

The Bicol Region, 1565-1818

Down the southeastern extremity of the island of Luzon lies the Bicol region which consists of an irregularly shaped peninsula, including the islands of Masbate, Ticao and Burias on its southern side and the island of Catanduanes and other outlying islets on its eastern flank. The region is divided into six provinces: Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, Albay, Sorsogon, Catanduanes and Masbate.

Bicol in 1565-1818, of which this essay is about, was vastly different. Peopled by Agtas, the highlanders; Dumagats, the strand dwellers; and Malayan descendants, the lowlanders, the region was once called *Tierra de Ibalon*, a land of once happy, free and industrious people refuted to be the bravest and the best armed in these islands.¹ By the 1590s through the zealous efforts of Franciscan missionaries, a good number of them had been Christianized.

Administratively, Bicol consisted of only two provinces: the Province of Camarines comprising of the *Partidos* (Districts) of Iraya, Rinconada, Bicol and Camarines Norte and the Province of Albay comprising of the *Partidos* of Sorsogon, Tabaco, Lagonoy

¹ José Castaño, "Breve noticia acerca del origen, cultura, religión y creencias y supersticiones de los antiguos indios del bicol. *Archivo del bibliófilo filipino*, ed. W.E. Retana (Madrid 1895) 1:3 Emma Blair & James A. Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, 1493-1893 (Cleveland 1903) 18:95; 34:286-287.

and Catanduanes. Camarines was split into Camarines Sur and Camarines Norte in 1829 but merged in 1845, split again in 1857, merged again in 1893 and finally split in 1919 by the Philippine Legislature. From Spanish population records, which unfortunately are not very reliable, Bicol's population by 1792 was listed as: Albay 53,047; Camarines 92,217; by 1805: Albay 73,002; Camarines 104,872; by 1810: Albay 103,935 indios and 2,398+ mestizos; Camarines 159,900 indios and 2,398+ mestizos.²

Province of Camarines

The northern half of Camarines borders upon Tayabas province on the west, the Pacific Ocean on the north and Ragay Gulf on the south. Its terrain is dissected by broad, fertile plains and valleys in the littoral areas and thickly timbered hills and mountains in the hinterlands, notably the sierras of Bacacay, Labo, Colasi and Pulantona.³ The pueblos in existence were mostly located on or close to the coasts. The western side, linguistically more Tagalog than Bicol, had rich fishing grounds and coastal waters teeming with marine products and a subsoil laden with precious metallic minerals. Its inhabitants lived on gold-mining, fishing, catching sea turtles and *balate* (sea cucumber or trepang) gathering.

Writing about his scientifically rewarding journey in 1792 from the port of Sorsogon and Tayabas, Luis Nee, one of the scientists of the Alejandro Malaspina scientific expedition, noted the abundance of various kinds of *balate* which the fisherfolks gathered in July to September.⁴ Gathering this sea product was the principal occupation in Capalonga, where the supply was most

² UST AR, Libros: Tomo 229, no pagination. Tomas de Comyn, *State of the Philippines in 1810* (Manila 1969) p. 145.

³ Ramón Gonzáles Fernández, *Anuario Filipino para 1877* (Manila 1877) p. 365.

⁴ MN Ms. 312, fols. 81v-82. The *balate* is a meaty and very sinewy sea-food that tastes like shrimp. Its process of preservation was quite laborious but, generally, it was cooked and smoked to dryness. A picul of it cost 30 to 38 pesos. Where *balate* abounds, the tortoise is also in abundance. That is why *balate* gatherers also engaged in tortoise catching. In China where the shells were shipped, "the price is from 300 to 350 Spanish dollars the picul...." John Crawford, *History of the Indian Archipelago* (Edinburgh 1820) 3:444. Juan de la Concepción, *Historia general de Philipinas* (Sampaloc 1788-1792) 5:86. Luis Nee saw three kinds of *balate* in Camarines: first class, the black which were gathered at a depth of eleven fathoms and

plentiful, until the people had to abandon it for fear of capture by Muslim pirates and sustained themselves by trading their *bonga* (areca nut) in Mambulao.⁵

Balate and tortoise shells were so abundant at the *Contra Costa* or northern coast that fishing boats from different provinces came. Pearls were also gathered in waters fronting Talisay and about Canton island. But Antonio de Siguenza, an army officer who knew the region, bewailed the loss of "the immense riches" of these coasts, mentioning particularly the inhabitants of Paracale who could neither fish nor gather *balate* for fear of the Muslims, not because the Muslims were valiant but because the people were "cowards" in the extreme who preferred to flee than defend themselves.⁶

The eastern coast inhabitants whose pueblos clustered about low-lying plains, with Daet as the *Cabecera*, had agriculture for their main occupation. But this northern region was more known for its rich mineral deposits so much so that on hearing of the rich gold mines in Paracale in 1571, the Spanish conquistador, Juan de Salcedo, with a handful of men, braved a hazardous journey through unknown territory from Laguna to Paracale, a small and poor pueblo at the foot of a mineral-yielding mountain ecstatically described by a writer as the "Golden Chersonese."⁷ Three

cost 2-1/2 pesos per *chinanta* (a weight of about fourteen pounds); second class, the *Manung-tung*, at five fathoms and cost two pesos per *chinanta*; third class, the white, at one to two fathoms and cost one to 1-1/2 peso per *chinanta*. MN Ms. 312, fols. 81v-82.

⁵ MN Ms. 312, fol. 81v. *Bonga* is one of the ingredients of *buyo* which next to *sili* or pepper, the Bicolanos were very fond of. *Buyo* is a wad of betel leaf (Chavica betel) with a piece of areca nut and slaked lime for mastication. F. Jagor, *Viajes por filipinas*, trad. del Aleman por Sebastian Vidal y Soler (Madrid 1875) p. 13. The much sought-after betel leaves were produced in barrio Duang-puro, Libmanan, Camarines, Adolfo Puya Ruiz, *Camarines Sur: descripción general de esta provincia en Luzón acompañada de un plano del territorio que la provincia ocupa* (Manila 1887) p. 220. For a critical analysis of the origins of piracy, see Anne Lindsey Reber, "The Sulu World in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries: A Historical-geographical Problem in British Writings on Malay Piracy," (unpublished M.A. dissertation, Cornell University, 1966).

⁶ MN Ms. 1666, doc. 19, fols. 40v, 42v. AFIO D-10/22, Ms. 1823. From folk memory, the earliest known raid in Bicol was around 1580. Slipping through Lagonoy Gulf, Magindanao marauders attacked a settlement presently known as Barrio Kinalansan, San Jose, Camarines Sur. The reputedly well-armed Bicolanos met them with bolos, knives, bows and arrows. PNL HDP, *Camarines Sur*, IV-29, pp. 58-59. (Since the pagination of these Papers is very disorderly and confusing, I am using my own pagination.)

