

philippine studies

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

The Island Saw it by Noone

Review Author: Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.

Philippine Studies vol. 31, no. 2 (1983) 277–282

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

But for us, in the developing country of the Philippines, where are we and what are we to think? Does the micro-chip world simply push us further behind, making the gap between the rich and the poor all the greater? (*Time*, 3 January 1983, p. 42).

Of course it can. Like all human inventions its use can be for weal or woe. But coming back to the analogy of the industrial revolution, the new element in this electronic revolution is precisely its scope. Because the computer is a micro-brain it can orchestrate and manage the first industrial revolution for those countries trying to reach the industrial takeoff point. Rather than being enslaved for repeating the era of the textile mills, for instance, with the micro-chip they can jump to automated textile manufacturing immediately. Thus the era of the first industrial projects can presumably be shortened for developing countries, and to this extent their progress hastened.

This is the promise of this small electronic wonder. It is the kind of potential that made *Time* magazine designate it the "man of the year." But of course it is the creation of man and as such suffers from the same ambiguity. In releasing man's intellectual potential it is releasing a mystery larger than itself. Let us hope the era of the microprocessor will be seen as the era of a deepening awareness of that ultimate mystery — man.

Daniel J. McNamara, S.J.

THE ISLANDS SAW IT. THE DISCOVERY AND CONQUEST OF THE PHILIPPINES, 1521-1581. By Martin J. Noone. Dublin: Helicon Press, n.d. xiii, 476 pages, maps, illustr.

Magellan's coming by a western route to the Far East in the first quarter of the sixteenth century was truly an event of global significance. It broke down the barriers that hemmed Europe in on itself; it made man the master of the high seas; and it initiated the unification of the human race, of which the United Nations today is, if nothing else, a hopeful symbol.

Paradoxically, this incident which introduced the Philippines to the world community has received only grudging interest from Philippine historians. Rather, attention has focused every now and then on comparatively trivial questions, like the "discovery" or "rediscovery" of the islands, Limasawa or Butuan as the site of the first mass on Philippine soil, and lately, the "fight for independence" or "insurrection" by Filipino troops against the new American government in the Philippines at the turn of the century.

One may debate on these points until he is black and blue in the face, but, unless talk is based on evidence, one gets nowhere. With Martin J. Noone's (MJN henceforth) *The Islands Saw It*, we now have a "reasonably full account of this accident of history, the discovery and occupation of the islands

called the Philippines by Spain . . .” (p. xi) which is based on historical sources. Sixty-four chapters divided into four groups recount the story of the expedition of Magellan in 1519-1521 to the occupation of the episcopal see of Manila by its first bishop, Fray Domingo de Salazar, O.P., in 1581. By this date, the former Muslim port had already had a ten-year existence as the Spanish *Insigne, Muy Noble y Siempre Leal Ciudad de Manila*.

The general outline of this first decade of the Philippine history is familiar to every school boy in the country. Of great interest in Fr. Noone's study are three key incidents during Magellan's brief stay in the islands: the first mass at Limasawa, the Christian baptism of the Cebuanos, and his sudden death.

FIRST MASS AND THE POSSESSION OF THE ISLANDS

Following the most obvious methodology of all historical writing — namely, using primary sources — MJN confidently states that “Limasawa has deservedly been regarded as a sacred shrine of Christianity — where mass was first offered on Philippine soil” (p. 66).

But mass at Limasawa was more than just an important liturgical interlude; it was also the act of possession of a territory by Magellan in the name of the Spanish king. As subsequent history has shown, the Philippines remained a Spanish colony for more than 300 years because of the joint action of the missionary and the royal official, the two agents of the Spanish *patronato real*. Not without reason is the remark added (p. 66, n. 136) that the Filipinos are what they are today largely because of their Christian beginnings.

The baptism of the Cebuanos is a bit more complex. Did the natives understand the new religion? Twice Pigafetta noted that they had asked for an explanation, just as Magellan himself had felt a momentary doubt. But he received immediate assurance “in typical polite counterfeit agreement” (p. 71), that there was neither pressure nor unworthy motive behind the natives' decision to become Christians. The important thing for Magellan was to make them imperial vassals and Christians right away; once this was done, instruction could follow in due course.

Thinkers in Magellan's and our own time have questioned this procedure. The problem lay in the linkage of interests between the Church and the Crown. But this must be distinguished, as MJN does, from Magellan's apparent sincerity to convert the natives, to doubt which would be aprioristic; and second, from the religiosity of the native population evidenced in their reverent awe on witnessing for the first time the religious rites of the newcomers. It is not surprising that the wife of Hamubon (traditionally, Humabon) should ask for the statue of the child Jesus “to keep instead of her idols” (p. 75). All of which leads MJN to disagree that the prehispanic native religion was animistic. Rather he points out, “fundamental . . . was belief in Man-

silatan and Bathala – the creator and the son of the creator, in antithesis to the problem of evil, personified in Padaugnon and Malimbong: ideas not at all too far removed from revealed religion” (p. 79).

