

## Baybayin Revisited

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While many know that *baybayin* (not *alibata*) was the system of writing prevalent at the time of the Spanish intrusion, certain misconceptions have remained about *baybayin*. Some have insisted it was of a useless design being more appropriately thought of as a toy. Others have suggested that only a few within Tagalog society could in fact use this technology. Though unspoken, there is also the belief that *baybayin* had no place in the Spanish Philippines. Above all is the assumption that *baybayin* “disappeared” shortly after the Spaniards arrived.

By examining indigenous language documents (in this case, documents written in Tagalog by Tagalogs) this essay challenges these misconceptions. Documents written in *baybayin* by a variety of individuals certainly repudiate the claim that the system was of useless design. And the fact that these documents were used in both Spanish ecclesiastical and civil settings, refutes the view that *baybayin* had no place in that world.

In retracing the work of Fr. Alberto Santamaria and examining documents in the archives of the University of Santo Tomas, this paper proposes that *baybayin* did not disappear at all.

**Keywords:** *Baybayin, Indigenization, Hispanization, Literacy, Doctrina Christiana, Santamaria, Alberto Signatures*

In February 2008, the First National Komedy Festival was held at the University of the Philippines, Diliman. Organized by Dean Virgilio S. Almario, the festival included a *komedy* performance every Friday night in February, as well as a run of *Orosman at Zafra* by Dulaang UP.<sup>1</sup> The *komedy* is a theatrical form based on the Spanish *comedia*, which had its origins in the sixteenth century. As Nicanor Tiongson notes:

From its Spanish antecedent, the Philippine play inherited the three-part structure and the use of verse, the use of *loas* as curtain-raisers and *entremeses sainetes* or dances as entr'actes, the stories which derive from everyday life, the lives of saints or tales of far-away kingdoms or even folklore and mythology, the tortuous and sensationalistic plot, the stereotyped characters, the themes of religion, love and honor as defined by the establishment (Tiongson 1999:2).

Yet, at a press conference at UPD, Dean Almario asserted that the *komedy* is “national theater as we know it, it’s what the Kabuki and the Noh are to Japan.”<sup>2</sup> The *comedia* has become the *komedy*, having been indigenized. Such is the case with *baybayin*, the form of writing used by the Tagalogs at the time of the Spanish intrusion.<sup>3</sup> This technology, borrowed from outside the archipelago, was indigenized and its uses determined by the local population. The difference between the *komedy* and *baybayin* as borrowed cultural realities is that many believed that *baybayin* faded and finally disappeared. This is not the case, as this paper will show.

Indeed, one could say that *baybayin* has experienced a kind of resurgence in the past few decades. Yet its current uses seem rather limited. One does not find it used as a writing system; rather as a symbol of connections to the past. *Baybayin* is used in logos or trademarks, as in the University of the Philippines, the University of the Philippines Press and the Cultural Center of the Philippines. On a popular level, particularly among the youth of the Diaspora, one finds it on t-shirts, on programs for Philippine Cultural Nights in the United States, on pendants and used as tattoos.

Although seen in a variety of settings, there appears to be confusion and general ignorance about this system of writing as a system of writing. One

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<sup>1</sup> The Friday night performances were presented by the Komedyang San Dionisio (Parañaque); Hiraya Theater Company (San José, Antique); Komedyang Don Galo (Parañaque); Dulaang UP (UP Diliman); and Comedia de Baler (Aurora).

<sup>2</sup> Ma. Guerrero, Amadis. “Is the ‘komedy’ politically incorrect?” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, January 27, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> This paper will focus on the Tagalogs and the use of *baybayin*. The primary reason for this is the abundance of evidence in Tagalog versus other languages in the Philippines. Although *baybayin* was used by other ethno-linguistic groups, few examples have survived.

is reminded of Constantino Lendoyro's condescending remark in his *The Tagalog Language*.

"It is not possible to conceive how such a pitiable system of writing as this could ever have been adapted to a language of such a complex phonetic character as that of Tagalog and have been available for the conveying and recording of thought. In all probability, it was never made use of for any practical purposes, being rather in the way of a toy than in that of a useful tool."<sup>4</sup>

The way *baybayin* is used today seems to fulfill this view. But Lendoyro was wrong.

### Name<sup>5</sup>

Some of the confusion regarding *baybayin* often begins with its name. Many today refer to the system as *alibata*, a name invented (as he freely admitted) by Dean Paul Versoza of the University of Manila who coined the term *alibata* in 1914. It was his claim that *alibata* was based on the first three letters, *alif*, *ba*, *ta*, of the Maguindanao arrangement of the Arabic letters. He did not explain the connection.<sup>6</sup> While it is clear that *alibata* was not its name, the origin of the name *baybayin* is not known. Spanish accounts tell us much about the system of writing, including its name, but the word *baybayin* does not appear anywhere in any Tagalog writings. And it is rare in Spanish sources as well. Pedro de San Buenaventura's *Vocabulario*, published in 1613, includes the following entry: Baibayin-A-b-c. But Pedro Chirino's *Relacion*, which includes a chapter "Of the Writing of the Filipinos" with examples of *baybayin*, but the word *baybayin* is not found there.

In Tomas Pinpin's book, *Librong pagaaralan nang manga Tagalog nang uicang Castila* (A book to teach Tagalogs the Castilian language [Spanish]), the

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<sup>4</sup> The section quoted continues: "as it could never have been so early eradicated and superseded by the Spanish one, had it even acquired any appreciable hold on the native mind. History, thus far, seems to lend support to the belief that it was not a real alphabet, for, as far as our knowledge goes, not a single inscription, not a genuine specimen written with its characters has ever been produced." (Lendoyro 1909:6).

<sup>5</sup> Much of the material on *baybayin* is taken from Chapter 2 "Literacy" from *Tomas Pinpin and Survival in Early Spanish Philippines* (UST Publishing House, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> "I coined this word in 1914 in the New York Public Library, Manuscript Research Division, basing it on the Maguindanao (Moro) arrangement of letters of the alphabet after the Arabic: alif, ba, ta (alibata), "f" having been eliminated for euphony's sake." Verzosa, Paul Rodriguez. *Pangbansang Titik nang Pilipinas* (Philippine National Writing). Manila, 1939.

word *baybayin* does not appear once.<sup>7</sup> In the second section- *ycalauang cabanata*- he deals with the differences between the Tagalog and Spanish systems of writing. In the introduction to this section, Pinpin writes:

*Hindi magaling na ytoloy co, ytong aral cong yto, cundi co mona cayò aralan, manga capoua co Tagalog, nang pag turing nang ybang manga letrang, di natin tinotoran torang dati, at ang uala nga sa uica nating Tagalog: bago, siyang maralas sa uicang Castilla.*<sup>8</sup>

Pinpin uses the borrowed word *letra*, rather than the Tagalog *titik*, to designate and describe the symbols written by both the Tagalogs and the Spaniards. In one vocabulary list, he gives *ang sulat* as the equivalent for *la letra*. It should be noted, however, that he also uses *letra* for numerals in the previous section. What one finds is various euphemisms for the Tagalog way of writing, such as mentioned in a 1745 document from Silang, Cavite: *Siquense unos caracteres al parecer de la lengua Tagala*.

The origin of the word *baybayin* is unknown. Joseph Espallargas defines *baybayin* as a set of objects placed in line (Espallargas, 1974:146-7), which contradicts Vicente Rafael's intriguing but unconvincing explanation:

... the seacoast, or the act of coasting along a river. This sense of the word highlights the seeming randomness involved in the reading of the script as one floats, as it were, over a stream of sounds elicited by the characters. (Rafael, 1988:49).

It is true that one of the meanings of *baybayin* in Tagalog is shoreline, from the root word *baybay*. But, *baybay* is also the root word for spelling; not in the alphabetic sense, rather in the syllabic sense of sounding out each syllable.

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<sup>7</sup> Tomas Pinpin, a Tagalog, wrote a book that was published by the Dominican press in 1610. Located in his hometown of Abucay, Bataan, the press became Pinpin's source of work for several decades, as he was involved in the printing of most of the works produced by that press. His book, *Librong pagaaralan nang manga Tagalog nang Uicang Castila* (A book to teach Tagalogs the Castilian language), was a series of language lessons that employed a variety of teaching devices to encourage Tagalogs to learn Spanish and become bi-lingual, or *ladinos* as they were known. See *Tomas Pinpin and Tagalog Survival in Early Spanish Philippines*. (UST Publishing House, 2011) for an examination of Pinpin's work and *Librong pagaaralan nang manga Tagalog nang uicang Castila*. (UST Publishing House, 2011) for a transcription of the original text.

<sup>8</sup> It is not good that I continue this lesson of mine if I do not first teach you, my fellow Tagalogs, how to recognize and remember other letters that we are not accustomed to recognizing and remembering, and that are absent from our Tagalog language, but that are often used in Castilian; and that are difficult to recognize for one who is not used to them. Though they are difficult, you can learn them well if you force yourself. Well, then, let's get on, and mark out these valuable lessons. (Rafael 1988: 72) Note the use of the Spanish word for letter (*letra*) in the Tagalog text.

A word of warning: it is the Spaniards who gave us the word *barangay*, which we now know was not what the Spaniards claimed. It was in fact a Spanish construction used to organize and govern Filipinos.<sup>9</sup> However, while the *barangay* might be seen as a social construction, the reality is that *baybayin*, or whatever it may have been called, did in fact exist. As will be shown below, the evidence clearly demonstrates that it was used by Tagalogs for a variety of purposes.