⁷ AGI FILIPINAS 165, 480, 687, 920. Domingo Abella, *Bikol Annals* (Manila 1954) I:5. PNL HDP, *Camarines Norte*, pp. 1-4.

leagues away on the northwest was another pueblo, Mambulao, whose very name means "town of gold" for the wealth of this precious metal all over the place.⁸

Astonishingly, the cliché "a beggar sitting on a mound of gold" fitted no one more appropriately than the people of this area. They lived miserably in dire need. Keen observers unhesitatingly faulted their crude methods, primitive equipments, overhead cost and endless lawsuits, not to mention their slothfulness and profligacy, as the constraints in the profitable exploitation of their rich resources.⁹ In fact a document confirms the sad state of the mining industry in the 18th century. In 1708 the King seemed to have been filled in by intriguers alleging that clerics were operating mines. In his letter of denial, Bishop Andres Gonzalez of Nueva Caceres mentioned a floundering Paracale gold mine of a debt-ridden lay operator with unpaid laborers.¹⁰

Lack of good communications in this northern region was a major problem which led to the formation of pockets of population and a negligible commercial activity. Not even in the 1830s could one travel from Daet to Cabusao in a day.¹¹ The roads were not only few and bad but also impassable in the rainy season. The people's adverse attitude towards road construction confounded the problem. Well into the 19th century, groaning under the Spanish yoke, their attitude worsened. Fr. Jagor, a two-time traveller in Bicol, talked of bad roads in Camarines and put his thoughts in print:

The people as well as the local authorities have no desire for roads which they themselves construct by forced labor, and, when completed, must maintain by the same method; for when no roads are made, the laborers are so much more easily employed in private operations. Even the parish priests, general-

⁸ AGI Filipinas 155. AFIO D-10/22, Ms. 1823, fols. 124, 126-130. Rafael Díaz Arenas, *Memorias históricas y estadísticas de filipinas y particularmente de la grande isla de luzón* (Manila 1850) fol. 2v.

⁹ AFIO D-10/22, Ms. 1823, fols. 116-120. MN Ms. 312, fols. 81v-82; Ms. 2228, fol. 27v. Díaz Arenas, *op. cit.* 2v. The richest deposits of gold were said to be in "deep veins" but the machineries that could extract them were not yet invented in the 18th century. Maria Lourdes Diaz-Trechuelo, "The Economic Development of the Philippines in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century," *Philippine Studies*, April 1963, 11:198.

¹⁰ AGI Filipinas 293.

¹¹ MN Ms. 1823, fol. 79.

ly, are as little favorable to the planning of commercial intercourse by means of which trade, prosperity, and enlightenment would be introduced into the country, and their authority undermined.¹²

But there was a saving grace, if it can be called that way. Along the northern coast, a seaborne trade flourished. Small sailing crafts from Paracale and Mambulao brought foodstuffs, agricultural and forest products up to Mauban, Tayabas (now Quezon).¹³ Trade and travel, however, were at the mercy not only of the Muslim pirates but also of the weather. Trips were impossible either during the season of Pacific-spawned storms or typhoons between October and January or during the northeast monsoons when seas ran high. Fishing and coasting vessels then sought shelter in protected coves and inlets. Several small islands off the coast, like the Calaguas group, some of which were inhabited by poor fishing families, and the Canimo island and adjacent islets at the mouth of San Miguel Bay also provided safe anchorages. On such seasons, only the southern coast remained safe for navigation.

The southern half of Camarines was much unlike the northern half. It was more populous and much richer in agriculture and other industries though poorer in mineral resources. Miguel de Loarca who wrote about the "great abundance" of gold in "the Vicor River district" obviously never saw the place. He erroneously placed Paracale and Catanduanes "in the neighborhood of the town of Caceres."¹⁴ But there were persistent rumors of gold in "dem thar hills," especially in Mt. Isarog and in a *sitio* (small group of 8 to 10 families) under its shadow named Mabatobato. Governor Mariano Fernandez de Folgueras received such reports. He, therefore, saw the convenience of dispatching armed incursions to *reduce* or bring the hillmen of Isarog to Christianized communities.¹⁵ It was, however, wisely suggested to him to inform or get in touch first with Antonio de Zuñiga and Jose de Eguia, both former *Alcaldes Mayores* (province magistrates) of Camarines, for information on the rumored wealth.

¹² Jagor, *op. cit.* 147.

¹³ PNA *Memoria de Camarines*, fols. 9-9b.

¹⁴ Blair & Robertson, 5:95, 99, Relation of Miguel de Loarca, 1582.

¹⁵ PNA EP-CS, 1797-1855, fol. 136.

It was an advice worth its wisdom and timeliness in gold, for the subsequent reports not only helped save lives but also disabused the Governor of any gilded ambitions he had entertained. The incumbent *Alcalde Mayor*, Iñigo Gonzalez Azcola, reported that Mabatobato had only fool's gold or iron pyrites.¹⁶ Antonio de Zuñiga's knowledge of the reported gold mines was from mere hearsay, and he could think of no other means to facilitate the exploitation of Isarog's rumored riches than to exterminate the *cimarrones* or hillmen.¹⁷ Neither was Jose de Eguia's report encouraging. He assured the Governor that the reports of precious metals in Isarog were baseless, and if that mountain had any, it would be quick-silver.¹⁸

The pueblos of southern Camarines were established along the southern shore of San Miguel Bay down the *Partidos* of Bicol, Rinconada and Yraya till the small pueblo of Cagsaua at the very foot of Mayon volcano. The boundaries of southern Camarines on the east consisted of *Partido* de Lagonoy and Gulf of Lagonoy; on the west, Ragay Gulf on the north, San Miguel Bay, and on the south, Albay province. Like the northern half, the southern is also frequently visited by typhoons.

Describing one of these typhoons that devastated the province on 5 November 1804, Jose de Eguia called it a "formidable hurricane" never seen before. A part of his damage report listed five coasting vessels and other smaller crafts sunk in the northern sea and Albay ports, while in principal pueblos in the north and eastern-most sectors, he continued:

All the roofs of the churches were destroyed, some totally; more than three thousand houses destroyed. Bridges, *Casas Reales*, conventos and, finally, the *poblaciones* have suffered immeasurably, but the coconut, abaca, cacao and pimenta plantations have suffered a mortal blow...¹⁹

The terrain of southern Camarines is traversed by mountain ranges, marked by rolling hills and rain-forested peaks, like Mt.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Iñigo G. Azaola to Governor Folgueras, 3 June 1818, fols. 138-139b.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Antonio de Zuñiga to Governor Folgueras, 15 October 1818, fols. 142-142b.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* José de Eguia to Governor Folgueras, 6 February 1819, fols. 145-145b.

¹⁹ PNA EP-CS, 1799-1820, fols. 77-78.

Isarog, that bounded in first-class timbers, wild game, stone quarries and other forest products.²⁰ Mt. Isarog, believed to be an extinct volcano, was the haven of *cimarrones*, fugitives from justice and *remontados* who were Christianized *Bicolanos* who fled to their former mountain homes, among other reasons, for fear of the Muslims, preferring a life of freedom in the highlands to one of repression in the lowlands, and whom the Franciscan friars sought zealously to bring back under the rule of Crown and Cross.²¹ Though generally hilly and mountainous, there are scattered flat lands and valleys that were given to major livestock raising and cultivation of coconut, abaca, rice and various other crops.²² In the 1790s, the Economic Society of Friends of the Country encouraged and supported the cultivation of pepper and mulberry trees for silkworm culture, particularly in the Yraya area close to Mt. Mayon.²³

Smaller plains are situated at the northeast while an extensive one sprawls across the heart of the province, notably the western, southern and eastern sides of Mt. Isarog, that forms a wide river basin fertilized by the alluvial overflows of the famous Bicol river and nutrient-laden waters cascading down the sides of Isarog.²⁴ This wide expanse of land within the *Partido* of Bicol, which was the most populous of the four *Partidos*, was mainly given to wet rice cultivation. But to the late 1820s, its inhabi-

²⁰ Felix de Huerta, *Estado geográfico, topográfico, estadístico, histórico, religioso de la santa y apostólica provincia de san gregorio magno* (Binondo 1865) p. 180. PNA EP-CS, 1785-1837, fol. 69b. MN Ms. 2296, doc. 39, fol. 302.

