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FILIPINO NATIVES IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY MARIANAS: Their role in the establishment of the Spanish mission in the islands

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Natives of the Philippines formed part of the colonizing force at the establishment of the Spanish colony in the Marianas during the 17th century. Coming from various regions of the Philippines they consisted of Tagalogs, Pampangos and Visayans who were already Christianized and hispanicized. They played an important role in the colony not just as servants and assistants of the Spanish administrators but also as officers and catechists in the mission. Together with the other colonists they endured the hostility of the native Chamorros who struggled to retain their traditions and distinguished themselves in the service of Spain. Among them were Juan de Santa Cruz and Jose de Tapia who were military leaders and played a vital role in the conquest and colonization of Guam and other islands. Others like Pedro Calungsod and Hipolito de la Cruz died as martyrs in the effort to Christianize the natives. Throughout the period of Spanish domination, native Filipinos proved themselves to be loyal and dependable allies. Spanish administrators made petitions to bring more natives of the Philippines especially Pampangos and Tagalogs to the islands. Many Filipino natives who completed military service opted to remain in the Marianas and became its *alcaldes*, *gobernadorcillos* and other officials. Loyal service in the hands of the colonizers gave them an opportunity to elevate their status from ordinary Spanish subjects to one that is more privileged.

THE “ACCIDENTAL IMMIGRANTS”

Compared to the Philippines, the islands of the Marianas were occupied much later by Spain. Though discovered almost at the same time by Ferdinand Magellan in 1521 and formally claimed for Spain in 1565 by Miguel Lopez de Legaspi, the actual systematic colonization of the Marianas did not begin until 103 years later. Then called ‘Islas de los Ladrones’ or the Isles of Thieves, the archipelago served as a stop-over for galleons from Mexico coming to the Philippines. Galleon captains used the islands only to replenish their fresh water and food supplies. Foreign presence in the islands was represented by survivors of galleon shipwrecks and occasional Spanish missionaries like Fr. Francisco de los Angeles and Fray Juan Pobre who jumped ship to live among the natives.

Despite several petitions especially by religious authorities to establish a mission to save the souls of the native Chamorros, Spain’s attention in the 1600s was clearly focused on Manila which was already a city of 40,000 inhabitants. Spain’s lack of interest in the Ladrones was caused by its lack of riches.¹ As early as 1577, Franciscan missionaries heading for the Philippines asked to be left behind in the Ladrones but were denied because it was inexpedient to leave them behind without any military protection.²

There were already people from the Philippines in the Marianas as early as 1568. That year, one of Miguel Lopez de Legaspi’s ships, the *San Pablo* ran aground in Guam while trying to return to Acapulco. All of the ship’s 132 passengers survived and a small craft was con-

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structed from the ship's wreckage. It sailed back to the Philippines after three months. In March 1601 another galleon, the *Santa Margarita* drifted off Rota after trying to cross the Pacific.³ The surviving Europeans and Philippine *indios* were allowed to live among the Rotanese who hoped to ransom them for iron.⁴ Of this group, 16 males and two females opted to remain behind. These former slaves saved Fray Juan Pobre and Fray Juan Talavera by convincing the Rotanese not to kill them.⁵

In September 1638 the galleon *Nuestra Señora de la Concepcion* ran aground off Aguingan Point in Saipan. Among the survivors of the *Concepcion* were two Tagalogs, Francisco de Mendoza and Estevan Diaz. They remained in the Ladrones where they lived among the native inhabitants for twenty years. These two men later served as tutors in the Chamorro language to Fr. Diego Luis de Sanvitores who was to establish the first Christian mission in the Marianas.

THE ARRIVAL OF FR. DIEGO LUIS DE SANVITORES

In June 1662, while on his way to serve as a missionary in the Philippines, the young Jesuit priest Fr. Diego Luis de Sanvitores made a stopover in the Ladrones. Fr. Sanvitores was overcome by the sight of the natives "who never enjoyed the blessings of Christianity." "The babies," he observed "died in deep ignorance of the things necessary for their salvation."⁶ It became his purpose in life to establish a mission in the islands for the love of God and the price of the souls of the natives. On July 18, 1664 he wrote a letter to King Philip IV requesting permission to establish a mission in the Ladrones.⁷ His request was denied for three reasons: that there were more souls to save in the Philippines than in the Ladrones; that there was no money for a new mission and that all ships that attempted to sail from Manila to the Ladrones failed.⁸