Magellan’s death was in keeping with his otherwise heroic character: brave, resolute, self-opinionated to the point of recklessness. He seems to have disregarded the most elementary precautions. Whatever the reasons, he certainly underestimated the native capacity to do battle on their own familiar ground. And yet, even as he fell, he proved himself the true leader, turning “round many times to see if we had all reached the boats,” as Pigafetta so poignantly recorded.

Equally admirable, although not as well known in their details, are the subsequent events after the anticlimax at Mactan: del Cano’s steering of the *Victoria* back to Spain with only eighteen survivors aboard, thus circumnavigating the world for the first time; the ill-starred Loaisa expedition, and the no less tragic voyage of Saavedra to follow up the aborted Magellan plan. On the face of it, these expeditions were failures. But something important was gained, namely, the certainty there was indeed a western route to the Far Eastern spiceries. But the way was too long. If there were intermediate stations where the boats could revictual, and if it was possible to return by the same western route in order not to trespass into Portuguese territory, then it was all worth the try. Actually, the experience and knowledge gained by the eighteen-year old Andres Urdaneta, a member of the Loaisa expedition, proved to be the key which opened the western return route from the Far East some forty years later.

SPICE TRADE AND THE MAKING OF HISTORY

Part of this story is the Hispano-Portuguese rivalry to control the spice trade. MJN makes a good case that this was a “constituent link in the chain of events that led up to the conquest and occupation of the Philippines in the long run” (p. 190). By some peculiar twist of history, the Portuguese governors in the Moluccas were not the best representatives of the Crown. Had they been less harsh or repressive, less greedy or less vicious, the whole spice trade could have been theirs. They could have easily exploited to their advantage the mutual rivalries of the local chiefs. As it turned out, it was the latter who used the Europeans to further their political plans, pitting the Portuguese against the Spaniards. One incident, especially, seems to have sealed the fate of the Portuguese (and Spaniards) in the Moluccas:

. . . Just as negotiations were going on, a servant of [Governor] Meneses, whether by his orders or not is uncertain . . . Slapped the haji across the face with a hunk of pork from the slain sow right before the eyes of the negotiators. It was a deadly insult, for which the devout Muslims fell prostrate to the ground weeping, while the Portuguese laughed uproariously.

Though the haji was eventually released the senseless abomination and insult to the Muslim faith was never forgiven and "that priest (haji) spent years travelling round the islands preaching revenge, and urging unity against the invader." Fuel was added to the flames shortly afterwards when Portuguese soldiers, left without pay for a long time, began looting houses for food (p. 193).

By the time Legazpi arrived in the Philippines in 1565, the damage had been done and resentment had already been stirred up against all Europeans. More important than this hostile attitude was the bungling of a "unique opportunity to Christianize the entire region" and which "set the stage for the eventual ejection of Portuguese and Spaniards themselves by the ruthless capitalist Netherlands East India Company" (p. 143).

For various reasons, some twenty years intervened before a third fleet was readied to continue where the Saavedra expedition had left off. On 1 November 1542, a fleet under the command of Villalobos weighed anchor off Navidad, and in three months it reached the northeastern corner of Mindanao. For the next three years, the Spaniards tarried around the region. Unable to move higher north because of contrary winds, they slid down to the Spiceries in search of food and on the lookout for the help promised from New Spain. One lasting achievement of Villalobos: the Philippines is called by this name because, having called Mindanao after Charles V, the island pair of Samar and Leyte was dubbed "Las islas Felipinas" in honor of the crown prince of Spain. As for the principal aim to establish a permanent settlement, nothing was accomplished because of their failure to open a western return route. There was no point in establishing a foothold in the Far East with no possible ties to the metropolis, an island far adrift somewhere in the Pacific.

A second interval of twenty years also was to pass before one more attempt was made to establish a Spanish colony in the Far East. Traditional historiography points to the European wars that occupied Charles V and drained Spanish gold as the cause. MJN adds an explanation closer to home.