## The System of Writing

The system known as *baybayin* was described by Scott as one of twelve or more indigenous alphabets from such Southeast Asian islands as Sumatra, Java and Sulawesi, which are ultimately derived from ancient India and share the Sanskrit characteristic that any consonant is pronounced with the vowel *a* following it, diacritical marks being added to express other vowels.<sup>10</sup>

It is generally considered to have consisted of three vowels, which could serve for five, and between twelve and fourteen consonants.<sup>11</sup> These consonants

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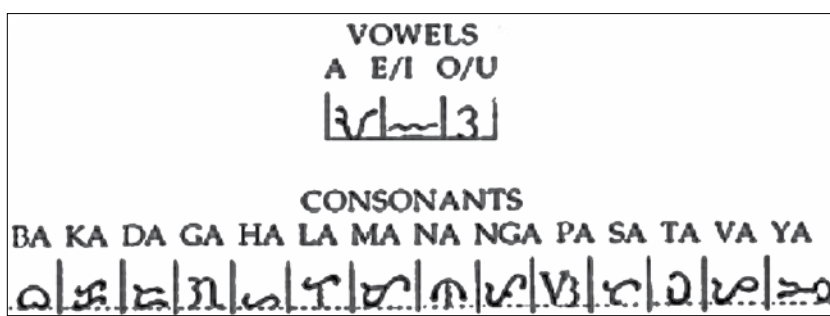
<sup>9</sup> See Woods “Towards a Reconstruction of Seventeenth-Century Tagalog Society” and “The Evolution of Bayan.”

<sup>10</sup> Scott 1989: 58. Although Dr. Scott and I had corresponded and he had acted as my sponsor when I applied for a Fulbright research grant, we met for the first time in Manila in 1993, while I was there doing research. Dr. Scott (or Scottie as he was known to his friends) was the person who most influenced my decision to study the early Spanish period in the Philippines. His book *Discovery of the Igorots* pointed to the tremendous possibilities for research in this time period. We discussed the issue of whether or not literacy was widespread during the early Spanish period in the Philippines. I must say that we did not agree. Yet it is almost ironic that although he did not see the syllabary was being used that much, in his book *Looking for the Prehispanic Filipino*, he gave a translation of a document written in Bicolano in *baybayin*. It was with great sadness that I heard of Dr. Scott’s untimely death in September, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> Pedro Chirino, S.J., notes twelve, Francisco Colin, S.J., mentions thirteen, and Francisco López, O.S.A., fourteen. The model syllabary printed at the beginning of the *Doctrina Christiana* of 1593 had seventeen characters. Gonzales refers to this section as a *cartilla* “or list of exercises for reading vowels, consonant-vowel combinations and consonant-vowel-consonant combinations” (Gonzalez 1985: 5). Espallargas notes that the order of the characters “is not the order of the letters of the Spanish alphabet, nor the order customarily found in authors who in later years copied the characters in their *Artes*. The first characters of the set are the three vowels; the last two are NGA and the VA, which to Spanish ears sound as the most peculiar of the Tagalog phonology. It would be quite hard to ascertain whether the sequences of the characters given in this model syllabary is [sic] of pre-Hispanic origin or was already modified by the habits of the Spanish authors of the *Doctrina*. Curiously enough when those last two characters are transcribed in alphabetic letters they are marked off with a double dash on top, similar to the tilde that Spanish n carries, perhaps to indicate the *g* and the *v* were in reality not identical to their Spanish counterpart *g* and *v*. (Espallargas 1974: 56-57). So much more could and has been written about *baybayin*. It is not my desire or my intent to add to the scholarship already in existence on the subject. Rather, I wish to make the reader aware of some of the basics of the writing system.

included both a consonant and a vowel value, thus the system of writing was not alphabetic but rather a syllabary, sharing the Sanskrit characteristic that any consonant is pronounced with the vowel a following it, diacritical marks being added to express vowels. “The three distinct vocalic characters represent separate vowel each preceded by an inherent glottal stop (‘).” (Conklin, 1991:37) The consonants without diacritical marks (called *kudlit* in Tagalog, the Spaniards wrote it as *corlit*) included the vowel *a*. The consonant with a *kudlit* above it included either *e* or *i*. One below meant that either *o* or *u* was included with the consonant. The letters designating vowels were used when placed at the beginning of a word or syllable.

The order usually given in Spanish accounts is as follows:<sup>12</sup>



From the nineteenth century on, various authors have written about and often printed facsimiles of *baybayin*. Eugène Stanislas Jacquet published *Considérations sur les Alphabets des Philippines* in 1831. A nineteen-page paper, with a ten-page appendix, it opened the door to discussion of the Philippine script. He based his work primarily on López’s *Libro a naisuration* of 1620/1621, which was in Ilocano although he apparently had seen one other sample of *baybayin*. Sinibaldo de Mas visited the Philippines in 1841 and among other matters during his year-long visit, sought out any information on the Philippine syllabary. He reported that he “saw some ancient written documents in the archives of the convents of Manila, particularly that of San Agustin.” (Espallargas 1974: 154) While he shared the opinion of the Spanish friars of his time, who had apparently failed to realize that their predecessors had in fact printed books in *baybayin*, he did include several

<sup>12</sup> But in the *Doctrina Christiana* of 1593, the first book published by the Spaniards in a Filipino language, (which will be discussed below) a different order is given, the only record of such an ordering.

‘A ‘U ‘I HA PA KA SA LA TA NA BA MA GA DA YA NGA WA

The order given in the *Doctrina Christiana* is taken by Harold Conklin to be indigenous in origin and he points out that it does not match either the Indic-Indonesia model or the Near Eastern-European alphabet tradition. He goes on to remark that no other mention of a specific order is given in the various Spanish accounts (Conklin, 1991:37).

specimens in his book of 1843, *Informe sobre el Estado de las Islas Filipinas in 1842*. These samples included five syllabaries, a fragment of a contract of a sale of land, two signatures, and an additional line of signs “that bore some resemblance to the ancient script letters.” (Espallargas 1974: 154)

## Origin

The matter of the origin of this system of writing has not been settled, but theories abound. Juan R. Francisco, the recognized authority in this area lists at least five possible origins<sup>13</sup> (Francisco 1971:79). More recently, Geoff Wade has suggested that *baybayin* may in fact have had its origins with the Cham, the people of the kingdom of Champa in southern Vietnam (Wade, 1993). What should be noted is that *all* theories point to the origin as being *outside* the Philippines; that is, the genesis of a writing system came from elsewhere. Thus, a technology of writing was brought to the archipelago, probably on the initiative of the local inhabitants. Here, a transformation took place.

The process involved in bringing about this transformation from something foreign to something local or indigenous in Southeast Asia has been referred to as “domestication,” “vernacularization,” “indigenization” and “localization.” All these point to “a purposeful and discriminating aptitude that wants to make sense of something foreign. They express the capacity of Southeast Asian societies to change.” H.G.Q. Wales used the phrase “local genius” to express how Southeast Asians retained indigenous culture and ideas while using the culture of another people (Reynolds, 1995:432). More often than not, the aspects of foreign cultures borrowed and domesticated in the region often gave concrete expression to local ideas. As a result, if one is not careful, one will observe the concrete expression and attach to it its original, that is, foreign, meaning, failing to understand its Southeast Asian meaning and significance. John Leddy Phelan wrote about Filipino responses to Spanish influences in the Philippines in his classic work *Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses 1560-1700*:

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<sup>13</sup> (1.) Isaac Taylor believes the system was introduced into the Philippines from the coast of Bengal some time before the eighth century A.D. Taylor also claimed the Tagalog alphabet, as he referred to it, was the prototype from which the alphabets of the Celebes and Makassar were derived. (2.) Fletcher Gardner points to the similarity between the Asoka alphabets with the Karosthi and Pali with the living Indic alphabets of Mindoro and Palawan. The alphabets used by the Mangyans on Mindoro and the Tagbanuas of Palawan differ from the *baybayin* under discussion. (3.) David Ciringer argued that the alphabet came from Java. Conklin and Fox held to this position. (4.) Lendoyro held that the Buginese of the Southern Celebes brought the alphabet through their traders. (5.) The Dravidian theory held that the Philippine scripts had their origin in the Tamil writings (Francisco 1971: 6-9). Francisco himself believed that the third theory was the correct view.

The Filipinos were no mere passive recipients of the cultural stimulus created by the Spanish conquest. Circumstances gave them considerable freedom in selecting their responses to Hispanization. Their responses varied all the way from acceptance to indifference and rejection. The capacity of Filipinos for creative social adjustment is attested in the manner in which they adapted many Hispanic features to their own indigenous culture (Phelan 1959: viii-ix).

It should be noted that Phelan was a Latin American historian and not a specialist on Southeast Asia. In fact, he never traveled to the Philippines or learned any of its languages or dialects. He wrote on the Philippines based on Spanish sources exclusively. Yet, he was able to discern the dynamic at work in how Filipinos responded to external cultural influences.

I would suggest the following sequence. First, the Tagalogs were exposed to the concept and examples of writing. They took this system and to use Reynolds' words, made "local sense of something foreign" (Reynolds, 1995:433). (It is altogether possible that earlier aspects of this stage – domestication or indigenization of a foreign cultural practice – had in fact taken place in Java or the Celebes, or somewhere else in insular Southeast Asia or, as Wade suggests, on the mainland.) Whenever the system of writing came to the Tagalogs and whatever the means, they had an abundant supply of materials used in writing, that is bamboo and palm leaves as the writing surfaces and sharp objects as the writing implement. The Tagalogs then chose the application, the function for this new technology. The choice did not involve history, literature, law or other areas, as they were covered by the oral tradition. Instead, they used this new technology for the purpose of writing letters, a new product in the Tagalog culture. The system we know as *baybayin* began to be used by the Tagalogs for the purpose they chose.