Far from being discouraged, Fr. Sanvitores wrote another letter why the establishment of a mission in the Ladrones should be no longer delayed.⁹ He made use of his family's connections with the Spanish court by writing to his father, Don Jeronimo de Sanvitores, an ad-

ministrator of the Royal Treasury of Seville. Don Jeronimo wrote an appeal to Fr. Evarard Nithard, who was a member of Queen Maria Ana's court and also her confessor and advisor. Through the Queen's intercession, King Philip IV issued a *cedula* on June 14, 1665 authorizing Fr. Diego Luis de Sanvitores to establish a mission in the Ladrones islands. In gratitude for the Queen's help Fr. Sanvitores asked that the Ladrones Islands be renamed Marianas in her honor.¹⁰

For his mission in the Ladrones, Fr. Sanvitores recruited nineteen devout *indios* from the Philippines along with twelve Spaniards. The Philippine *indios* were composed of Tagalogs, Pampangos and Visayans headed by Juan de Santa Cruz, a man of noble birth from Indang, Cavite. He was described as a *panday* or master blacksmith. De Santa Cruz brought along his wife, his sister and his baby nephew named Pedro Juan de la Cruz.¹¹

The Philippine *indios* were Francisco de Mendoza and Estevan Diaz, both survivors of the shipwreck of the *Concepcion*. They were to serve as interpreters in the mission. Among the others listed with skills were Pacual Francisco, a weaver; Andres Ysson, farmer; Juan de los Reyes; Juan Santiago and Felipe Tocsan, both singers and Andres de la Cruz, a boy soprano.¹² Others were Juan de los Reyes, Domingo de la Cruz, Domingo Mindoro, Damian Bernal, Nicolas Figueroa, Pedro Calungsod, Hipolito de a Cruz, Gabriel de la Cruz, Agustin de la Cruz, Felipe Sonson¹³ and a certain Ambrosio.

Some of them were very young like the boy soprano Andres de la Cruz who hailed from Pampanga. He was described as a boy barely twelve years old. The oldest appeared to be Felipe Sonson who came from Macabebe, Pampanga. He was around 60 years old. Aside from having skills like farming and weaving needed in the mission, they were to serve as soldiers and officers in the mission. On August 7, 1667 Fr. Sanvitores left Manila for Acapulco to receive money and other things he needed for his mission. On March 23 the following year, he left Acapulco for the Marianas aboard the galleon *San Diego*. With him were four Jesuits, Fr. Luis de Medina, Fr. Tomas de Cardenoso, Fr. Pedro de Casanova, Fr. Luis Morales and

Brother Luis Bustillo. All of them were not merely passengers in the galleon that took the mission to Acapulco and the Ladrones but actually worked for their passage in the galleon.¹⁴

On June 15, 1668, the *San Diego* reached Rota and headed for Guam, the largest island in the Marianas. It arrived off the Alupat islands at Hagatña (Agaña) Bay the following day.¹⁵ The galleon's captain, Bartolome Muñoz, offered to leave a military escort for the missionaries but the latter declined the offer. Muñoz left two muskets adding to one already with the missionaries for self-defense.¹⁶

The missionaries were welcomed by Quipuha, the *papahurao* or great chief of the village of Agaña. Quipuha was gifted with iron hoops and a hat and in return he allowed the missionaries to construct a church and a school for boys and girls. Among the first teachers in the college for girls was Juan de Santa Cruz's wife, who was described as the first school teacher in the Marianas.¹⁷ Santa Cruz who was given the rank of Captain, served as the mission's military commander. In 1670 he made the first survey of the Mariana islands and sent important information about possible anchorages for galleons in Guam including the sites of the shipwrecks of the *Santa Margarita* and the *Concepcion*. His report about his survey of the Marianas was sent to the Governor General of the Philippines.¹⁸

The mission was joined by Philippine indios and Spaniards who were already in the islands. They were named Francisco Maunahun, Pedro Ximenez and a certain Esteban. Both of them served with Fr. Sanvitores in teaching the Catholic religion to the natives.¹⁹

THE ROOTS OF THE CONFLICT WITH THE CHAMORROS

Though the Fr. Sanvitores and his missionaries were excited with the prospect of converting the natives to the Christian faith, they found themselves in conflict with native practices and traditions. The principal citizens or *chamorri* demanded that Christianity should belong only to the upper caste *matua* not to Chamorros of lower status like the *achoat* and *mangatchang*. The missionaries also objected to ancestor worship practiced by the Chamorros. The bones of the

dead were dug up by their relatives and the skulls were placed in special houses guarded by shamans or *makanas*. They believed that the ancestral spirits or *anihi* had powers to grant good harvests, good luck and victory in battle. Also found objectionable by the missionaries was the practice of young men or *urritaos* who consorted with young women in public houses without the benefit of matrimony. The young women were sold or rented out by their parents. The missionaries considered this practice as a form of institutionalized prostitution.²⁰

