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and the Spanish Philippines in the Golden Age

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words” (“Poetically Man Dwells,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Alfred Hofstadter, 213; Perennial Classics/Harper Collins, 1971), keeping the verbal arts of indigenous communities alive not only allows us to discover wonderful worlds other than ours. It may also help us to look into our own worlds, and enable us to realize how language indeed is the very soul of a people, and that its source is poetry.

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JOHN NEWSOME CROSSLEY

Hernando de los Ríos Coronel and the Spanish Philippines in the Golden Age

Surrey: Ashgate, 2011. 244 pages.

To scholars of Philippine history, the name Hernando de los Ríos Coronel is most likely to ring a bell. His is a familiar name, but many will have a hard time recalling who exactly he was. At most, they will remember De los Ríos from his letters and memorials published in Antonio de Morga’s *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* and in Emma Blair and James Robertson’s *The Philippine Islands*, where he brings to the attention of colonial officials problems in the Philippines and the surrounding region. Other than that, almost everyone will draw a blank on his life or even the personal circumstances behind his letters and memorials. John Newsome Crossley’s book on De los Ríos fills this gap in our knowledge and gives life to the man behind the words.

Doing the biography of a person who lived four centuries ago is not the easiest of tasks, even in the case of a relatively important person in Spanish Philippine society. Crossley had to follow the tracks left behind by De los Ríos in libraries and archives in different countries from Australia, United States, and the Philippines to Spain and the United Kingdom. Readers who are used to biographies of famous persons whose every move and motivation are accounted for might be slightly disappointed by this book since there are noticeable gaps in the life story of De los Ríos, such as where in Spain he was born, why as a soldier he decided to become a priest, what happened during his unaccounted for years during his second stint in the Philippines, and in what year did he die. That basic biographical questions are left unanswered has nothing to do with the quality of the research but more to do with the lack of extant materials. Crossley’s detective skills extract as much information from the primary sources as possible without going overboard with fanciful speculation. The life of De los Ríos still comes alive in the mind of the reader. De los Ríos was one of those Renaissance men of the early colonial era; he was a pilot, navigator, mathematician, scientist, priest, and lobbyist.

Crossley’s strategy is to follow the life of De los Ríos as it was inextricably linked to the history of the Spanish Philippines in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. After a couple of introductory chapters that center primarily around the colonization of the Philippines, each succeeding chapter in the book focuses on one stage in the life of De los Ríos. As a soldier

he arrived in the Philippines, where he joined the expedition to Ternate with Gomez Perez Dasmariñas, served as administrator at the hospital for Spaniards in Manila, defended Manila against a Chinese fleet, went on an expedition to Cambodia with Luis Perez Dasmariñas, got shipwrecked off the coast of China, and invented a new kind of astrolabe. On his return to Spain, he maintained a sea-log of his voyage and, once there, performed his role as procurator-general dispatching requests and letters to the king informing him of the Chinese uprising, explaining problems of administration and security in the colony, and advocating the rights of Spaniards and indigenes alike. He was effective in his job since most of his proposals were approved and resulted in royal decrees. He returned to the Philippines as a newly ordained secular priest, but on the way he still had to perform his duty as navigator because he was tasked to try out a new compass that was supposed to solve the problem of determining longitude.

His second stint in the Philippines is unaccounted for except for the fact that he received a chaplaincy in Manila. To fill this gap, a chapter is dedicated to De los Ríos's personal library that survives to this day in the Heritage Library of the University of Santo Tomas. Religious books on how to convert Muslims along with scientific books like Copernicus's *De revolutionibus* prove the wide range of his interests and the many hats that he wore. When he went back to Spain for the final time to reprise his role as procurator-general, he repeated many of his previous proposals because these had not been implemented in the colony. As the Philippines was a theater of battle in the ongoing war with the Dutch, his most pressing task was to obtain military help for the colony from the king as soon as possible.

People who are interested in reading De los Ríos's writings themselves will find the appendices useful since they discuss where the primary sources can be found and they break ground by publishing the very first translations in English of the 1619 memorial and the first part of the 1621 memorial that appears in summary form only in Blair and Robertson. Primary sources not published in the book, like translations of the complete 1621 memorial and of the sea-logs of his voyages across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, are available for public viewing at Crossley's personal website.

A weak point of the book is that there is no theoretical framework that holds everything together. Although the book's title might lead one to think that both De los Ríos and the Spanish Philippines would get equal billing, it is mostly the life of De los Ríos that sustains the narrative, with the history

of Spanish Philippines serving largely as a background that comes in and out of focus as the biography unfolds. Understandably, Crossley sets his sights on De los Ríos and provides just enough context to make sense of his actions. Thus, Crossley illumines De los Ríos's memorials by explaining their immediate context such as the Chinese uprising in Manila and the increasing depredations of Dutch fleets in Southeast Asia. To make sense of De los Ríos's sea-logs, Crossley explains the problem of determining the longitude that navigators of that time faced. These explanations are enough to carry the narrative, but they are not of such depth as to problematize certain historical themes such as those relating to the early Spanish Philippines, which the book covers but does not push for a deeper understanding of the period. Moreover, the relationship between the procurator-general, the governor-general, and the Manila Spaniards could have been developed further. Crossley points out that De los Ríos was chosen as procurator-general by the Manila Spaniards and that he constantly criticized the governors-general in his memorials, yet the dynamics of this political maneuvering are not explored in the book. Of course, doing so would have brought Crossley away from his task of writing De los Ríos's biography, but it would have brought out the significance of De los Ríos's two terms as procurator-general in the context of Spanish Philippine politics.

De los Ríos comes out a bit too clean and idealized in the end, advocating for the rights of the Manila Spaniards and indigenes and denouncing the nepotism and favoritism prevalent among the governor-general and other colonial officials. But the position of procurator-general was to a certain extent that of a lobbyist arguing for the king to favor a particular group of backers, so De los Ríos was not really exempt from the favoritism that Crossley solely pins on others but not on De los Ríos. The only governor-general De los Ríos approved of was Gomez Perez Dasmariñas, and it is probably not a coincidence that he served all three of his expeditions across Southeast Asia under the leadership of Dasmariñas and his son.

When Crossley ventures out of De los Ríos's life and discusses Spanish Philippine history, he also resorts to easy answers. The majority of De los Ríos's proposals was approved by the king and became the basis of royal decrees that were, unfortunately, not implemented in the colony. Crossley blames this lack of action on "human greed, the tyranny of distance and the increasing demands of Spain's European wars" (2). The last two reasons are fine enough, but the first one resorts to a rather simplistic reasoning where

certain persons are just morally strong and upright like De los Ríos while others are intrinsically frail like the Philippine governors-general.

Despite these limitations, the book does the task of presenting the biography of De los Ríos well. In a way, the lack of a larger context or framework constantly hovering over the book helps Crossley instead to capture all the dimensions of a multifaceted man. Putting the life of De los Ríos within the framework of Spanish Philippine politics might have meant more space devoted to the memorials than to other parts of his life, and readers might have missed the lesser-known aspects of his life spent making sea-logs as he crossed oceans and amassing books for his personal library. These are fresh topics and avenues that are hardly explored in traditional Philippine histories, which are largely political. Crossley's biography of De los Ríos transports the reader from one unexpected setting to another, from military expeditions in Southeast Asia to the calculation of degrees in ocean voyages to consultations with Spanish kings to hours spent reading books. Exhibiting great flexibility in his ability to stay toe-to-toe with his subject's broad expertise, Crossley is successful in writing the first in-depth biography of this Renaissance man and bringing the reader along for a fascinating ride.

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