For the most part, pre-hispanic writings in Tagalog have not survived to the present for at least two reasons. First, the materials they were written on bamboo and palm leaves have not survived; nor were they supposed to do so. Second, the nature of the writings were not intended to last for extended period of times. As a result, the knowledge we have about such writings come from those who used materials that would survive and from those who intended for such writings to survive: the Spaniards. From Spanish accounts, we learn that Tagalogs used this technology, writing in *baybayin*, primarily for writing letters to one another. As one account notes: "They have neither books nor histories, and they do not write at length except missives and notes to one another."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> No tienen libros ni ystorias ni escriuen cosa que sea de tomo sino solamente cartas y rrecaudos



Three things are apparent and must be reiterated. First, the technology of writing came from outside the islands. Second, the system of writing was changed into the form we now know as *baybayin*. Third, the local population determined the use or uses of the technology. But they were open to changes in both the technology of writing and its uses, as the Spanish intrusion was to demonstrate.

## Literate Tagalogs

The Spanish intrusion began in 1521 with the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan, but the establishing of a permanent presence was marked by the arrival of Miguel de Legazpi in 1565. This intrusion was accompanied with new cultural practices. Among the things brought by these outsiders was a new technology of writing- an alphabetic system- as well as new uses for this technology. The Tagalogs embraced aspects of both and in typical Southeast Asian fashion “domesticated” the system. When the Spaniards arrived, they found a society that was both literate and oral. While the uses of literacy had been limited, this was to change.

A problem one faces when dealing with the activities of the local population is the point of view that interprets historical accounts in a such as a way as to discount or eliminate the possibility of the existence of writing among the locals. For example, Antonio Pigafetta, who accompanied Magellan on his voyage to the Philippines and was one of the eighteen men to make it back to Spain, completing the circumnavigation of the globe, kept a journal, which was later published. It remains an important source of historical and cultural information. Scott records that Pigafetta

took no note of writing; on the contrary, he reported that Rajah Colambu, a gold-bedecked chieftain of sufficient attainment to be able to use Chinese porcelain as containers for unpounded palay, was amazed to see this art demonstrated for the first time (Scott, 1989:55).<sup>15</sup>

The unspoken assumption apparently was that the local population was illiterate,<sup>16</sup> or perhaps, more benignly, that they were simply an oral culture. unos a otros (Quirino and Garcia 1958:425). This is taken from the anonymous work now known as the Boxer Cedex.

<sup>15</sup> Chief in 1521 of Limasawa, brother of Rajah Siagu of Butuan. He met Ferdinand Magellan and guided him to Cebu on April 7, 1521.

<sup>16</sup> In the book *Literacy*, David Barton points to the fact that the word literate, while used from the fifteenth century on to indicate one who is educated, its usage “in the sense of being able to read and write, the opposite of illiterate, does not appear until 1894” (Barton, 1994:20). Literacy and illiteracy are not always paired together. Rather the pairing is that of literacy with orality (Barton, 1994:21). Barton shows that the disease metaphor is often used for illiteracy. Illiteracy has been described in

Perhaps Pigafetta's own bias has come through. Other options were apparently not considered. There was extensive contact between the Philippines and other cultures of Asia, most of which possessed writing technologies. Could this curiosity have to do with the system, style, manner, materials, and purpose of this form of writing? But the assumption remained: Filipinos were illiterate.

Authors such as Milman Parry, Jack Goody, Walter Ong and others have perpetuated the notion of the 'great divide' between 'modern' and 'traditional' societies by speaking in terms of literacy that is based on certain methodological and theoretical assumptions (Street 1993:7). Thus the problem one must deal with remains that of perception. Literate individuals are viewed as more 'modern,' 'cosmopolitan,' 'innovative' and 'emphathetic' than non-literates (Street 1993:7). Goody's title *Domestication of the Savage Mind* speaks volumes. (To be fair, Goody in his *Domestication of the Savage Mind*, deals with the problems of Claude Lévi-Strauss' dichotomies of mind and thought or savage and domesticated as set forth in his book *The Savage Mind* (1968), and views them as inadequate.<sup>17</sup>)

In an earlier work, *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, Goody writes:

Nevertheless, although we must reject any dichotomy based upon the assumption of radical differences between the mental attributes of literate and non-literate peoples, and accept the view that previous formulations of the distinction were based on faulty premises and inadequate evidence, there may still exist general differences between literate and non-literate societies somewhat along the lines suggested by Lévy-Bruhl. One reason for their existence, for instance, may be what has been described above: the fact that writing establishes a different kind of relationship between the word and its referent, a relationship that is more general and more abstract, and less closely connected with the particularities of person, place and time, than obtains in oral communication (Goody 1968:44).

One of the ways that 'traditional' societies are differentiated from 'modern' societies is along the lines of oral versus literate, that is, what Graff calls the tyranny of conceptual dichotomies; the assumption that societies must be either literate or illiterate, their cultures written or oral. Graff states: "None of these polar opposites usefully describes actual circumstances... What needs to be grasped is that the oral

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terms of sickness, handicap, ignorance, incapacity, deprivation, and deviance (Barton, 1994:11,13). Thus, many are inclined to think of the indigenous population of a country "discovered" by someone from the West as illiterate.

<sup>17</sup> Goody, Jack. *The domestication of the savage mind*. 1977, chapter 1, "Evolution and communication," and chapter 8, "The Grand Dichotomy reconsidered."

and the literate, like the written and the printed, need not be opposed as simple choices.” (Graff, 1987:24)

Yet this dichotomy has been largely accepted and applied to ‘traditional’ societies, like the Tagalogs. In an either/or situation, the Tagalogs, who had “a traditional largely oral” culture, literacy is discounted (Mojares 1983:27). Resil B. Mojares also writes of the replacement that occurred when literacy replaced orality (Mojares 1983:25). But one must reject as inadequate the notion that the Tagalogs had to be either a literate society or an oral society. This was demonstrated time after time.

For example, Tagalogs responded to the Catholic religion in both written and spoken form. Horatio De la Costa wrote of the Tagalog parishioners

singing not only the set words of the catechism but hymns and cadenced prayers of their own composition based on what they had heard in church. The melodies used must have been those of the *awit*, employed in love songs and lullabies, simple tunes to which each one fitted his or her own verses as the spirit moved. Women especially were very skillful in these impromptu compositions. After Mass one Sunday one of the fathers heard a woman across the way from the mission house chant the sermon he had just preached in its entirety, put into verse adapted to traditional melody (de la Costa, 1961:156-157).

Tagalogs responded to information transmitted in songs and prayers in oral fashion. This is but one side of the story. Chirino recorded:

There is scarcely any man and much less a woman that does not possess one or more books in their language and characters, and in their own handwriting, on the sermons they hear or on the sacred histories, lives of the saints, prayers and pious poems composed by them. This is something unheard of among any other people so recently Christianized. And I can bear witness of this because I was recently charged with the *examen* of those books in this year 1609 by order of the Treasurer, Procurator and Vicar General of the Metropolitan See of Manila, who had them all inspected in order to correct the errors.<sup>18</sup>

There was a dual response to record the information from the Spanish friars both in writing and in oral forms. The Tagalogs were an oral society that had the

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<sup>18</sup> This comes from Chirino’s manuscript “Historia de la provincia de Philipinas” which is included in Francisco Colin’s *Labor Evangelica*, edited by Pablo Pastell, vol.1: 223; cited in Escallargas 1974: 21.

ability to read and write.<sup>19</sup> Thus, it was to a population and culture that were both literate as well as oral that the Spanish intruders arrived.

### The Philippinization of Spanish Writing<sup>20</sup>

The Spaniards brought with them a new culture, including new art forms, a new religion, and a new technology of writing. The Tagalogs selected those aspects they wanted and made the changes to suit their wants and needs.

The Tagalogs soon discovered that these new intruders, the Spaniards, had a system of writing different from *baybayin*. Tomas Pinpin, in his *Librong pagaaralan nang manga Tagalog nang uicang Castila* (A book to teach Tagalogs the Castilian language [Spanish]), published in 1610, sought to bridge the gap between the two languages, including their systems of writing. (Pinpin's work provides additional evidence for the existence and use of *baybayin*). The approach one finds in Pinpin's work is that he is in fact addressing Tagalogs directly, not through a teacher or tutor. As mentioned above, Pinpin assumed that his readers were familiar with *baybayin*, both as a system of writing as well as reading. It should be noted that he did not use the word *baybayin* once in his work. In the second chapter (*cabanata*), Pinpin dealt with the differences between the Tagalog writing system and that of the Spaniards. There were two major differences: Spanish had more characters (letters and sounds not found in Tagalog), and Spanish letters could not be used interchangeably, as was the case with some Tagalog letters, both consonants and vowels. He pointed out to his readers that Spanish had letters which would be unfamiliar to those who used *baybayin*.<sup>21</sup> It should be noted again that Pinpin used the Spanish *letra* instead of the Tagalog *itik*. He listed these letters: *ch*, *c*, *x*, *f*, *ll*, and *j*. Although *baybayin*

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<sup>19</sup> Street uses the phrase "the 'autonomous' model of literacy" to describe the position held by those who "conceptualize literacy in technical terms, treating it as independent of social context, an autonomous variable whose consequences for society and cognition can be derived from its intrinsic character" (Street 1993:5). Ong, "probably the most influential writer on literacy in the United States," states: "By isolating thought on a written surface, detached from any interlocutor, making utterance in this sense autonomous and indifferent to attack, writing presents utterance and thought as uninvolved in all else, somehow self-contained, complete" (Street 1993:5). Street then goes on to discuss a new approach to literacy as the ideological model, and its proponents who "have come to view literacy practices as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society..." They "have also paid greater attention to the role of literacy practices in reproducing or challenging structures of power and domination" (Street 1993:7). This approach is also flawed, at least in terms of the Tagalog situation. With universal literacy, power or cultural structures were not issues. Literacy was not used for political or religious purposes (see quotes above), but for personal correspondence.

