Don Esteban Cura	Misulao	
Don Alonso Libac		
1593		
Don Miguel Dyon	Guiong Guiong	75
Doña Isabel Siclan	"	75
Doña Catalina Siclan	"	75
Doña Ana Siclan	"	75
Don Andres Nague	"	100
Martin de Mana	"	100
Doña Isabel Asie	"	100
Don Agustin Omol	"	200
Don Miguel Pilao	"	20
Don Guillermo Nasa	"	20
Don Mateo Panbinit	"	20
Don Miguel Suctia	"	100
Don Alonso Napsal	"	50
Don Guillermo Dimaroco	"	300
Don Miguel Banaga	Bauí	20
Don Phelipe Balactas	"	20
Don Guillermo Tongo	"	10
Don Fernando Doquit	"	10
Don Felipe Yacton	"	10
Alonso Marin	Candaba	100
Doña Maria Liquita	"	10
Don Mateo Nautit	"	10
Don Nicolas Casangan	"	10

Principal	Place	Size
Don Pablo Monacal	"	10
Don Gregorio Canonao	"	10
Don Phelipe Balactas	Lincallos	50
Don Pedro Cumano	"	50
Don Marcos Pilao	"	50
Don Francisco Patauaran	"	50
Comunidad de Nueva Mexico	"	50
Don Alonso Ilac	"	300
Don Diego Guintio	"	100
Don Geronimo Sigla	"	50
Doña Cathalina Salin	"	50
Juan Catal	"	50
Don Agustin Lucandalei	"	300
Don Miguel Danga	"	50
Doña Maria Liquiban	"	50
Doña Ana Siglao	Lipit	50
Don Francisco Toa	"	50
Don Marcos Puiat	"	50
Don Marcos Pambanagan	"	50
Comunidad de Mexico	"	50
Doña Maria Guina	"	20
Don Agustin Toto	"	50
Benito Libay	"	20
Don Marcos Panbatal	"	50
Don Miguel Banago	"	350
Don Alonso Asso	"	150
Don Marcos Calaguean	"	50
Doña Maria Sara	"	100
Marcos Patoa	"	20
1602		
Don Geronimo Tongcol	Mayantal	300

^asize in *cabalitas* unless otherwise stated

The granting of land to Pampangan *principales*, to 18 of them by Santiago de Vera between 1585 and 1589, to more than 50 by Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas in 1593 and to one by Francisco Tello in 1602, fits in with the pattern of close and quite special collaboration between the elite of that province and their Spanish overlords. Not long after the conquest of Central Luzon in the early 1570s, the Spaniards in their newly established settlement in Manila came

to rely heavily on Pampanga for food, labor, and soldiers, all volunteered by local leaders. As early as 1574 Pampangan warriors joined in the defense of the colony against the depredations of the Chinese marauder, Limahong. Governor Francisco de Sande reported in 1576 that Pampangan rice was the only reliable source maintaining the foreign community of Spaniards and Chinese. The Pampanga *datus*, now called *principales*, organized the labor gangs that went to work the gold mines of Ilocos in 1583, service which in part caused a famine at home the following year. In the wake of this tragedy a near revolt developed, thwarted only at the last moment by alerted Spanish officials.

When the first Royal Land Grants were awarded to the Pampanga *principales* the following year, it might have been for the kinds of services previously contributed by them or for some secret cooperation (as yet unrevealed in the sources) in suppressing the revolt of 1584. Or possibly Governor de Vera wished to reward the Pampangans for sending troops for his foray, ultimately unsuccessful, to the Moluccas in 1585. Pampangan contingents were continually serving in Spanish military ventures within and outside the Archipelago. Some Pampangans, like the famous Pandaypira, and Bacu, one of the grantees listed here, cast cannons for the colonials. One can only wonder if Dasmaríñas gave the Pampangan *principales* land grants for prior aid or for helping him mount his ill-fated expedition to the Moluccas in 1593. The loyalty of the Pampangan *principales* was complete and constant, making them the most valued among the native population, and this document verifies for the first time the unique collaboration between them and the new conqueror.

The document also reveals two of the early ways in which the Spaniards rewarded loyal Pampangans. First of all, they gave *principales* and their spouses the titles of "Don" and "Doña," thus elevating them socially above the rest of the native population. In time these titles became associated with local political offices and increased the differentiation into the two-class order which evolved under the Spanish regime. But such titles were granted frequently and to leaders in other regions as well. The added privilege of landholding was conferred exclusively upon the Pampangans.