²¹ PNA EP-CS, 1837-1850, fols. 150-152; 1781-1883, fol. 100. Spanish sources give varying figures on the number of *remontados*, making it impossible to know their exact number. Díaz Arenas noted a rise in 1849: Isarog had 8,000; Iriga, 500; Buhí, 300; Caramoan, 4,000. Díaz Arenas, *op. cit.*, 7v. Fr. Crespo, a veteran missionary of Isarog, claimed that the hill-dwellers in Isarog did not exceed 15,000 of whom about 12,000 were already reduced or settled in new villages. Manuel Crespo, *Memoria sobre la reducción de monteses del Isarog en Camarines* (Manila 1881) pp. 26-27. Jose Montero y Vidal, *Historia general de filipinas* (Madrid 1895) I:516, 518. Concepción, *op. cit.* 13:190, 191.

²² MN Ms. 312, fols. 78v-79, 80.

²³ AGI Filipinas 796, 502, 498. PNA EP-CS, 1739-1837, fols. 19-52 contain the extracts from the government instructions so that the natives would learn the process of propagating mulberry trees to raise silkworms. PNA EP-CS, 1797-1852, fol. 12. Trechuelo, *op. cit.* 11:217. Maria Lourdes Díaz Trechuelo, "Eighteenth Century Philippines Economy: Agriculture" *Philippines Studies*, January 1966, 14:65-126.

²⁴ AFIO 93/19. Gonzalez Fernandez, *op. cit.* 367.

tants were characterized as miserable and slothful, a far cry from the Bicolanos of the pre-conquest days.²⁵

This heart of Bicol was a veritable granary. From their abundant rice harvests, the "miserable and slothful" farmers supplied the mining pueblos of Paracale and Mambulao, the rest of the region, the neighboring provinces and distant Manila. Only on rare times was there hunger in this province, usually after a great plague of locusts or a very destructive typhoon or major eruption of the Mayon volcano.²⁶ It is difficult, however, to imagine how this province could go hungry. Its coastal waters, inland lakes and rivers were plentiful with food till then untouched by harmful chemical pollutants. As Joaquín Martínez de Zúñiga said, "Fish exists in abundance in this province, especially in Naga and its vicinity. They can also be caught in its fresh-water rivers, lakes, and even in ricefields during the planting season. They likewise could be caught in salt water by the use of fish traps, in the employment of which the natives are dexterous."²⁷

Just as in the north, good communications were wanting in the south. Facilities like a mail service linking Bicol and Manila would still be more than a decade away when Manuel Esquivel y Castañeda and Jose Ma. Peñaranda would be province magistrates of Camarines Sur and Albay respectively. As late as the 1830s, roads linking the towns of *Partido* of Yraya and *Partido* of Lagonoy would be nothing better than rough bridle paths, impassable in the wet season.²⁸ The four to five-mile Pamplona-Pasacao road, the "most important road in the province" because the Pasacao port was the outlet of province products to Manila, did not seem to have ever been completed over the years up to Jagor's visit in 1859 and 1860.²⁹ The bridges over numerous streams were almost always dilapidated. Annually some 900 to 1,000

²⁵ PNA *Memoria de Camarines*, fols. 9-11.

²⁶ Pedro Murillo Velarde, *Historia de la provincia de filipinas de la compañía de Jesús* (Manila 1749) pp. 152b-253. AFIO 94/42, fols. 4-6. PNA EP-CS, 1799-1820, fols. 167b, 348.

²⁷ Joaquín Martínez de Zúñiga, *Estadismo de las islas filipinas* (Madrid 1893) p. 44. In the Franciscan archives in Madrid, there is a photo copy of the manuscript, "Descripción de la región del bicol" which is at the Newberry Library in Chicago. It was written in verse by Fray Bernardino Melendreras, Religious Minister of Quipayo, Camarines in 1841. Pages 1-2 describe the aquatic and land resources of Bicol. AFIO 260/1-2.

²⁸ MN Ms. 2237, doc. 20, fols. 191-192.

²⁹ Jagor, *op. cit.* 144-145. AFIO D-10/22, Ms. 1823, fol. 7.

polistas (corvee workers) would be employed for repairs with so much sufferings and even loss of life.³⁰ The road was miry in rainy days but dusty and rocky in hot days so that in either season, travel was a torture for draught animals as well as native porters.³¹

Luis Nee, who travelled with an armed escort, observed that the roads were exposed to attack by "ferocious Ygorrotes."³² This was particularly true in the *Partidos* of Bicol and Rinconada. It was confirmed by Fray Ginés Antonio Fernández who wrote, on 8 September 1770, about the death of Fray Juan de Silba who, after celebrating Mass in Tigaon, left to say the next one in Sangay. While on the road, a *remontado* shot him to death with an arrow.³³

The inland locations of most pueblos of the *Partidos* of Bicol and Rinconada did not guarantee their safety from Muslim raids. Bishop of Nueva Caceres Manuel de la Concepción y Matos reported to the King that in the intensity and destructiveness of the Muslim raids in 1757, ten towns and two missions were completely destroyed; ten churches looted and burned; about 8,000 indios captured or killed; one priest killed, two captured; and the *cabecera*, Caceres, was ready one night for a raid.³⁴

Of the 48 rivers and 296 *arroyos* of the province, only a few, in a limited manner, facilitated communications and transport. Deposits of silt carried by mountain streams allowed only small, shallow-draft *barotos* or dugouts to navigate for short distances. An exception was the famous Bicol river, the *rio grande* of Camarines. It was a copious waterway springing from Lake Bato, draining nearby headwaters from Lake Baao and Lake Buhi, wending its way through the interior until it reached Cabusao, and through its wide mouth, emptied its waters into San Miguel Bay. Fed by numerous rivers and streams from the inland reaches, it used to overflow its banks in months of heavy rainfall, leaving a trail of devastation and death in the riverine pueblos

³⁰ PNA EP-A, 1800-1858, fol. 190. PNA EP-CS, 1797-1855, fols. 258-258b.

³¹ PNA EP-CS, 1797-1855, fol. 149. AFIO D-10/22, Ms. 1823, fol. 426. Jagor, *op. cit.* 168.

³² MN Ms. 312, fol. 80.

³³ AFIO 93/27, fol. 2.