Adding to the brewing conflict were the preachings of a Chinese castaway named Choco who said that the missionaries were hated and scorned in their own country which was the reason they were banished to the Marianas. Choco also said that the holy water and oil used by the missionaries in baptism were poisonous and were responsible for the cause of the deaths of infants who died after being baptized. Two months after their arrival the missionaries suffered their first casualties from angry Chamorros.²¹ On August 19, 1668 the young boy Gabriel de la Cruz and a seaman named Lorenzo Castellanos were killed in the sea of Tinian. Fr. Luis de Medina was badly beaten and Fr. Luis Morales was speared in the leg in Saipan earlier on August 14.²²

The missionaries also became involved in rivalries between the native villages. In January 1670, the village of Marpo and Sunharon in the island of Tinian quarreled with each other over a church built in the latter. The fighting temporarily stopped when Fr. Sanvitores and Fr. de Medina warned the natives against fighting each other saying that the houses of the islanders will be razed by the iron pieces of Captain Juan de Santa Cruz which spouted lightning bolts. Instead of fighting both villages exchanged turtle shells as peace offerings.²³

On January 29, 1670 the mission lost one of its first priests. Fr. Luis de Medina was speared to death in Saipan along with his Visayan assistant Hipolito de la Cruz. The natives accused Fr. de Medina of spreading diseases with his holy water and taking away the skulls of their ancestors.²⁴ In April, Captain Juan de Santa Cruz recovered the bones of Fr. de Medina and de la Cruz. They also captured the assassins

Poyo and Daon. While being taken back to Guam, Poyo tried to grab the knife of one of his Pampango guards and was killed. His companion Daon was also killed.²⁵

Meanwhile fighting broke out again between the villages of Sunharon and Marpo on Tinian. This time the natives were no longer awed by the show of force after being told that the Spanish cannons and muskets were just thunder. While trying to sneak to the Spanish force, they were met with musket fire and spears. The boy soprano Andres de la Cruz killed a native with a spear while Diego Bazan wounded a few with his musket.²⁶

In the following years until the Chamorro rebellion of 1684, around 38 members of the mission were killed by the Chamorros. Nine of them were from the Philippines. One of the Filipino natives who was killed was Pedro Calungsod, a young Visayan boy who was Fr. Sanvitores' assistant.²⁷ He was killed with Fr. Sanvitores on April 2, 1672 after he baptized the daughter of Chamorro *matua* named Mata-pang. Another was Fr. Francisco Ezquerria, a Jesuit priest born in Manila. Fr. Ezquerria was killed on February 4, 1674 after he gave extreme unction to a woman about to give birth.

In the latter years Filipino natives distinguished themselves in the Chamorro wars which lasted up to 1696. One of these was Jose de Tapia, a Pampango who rose to the rank of Captain. De Tapia who led in several campaigns against villages hostile to Spanish occupation was killed during the 1684 Chamorro rebellion. There were soldiers from the Philippines like Captain Nicolas Rodriguez and Mateo Guevara who distinguished themselves in the final battle of Aguigan in 1696²⁸.

THE DESIRE FOR FILIPINOS AS IMMIGRANTS AND MEMBERS OF THE SPANISH MISSION

The Spanish missionaries wanted to bring in more Philippine natives to serve in their mission in the Marianas. In 1670 Fr. Sanvitores made a request to Queen Maria Ana asking that 200 men be sent from Manila, or the largest possible numbers of Indians from the Philippines, "of good character, of old Christianity, like the Pampangos and Tagalogs."²⁹

Fr. Francisco Ezquerria, who became the head of the mission, wrote another letter, this time to the Governor General of the Philippines requesting that 200 Pampangos be sent to the Marianas to protect the mission. Only a few men, however, were actually sent. The reason was the requested Pampangos had to be sent to the Marianas via New Spain which would take at least six months and another four months to travel from Mexico to the Marianas. The cost of feeding them would be prohibitive. Governor General Manuel de Leon also said that the Pampangos were in short supply and were needed to cut and drag timber for the building and repair of galleons in the Philippines.³⁰

The preference for Pampangos can be seen in the 1673-1674 annual report signed by Fr. Tomas Cardeñoso and Fr. Alonso Lopez. They wrote:³¹

"This (Pampango) nation is preferred to the others, not only because it is closest to the Spanish nation in things military, but also because it has already proven its zeal of the Holy Faith of Christ, and also its natives display courage, tolerance and docility under duress."