<sup>20</sup> The word Philippinization was coined by John Leddy Phelan in *Hispanization of the Philippines*. Illustrating how Filipinos changed Catholicism to suit their wants and needs, Phelan's chapter six, "The 'Philippinization' of Spanish Catholicism" follows chapter five, "The Imposition of Christianity."

<sup>21</sup> *ybang manga letra di natin tinotoran torang dati, at ang uaula nga sa uica nating Tagalog*. Pinpin, 37.

(and Tagalog) had similar letters to those in Spanish, they could not be used interchangeably. For example: *p* and *f* are both fricatives, but as Pinpin patiently explains, in Spanish, *piel* and *fiel* do not mean the same thing; as is the case with *depende* and *defende*, *pino* and *fino*, and so on. In addition, the interchanging of *i* and *e*, and *o* and *u* was not permitted in Spanish.

The Tagalogs also discovered that the Spaniards employed this technology for a wide variety of uses: religion, administration, record-keeping, commerce, and of course, correspondence, but much something more extensive and elaborate than that with which the Tagalogs were familiar. One does not find these uses among the Tagalogs, as Spanish reports of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries point out. The Boxer Codex records, “They have neither books nor histories, and they do not write at any length except missives and notes to one another.” (Quirino and Garcia 1958:424-425) It was in fact a reference to allowing others to read one’s letter from another that began my investigation into the matter of the writing system and literacy.<sup>22</sup> The Franciscan Marcelo de Ribadeneira wrote in 1601:

“Although they had a formal system of writing in characters wholly different from our western alphabet, the natives had no knowledge of the sciences, or any acquaintance with knowledge as in laws or schools.”<sup>23</sup>

While the Tagalogs did not use writing for the same purposes as the Spaniards, they quickly learned and adapted. Religion was where the transition seems to have started. The Tagalogs, although having been exposed to Islam, were primarily animists (or *anitists* as Professor Teodoro A. Agoncillo preferred) with the various *anitos* being a major component of the religious system. Such a system did not require writing and had no written tradition. Chirino wrote:

Then I shall write first about the false belief they have of the divinity of their idols. Secondly, about their priests and priestesses. Thirdly, and

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<sup>22</sup> From the *confesionario*, the section on the Sixth Commandment: questions 45, 47, 53, 60. “Did you read the letter and did you write their demands?” (*Con baga nasa ca caya nang sulat, at cong songmolat ca caya nang canilang ypinag paparalahan? Es dezir si leyste cartas, ó si escriviste sus demandas, y respuestas?*) “Did you know their bad intentions before you read that letter and before you received them into your house?” (*Naaalaman mo caya yaong canilang loob na masama, bago mo binasa yaong sulat, at bago mo caya tinangap sa bahay mo? Sabias su mal designio, y intención antes que leyesses sus cartas, ó reziviesses en tu casa?*) “Do they admire you for letting them read the letter or for letting them watch you in your sin?” (*Anong pamimintacasi mo sa canila, con pinabasa mo caya nang sulat at con pinatanod mo caya sa inyong pagcacasala? De que manera te ayudaste de ellos, si leyendo las cartas, ó guardandote las espaldas?*) “Did you read writings that contain obscene words?” (*Nanasa ca caya nang sulat na pinagpapalamnan nang mahalay nauicang sucat ycaalaala nang masama? Lees libros, que contienen cosas sucias, y palabras que trahen a la memoria torpezas?*)

<sup>23</sup> *Historia del Archipelago y otros Reynos*. translated by Pacita Guevara Fernandez. (Original title: *Historia del Archipelago Filipino y Reinos de la Gran China, Tartaria, Cochinchina, Malaca, Siam, Cambodge y Japon.*) Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1971: 342.

last, about their sacrifices and superstitions. They did not avail themselves of their writings for any of these things, nor for the things pertaining to government and order-about which, later on I will say something of the little that there is to be said-for they never used their characters except to write letters among themselves, as we said above. All their government and religion is based on tradition, and in the customs introduced by the devil himself who speaks to them through their idols and ministers, and they preserve it in songs they have memorized and learned since childhood, hearing them sing when they row, when they make merry and entertain themselves, and even more when they mourn their dead (cited in Espallargas 1986:20).

Not for [religion]-nor for government and public order-did they make use of their letters...Government and religion are for them founded on tradition...and are preserved in songs, which they have committed to memory and learned from childhood, having heard them sung while sailing, while at work, while rejoicing or feasting, and above all while mourning the dead. In these barbarous songs they relate the fabulous genealogies and vain deeds of their gods. (cited in Reid 1988:229)

Forgoing the details of the animism found in the islands, it should be noted that while the population was literate, this literacy had no place in religious practice.

The Spaniards, on the other hand, maintained “the sacred authority of a book.”<sup>24</sup> In addition, the Spanish friars used writing for different aspects of their religious practice: prayers, rituals, baptisms, funerals and weddings. Whenever the friars performed religious rituals, they read from a “script,” from religious writings. The friars (or *doctrineros* as they were known) found that the presence of a literate population presented a unique opportunity to educate and catechize Tagalog converts. In his dedication to his *Libro de las quatro postrimerias del hombre* (1605), the Dominican Francisco Blancas explains that the purpose of printing was to allow the friars to expand their work beyond the spoken word to the written word (see quote below). Although they came to the Philippines unprepared for a printing ministry, the friars published a series of books using *baybayin* beginning with the *Doctrina Christiana* in 1593. The contents of the *Doctrina Christiana* were typical of those printed elsewhere in the Spanish world.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Reid maintains one of the seven reasons why Southeast Asian “converted” to various world religions was “the sacred authority of a book.” (154) His argument would be more persuasive is not for his assertion that “The profound change in the mental universe of many insular Southeast Asians during the age of commerce could not have happened if there was not some desire for change, some perceived lack of fit between existing beliefs and the changing world.” (150) In the matter of writing, Tagalogs saw new possibilities and opportunities, rather than some perceived lack.

<sup>25</sup> The Our Father, Hail Mary, Creed, Hail Holy Queen, articles of Faith, Ten Commandments,

What was fascinating about the 1593 version of the *Doctrina*, published in the Philippines, was its format. The material was given first in Spanish, then in Tagalog using the Spanish alphabet, and finally in Tagalog using *baybayin*. Equally fascinating is the fact that the first three pages of this religious work contained model Spanish syllables—examples—followed by the seventeen characters of *baybayin*. As mentioned above, the order of the characters in *baybayin* does not match the Spanish alphabet, and is the only record of what appears to be the indigenous order of the characters in *baybayin*. What should be kept in mind here is that the Catholic faith was presented as a religion of writing. The Tagalogs had seen this in practice, but now had access to religious material in their writing. As to the content of the *Doctrina Christiana*, Phelan notes:

It contains the Spanish alphabet, some three pages of model Spanish syllables, the seventeen Tagalog syllabic characters, and then the Our Father, Hail Mary, Creed, Hail Holy Queen, articles of Faith, Ten Commandments, Commandments of the Church, Sacraments, Capital Sins, Works of Charity, Confession, and finally a brief catechism, that is, an extract of the teachings of the Church in thirty-three short questions and answers. Throughout the book the order of presentation of each prayer is the same: first the Spanish text is printed in Gothic style letters; then the Tagalog in the same type of letters; and finally the Tagalog in the Ancient syllabic characters (Phelan, 1955:155-6).

The Spanish friars not only used their system of writing for religious purposes, but also *baybayin*.

This opusculum will at least serve to inform you, Reverend Fathers, how through the mercy of our Lord God we now have in these islands complete and perfect printing for a more perfect fulfillment of our ministry. For we shall now be able, not only verbally by preaching but also in writing, to teach these our brothers, and write for them, either in Spanish characters for those who know how to read them, or in their own Tagalog script, everything which will seem to us to further the progress of this mercy which the Lord has done to them in making them Christians (Van der Loon 1966: 37) [emphasis added].

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Commandments of the Church, Sacraments, Capital Sins, Works of Charity, Confession, and finally a brief catechism, that is, an extract of the teachings of the Church in thirty-three short questions and answers.

The first books published in Mexico and Peru were also *Doctrinas* (Phelan, 1955:156). The *Doctrina* printed in Mexico in 1539, was in Spanish and Nahuatl. The *Doctrina* in Peru was printed in 1584 in a Spanish/Quechua/Aymara format (Sell, 1993:4-5).

The Dominican Francisco Blancas' fame rests in the books that he wrote and which were printed by the Dominican press. In his listing of the first books printed in Tagalog, with the exception of the first-the *Doctrina Christiana*-Van der Loon lists Blancas as the author of the first five books in Tagalog.<sup>26</sup> At least two, possibly three of the books written by Blancas were printed using *baybayin*: *Libro del Rosario de Nuestra Señora* (1602) and *Libro de Quatro Postrimerias* (1605). It is also likely that his book on confession, *Librong pinagpapalamnan yto nang aasalin nang taong Christiano sa pagcoconfesar, at sa pagcocomulgar* (1608) (Espallargas 1974:69-70), although he mentioned in his *Memorial de la Vida Christiana* that using the Tagalog characters was impractical.