³⁴ Abella, *op. cit.* 105-106.

and barrios. Late in the 19th century, it was navigable only for rafts and barotos from Rinconada to Nueva Caceres, but deep-draft vessels from Nueva Caceres to Cabusao.³⁵

However rich in resources this province was, its progress was hampered by its lack of good ports. It could depend only on Pasacao on the southern coast, the *Cabecera* of Albay and Cabusao on the opposite coast. But the first two were far from ideal. Pasacao port was rendered dangerous by sunken shoals at high tide and coral reefs close by, and the port of the *Cabecera* of Albay was unprotected from strong easterlies. Till the late 19th century, J. Baptiste Mallat, a French physician who travelled in the islands, noted that Cabusao at San Miguel Bay was the "only noteworthy port" of the province.³⁶

On the matter of defense, southern Camarines was also beset with serious problems. Because of its peculiar terrain, Antonio de Siguenza, Adjutant of the Army Staff, who wrote an extensive description of the provinces of Camarines Norte and Sur, made this observation:

...there is not any place for the cavalry to manuever and much less for the movement of artillery, for although the *Partido* of Bicol has some plains, these are only passable in dry season because in wet season, they flood them for rice planting; for the meantime, it can depend only on very excellent defiles. By the way, the terrain in general is only for light troops.³⁷

In the period this study focuses on, the coasts were vulnerable to hostile encroachments. But Jose Ma. Peñaranda, an army Colonel commissioned by Governor Pascual Enrile to reconnoiter the northern Luzon provinces, including Bicol, reported later on that the inhabitants of Camarines, being hinterland dwellers shielded by mountain ranges running along the coasts, had no reason to fear enemy incursions.³⁸ Later events, however, proved that he was far from prophetic.

³⁵ PNA *Memoria de Camarines*, fol. 42b. Castaño, *op. cit.* 4.

³⁶ Jean Baptiste Mallat, *The Philippines*, trans. Pura Santillan Castrence (Manila 1983) p. 179.

³⁷ AFIO D-10/22, Ms. 1823, fols. 438-439.

³⁸ MN Ms. 2237, doc. 5, fol. 51.

Province of Albay

Adjacent to Camarines, southeast of the peninsula, extended the *Partidos* of Lagonoy, Tabaco and Sorsogon that made up a part of Albay province which Miguel Lopez de Legazpi established as the *Encomienda del Partido de Ibalón* in the early 16th century.³⁹ The boundary line separating Albay from Camarines on the northeast was designated from the eastern slope of Mayon towards the eastern edge of Buhi and the eastern foothills of Mt. Isarog, stretching onwards on a northerly course. Between this boundary line and the coasts of Albay Gulf and Lagonoy Gulf, was a pick-ax shaped territory formed by the *Partidos* of Tabaco and Lagonoy and the peninsula of Caramoan. This peninsula's rugged mountains, more than 900 meters above the sea, serve as a buffer for the heart of Camarines province against tropical typhoons that lash Bicol with destructive intensity and regular frequency. On the opposite coast of this shoal-fringed peninsula, lie Tabgon and Pitogo bays where Albay *armadilla* or provincial fleet commanded by Pedro Estevan, a *principal* or leading citizen of Tabaco, and his Deputy Commander, Jose Blanco, dealt a punishing defeat, on 26 October 1818, to forty Muslim slaving vessels led by Datu Amayloco, Datu Caratao and Prince Nune, a Mindanao Sultan's son.⁴⁰ Then the other half of the boundary line ran from the southern slope of Mayon volcano till the river Ogod to the southwestern shore of the peninsula.⁴¹

The terrain of Albay is mountainous. Its conspicuous elevations with varying heights of 1,000 to 2,420 meters, like Bulusan, Malinao and Mayon rise above plains and valleys fertilized by volcanic ash spewed over the centuries by Mayon and Bulusan volcanoes.⁴² In the past, tracts of land where so fertile and so

³⁹ PNL HDP *Albay*, 1-2, p. 5.

⁴⁰ For a full account of the whole day battle at Tabgon bay and the night action at Pitogo bay, see PNA EP-A, 1772-1836, fols. 297-298, 300-300b, 301, 308, 313-314, 334-334b, 335, 340b, 344, 350. The King's award to Esteban is in AGI Filipinas 690.

⁴¹ PNA *Memorias de Albay*, fol. 1.

⁴² Not everything spewed out produced good results. Mayon's eruption of 1814 was one of the worst. It wiped out the pueblo of Cagsaua and destroyed several others. PNA EP-A, 1800-1858, vol. 2, fol. 347b. In the Franciscan archives in Madrid, there is a manuscript, 'Erupción del volcán, el Mayón de Albay en 1814,' an eye-witness description of one of the most destructive volcanic eruptions. Because it is unsigned, some question its source or author. But internal evidence and a handwritten note on the cover esta-

receptive to rainfall that crops commonly raised in the archipelago could thrive here but the inhabitants were "contented with only raising their rice and, since they have but few needs, they dedicate so little to the encouragement of all these industries, preferring idleness to wealth."⁴³ Because of their forest products, these mountains were a boon but their hulking intrusion turned them into natural barriers for intercourse and communications, and the havoc wrought by Mayon and Bulusan are recited by records.⁴⁴

The numerous streams and rivers formed by these mountains cut up the landscape. They served as sources of food but not as channels for water transport and communication for long distances into the interior. Narrow stream beds and thick sedimentary formations shortened their navigability for deep draft vessels. The province had to wait for the 1830s when a progressive provincial magistrate by the name of Jose Ma. Peñaranda pulled Albay out of the backwater through development of agriculture, introduction of new industries and construction of many roads, bridges and public buildings.⁴⁵ Till then Albayños preferred the lengthy sea travel to the hazardous trek up and down wild mountain trails which were not only impassable and perilous in seasons of rain but also extremely laborious in months of heat. Sea travel, however, became unpleasant and risky at the outset of the northeast monsoon.⁴⁶

blished Fray Francisco de Tubino, Curate of Guinobatan, as the author. It is indexed AFIO 281/2. Another fearful account of the eruption by an eyewitness is in Fr. Francisco Aragoneses, *Suceso espantoso y memorable acaecido en la provincia de Camarines el día primero de Febrero de este presente año de 1814*. AFIO 94/43. A copy is also available at the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid with the call number R-33.365/3.

⁴³ Zuñiga, *op. cit.* 48.

⁴⁴ Huerta, *op. cit.* 255.

⁴⁵ MN Ms. 2284, fol. 93-93v. Peñaranda was an efficient aide-de-camp, adjutant and military engineer under Pascual Enrile and much-cited Colonel in the Moro wars before he was appointed provincial magistrate of Albay on 14 May 1834, and in that position, he transformed Albay from a backwater province into one of the most progressive. He was one of the few dedicated and honest governors before 1844. At his death, the grateful people of Albay preserved his memory with a monument in the plaza and a road named after him at the provincial capital. Blair & Robertson, 51: 55-56. Eliodoro Robles, *The Philippines in the Nineteenth Century* (Quezon City 1969) p. 122. Jagor, *op. cit.* 100.

⁴⁶ PNA *Memorias de Albay*, fols. 5-5b. In his travel, Luis Nee was forced to go by sea as the rains made the road from Bacon to Albay impassable. MN Ms. 312, fol. 78.

Forested areas rich in resources, such as timber for ship and building construction, a wide variety of bamboos, medicinal plants, rattans, wax and wild game contributed to the wealth of the province, and with its rich supply of timber, abaca cordage and protected bays, shipyards sprang up.⁴⁷ But for clay deposits that encouraged pottery-making in scattered places, the scanty minerals—metallic and non-metallic deposits—were not feasible for commercial exploitation.