In 1679 the request of Fr. Sanvitores for 200 Pampangos was formally approved but it could not be implemented allegedly because of lack of transportation. The real problem was the reluctance of Spanish pilots to sail to the Marianas.³²

CONCLUSION

Filipinos performed notable achievements while serving with the Spanish mission in the Marianas. While writing the first biography of Fr. Sanvitores in 1683, Fr. Francisco Garcia identified Juan de Santa Cruz, the first military chief of the Spanish mission, as "the first peaceful conquistador of the Marianas."³³ When he retired from his position in 1671 he was not given a pension by the Spanish government nor given the honor of being the first conquistador of the Marianas. On April 18, 1673, however, Queen Maria Ana sent him a letter thanking him for his services to Fr. Sanvitores and his companions.³⁴ In 1686, de Santa Cruz was recommended to be rewarded by the

Council of the Indies by Fr. Luis Morales, who had become the Jesuit Procurator for the Philippines and the Marianas.³⁵ The Council decided to grant de Santa Cruz a medal for his services. Juan de Santa Cruz' nephews, Ignacio Pagtacotan, Jose de la Cruz and Andres de la Cruz were also awarded medals and recommended for exemption from tribute and forced labor.³⁶

De Santa Cruz's wife was also recognized as the first schoolteacher of the Marianas. Described as pious and god-fearing, she taught the young girls at the Jesuit college. De Santa Cruz's nephew who came as a baby boy in the Marianas in 1668 grew up and later became an interpreter in the mission.

Another native Filipino who achieved distinction was Andres de la Cruz. Having come to the Marianas as a young boy with Fr. Sanvitores, de la Cruz served in the garrison for seven years, rising to the rank of lieutenant. At his return to the Philippines he was reported to be destitute. In 1685 Fr. Luis Morales, asked that de la Cruz also be recognized for his services in the Marianas. In January 1686, the Council of the Indies recognized de la Cruz's services in the Marianas. He was honored with a Knight of the Medal and a decree of thanks by the Council of the Indies. He was also given the staff of a *Maestre del Campo* or Master of Camp with a rank of Sergeant Major of the Pampango nation. In addition, he was given a pension to be paid from the Port of Cavite and his children, two sisters and their children were recommended by the Council of the Indies for exemption from tribute and forced labor.³⁷

Other Philippine natives who were cited either for bravery or dedication to the faith include Felipe Sonson, who was described as a "holy man." Sonson a veteran of the Chinese rebellion in 1662 and probably the oldest native Philippine companion of Fr. Sanvitores, was severely wounded during the Chamorro rebellion of 1684.³⁸ Another native was the Visayan adjutant Francisco Masongsong who revealed the plans of the Chamorros and their native Philippine supporters to rebel against the Spaniards.³⁹ Other Philippine natives was Francisco Maunahun who was killed on June 5,

1672.⁴⁰ The Philippine native who achieved the highest distinction was Pedro Calungsod who was killed with Fr. Sanvitores in 1672. He was beatified by the Catholic Church in 2000. Others who died while serving the cause of the faith, like Hipolito de la Cruz, have yet to be recognized.

For the native Filipino soldiers, loyal service with the Spanish mission helped to change their social status. As demonstrated with the lives of Juan de Santa Cruz and Andres de la Cruz, it proved that ordinary indios could rise to the status of the privileged class. This change of social status could also affect their descendants who were given privileges accorded to the *principalia* of the colonies.

Beyond the Spanish conquest, some natives of the Philippines served as local officials in the Marianas, many of them as *alguaciles* and tenants in the *barangays*. Being already hispanicized, native Filipinos helped in the spread of Spanish culture after mingling and intermarrying with the Chamorro. One of the areas of influence could be found in the language of the Marianas. Like the Philippines, the present Chamorro language shows a profound Spanish influence. At the same time natives of the Philippines introduced their own qualities which over the years helped transform the culture of the Marianas. As part of the Spanish dominion, the Philippines and the Marianas share a common history which plays an important role in the relationship of the two regions.

ENDNOTES

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- 3 Fr. Juan Concepcion, Historia General de las Islas de las Philipinas Conquistas Espirituales y Temporales de estos Españoles Dominios Establecimientos Vol. 3 (Manila: 1788-1792), p. 388, cited as Document No. 1601C in Rodrigue Levesque, History of Micronesia, Vol. 3 (Dufresne: Quebec, 1993), 143-144. This source

will be cited as "HM" with volume and page numbers.

