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**Martin R. Gaerlan**

## **Sampaloc's Sacred Ground: The Franciscan Backstory (1613–1918)**

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# Book Reviews

MARTIN R. GAERLAN

## **Sampaloc's Sacred Ground: The Franciscan Backstory (1613–1918)**

Manila: Martin R. Gaerlan and Gaerlan Management Consulting, 2014. 176 pages.

A popular study in the field of historical writing is that of local history. For decades this branch of history has become popular among scholars and residents alike, with the latter becoming more interested in the stories of people and events in their localities while the former viewing it in the context of national history. Local history, of course, provides us with information on an otherwise unknown segment of people and on places, milieus, and events that general histories have placed in the background. Such interest has led to the publishing, by both commercial and private publishers, of a number of books and monographs on various provinces, towns, districts, and even barrios. These publications can be categorized into those with a scholarly undertaking for academic circles; those written with the lay reader in mind with, more or less, a sprinkling of scholarship; and those that have both academic and lay readers in mind.

*Sampaloc's Sacred Ground: The Franciscan Backstory (1613–1918)* falls under the third category. It is not written as an academic work but the scholarship in the research for this book shows the author's deep knowledge of the place under study and his appreciation of its importance. It is privately published and thus of limited circulation—a regrettable circumstance considering its interesting topic.

The author, Martin Gaerlan, is both a business management professor and a corporate professional who dabbles in history, believing as he says that “a community without a sense of history loses their soul” (176). His research interests include the history of the Trinitarian devotion in the Philippines, coffee production in Lepanto province during the Spanish and American colonial periods, as well as human resources management. *Sampaloc’s Sacred Ground* is his first book.

In 1994 he realized that fellow parishioners of the Most Holy Trinity Parish of Balic-Balic in Sampaloc, which was under the Franciscan Order, had no knowledge about their place prior to 1925, leading him to undertake the initial research on the church’s cemetery, the Cementerio de Balic-Balic. In 2011 he took a “sabbatical” from his corporate job to focus on his research, which led to a bigger project on the parish. This project included a history of Balic-Balic in the context of the development of the Sampaloc district during the Spanish period and, later, during the first two decades of the American colonial era. The result was this book, a well-documented work on a section of the City of Manila.

The book does not follow or expound on any theory or idea. It simply follows a general narrative of the beginnings and development of three unknown places in the City of Manila: the area of Balic-Balic, its parish and church, and the Franciscan mission in Sampaloc. There are also side stories of the various establishments and places linked to the Franciscan mission: the printing press and the Cementerio de Balic-Balic. All narratives are based on available primary sources, mainly archival documents and rare books found in the Philippine National Archives, the National Library of the Philippines, the Archives of the Archdiocese of Manila, the Franciscan Archives in the Philippines, the Filipinas Heritage Library, the Lopez Memorial Museum and Library, the Ortigas Foundation Library, and the American Historical Collection in the Rizal Library, Ateneo de Manila University.

Gaerlan’s work fills several gaps in the historiography of Manila to the benefit of a variety of historians and other professionals: the history and culture of a city district for local history and cultural scholars, the growth and development of an urban area and its related structures for heritage consultants and architects, social and economic life for social and economic historians, and the development of the Franciscan mission in Sampaloc for church historians. What is interesting is that Gaerlan does not merely

confine the historical narrative to the place itself (as some local historians do), but also discusses Sampaloc's place in the context of the wider scope of general history. He does so by showing the area's active role in the formation of the religious, economic, social, and cultural history of Manila, as seen for example in the creation of the Franciscan printing press, which later made "Sampaloc famous as the place of printers and newspapers during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century" (24), and the urban transformation of the district into a recreational suburb for Spaniards who wanted to leave the heat of the city (74–80).

Gaerlan also describes the role that Balic-Balic played in the Philippine–American War in 1899, beginning with the Cementerio de Balic-Balic, which American soldiers used as a jump-off point to begin the battle against the Filipino revolutionaries following their skirmish on 4 February, the day that marked the start of the war. Gaerlan elaborates on Sampaloc's tactical location for military purposes, emphasizing that the district was used by both the Spanish military during the Philippine Revolution and the US forces during the Philippine–American War:

The distant high grounds of Balic-Balic served as the choice spot for the sacred burial ground of Sampaloc. However, precisely because of this terrain advantage, death and destruction came knocking at the gate and walls of Sampaloc cemetery and almost destroyed it. . . . Sampaloc, being on the edge or outskirts of Manila, became one of the focal points for building a protective ring around Manila. (87)

In addition to the documented narratives, Gaerlan provides the reader with a sprinkling of popular stories among Balic-Balic residents, such as how the name of "Balic-Balic" seemed to have come from a funeral ritual to the Cementerio Balic-Balic, in which pallbearers were instructed to walk forward and backward ("balik") a number of steps before they finally reached the cemetery. Insertions of the personal can sometimes be distracting, although it does show the author's experiences in discovering information during his research. These personal anecdotes add drama to the historical narrative, as evident in the author's explanation of how he began researching about Balic-Balic (1) and in his ending with the "familial full circle," in which he tells the story of the visit of the descendants of an old Sampaloc family to their ancestor's birthplace—the meeting of the past with the present (125).

The book needs proofreading, although overall the number of misspellings is insignificant. A number of photo reproductions need to be fixed for clarity, but the maps and documents—considering that some of them are photostats and archival materials—are to be lauded for their clear reproductions. These flaws do not detract from the book's use as an excellent source material for a history of Manila and its environs.

Gaerlan mentions the publication of a second volume to this work. It is surely awaited by history scholars and enthusiasts alike.

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RANILO BALAGUER HERMIDA

## **Imagining Modern Democracy: A Habermasian Assessment of the Philippine Experiment**

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014. 338 pages.

Exemplifying the current trend in the Philippine philosophical community, *Imagining Modern Democracy: A Habermasian Assessment of the Philippine Experiment* fuses political theory with a sustained practical assessment of Philippine democracy, which is one of Asia's oldest. In examining the Philippine democratic experience, Ranilo Hermida divides the book into two parts. The first part lays the overall framework culled from the Habermasian concept of discursive/communicative democracy. The author utilizes this concept to assess the Philippine experience of what Hermida calls as "imagined modern democracy," the main substance of the second part. By drawing from the requisites of facticity and validity that Habermas expounded in *Between Facts and Norms* (1992), the author clearly extracts the epistemological grounding and theoretical formations of the conduct of the state in modern societies with diverse goals, cultures, and interests. For Habermas, as Hermida explicates well, the laws that govern modern societies must constitute more than a form of a compelling instrument but also "serve as medium of social integration" (35). Such social integration can be realized if the proceduralist paradigm embedded in the democratic process "would