The inhabitants of Albay who were mostly coast dwellers occasionally suffered shortages in staples, for the province lies fronting the Pacific ocean within the tropical typhoon belt and has only a limited land along the coast fit for tillage.⁴⁸ On such critical times, it was the perennial and ubiquitous abaca that took up the economic slack.⁴⁹ Nevertheless the Albayenos elected to establish their settlements and pueblos along the eastern littoral of the peninsula down the looping extremity of Sorsogon to the opposite coast on account of ample marine products and bounteous fishing grounds in the surrounding seas. But the upper coastal areas lapped by the waters of Burias Pass and Ragay Gulf remained thinly populated till 1818 due to their rugged terrain, exposure to strong southwesterlies and Muslim invasions.

The lower end of the province was much different. In the Spanish period, Sorsogon occupied a strategic geographical location. On its southeastern coast is the San Bernardino Strait, the outlet from the Visayas to Catanduanes and coastal regions of Bicol bordering the Pacific and a most feared waterway "being infested by the cruisers of the Mohammedans and, Indians of Mindanao, Jolo, Borneo and Paragao..." When Pierre Pages, a foreign traveller, wanted to cross this Strait, in the 1700s, from Samar to Sorsogon for a land journey to Manila, he could find no one willing to take him across. The very name *Moro* "seem to inspire the Catholic Indians with extreme terror," thus watch-towers and a signal system were installed on its coast to watch

⁴⁷ PNA *Memorias de Albay*, fol. 35b. MN Ms. 2237, doc. 10, fols. 83-83v. Blair & Robertson, 22:204-205; 35:316.

⁴⁹ Luis Nee gives a foreigner's description of the abaca plant and the

⁴⁸ PNA *Memorias de Albay*, fols. 1-3.
process of fiber extraction in MN Ms. 312, fol. 77v.

for approaching marauders and foreign corsairs and relay the warning from pueblo to pueblo.⁵⁰

Unlike the other two *partidos*, Sorsogon's surface features are unspoiled by rugged cordilleras. Save the towering peak of Mt. Bulusan, an active volcano rising 1,559 meters beside beautiful Bulusan lake, gentle slopes define the expanse of fertile plains. However, similar to the neighboring *partidos*, *Sorsogon* had experienced great volcanic eruptions and, like the rest of Bicol, killer earthquakes as destructive as the temblors of 1811.⁵¹ Volcanic ejecta and good year-round rainfall enriched the soil for almost every kind of crops, especially abaca. Inhabitants in the Pacific coast and edge of Sorsogon Bay engaged also in rice and livestock raising. Gubat's farmlands were concentrated in its *sitios* of Tagdon, Danglong, Ariman and Bacacay; Bulusan's in its *visitas* of Macabari and Tabog; Casiguran's in its *sitios* of Cavit, Maohan and Boton; but in one letter, Juban reported that its tilled fields were looted and its animals slaughtered by Muslim raiders.⁵²

Sorsogon had more tillable lands about the bay shore that were already settled in the 16th century by farming-fishing folks who preferred the larger and more sheltered Sorsogon bay to the open eastern Pacific coast. No other bay in the peninsula can compare with Sorsogon's. Nestling securely within the protecting loop of land covered with arable acreage and giant trees, it was the site of the prosperous Bagatao naval shipyard established by the Spaniards for the construction of galleons, one of which was the *Nuestra Señora del Buen Socorro*, the largest and best galleon built in the islands. No wonder it was a prime target in 1616 when Magindanao raiders sacked the shipyard, seized the missionary, Fr. Alonso de la Soledad, whom they cruelly beat up for con-

⁵⁰ PNA EP-A, 1799-1864, vol. 2, fols. 11, 16, 18-18b, 36, 39b, 40b, 42, 48b. Pierre Pages, *Travels Round the World* (Dublin 1791) p. 145.

⁵¹ Bishop Bernardo de la Concepción of Nueva Cáceres gives us an idea of the intensity of the earthquakes of 1811. Before the end of his first year in Cáceres, he wrote to the King, "When I arrived in this city of Nueva Cáceres, I found the holy cathedral church in ruins and the episcopal palace destroyed as a result of the great earthquakes of the year '11." Abella, *op. cit.* 147.

⁵² PNA EP-A, 1799-1864, vol. 2, fols. 10, 11, 16, 18-18b; 20, 39b, 40b, 42b, 45.

tinuously preaching to them the Christian faith and cast into the sea.⁵³

This shipyard met what William Schurz called the three requisites for the site of a dockyard: a safe port, abundant supply of ship timber and native labor.⁵⁴ By this bay lie the pueblo of Sorsogon which was the *Cabecera* of the *Partido* of Ibalon, the former name of Albay Province. But for its vulnerability to Muslim raids, the *Cabecera* was transferred to Albay town, and the government closed down the shipyards in Bicol in the 1700s. In 1792 when Luis Nee and his fellow scientists landed in Sorsogon, he saw its decadence: much of its territory easily flooded and swampy, settled by no more than 200 inhabitants, the grim result of repeated Muslim raids in 1737, 1740, 1749 and 1781.⁵⁵

Catanduanes Island

Northeast of the Albay peninsula, across Lagonoy Gulf and the Maqueda channel, lies the island *Partido* of Catanduanes, a mass of dark-green mountains thrusting up from the sea. Zúñiga calculated its area to be "about 10 leagues long from north to south, and six leagues wide."⁵⁶ Early Spaniards who visited the island saw few narrow coastal plains and most of its mountainous sides plunging almost perpendicularly into the sea. Numerous streams and rivers cut deeply through plateaus and sides of slopes, some large enough to afford traffic for *barotos*. In fact, according to one version, the island's name is a derivative of Catangungan, one of the copious rivers.⁵⁷ By the banks of this river, there were fertile lands for farming but the place was unhealthy.⁵⁸ The interior is mostly mountainous topped with heavy forests of narra and molave and other high class woods except up north where there are some flatlands and gentle slopes suitable for cultivation.

⁵³ Huerta, *op. cit.* 589. Mariano Goyena del Prado, *Ibalón* (Manila 1940) pp. 105-106. Zúñiga, *op. cit.* 48.

⁵⁴ William Schurz, *The Manila Galleon* (New York 1939) pp. 195-196.

⁵⁵ MN Ms. 312, fol. 77v. Goyena del Prado, *op. cit.* 183-184. Sorsogon's need to repel Moro attacks appears in PNA EP-A, 1799-1864, vol. 2, fols. 48-49.

⁵⁶ Zúñiga, *op. cit.* 51.

⁵⁷ Juan Francisco de San Antonio, *Crónicas de la provincia de San Gregorio Magno* (1734 y 1735), I, Parte I, Libro I, capítulo XVIII, p. 67.

⁵⁸ PNA *Memorias de Albay*, fol. 4b.

From the Spanish experience, the island was not a safe haven for ships for most of the year. Looming alone at the edge of the Pacific, within the typhoon belt, it was never known as an island of languorous stillness and serenity. It was frequently pummelled by cyclonic winds from the north to which it lay bare and drenched from mid-October to January by torrential rains that fell fitfully in what would be almost dry months in other regions.⁵⁹ Thus the island never really experienced dry season. Though miles of irregular coastlines that bind the island afford several coves and bays, none offer much protection from the northeast and southwest monsoons as much as the harbor of Virac, a pueblo at the mouth of Cabugao Bay, at the southern tip. It is sheltered from severe storms and accessible to large and small sailing ships. If for its harbor alone, Virac was rightfully chosen as the *Cabecera* of a number of pueblos ringing the island.