How did the Tagalogs respond? Chirino, a contemporary of Blancas, would record, as quoted above, that within a generation of the taking of Manila by the Spaniards, Tagalogs were writing in *baybayin* what they had heard in sermons "or on the sacred histories, lives of the saints, prayers and pious poems of their own creation." Unfortunately, no physical evidence remains of the Tagalogs using *baybayin* for their own personal religious purposes. We are left with only Spanish testimony.

Religious uses were but the beginning. There is evidence, however, of the use by Tagalogs of *baybayin* in other areas. As Tagalogs observed, the Spaniards employed writing for a variety of purposes, not merely letters. In terms of governance, the Spaniards intended and required a much broader level of organization and administration, and writing was critical to maintaining control. Reports were generated for local use as well as to be sent to Mexico and Spain: records of sales, legal proceedings- including testimonies, land grants and administrative instructions.

As will be demonstrated below, Tagalogs followed, in their own way, the Spanish examples in writing. In part, they did so as a part of the Spanish system, providing required documents for legal and commercial activities. But they could have chosen to use Spanish or Tagalog using the Spanish alphabet. Some did not.

The Tagalog response to written Spanish and its alphabetic nature was selective. This is evidenced in at least two areas. First, the direction writing changed. The testimony regarding the direction of writing in *baybayin* is conflicting. A variety of opinions have been expressed as to the direction of the writing. Chirino, San Antonio, Zuñiga, and Le Gentil say that it was vertical, beginning at the top. Colin, Ezguerra, and Marche assert that it was vertical but in the opposite direction.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Libro de nuestra Señora del Rosario* (1602); *Libro de los Sacramentos* (1603); *Libro de quatro postrimerias* (1604); *Memorial de la vida christiana* (1605); *Tratado del sacramento de la confesión* (c. 1607) Van der Loon 1966: 43.

<sup>27</sup> BRPI 16: 117, footnote 135. Marche's work was published in 1887 and as such is derivative. Ezguerra's grammar (1747) was of Bisayan and not Tagalog.



Chirino has been accused of creating confusion by stating in his *Relacion* (1604) that Tagalogs wrote in columns from top to bottom.<sup>28</sup> However, in 1610, he corrected this and stated that they wrote from bottom to top beginning at the left column (Espallargas 1974:64-65). Antonio Morga, on the other hand, recorded that Tagalogs wrote from right to left (Espallargas 1974:66). Chirino suggests that the direction of writing changed after the arrival of the Spaniards.

They have taken after us by writing horizontally from left to right, but formerly they used to write from top to bottom, putting the first vertical line on the left side (if I remember well) and continuing towards the right, quite differently from the Chinese and Japanese who (though they write from top to bottom) proceed from the right hand side towards the left (Chirino 1969:281).

Antonio de Morga writes, “The method of writing was on bamboo, but is now on paper, commencing the lines at the right and running to the left, in the Arabic style” (BR XVI:116).

Scott’s solution is to suggest that the direction of reading has always been left to right, though the writer may have appeared to be writing from top to bottom. The reason for the apparent discrepancy was the result of the materials used. Writing on bamboo with a sharp object would be better done if pointing away from the body (Scott 1989:58).

I would argue that the Spanish format of writing left to right was adopted by Tagalogs who began to write *baybayin* in the same way. Although the Spaniards printed *baybayin* left to right in the *Doctrina Christiana*, at the time of Chirino’s writing, a decade or so later, local practice remained the same.

The second area demonstrating Tagalog selectivity in response to the new system of writing was the continuing role of intuition. Intuition was a necessary component to reading *baybayin*, the cause of one of the primary objections to any argument regarding literacy (discussed below). Chirino had no objection to vowel-final syllables.

Final consonants are omitted in all words... In spite of this, they understand and make themselves understood wonderfully well and without ambiguities: the reader easily and skillfully supplies the omitted consonants.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Chirino also “omitted two of the syllabic characters and copied at least three of them wrongly.” (Espallargas 1974:64).

<sup>29</sup> Pedro Chirino, S.J., *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas*, translated by Ramon Echevarria. 1969: 47, 281. (This work is one of the many produced by the Historical Conservation Society in Manila.

Others considered this evidence of the impracticality of the system of writing. Such a system presented problems for non-Filipinos because it could not be used to write consonant-ending syllables and words. Lendoyro's comments, quoted above, in his *The Tagalog Language* are typical and worth repeating. "The alphabet was practically a useless design ... In all probability, it was never made use of for any practical purposes, being rather in the way of a toy than in that of a useful tool." Fray Gaspar de San Agustín pointed out that when writing in *baybayin*:

These two letters 𑀓𑀔 can be read in eight ways, which are lili (side), lilim (shade), lilip (border), lili (to raise), lilit (?), limlim (the act of shading something), liclic (to deviate), liglig [laglag] (to drop something), and with all these they are understood. Ditto 𑀕𑀖 with which can be read as bata (child), batar (?), batat (to throw away), banta (threat), batay (to fix on something).<sup>30</sup>

Cipriano Marcilla y Martín, a priest who served in Batac, Ilocos Norte in the late nineteenth century and whose work was published in 1895, also criticized *baybayin*.

This script cannot be any less than illegible ... it presents great difficulties not for him who writes it but for him who reads it ... [We are thus] far from believing that this alphabet could provide the simplicity and clarity of Latin. Also it is absurd to say that with a few points and commas these characters can be made to signify everything that one might want to write as fully and as easily as our own Spanish alphabet (cited in Rafael 1988: 46).

In the introduction to his *Arte y reglas de la lengua tagala*, published in 1610, Blancas wrote of *baybayin*:

Those who wish to talk well should learn to read Tagalog characters, since it is such an easy matter that they can be learned ordinarily in one hour, although reading the Tagalog language in its own characters without faltering as we read our own Spanish language no Spaniard will ever be able to do in all his life, though it might be as long as Adam's.<sup>31</sup>

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The first part of the book is the Spanish text and the second part an English translation done for the Historical Conservation Society.) "*Las consonantes últimas se suplen en todas las dicciones...Pero con todo y eso sin muchos rodeos se entienden, y dan á entender maravillosamente: y el que lee suple con mucha destreza y facilidad las consonantes, que faltan.*"

<sup>30</sup> Cited and translated in Rafael 1988: 47. Taken from *El compendio de la lengua tagala* (page 169).

<sup>31</sup> Rafael 1988: 45. To be fair, Blancas continued: "The reason for this will be readily understood by anybody who takes just one lesson in it, and he will see it by experience even in the native speakers

The solution is the role of intuition. Blancas tells us that to learn the Tagalog characters is easy enough, but that the ability to read it as one read Spanish was practically impossible. On the other hand, Chirino states that Tagalog readers “easily and skillfully” and one might add *intuitively* supplied the missing consonants. Rafael uses the metaphor of “fishing” to describe “a distinctive Tagalog strategy of decontextualizing the means by which colonial authority represents itself” (Rafael 1988:3). He goes on to state: “Yet the process of listening-as-fishing is suggestive of the conditions that permit subjugation and submission to exist in the first place.” I would suggest that Rafael’s metaphor might be helpful in understanding not communication between the Spanish authorities and their Tagalog subjects, but rather communication between Tagalogs.

The Augustinian, Francisco Lopez, in the first book published by the Spaniards in Ilocano, *Libro a Naisurátan ámin ti bagás ti Doctrina Cristiana*, (Book in Which is Written all the Contents of Christian Doctrine [1620/1621]), tried to solve the problem of paired consonants and vowels in order to be able to end words with consonants and to write the double consonants common to Ilocano.<sup>32</sup> He accomplished this by introducing another diacritical mark, a little cross to cancel the vowel value, similar in function to the Sanskrit *virama*. His work seems to be the only Philippine text to make use of this *virama*-like mark.<sup>33</sup>

themselves, among whom even the most skillful grope through it, because after all, reading their characters is almost pure guessing.” *Ibid.* There are different possible explanations for Blancas’ view on even the most skilled groping through- for example: were they reading *his* writing? In any case, the issue is not the quality of their reading skill but the existence of that ability.

<sup>32</sup> In a comparison of Tagalog and Ilocano, Cecilio Lopez noted that in Ilocano there is a prevalence of double consonants, while there are none in Tagalog (cited in Yabes 1936: 6).

<sup>33</sup> Scott 1989: 57-58, 61. Scott used the Sanskrit *virama* because he believed that the original source to be India and *baybayin* shares the Sanskrit characteristic that any consonant carries with it the vowel *a* and diacritical marks are used to express other vowels. I think the average person would simply assume that López used the mark of a cross to serve as a diacritical mark. López explained: “*ha sido para dar principio á la corrección de la dicha escritura Tagala, que de suyo es tan manca, y tan confusa (por no tener hasta ahora modo com recibir las consonantes suspensas, digo las que no hieren vocal;) que al más ladino le hace detenerse, y le da bien en que pensar en muchas palabras para venir á darles la pronunciación que pretendió el que secribió: Y este es comun sentimiento de todos. La palabra que pongo abajo por exemplo, basta por probanza plena de la confusión de la dicha escritura: pues dos caracteres solos, sirven á once palabras diferentes, y hasta ahora no tienen modo como escribir con distinción cada una de ellas, sino que todas once las han de escribir de una misma manera. Ahora se considere lo que habrá menester adivinar el que lee. Pues con sola la + que tienen las consonantes, queda la escritura tan entera, y cabal, como la castellana: considerando, que la + les quita todas las vocales con quien (segun la escritura antigua) las casaban, de manera, que solamente les deja su pronunciación unida, y natural v. gr.: esta letra*” “con la cruz debajo viene á ser lo que nuestra *t*. Pues ahora para escribir, derechamente esta palabra *surat*. Pondráse así.” “Y este ejemlo bastaba para quien entiende pero el exemplo de abajo, de todas las palabras, ó se pueden leer en las dos letras “--” escritas con la cruz, dará bastantísima luz para entender con toda claridad el uso, y efecto de la cruz. Y esto baste” pp. LXII-LXIII.