OVERSEAS EXPANSION OF SPAIN NEARLY ABORTED

In response to the outcries of Bartolome de las Casas, the royal government bestirred itself to look into conditions in the New World. Four inspectors general were sent to New Spain, Panama, Venezuela, and Peru respectively. The man sent to New Spain was Canon Tello de Sandoval of Seville, a member of the Council of the Indies and Inquisitor of the Holy Office. Unusually energetic, he conducted within the period of four years a thorough inspection of practically every aspect in New Spain, "poking his nose into every complaint big or little, and composing a mountain of memoranda" (p. 253). As usually happens, he antagonized everyone. More importantly for

our story, because of charges against the Viceroy of New Spain, Sandoval stopped all voyages of discovery while the investigations were going on. This happened precisely when Villalobos and his men were trying to keep body and soul together, hoping against hope for the aid from New Spain which never materialized. By 1547, Sandoval was finally forced to board the ship to Spain, but by then, "the Villalobos expedition was a shambles" (p. 255).

The account does not stop here. Peru was also in need of a clean-up. The conquest and subsequent introduction of Spanish rule there brought that area to near ruin. Someone was needed to put things in order. Charles found his man, Luis de Velasco, but his appointment was contingent on the health of the Viceroy of New Spain. For a change, the latter chose to go to Peru, and Velasco went to New Spain. This was shortly before Philip II ascended the Spanish throne. As mentioned, European politics had tied the hands of his father and kept him from paying close attention to the overseas discoveries. Now, during Philip's reign, the anti-Spanish tide had not only not abated, but had actually almost aborted the promising overseas expansion so auspiciously begun.

It will perhaps surprise not a few, but the evidence points to Lavezaris as the first to plan the occupation of what is now the Philippine archipelago. He had sailed out with Villalobos in 1542, and six years later, he was back in Portugal. In 1548, he was in Mexico, where he must have discussed with the Viceroy the idea of a permanent settlement in the Philippines. By 1552, a letter from the Viceroy was in the hands of Philip II. When Velasco became Viceroy of New Spain, Lavezaris was sent back to Spain to discuss with the Council of the Indies the "suitability of Felipinas as a base from which the return voyage . . ." could be attempted (p. 264).

Once "blanket permission for overseas expansion" was received, preparations were undertaken. Two men proved to be the key to the success of this last attempt: Legazpi, whose humaneness won over the natives despite their initial hostility; Urdaneta, who guided the first return trip from Cebu to Mexico. Seeking the higher northern latitudes before turning east, Urdaneta inaugurated the route which would be followed for the next three hundred years and is now known as the Galleon route. All throughout the voyage, he insisted on accuracy in the pilots' log books. The purpose was not only to measure the extent of the Pacific Ocean, but especially to determine where the Demarcation Line stood. He had been opposed to landing in what is the Philippines, as is well known. What the pilots' reckonings arrived at may not be accurate according to modern science, but it was the best they could do. The Philippines did lie within the Spanish sphere, but Charles V had sold it to the Portuguese when he signed the treaty of Zaragoza. This was Urdaneta's opinion and he so informed the king. But apparently, he was ignored. As MJN writes, ". . . he would not have changed an iota of his written opinion

even for the king — an attitude that would not have made him very popular with Philip II — and . . . he simply withdrew from the limelight to the monastery where he wanted to be all along — his task finished” (p. 346). He died on 3 June 1568 at the monastery in Mexico City.

The Islands Saw It is evidently a meticulously researched study. MJN shows he is familiar with the sources and the pertinent literature. Not only that, he also knows the various forms of the Visayan tongue, although his attempts at philological interpretation may be open to question. One is also surprised that he still cites the Povedano manuscript (p. 81, n.) after it has been shown to be a fabrication!

These are minor drawbacks. They do not detract from the importance of this latest addition to the history of the Philippines. From now on, students will have to consult this book if they wish to talk intelligently about the coming of the Europeans to the Philippines.

Jose S. Arcilla, S.J.

Republic of the Philippines
Department of Public Works & Communications
BUREAU OF POSTS/MANILA

SWORN STATEMENT
Required by Act 2580

The undersigned Joseph L. Roche, S.J., editor of *Philippine Studies*, published quarterly in English at the Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, Quezon City, after having been duly sworn in accordance with law, hereby submits the following statement of ownership, management, circulation, etc., which is required by Act 2580, as amended by Commonwealth Act 201.

Editor: Rev. Fr. Joseph L. Roche, of P.O. Box 154, Manila
Owner: Ateneo de Manila, of P.O. Box 154, Manila
Publisher: Ateneo de Manila, of P. O. Box 154, Manila
Office of Publication: Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, Quezon City

Total number of copies printed and circulated of the last issue dated January-March 1983: Sent to paid subscribers 366; sent to others than paid subscribers 50; copies retained for future sales and replacement 384; total 800.

Joseph L. Roche, S.J.
Editor

Subscribed and sworn before me this 11th day of April 1983 at Manila the affiant exhibiting his Residence Certificate no. 4430906C issued at Quezon City on 25 January 1983.

Benjamin R. Enverga
Postal Inspector