A musket-shot away from the coasts are very dangerous shoals, the scene of tragic shipwrecks in the past. Most of those sea disasters were occasioned by the island's proximity to the Embocadero or San Bernardino Strait. Inveigled pilots of some trans-Pacific galleons mistakenly set their course towards Catanduanes, thinking they were entering the Embocadero, only to founder on the coral reefs. Such was the fate in 1601 of the galleon San Geronimo.⁶⁰

In contrast to other Bicolanos, the islanders were of a different ilk. Pressed to the fringes by walls of inhospitable forests of towering trees, the islanders settled mostly along the coast where subsistence was easier to come by. Spanish chroniclers did not butt an eyelash in branding the mainland Bicolanos easy-going and lazy but placed these islanders in a different light. They were described as "stocky and painted like the Visayans." Their land was harsh and their weather cruel. But they were self-sufficient. The men farmed, fished, hunted, built boats and sailed the seas. The women, a very manly lot, cultivated the fields, fished with nets which they employed like drag nets at the mouths of rivers and, in this manner, caught many.⁶¹ Through their in-

⁵⁹ Francisco Colín, *Labor evangélica* (Barcelona 1900) I:25. Juan Alvarez Guerra, *Viajes por filipinas: de Manila a Albay* (Madrid 1887) p. 252.

⁶⁰ San Antonio, *op. cit.* 67. Colín, *op. cit.* I:25.

⁶¹ Colín, *op. cit.* I:25.

dustry, their farmlands in the northeast coast gave them plenty of rice; their coconut trees oil and beverage; their mountains honey, timber, wax and wild game; their seas fish, turtle shells and *balate*; their rivers gold, and their swampy shores nipa palms.⁶²

Brought up in the inter-barangay relationship of non-interference and constant struggle with Muslim raiders, these islanders developed a resentful suspicion of or even an aggressive hostility to intruders. In 1576 the galleon *Espiritu Santo* returning from Acapulco with a cargo of merchandise and lay and Religious passengers foundered at the coast of the island. To the mind of the islanders, they were intruding. Thus all passengers perished in the hands of the inhabitants except a certain Spaniard named Geronimo Albez who spoke the Visayan tongue.⁶³ Their fierce love of independence was further illustrated in their heroic battles on land and sea with Muslim invaders till the 19th century.⁶⁴ Frequently outnumbered but rarely outfought, they were a distant contrast to other inhabitants in other regions who were herded like sheep into Muslim vessels on their long journey to slavery. Such strength of spirit and body doubtlessly came from long inurement to the hard realities of isolation. Certainly these islanders who in 1815 numbered about 14,034 knew how to fend for themselves.⁶⁵ They should, for one of the realities they had to live with was that to reach their island by sea from Caramoan point, it took a day, but across Lagonoy Gulf, two or more days, depending on the weather.⁶⁶ In critical times, like piratical attacks, this fact bore hard on them when they sent for aid in the mainland and waited agonizingly for its coming.

Burias Island

From a distance, the elongated island of Burias fronting the western coast of Albay peninsula looks like a summit of a high

⁶² *Ibid.* I:25-26.

⁶³ *Ibid.*; Zuñiga, *op. cit.* 51.

⁶⁴ PNA EP-A, 1772-1836, fols. 191-193, 312b. PNL HDP *Catanduanes*, pp. 7-8. Goyena del Prado, *op. cit.* 81. PNL Microfilm, Ramo: Filipinas, Reel 3, Tomo 5, Expediente 3, fols. 196b-197.

⁶⁵ UST AR, Libros: Tomo 171, Estadística 1815, fol. 21b.

⁶⁶ AFIO 92/32, fol. 23.

submarine mountain.⁶⁷ Burias extends from Colorado Point, the northern-most tip of the island to Punta Aguja, the southern-most tip, for fifty-one miles, more or less. Across the broadest section from coast to coast, it is about five miles wide. The island derived its name from the *burí*, a variety of Philippine palm tree that grew abundantly on the island.⁶⁸ It was *reduced* under Spanish dominion in 1569 by Don Luis de Guzman and his little band of conquistadores.

Its terrain is rugged with few flatlands broken by dense forests of giant trees till the early 19th century. The timbers were ideal for shipbuilding and other construction. Nevertheless, the difficulty in extracting them from the forests hindered its few inhabitants from benefitting by them.⁶⁹ Though its eastern coastline is generally lined with inhospitable cliffs, at its northern extremity, there is a good harbor in San Pascual, the *Cabecera* of the island. Here Spanish frigates and trans-Pacific galleons called for supplies and repairs.⁷⁰

Except for folk memories of this island's history, there seems to be no reliable written document when this island was inhabited. Bicolanos would like to believe that the early settlers were the captured followers of Raja Soliman and Raja Lakandula, after the fall of Manila, whom the conquistadores dumped on this island upon their return to Cebu.⁷¹ In the 18th century, it harbored a satellite community of Muslim marauders called Iranuns. Thomas Forrest, an English sea captain who visited the islands, narrated:

These [Iranuns] within ten years before 1775, have done much mischief to the Spaniards... and at this time, they possess an island in the very heart of the Philippines called Burias, where has been a colony of Illanos, for many years, men, women and children. The Spaniards have often attempted to dislodge them, but in vain; the island... being environed with rocks and shoals to a considerable distance.⁷²

⁶⁷ *The Philippine Atlas* (Manila 1975) I:71.

⁶⁸ Juan Delgado, *Historia general sacro-profana, política y natural de las islas del poniente llamadas filipinas* (Manila 1892) p. 87. PNL HDP Masbate, No. 60, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Murillo Velarde, *op. cit.* 362.

⁷⁰ PNL HDP Masbate, No. 60, p. 8.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 1.

⁷² Thomas Forrest, *A Voyage to New Guinea and the Moluccas* (London 1779) p. 302. Burias continued to be a deposit of Moro booty and plunder from 1797 to 1799. Comyn, *op. cit.* 119.

By 1800 it was deserted, serving as a "haven for Moro pirates;"⁷³ its rich forests and fishing grounds readily filling their needs. In 1832 upon verification that Burias was the springboard of some raids in Bicol, Governor General Pascual Enrile commissioned two trustworthy and extremely efficient aides, Jose Ma. Peñaranda, a Colonel from the Moro wars, and Nicolas Enrile, a naval Lieutenant, to conduct a reconnaissance of the island, dislodge the Muslims and erect a fort.⁷⁴ There was then a need to protect the few settlers and encourage others to come. In the same year, a report implied that it was still very underpopulated. A young, imaginative and enterprising *Alcalde Mayor* of Camarines Sur, Manuel Esquivel y Castañeda, who had initiated different projects in his province, thought of developing Burias.⁷⁵ He contemplated sending unmarried women to the island, and informed Governor Enrile about it, to solve its problem of underpopulation but desisted from carrying it out for fear of giving rise to scandal.⁷⁶ It is not known how he reacted when the government later on converted the island into a dumping ground for captured *cimarrones*, *remontados* and Muslim marauders.