How the Spaniards viewed the grants is still unclear. Were the Pampangans merely expected to benefit socially from being titled

landholders or were they actually supposed to profit economically from bringing the land under cultivation through some system of rental or tenure? The latter seems likely, since some grants were awarded to whole communities. Grants to women would imply that they were economic sinecures offered to the widows of loyal *principales*. Certainly the Spaniards needed food from Pampanga, and the grants may have been made as an inducement to bring new land under cultivation. On the other hand, land grants varied considerably in size, between ten and 350 *cabalitas*, giving a good indication that they were intended to create a rank order. For whatever purpose they were given, they surely altered pre-existing social and economic patterns in Pampangan society.

While some ambiguity surrounds the exact nature of the pre-Hispanic land tenure system in Pampanga, there certainly did not exist the notion of private land ownership. Economic differentiation, which might have been quite small, derived from the control of labor services bestowed upon *datus* because of their special skills in combat and leadership. Wet rice fields were parceled out to the community on the basis of need and use, and the surrounding jungle remained open to slash-and-burn agriculturalists, to hunters and gatherers, and to those cutting wood. But the Spaniards, first by granting land to the conquistadores and then to native *principales*, changed that system. The individual now had a way to perpetuate his or her family's wealth and power without relationship either to personal skill or prestige. The environment for rigid class distinctions based primarily on wealth had been created, and community pressure to prevent such distinctions was sharply reduced. The original awardees may or may not have benefited from the Royal Land Grants, but the new pattern of land ownership altered society from that time on. It would appear that the Pampangan leadership was the first native group to solidify their elite status in regional society, and, although the membership changed over time, the class persisted from the awarding of the grants onward.

Besides the grants listed in Table 3, a few *principales* in other provinces received land from the government, and even a town was awarded a land grant. Francisco de Tuliao was given an *estancia* in Cagayan in 1608, and in 1621 and 1626 Alonso Bugason, the Filipino gobernador of Lingayen, was granted *estancias* near Lingayen and near Sual. The community of Binalotonga was given a

pedazo of land on 30 September 1600. However, it should be kept in mind that almost all grants to Filipino *principales* were in *cabalitas*. Grants to Spaniards were the much larger *estancias* or *caballerías*.

Several further points can be raised apropos of these early land grants. For one, the idea that the ownership of land resided in one person, the king, or that land could be owned in fee simple, were totally new concepts diametrically opposed to the traditional practice of Filipinos. As said above, we are not certain of the specifics of pre-Hispanic land tenure practices, but we do know enough to understand that titles, leases, sale and purchase of land, or unwillingness to work it, were innovations which shook the social fabric of native society. Secondly, although the land granted by the governors was supposed to have been vacant, early grants took no account of swidden farming. Many of these grants could have reduced the native farming area. Thirdly, it is clear from the geographical distribution that royal grants affected primarily the Manila area, principally Tondo, Cavite, and Pampanga. The rest of the Philippines, at least for the first 50 years of Spanish rule, was left for the most part untouched. And one really does not know how many of the land grants actually were farmed. We suspect that many were not. The large turnover of Spaniards in the Philippines and the severe diminution of the Spanish population in the seventeenth century indicates that either the grants remained unworked or were sold and consolidated into larger holdings.

Purchasing land from native Filipinos or from *principales* was the more common Spanish form of acquiring property. The Royal Land Grant, however, was a mechanism widely used in the early colonial Philippines, and it helped to establish and reinforce a European pattern of land use and ownership. It is in the early colonial period that future land ownership patterns formed. The Pampango elite especially benefited from this early formation and it may well have been that they were the first Filipino colonial elite class formed from the new European-inspired determinants.

One final word by way of conclusion concerning the abruptness with which the granting of land apparently ceased in 1626. If indeed this list includes all of the Royal Land Grants made in the Philippines during the colonial period, one might wonder why no further grants were made after 1626. Since the document was copied in 1698, there seems to have been no reason not to include

subsequent grants. There are several possible answers to the question. There might have been some decree from Madrid forbidding grants to Pampangos or Filipino *principales* or there might have been an internal policy which considered it dangerous to give land to Filipinos. Or perhaps Spaniards simply were not interested in land after 1626, so no grants were made to Spaniards. Whatever the reason for the cession of grants, if indeed none were given, it could not have changed the process already set in motion. The concept of private ownership of land was in the Philippines to stay.