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- 9 AGI Fil. 82, 2-15-37. Also AGI Ultramar, 52 Jesuit Documents No. 6 and 16, *Reasons why a mission to the Ladrones should no longer be delayed. Letter of Fr. Sanvitores to the King. 29 May 1665*, cited as Document 1665 in HM4:265-270.
- 10 AGI Fil. 82-2-29, *Memorial of Fr. Sanvitores to the Queen, July 1667*, cited as Document 1667H in HM4:341-356.
- 11 RAH (Real Academia de Historia, Madrid) 9/2676 Doc. No. 5, *Letter from Fr. Pedro Casanova to Fr. Gabriel Guillen, San Juan, Marianas, 17 June 1668*, cited as Document No. 1668 J3 in HM4:445-454.
- 12 RAH 9/2676 *Requirements of the mission to the Marianas dictated by Fr. Sanvitores*, cited as Document No. 1668F in HM4:381-393.
Actually only twelve Philippine indios were mentioned in Fr. Sanvitores' letter. These were Francisco de Mendoza, Estevan Diaz, Juan de Santa Cruz, Felipe Songsong, Juan de los Reyes, Domingo de la Cruz, Domingo Mindoro, Pascual Francisco, Andres Ysson, Juan de Santiago, Felipe Tocsan and Andres de la Cruz. The others like Damian Bernal, Nicolas Figueroa, Pedro Calungsod, Hipolito de la Cruz, Gabriel de la Cruz, Agustin de la Cruz and a certain Ambrosio were mentioned in the other letters of the missionaries.
- 13 Also spelled as Songsong.
- 14 HM4:387.
- 15 Domingo Abella, *Vignettes in Philippine-Marianas History* (Manila: International Association of Historians of Asia, 1962), p. 50.
- 16 AGI Fil. 82-2-54, *Letter of Fr. Sanvitores to Queen Maria Ana dated 23 February 1665*, cited as Document 1668H2 in HM4:403-432.
- 17 *Op. cit.* RAH 9/2676 Document No. 4, *Requirements of the mission to the Marianas*
This letter was written in Acapulco most likely in January 1668 describes Santa Cruz's wife as destined as a teacher of girls in the Marianas. This role was actually fulfilled
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- 19 RAH 9/2676 Document No. 6, *Letter of Fr. Sanvitores to the Provincial of the Philippines, San Juan Marianas, 17 June 1668*, cited as Document 1668J4 in HM 4:455-461.
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- 25 ARSI 13, fol. 50-53, *Report on the death of Fr. Luis de Medina*, cited as Document 1670B in HM4:585-619.
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- 27 RAH 9/2676, Document No. 24, *Compendio de la vida apostolica de Ven. P. Diego Luis de Sanvitores*, cited as Document 1672H in HM5:443-445.
- 28 ARSI Phil. 13, fol. 306-325v, *Relacion de la conquista y restauracion de las islas Marianas*, cited as Document No. 1696F in HM9:665-678.
- 29 ARSI Phil. 13, fol. 44-49, *Requests made by the missionaries of the Society of Jesus in the Marianas to Her Majesty, the Queen, for the growth of new Christianity in the Mariana Islands, 1670*, cited as Document 1670H in HM5:63-82.
- 30 AGI (Archivo General de Indias, Spain) Fil. 101-3-186 *Razon de los Puntos en que esta tomada resolucion sobre las cosas que son necesarias para las misiones de naturales de las Islas Marianas en Filipinas que estan a cargo de los religiosos de la Compania de Jesus*, cited as Document No. 1674K7 in HM5:200-201.
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- 32 AGI Ultramar 562 Jesuit Document No. 18, *Jesuit annual report for 1679-1680 by Fr. Xaramillo*, cited as Document 1680T in HM 8:411-417.
- 33 Francisco García, SJ, *Vida y Martirio de El Venerable Padre Diego Luis de Sanvitores de la Compania de Jesus Primer Apostol de las Islas Marianas, Sucesos en Estas Islas desde del Año mil seiscientos sesenta y ocho* (Madrid: Ivan Garcia Infanzon, 1683), cited as Document No. 1682A in HM7:382.
- 34 AGI Fil. 331, Libro 7, fol. 53, pp. 129,-130, *Letter of Queen Maria Ana to Captain Juan de Santa Cruz, Madrid, 18 April 1683*, cited as Document No. 1673B5 in HM5:536-537.
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