Ticao Island

Ticao lies southeast of Burias, a stone's throw away. Folk history relates that this islet of only eight leagues in circumference was initially inhabited in 1609 by three Muslims named Equicos, Bakson and Montala.⁷⁷ When other settlers from Luzon arrived, the original ones resented them. Instead of cultivating their fields and devoting themselves to their occupations, they resorted to "piracy" and left the island altogether.⁷⁸ Life gradually changed at the arrival of Fray Gregorio Grijalvo. By 1776, it was under the spiritual care of the Recoletos but, by that time,

⁷³ Zufiga, *op. cit.* 52.

⁷⁴ MN Ms. 1446, doc. 17, fol. 68.

⁷⁵ Esquivel's other projects included the construction of the Pamplona-Pasacao canal which he started before 13 June 1833 to remedy the problem of lack of communication in Camarines. But his most successful project was the alteration of the course of the Naga river by digging a new channel and filling up the old river bend. MN Ms. 2228, fol. 29v; Ms. 1740, doc. 1, fols. 1v-2v, 3-3v, 5, 6-6v, 8, 9, 11-12, 136-14. PNA EP-CS; 1791-1891, fols. 330, 334b.

⁷⁶ MN Ms. 1740, doc. 1, fol. 1v.

⁷⁷ PNL HDP *Masbate*, No. 60, p. 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

there were no Christians left in Burias and only few in Ticao, for the constant piratical raids had taken their toll.⁷⁹ In 1798 the island's fortification was strengthened when its position became more and more strategically significant for defense and navigation.⁸⁰ With impunity, Muslim raiders were then using its deserted coves and inlets as lairs from where they launched their raids on different parts of Bicol and Tayabas. Like Burias, Ticao's untouched natural resources sustained their marauding activities.

Ticao's fortunes brightened up in 1811 when Antonio Vicente, a native of Mandawe, Cebu, moved to Albay and engaged in privateering against the Muslims. In no time, the Muslims held him in high terror after he captured two *pancos* (raiding vessels propelled by oars and a sail) of Muslims in Masbate, freed several captives, seized rice and gunpower and killed 18 pirates which he proved by presenting thirty-six ears to the *Alcalde Mayor*.⁸¹ In 1818 petitioned by the pueblo of San Jacinto in Ticao island, he transferred with several companions to the island where he established the *visita* of Ticao, San Jacinto, opened lands for cultivation and constructed two wooden *baluartes* (forts) armed with two cannons bought with his savings from *balate* gathering. Since his coming to Ticao, the pirates stopped harassing the island. For his outstanding valor, the *Alcade* recommended him for an award.⁸²

The port of San Jacinto, a safe anchorage of two to three leagues in perimeter at the eastern flank of the island, became an important and busy outlet of the island's products especially caulking pitch for Manila and neighboring ports.⁸³ Because of its favorable location, Acapulco-bound galleons used to stop here either to escape heavy monsoon rains before the coming of a typhoon or stack up firewood and fresh water and wait for the strong southwesterlies to blow to propel them through the treacherous currents and dangerous shoals off the Calantas and Naranjos islands towards the Embocadero and open Pacific; thus the Muslims were very intent on putting the two ports of San Ja-

⁷⁹ AFIO 92/23, fol. 26.

⁸⁰ PNA VP-A, XI, fols. 1-1b.

⁸¹ The cutting of Moro ears dates back to the time Bornean and Mindanao pirates plundered Albay province. PNL HDP *Albay*, III-4, pp. 1-2.

⁸² PNA EP-A, 1772-1836, fol. 330. For more particulars on Vicente's life, see fols. 332-332b.

⁸³ PNA VP-A, XI, fol. 1.

cinto and San Pascual out of use and exterminating their populace.⁸⁴ Up to 1844, San Jacinto was the only pueblo in the island, and Ticao's inhabitants were described as the most lazy of the province. The same report, however, gives the reason, "They do not have any tillable land or any kind of industry. They engaged only in gathering pitch and fishing."⁸⁵

If the island of Ticao evoked hope from the hearts of mariners, it also inspired fear. The sailing route from the port of Cavite to the Embocadero was lined with sunken wrecks of sailing ships, and Ticao had claimed at least two. The galleon Santo Cristo de Burgos was driven aground between the port of Ticao and the port of San Jacinto in 1726, and the galleon San Andres met the same fate in 1798 on the dreaded Naranjos passage not far from Ticao.⁸⁶

Masbate Island

Masbate is the largest and richest of the three islands of Bicol west of San Bernardino Strait. A glance at it on the map brings to mind Grecian myths and legends out of the Aegean sea. It is weirdly shaped like the head and neck of a decapitated seahorse (a mythical sea creature, half fish and half horse) that could not make up its mind whether to stay in the Sibuyan group of Romblon, Sibuyan and Marinduque or the eastern Visayan group of Samar and Leyte. Its snout is washed by the waters of the Sibuyan Sea on the one side, and the Visayan Sea on the other side; and the back of its head and neck by the waters of Masbate Pass and Samar Sea. How it became a part of Bicol is puzzling. Geographically, culturally and, to some extent, linguistically, it has no affinity with the region.

Together with Burias and Ticao, Don Luis de Guzman with a handful of soldiers started its reduction in 1569. The following year, under Miguel Lopez de Legazpi's orders, the abusive and despotic Captain Andres de Ibarra and his men, including Fr. Alonzo Jimenez, an Augustinian friar, completed de Guzman's

⁸⁴ Schurz, *op. cit.* 222-223. Zuñiga, *op. cit.* 51-52. Delgado, *op. cit.* 88. Díaz Arenas, *op. cit.*, cuaderno 6, p. 8.

⁸⁵ PNA *Memoria de Camarines*, fol. 4.

⁸⁶ AGI Escribanía de Cámara, 444-A. Zuñiga, *op. cit.* 52.

work. It could well have been the ill-founded rumor of "rich mines of high-priced gold of twenty-two carats" that attracted the gold-hungry Spaniards to the island. They found the mines alright; even the mining tools of the inhabitants, but not the glittering gold. Rumors of gold in the numerous rivers and streams of the island persisted as prospectors struck fool's gold which, in reality, was amber, a yellow or brownish-yellow, translucent, fossil resin deflected ashore from the strong currents of the Embocadero. But at times, patience rewarded the Bicolanos some gold grains in their washery which served them in good stead to meet their tribute dues to escape punishment.⁸⁷

The topography of this island is distinguished by

...rolling hills, discontinuous ranges of highlands, and relatively broad bands of lowlands. On its northwestern tip are limestone cliffs which rise almost perpendicularly to the waterline. Several bays indent the coast of the island...⁸⁸

These bays and coves furnished ideal sites for shipyards and anchorages secure from driving monsoon winds, like the ports of Palanog, Magdalena and Uson which could receive ships of any tonnage in need of supplies or careening or shelter.⁸⁹ Its coastal waters provided so extensive fishing grounds and sources of *balate* and tortoise shells that fishing folks from as far as Leyte, Cebu, Panay and Negros came.⁹⁰

In the interior are rugged hills and small plateaus. The forests, in Spanish times, were not large but lush and yielded lumber, indigo, rattans, gums, resins; pitch and wild game.⁹¹ Coconut trees and buri palms were common sights. Its fertile soil sustained by a continuous rainfall turned out excellent grazing grounds where deer and wild cattle roamed. But like the rest of Bicol, Burias, Ticao and Masbate sit within the typhoon belt and had received their fair share of destruction over the years. Lo-

⁸⁷ PNL HDP *Masbate*, No. 58, p. 1. AGI Filipinas 686. Delgado, *op. cit.* 88. Colín, *op. cit.* I:26-27. Copper deposits were found in Masbate and Francisco X. Salgado made an attempt to mine it. AGI Filipinas 686.