His explanation in Ilocano appears to be more of a sales pitch than an explanation of the *cruz* as

However, writing Tagalog using the Spanish system removed the need for intuition. But that is the case only if diacritical marks used in Spanish were retained. They were not.

Andrew B. Gonzalez, in his essay, “Tagalog Accent Revisted: Some Preliminary Notes,” does not deal with accent marks but accents themselves. However, his observations are applicable.

To the student of Tagalog (renamed Pilipino) linguistics, the accentual system (or lack of it) continues to be fascinating. One can take an optimistic position, albeit a guarded one, and state with Zorc (1978a) that ‘stress [is] generally predicable’ (100 fn 2) or with Soberano (1976) that ‘accent is more or less predictable and does not seem to be distinctive’ (54), or one can take the pessimistic position and state with Lopez (1981; published posthumously) that ‘stress or accent is meaningful in Tagalog... But generally speaking, the place of the accent is unpredictable’ (66) (Gonzalez, 1981:27).

Gonzalez later refers to Lope K. Santos’ list of various types of stress, including:

*malumay* (accent on the penultima); *mabilís* (accent of the ultima), *malumi* (accent of the penultima and final glottal stop), *maragsâa* (accent on the ultima and the final glottal stop, *mariin* (secondary accents not on the penultima or the ultima), *malaw-aw* (beginning glottal stop in the syllable initial position of the second syllable) (Gonzalez, 1981:27).

In personal correspondence, Jean-Paul G. Potet noted:

To me this is one more instance of the necessity for Tagalog to be printed with accents. Many Filipinos claim that these are useless, and believe that theirs, like English, is a tongue that can be written without accents. Tagalog is more like French or Czech, which cannot be properly written without accents, although of course a native speaker may reconstitute the meaning, often with little effort, but in some cases with a lot of difficulty... The proof is that if a Tagalog does not know a word, he

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he refers to his innovation. Don Pedro Andres, writing some one hundred and fifty years later based on an earlier tradition, details the reaction of the Filipinos to this innovation. “The expert natives were consulted about the new invention, asking to adopt it and use it in all their writings for the convenience of all. But after praising the invention of the little cross and showing profuse gratitude for it, they decided that it could not be accepted into their writing because it went against the intrinsic properties and nature that God had given their writing and that to use it was tantamount to destroy with one blow all the Syntax, Prosody and Orthography of their Tagalog language.” (Cited and translated by Espallargas 1974: 98, from *Ortografia y Reglas de la Lengua Tagalog Acomodadas a sus Propios Caracteres*. ed. Antonio Graiño. Madrid: Victoriano Suarez, 1930, 15)

cannot read it correctly. Or, if he does, it is merely by chance... Another drawback coming from printing without accents is that non-Tagalogs cannot improve their knowledge of Tagalog by reading books, magazines and newspapers.<sup>34</sup>

Potet's view points to need for two qualities: being a native Tagalog speaker and intuition – what he calls chance. As a non-native speaker and coming from an Ilocano background, I would agree that accent marks and the *maragsâ* (non-existent in Ilocano) would be most helpful. But intuition is a fundamental and necessary component of Tagalog, first present in *baybayin* and then in modern Tagalog in Roman letters.

## Evidence

Physical evidence has survived which demonstrates the uses to which Tagalogs put *baybayin*. They have survived, in part, because they were of use to the Spanish regime. That Spain was the colonial power in both the Americas and the Philippines allows the historian of colonial Philippine history to follow certain patterns established in the Americas. As James Lockhart has noted about the sources for the writing of colonial Latin American history, the sources:

There is a cycle of sources, from more to less synthetic, with corresponding kinds of history. For early Latin American history, the main elements of the series are 1) contemporary books and other formal accounts, which we call 'chronicles' 2) official correspondence; 3) the internal records of institutions; 4) litigation; 5) notarial records. With the chronicles, a sort of narrative history is practically ready made; the scope of reference is then gradually reduced as one proceeds through the series until in the notarial records the historian is confronted with an individual item about one ordinary person on one day of his life. The sources also get less and less accessible as one proceeds down the list, both in the physical sense and in the sense of requiring more special skills for use. They become more primary, minute, local, fresh, and of more direct interest to social history (Lockhart 1992:3).

As with Mexico, for example, the first three categories mentioned by Lockhart have provided the bulk of material used thus far to write the history of early Spanish Philippines. Indigenous language documents usually fall into the

<sup>34</sup> Potet's credentials are impressive, to say the least. His academic writings include: "La petition tagale *Camang Manga Alipin* (1665)," "Numeral expressions in Tagalog," and "Seventeenth-century events at Lilfw, Laguna, Philippines." (See bibliography for full citations) In reading his works, one finds that he in fact does use accents when writing in Tagalog.

last two categories: litigation and notarial records. Thus, it is in these final two categories that we find the use of *baybayin*. What have survived are those uses of writing both systems which were of use to the Spanish regime. These fit into three categories: complete documents, notations, signatures.

### Complete Documents

Sinibaldo de Mas visited the Philippines in 1841 and among other matters during his year-long visit, sought out any information on the Philippine syllabary. He “saw some ancient written documents in the archives of the convents of Manila, particularly that of San Agustin.” (Espallargas 1974: 154) While he shared the opinion of the Spanish friars of his time, who had apparently failed to realize that their predecessors had in fact printed books in *baybayin*,<sup>35</sup> he did include several specimens in his book of 1843, *Informe sobre el Estado de las Islas Filipinas in 1842*. These samples included five syllabaries, a fragment of a contract of a sale of land, two signatures, and an additional line of signs “that bore some resemblance to the ancient script letters.” (Espallargas 1974: 154)

There is ample evidence that entire documents- usually legal in nature- were written in *baybayin*. While only two such documents have survived, there is evidence that others existed. These documents generally fell into the category of either business transactions or legal petitions and affidavits. This stands in contrast to what is found among indigenous languages documents of early Spanish Mexico.

Kevin Terraciano explains in his work, *The Mixtecs of Colonial Oaxaca*:

The last will and testament was the first genre of alphabetic writing to be practiced within the indigenous community. Priests promoted the writing of testaments for obvious reasons: to account for one’s body and soul, to settle matters of debt and inheritance, and to leave money or land to the church (Terraciano, 2001:50).

Terraciano goes on to note:

Nahua informants in the *Florentine Codex* suggest a preconquest precedent for the testament by attributing to the Mixtecs an ancient tradition of summoning a diviner when someone was about to die,

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<sup>35</sup> Espallargas includes a quote from the Augustinian Recollect Felix de la Encarnación, who wrote of the Visayan characters: “We are firmly persuaded that we shall never have in our hands any book written in the old Visayan characters.” Apparently he was unfamiliar or unaware of the *Doctrina Christiana del Cardenal Roberto Belarmino* (1610-Bisayan by Cristobal Jimenez, S.J.) (Espallargas 1974: 154. from *Diccionario Bisaya-Español*. Manila: Imprenta de los Amigos del Paris, a cargo de M. Sanchez, 1851, unnumbered).

whereupon the sick person would generally confess his or her faults and settle matters of earthly debts and possessions (Terraciano, 2001:50-51).<sup>36</sup>

Surviving documents from early Spanish Philippines are generally found among those belonging to the various religious orders. Anxious to be able to document the lands they had acquired, the various orders kept such documents to support the legal ownership.

One of the exceptions to this is dealt with in the 2005 monograph, *Seventeenth-century events at Liliw, Laguna, Philippines*. Potet examines the lone bundle of Tagalog documents found in the Newberry Library. As he notes:

The Newberry Library manuscript no. Ayer 1748 is the certified copy completed and signed on the 2nd of December 1809 of a compilation of older documents. The compilation itself was completed, certified and signed on the 6th of November 1753. These documents mainly concern the Laguna mountain town of Liliw (Span. Lilio) (Potet 2005:2).

Although not in chronological order, the eight documents in this ten-page compilation date from 1601 through 1648. In 1753, these documents were transcribed or one might say “translated” as the word used is *salin*. *Na kaya sinalin ito* (Thus it was translated) (Potet 2005:50). As Potet argues:

It seems that the above mentioned documents were written in the Tagalog syllabic alphabet called *baybáyin* for a transcription in Latin characters was completed by various clerk, and signed by Mayor Don Lorenzo Pasco on the 6th of November 1753. At least such is how *ginawâ ang pagsálin sa tutuó ‘ng original* (did the transfer of the authentic originals) should be interpreted ... (Potet 2005:14)

As Potet explains, *pagsalin* is usually understood as to translate, but in this case the “translation” that took place was from Tagalog in *baybayin* to Tagalog using the Spanish alphabet. As is stated in the 1753 document attached to the compilation, the originals were in poor condition, thus the transcribing and “translation” were done. The process of transcribing was repeated in 1809. The resulting document is the copy found in the Newberry Library.

It would seem unlikely that this was done for a set of documents created in a small town in Laguna, but not elsewhere. That this was not the case will be demonstrated below.

<sup>36</sup> While wills appear to have been the exception, Luis Camara Dery in his essay “Iisang Dugo: Kinship and the Origin of the Filipino People” in *A History of The Inarticulate: Local History, Prostitution and Other Views from the Bottom* mentions the will of Don Fernando Malang Balagtas dated March 25, 1589 and that of Captain Don Antonio Tinuga on March 26, 1642.

In 1922, Ignacio Villamor published *La Antigua Escritura Filipina* (The Ancient Filipino Writing), the text of which is first in Spanish and then in English. Included in this work are examples of *baybayin* writing. For the most part, he reproduced a part of the catechism published in 1620/1621 in Ilocano, *Libro a Naisuratán ámin ti bagás ti Doctrina Cristiana* (see above). In addition, there are pages of signatures in *baybayin*. But the real treasure of the work is found in two complete documents written in *baybayin*. Villamor not only reproduced them but also “translated” them using the Spanish alphabet and then into English.<sup>37</sup>

Some sixteen years later, Father Alberto Santamaria published an article in *Unitas*, the University of Santo Tomas Journal. Entitled “El ‘Baybayin’ en el Archivo de Santo Tomas,” Santamaria provides examples in *baybayin* are from the first half of the seventeenth century. They include: two contracts; ninety-seven signatures; fifteen short inscriptions. The two contracts in question are the same documents included in Villamor’s book. Santamaria, however, corrects some mistakes in transcribing and translation, as well as provides the context to these documents.<sup>38</sup>

The reason that Santamaria was able to make these corrections is that these documents were presented as exhibits in a court case by Don Luis Castilla from Pasig. He was the second husband of Doña Francisca Longad, who had been married to Don Andres Piit.

Most of the other signatures and inscriptions form part of the transcripts of the court that heard Don Luis Castilla’s case, and are of particular interest

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<sup>37</sup> Several things are worth noting about these documents: 1. While the first one follows the Spanish formula of stating the place and date of the document, (In the place of Tondo on the fifteenth day of the month of February in the year one thousand six hundred and thirteen) Sa bayan nang Tondo, sa ika labing limang araw nang buwan nang Febrero sa taong isang libo’t anim na daang taon at labing tatlong taon), the second begins, As reckoned in the year one thousand six hundred fifteen, on the fourth day of the month of December (Sa ulat bilang libo anim na raan taon may ikatlong limang taon sa iaapat na araw nang buwan nan Diciembre). 2. Women are prominent- using both the Spanish title *doña* and the Tagalog *maginoo*. 3. The indigenous method of reckoning is used in three areas: currency- the price of the land is given in Tagalog currency-*salapi*., measurement of land, stating the four directions. In the second document, the land type is given as *lupang tubigan* (watered land) and the land location is described by those whose land borders in on the north (*hilaga*) and south (*timug*)-both indigenous terms. But some terms remain the same even when there are Spanish equivalents. As was the case in Culhuacan, a town in Central Mexico:

“Other retentions from the pre-hispanic period were toponyms locating land, terms for cardinal directions, and terms for classifying soil types. Land was measured in native units, despite Indians’ knowledge of Spanish units.” (Cline 1986, 166)

<sup>38</sup> The corrections are first in the names: Doña Catalina Baycan instead of Bayiya; Andres Pagondatan instead of Paudata; Doña Maria Silang instead of Sila; Doña Francisca Longad instead of Luga. The second document is incorrectly dated by Villamor as 1615. The true date is 1625. “External evidence indicates that Doña Maria Silang was the writer of this second document.” (Espallargas 1974: 82-83)



... because in 1620, along with the original scripts in syllabic writing, the notary public had to provide their translation in Spanish, giving at the same time some personal details about the contestants and witnesses in the lawsuit; thus assuring us of a substantial interpretation of the documents and signatures (Espallargas 1974: 82-83).

That the Spaniards recognized and acknowledged such signatures and inscriptions is seen in a court document from the same case mentioned above. The petition asked: "Furthermore I request your Lordship to order all sureties and sale documents of the above mentioned parcels of land to be written in the Spanish language so that they could be better understood." (Espallargas 1974: 84) The legality of such documents is not the issue, merely the difficulty the court was having in reading such documents. In fact, the notary who took part in the case added this side remark: "Among the documents exhibited there are two in Tagalog characters which on account of the bad style that they have, cannot be transcribed literally." (Espallargas 1974: 84)

Thus, the first strand of evidence regarding the use of *baybayin* consists not merely of two surviving documents from the early seventeenth century, but also references to such documents. Such references include transcriptions of such documents- as in the case with those from Liliw- as well as court documents requesting a more accessible format be used, in the place of *baybayin*.<sup>39</sup>

## Notations

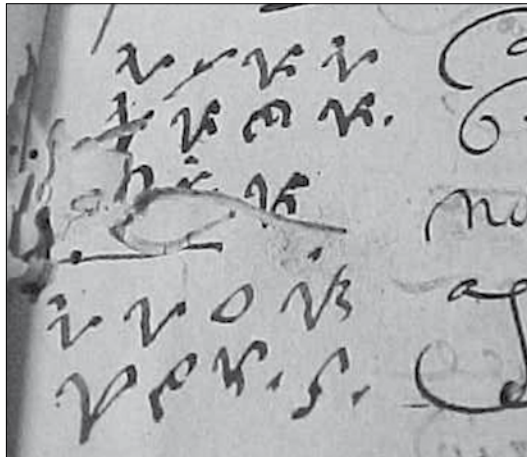
The most intriguing use of *baybayin*, however, is found in the almost casual notations found on documents, many of the documents being in Spanish. They tended to be brief notes about the purpose or content of the given document. Some are found on the margins, others at the bottom, while most are found on the backside of the documents, which had been folded for filing. Several examples should suffice.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> In an essay entitled "The Conquerors As Seen by the Conquerors" in his book *Looking for the Prehispanic Filipino*, Scott has translated chapter 61 of Fray Juan Pobre de Zamora's *Historia de la perdida y descubrimiento del galeon San Phelipe con el glorioso martirio de los gloriosos martires del Japon*. Fray Juan writes of his conversations with a Bikolano Christian by the name of Tomas. "Of particular interest is the inclusion of the Spanish translation of a Bikolano letter originally written in Philippine script, from a chieftain of Gumaca (in Quezon Province today) named Panpanga to his brother Antonio Simaon, Tomas' friend" (Scott 1992: 64). While this reference is not about something written in Tagalog, one could make the case that if such material existed in *Bicolano*, then certainly it did in Tagalog as well.

<sup>40</sup> All of the documents mentioned in this section are from the University of Santo Tomas Archives, a wonderful treasure of seventeenth-century documents. Fr. Santamaria in his essay, "El 'baybayin' en el Archivo de Santo Tomas," has dealt with these at some length and is my source for this

On the first page of a three-page document, entirely in Spanish, in the left margin, near the middle of the page, there is the following five-line notation in *baybayin*:

*Ang lapad ay  
apat na po  
uo dipa  
ang haba si  
yam na pouo*<sup>41</sup>



Translated, this reads: the width is forty *dipa* and the length is ninety *dipa*. Pinpin lists two basic measurements for land: *dipa* which is said to be the equivalent of a *braza* (approximately six feet or the distance measured with both arms outstretched), and a *carangcal*, the equivalent of a *palmo* (handspan).<sup>42</sup> This

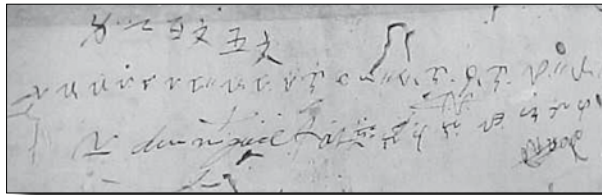
section. He patiently deciphered and transcribed each line of text, often with the assistance of text in Tagalog or Spanish in Spanish letters. However, it is almost encouraging to note that at some points he was also puzzled as to what was intended.

<sup>41</sup> AUST Lib 22. fol. 142. The entire document includes folios 142A to 143A (Santamaria, 1938:467 O).

<sup>42</sup> Pinpin writes in lesson six (Ycanim na aral) of section one (ang unang cabanata): *Sang dipa, una braza. Dalauang dipa, dos brazas, tatlong dipa, tres brazas. Maycalauang cahating dipa \* may calauang somasa, braza y media. Maycatlong cahating dipa, dos brazos y media. At ang pagbubuhatbuhat nitog manga bilang ay pararin nang sa pilac. At con may calalabhan carangcal ay gayon labi sa dipan carangcal; una braza y un palmo. Dalauang dipa,t, carangcal: dos brazas y un palmo. Maycalauang saycapat dipa: una braza y dos palmos. Sang pouong dipa, diez brazas.* In Juan Francisco de San Antonio's *Cronicas* (1738-1744), he records: They also measure by brazas and palmos (but for the vara, I find no proper Tagalog term, but only the Spanish). The braza is called *dipa*; that of the city is sixty points, into which the six feet contained in it are divided. The palmo is called *dancal*. *Tumòro* is one *jeme*. *Sangdamac* is the whole width of the hand with the five fingers. *Sangdali* is the width of one finger; and *sucat* is the act of measuring in this manner. (492) BR XL, 363– from *Cronicas* “The Native Peoples and their Customs” Juan Francisco de San Antonio 296-373.

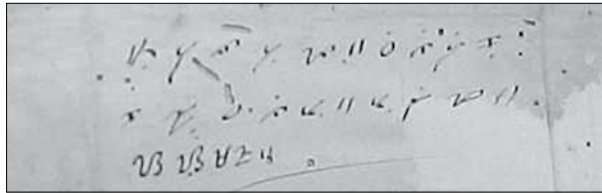
notation is in fact in the same vein as most of those recorded by Santamaria. That is, they usually have to do with the sale of land and those who are witnesses to the sale.

On the back side of one document is a long line of *baybayin* text with a short one below it at the right end, as well as Chinese signatures. The text reads: *Ang saksi humahanda si Don Miguel Tapa, Don Gregorio Pahi (?)* [sic]. The brief line below it reads: *Don Gregorio Sanguila*<sup>43</sup> (The prepared witnesses are Don Miguel Tapa, Don Gregorio Pahi, Don Gregorio Sanguila).