⁸⁸ *The Philippine Atlas*, *op. cit.* 71.

⁸⁹ Delgado, *op. cit.* 88.

⁹⁰ PNL HDP *Masbate*, No. 59, p. 51. Delgado, *op. cit.* 88. Colín, *op. cit.* I:26.

⁹¹ PNA *Memoria de Masbate/Ticao*, fol. 2. Gonzalez Fernández, *op. cit.* 400.

custs also plagued these islands in the past. In the 1840s locusts were in Masbate for seven years at a stretch but could not be exterminated for lack of hands. It could have compelled the inhabitants to abandon agriculture and devote their time to the hunt. Wild cattle in the Cataingan area was considerable and deer was abundant.⁹²

Till 1818 its shore lands were sparsely populated by small settlements of fishermen but a good number of infidels and christianized inhabitants were up in the hills, refusing to dwell in seaside settlements or mission posts for fear of pirates who had established their own communities on deserted coasts.⁹³ By 1844 only three small pueblos existed on the northern coast, namely, Baleno, Mobo and Palanas while the whole southern coast was in the hands of the Muslims.⁹⁴ This is another angle to the inhabitants being "little enthusiastic about work" and making do with their "pitch and some ricefields and edible roots to live without stirring from their huts..."⁹⁵

To get at least a glimpse of the impact of pirates on the dynamics of demography this side of Bicol, however unreliable Spanish population records are, note the following: a census record of 1591 listed Masbate and Burias with 3,200 souls, then an Augustinian report stated that Masbate, with a much bigger population than Burias, had only 1,380 souls in 1771.⁹⁶

Considering the geographical location and natural resources of these three islands, the Muslims could not have chosen better outposts for their marauding missions. The Muslim raids in Bicol did not all directly originate from Sulu and Mindanao. Raiding expeditions from Sulu or Mindanao to Bicol were not two or three-day affairs. They were of long duration, lasting one to two years, at great distances almost impossible for heavily-laden, frail sailing crafts and their crews and human cargo to negotiate without midway replenishment stations for careening vessels, depositing booty, staging attacks and landing captives to recuperate before

⁹² PNA *Memoria de Masbate/Ticao*, fol. 2.

⁹³ AFIO 92/23, fols. 25v-26. Delgado, *op. cit.* 88.

⁹⁴ PNA *Memorias de Albay*, fol. 4.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* fol. 4. Delgado, *op. cit.* 88.

⁹⁶ PNL HDP *Masbate*, No. 58, pp. 1-2. Gonzalez Fernandez, *op. cit.* 400. AFIO 92/23, fol. 26.

the long voyage to Moroland.⁹⁷ The raiders in Bicol could not have carried out their mission of destruction and slave-raiding with such frequency and intensity, and sometimes outside the raiding season, if they did not have such stations within or about the region. Burias, Ticao and Masbate answered the need. They were conveniently located at the crossroads of Luzon and the Visayas, both densely populated potential sources of Christian captives. Furthermore, the natural resources of these three midway stations at least eased, if not totally did away with the problems of logistics.

Commentary

To this day Bicolanos are still regarded as lazy and passive. Some blame the Spaniards for it. Spanish chroniclers were quite fast in giving the indios those twin brand names. The Spaniards, however, did not have a monopoly of this hard-spun prejudice. Jean Baptiste Mallat, a long-time French resident of the islands, was blunt about the indio's natural laziness and hedonistic tendency, and F. Jagor, a German traveller in Bicol, wrote of the indio's easy-going disposition.⁹⁸ There must be some truth to this native malaise. But how explain, for instance, the Bicolano indio's pristine creativity and industry which the Spaniards themselves praised on their first arrival in Bicol and his alleged post-conquest passivity and laziness? A comprehensive analysis would certainly bring out deep-seated reasons but that is beyond the scope of this short study.

Suffice it to say, though not definitively, that from the brief description of Bicol in 1565 to 1818, it seems that socio-economic and geographical factors contributed to the shaping of the Bicolano character. His land was so rich that almost anything he planted grew. His seas, lakes, rivers and streams so bounteous that the next meal's fare was assured, so why would the Bicolano be as concerned and as hard-working as his fellow indio in less affluent regions?

Death and destruction also disrupted the rhythm of his existence. He was plagued by pests and pestilence. He suffered from

⁹⁷ James Francis Warren, *The Sulu Zone, 1768-1898* (Singapore 1981) pp. 155-56.

⁹⁸ Mallat, *op. cit.* 299. Jagor, *op. cit.* 23-24, 56.

volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and floods. He suffered continually from his life-time tormentor — the typhoon — so that another foreigner who recently did extensive research in the Bicol region accepted the truth of this witticism, "The land is so good, the people so kind, the Almighty had to invent the typhoon to even things up."⁹⁹

He was also exploited by oppressors and harried by pirates. The Muslim incursions were not as perennial as the typhoons but they were undisputedly the most terrifying and the most destructive not only to the Bicolano's socio-economic life but also to his morale, for the very government duty-bound to protect him was helpless against the Muslim menace which it admitted was "an evil without remedy."¹⁰⁰

Though the almost unbroken cycle of natural calamities bore hard on him, the Bicolano learned to cope with it. But not so, at least efficiently, with man-made adversities. That is why he was far different when his land was still called *Ibalon* before it was trampled upon by foreigner oppressors and despoiled by pillaging pirates. Thus the Bicolano seems to be as much a product as his critics were of distinctive human and natural factors. Moreover, "in this matter of indolence," Francisco Leandro de Viana, Attorney-General of the Audiencia of Manila in 1756 and an acute observer of insular affairs, reported to the King that the Spaniards of the Philippines were just as lazy and shiftless.

FRANCISCO MALLARI, S.J.
Xavier University
Cagayan de Oro

⁹⁹ Norman Goodner Owen, "Kabikolan in the Nineteenth Century: Socio-Economic Change in the Provincial Philippines" (published Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1976) p. 31. I am greatly indebted to him for allowing me to make use of his work.

¹⁰⁰ Summing up the Muslim problem, Governor Felix Berenguer de Marquina wrote dejectedly to the King in 1789 this celebrated line, "This is an evil without remedy." Emilio Bernaldez y Fernandez de Folgueras, *Reseña histórica de la guerra al sur de filipinas* (Madrid: Imprenta del Memorial de Ingenieros, 1857) p. 136. Jose Montero y Vidal, *Historia de la piratería* (Madrid: Imprenta y Fundación de Manuel Tello, 1888) I:355.

Abbreviations used:

AFIO	=	Archivo Franciscano Ibero-Oriental (Madrid)
AGI	=	Archivo General de Indias (Sevilla)
MN Ms.	=	Museo Naval (Madrid), Manuscrito
PNA EP-CS	=	Philippine National Archives, Ereccion de Pueblos, Camarines Sur.
PNA EP-A	=	Philippine National Archives, Ereccion de Pueblos, Albay.
PNA VP-A	=	Philippine National Archives, Varias Provincias, Albay.
PNL HDP	=	Philippine National Library, Historical Data Papers.
UST AR	=	University of Santo Tomas Archives.