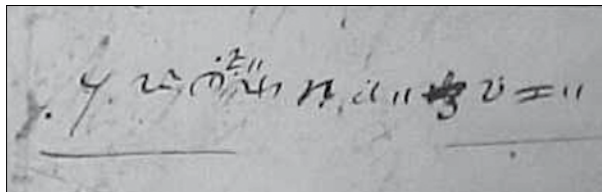
Another such notation, three lines of text, reads:

*Sulat nang lupa binili ko  
kay Don Benito Tolliao  
sa Sogmandal*<sup>44</sup>



(The letter regarding the land I bought from Don Benito Tolliao in Sogmanda.) This notation is made more accessible by the Spanish notation below it, which begins: *El escritura de d. Benito ...*

The most common word found in the various notations is *lupa*, as the documents in questions usually dealt with the buying and selling of land. Thus, one finds single lines of text, such as: *lupa ni Don Agustin Vica*<sup>45</sup> (land of Don Agustin Vica)



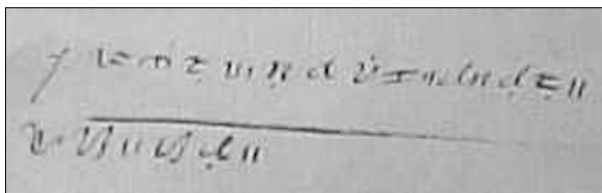
<sup>43</sup> AUST Lib. 22, fol. 146 (Santamaria, 1938:466 J).

<sup>44</sup> AUST Lib. 22, fol. 161 (Santamaria, 1938:463 B).

<sup>45</sup> AUST Lib. 22, fol. 162 (Santamaria, 1938:463 E).

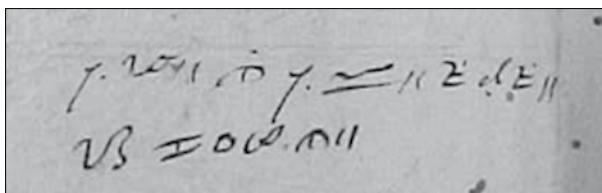
or when two lines are required:

*Lupa ni Don Agustin Vika // ta sa Tongdo  
ang sa Santol*<sup>46</sup>



This is also the case

*Lupa ni Luis // de Torres  
sa Cabayanan*<sup>47</sup>



The informality and casual use of *baybayin* in such notations speaks volumes. Used almost as a form of shorthand, these notations in *baybayin* convey the essence of the contents of the document, for the benefit of the holder of the document. He or she (as some of those involved in the various transactions were women—see above) would simply have to read the notation to know what the document involved. One might make the case that the use of *baybayin* in these notations served as a form of code, keeping the outsiders from knowing what was written. But this cannot be the case as the documents themselves supplied all the necessary information, and usually in Spanish. And in some cases, either above or below the *baybayin* notation was the same information in Spanish. The *baybayin* notations were for those who held the documents. The use of *baybayin* reveals the ongoing use of a dynamic and living system of writing which continued during the Spanish occupation.

## Signatures

It is in the use of *baybayin* for signatures that we encounter an embarrassment of riches. When I first began my search for documents in

<sup>46</sup> AUST Lib. 22, fol. 159 (Santamaria, 1938:464 I).

<sup>47</sup> AUST Lib. 22, fol. 184 (Santamaria, 1938:467 M).

Tagalog from the early Spanish period, I encountered *baybayin* signatures, almost to the point of distraction.<sup>48</sup> They were usually found on legal documents in Spanish, occasionally on documents in Tagalog.

As no complete indigenous language documents from the pre-Spanish era have survived (some might disagree, but complete documents is the issue), we have no basis for comparison, particularly when it comes to the matter of legal documents requiring signatures. But I believe it is a safe assumption that along with embracing the concept of the written legal document, for a variety of purposes, Tagalogs adopted the idea of the signature, one's identifying mark.

As Roger Chartier explains in his work *Inscription and Erasure: Literature and Written Culture from the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century*:

The need for an autograph signature to authenticate a document invested with the value of a command or obligation was thus associated with another common practice in early modern societies, the delegation of writing .... (Chartier, 2008:17)<sup>49</sup>

This was true in Spain as well.<sup>50</sup> As spelled out in the legal code of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, *Las Siete Partidas*, among the duties of scribes was the ability to authenticate signatures.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> My first encounter with Tagalog documents, besides Pinpin's *Librong pagaaralan*, was at the Lilly Library at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. While it might seem an unlikely location for such materials, it was in fact a wonderful place to begin my search and research. A good place to start is C. R. Boxer's *Catalogue of Philippine manuscripts in the Lilly Library*.

<sup>49</sup> La costumbre ya muy Antigua de las autoridades españolas, de usar en muchos casos las rubricas señales en vez de la firma entera, siempre has sido una pesadilla del investigador concienzado de los archivos, quien con frecuencia, por falta de medios comparativos, se ve casi imposibilitado de identificar al autor o a los autores de un documento, una carta or un auto que no lleva mas que unos garabatos indecifrables en lugar de la firma. (Las Rubricas del Consejo Real y Supremo de las Indias, no page).

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<sup>51</sup> Discussion of documentary evidence leads Alfonso naturally to the power of pen, the notary, for whom he reserves a title of sixteen essays. By Alfonso's day the scribe-amanuensis had largely given way in Mediterranean Europe to the publicly license official called a notary, the bulk of whose business was drafting the flood of private and public documents necessary for a modern society. Merchants and individuals needed him to record in binding juridical form their partnerships and payments, contracts, loans, bill of lading and sales.

Private individuals made their wills and gifts and borrowings and family affairs through him. (Burns, 2001): vol. 3, pages xxii-xxiii). For more, see Burns, *Society and Documentation in Crusader Valencia*, chapter 5, "The Notariate."

An extended study of the development and role of the signature is beyond the scope of this study. But at least two things should be pointed out. Many if not most of the individuals who signed their names did so as witnesses. As Lockhart remarks regarding witnesses to Nahua wills and testaments:

The nature of the witnesses, together with the nature of the statements of the testator, leads me to the conclusion... that the understood purpose of the witnesses' presence was much broader than in the Spanish system. It appears to me that the primary function of the whole body of witnesses was to give assent on behalf of and in the eyes of the community—assent not merely to the fact that a certain ceremony was properly carried out, but to the truth and validity of what the testator said (Lockhart, 1992:370-371).

Certainly, in a large number of surviving Tagalog documents, one finds multiple signatures, sometimes requiring an additional page or two to contain them.

In line with this study, however, it is *baybayin* signatures that are of particular interest. From the earliest documents in Tagalog, well into the eighteenth century, signatures using *baybayin* can be found. Only two cases will be cited here. The first involves the documents generated by the 1745 uprising in Silang. Pedro Calderón Henriquez, an Oidor of the Audiencia of Manila, who had been sent to investigate the uprising. His investigation resulted in some 5,000 pages of material. Some of the documents were statements by the people of Silang; some in Tagalog, others in Spanish. In some cases, we have both the original in Tagalog along with a Spanish translation. At the end on both types of documents can be found the following: *siguense unos caracteres al parecer de la lengua Tagala* (followed by characters appearing to be in the Tagalog language.) These are *baybayin* signatures. Why were they not found on the Tagalog documents? These documents were copies made by *escrivanos*, some of whom were not conversant in Tagalog as is apparent by the errors made in transcribing.

The second example is found in the compiled document from Liliw, Laguna. As mentioned above, the copy found in the Newberry Library was transcribed in 1809, based on a 1753 transcription, which was in fact a “translation” of the original documents from *baybayin* to Tagalog using Spanish letters. One of the issues contained in the documents is the use of Chinese workers in completing the altarpiece for the church in Liliw. On folio 8, the *escrivano* records: *ang pagcatotoo nag firma ytong manga Sangley, may tatlong firmang sulat Sangley sa harapan*—the truth is, these Chinese signed (the document), there are three signatures in Chinese

writing in front (side of the document). This would seem to indicate that those transcribing the document in 1809 did not have the ability to copy the Chinese signature; or perhaps the signature was not there in the 1753 documents from which they worked. However, it is worth noting that several pages earlier there are three lines of *baybayin* signatures and they are present in the 1809 transcription. There is no *siguense unos caracteres al parecer de la lengua Tagala*. The signatures are written down by someone in 1809 who retains the knowledge of writing in *baybayin*. And the means by which it survived, in part, was its use in signatures.

## Conclusion

*Baybayin* has not been lost. But it has been misunderstood. *Baybayin* has been seen as a writing system like those in the West, in its origin and its purposes. That is, the system of writing the Tagalogs were using at the time of the Spanish intrusion is viewed as one that developed over time, rather than something that was borrowed. And as a writing system, it is expected to fulfill the same functions as other writing systems. This simply is not the case with *baybayin*, nor should it be.

The Tagalogs borrowed a writing system from others, unknown to us, developed it to their liking and then used it for their own purposes. Remaining a predominantly oral society, the Tagalogs became a literate society as well. With the Spanish intrusion, the Tagalogs found new uses for their writing system. However, within a relatively short period of time, the Tagalogs shifted to the new way of writing brought in by the Spaniards. But they retained *baybayin*, using it as they wished. The system was preserved for years through the mechanism of the signature, one of the many innovations brought by the Spaniards.

Revived during the *himagsikan*, it remained a form of identification, not merely for the individual but for the culture as well. In recent decades, there has been once more a reviving of the ancient system of writing. And as has been the case time and time again, it is used for purposes chosen by those using it: logos, tattoos, signatures and more. All this seems entirely appropriate and in keeping with the tradition of *baybayin*.

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