

Ignacio Francisco Alzina: The Great Samar-Leyte Bisayan Missionary of the 17th Century

Introduction

There is a tremendous need for inculcating and cultivating a deep sense of appreciation and gratitude to the early missionaries who laboured so zealously in the various parts of this Philippine Archipelago.

Aside from planting the Faith in the lives of the Filipinos and Christian love in their hearts, they also took painstaking efforts to record and preserve the great wealth of cultural and historical material about the people and their islands.

If today we are able to evaluate the glory, the genius, the beauty and the rich cultural heritage of that ancient past, it is only because there were deeply concerned ministers of the Gospel who loved their people so dearly that they made heroic efforts to write down their observations and enquiries.

One such great and zealous missionary was the "gran defensor de Bisayas", Father Ignacio Francisco Alzina (1610-1674). His writings reveal him today as one of the most outstanding and indefatigable missionaries in the entire Bisayan region in the seventeenth century. Notwithstanding his tireless efforts in building-up Christian communities on the Islands of Samar, Leyte, Cebu, Bohol and Panay, he found time to observe the wealth and treasures of the ancient Bisayan culture and record it for us and for all posterity, as a most precious contribution and heritage for which we must pay him a word of tribute.

Our Bisayans today, particularly the Samar and Leyte group, can boast of one of the most detailed, most extensive cultural and evangelization histories among any of the regional group in the entire Philippines.

In his monumental work *Historia de las Islas e Indios de Bisayas... 1668*, Father Alzina explored and recorded practically every possible human aspect for the Bisayan's life. Constantly and relentlessly, he made his inquiries from the very old folks about their ancient and pre-Hispanic customs, traditions, beliefs, marriage rites, burial practices and about every conceivable aspect that has bearing on the life-ways of people.

This great Apostle of the Bisayans realized a long and a fruitful evangelical labour among the people whom he loved so dearly. He was intensely dedicated to the work of putting God into the hearts of the Bisayans and putting the Bisayans into the Heart of God through love-dedication in the work of evangelization. Actually he spent a total of some thirty-four years among his "beloved Bisayans", as he was wont to call them.

Alzina's Birth and Arrival in the Philippines

Father Alzina was born in Gandía, Valencia, Spain, on February 2, 1610. He was one of the eight boys in the family; six of his brothers died at an early age. Vicente, three years younger than Ignacio, entered the Jesuit Society and became a well-known missionary to the Indians in Paraguay, South America. Ignacio entered the Jesuit Province of Aragón in the year 1624.¹

Alzina himself gave us some very interesting autobiographical information in one of his excellent and classic reports on the status of the Bisayan Missions which he penned in the year 1660.

...In 1631 I left Zaragoza for these Islands on the feast of the Apparition of Saint Michael the Archangel...

We arrived in Manila on the 26th of May in 1632. I stayed in the City for two and a half years where I completed my studies toward ordination. In September of

¹ Pedro Murillo Velarde, *Historia de la Provincia de Philipinas de la Compañía de Jesús. Segunda parte, que comprehende los progresos de esta provincia desde el año de 1516, hasta el de 1716*, Libro IV, Cap. 15, fol. 353v. Manila: Imp. de la Compañía de Jesús, por D. Nicolás de la Cruz Bagay, 1749

1634, I came to these Bisayan Missions where I have worked till this present year 1660, except for less than two years stay in Manila where I worked with Spaniards. I was sickly at the time and since I derived little relief or remedy, I returned to these missions where I lived with a kind of health which I will describe later...²

In the year 1634 Alzina was ordained to the sacred priesthood in the Diocese of Cebu by the Agustinian Bishop D. Fr. Pedro Arce.³

There is also another little item recorded in history which throws some interesting light on the voyage Alzina made to the Philippines.

...on June 18, 1631 they sailed from Cádiz and on the first day of August they arrived in Veracruz. They left Acapulco on February 23, 1632 and sighted the first land of these Islands on May 15th.

...twenty-one Jesuits left Cádiz and all arrived at Manila except Father Matheo de Aguilar who died near these Islands on May 12, 1632. The others who are known to have sailed that year with Father Francisco Encinas, procurator and Brother Pedro Martínez are: Rafael de Bonafe, Luys de Aguyo, Magino Sola, and Francisco Pérez; the brothers Ignacio Alzina, Joseph Pimentel, Miguel Ponze, Andrés de Ledesma, Antonio de Abarca, Onofre Esbrí, Cristóbal de Lara, Amador Navarro, Bartholomé Sánchez; also Brother Juan Gazera, a coadjutor and Diego Blanco and Pedro Garzía, candidates.⁴

Along with this tiny bit of information, the chronicler threw some light on how the missionaries prepared for their long journey

² Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu, Philippinarum 12, Ms. "P. Ignatius Alzina ad P. Joannem Marín refert statum missionis de los Pintados, Junio 24, 1660." I am deeply grateful to Fr. Joseph Teschitel, S.J., Archivist for providing me with this precious document in microfilm together with hundreds of other folios on matters pertinent to the missions of Samar and Leyte in October of 1966. The writer also owes a debt of gratitude to Fray Servulo San Martín, O.F.M. for transcribing and reading the photo-copies of the microfilm and to Very Reverend Pablo Fernández, O.P. for the corrections and for filling-in the lacunae. Finally, a word of appreciation to Bro. Ubaldo San Juan for the preliminary translation.

³ Ignacio Francisco Alzina, *Historia de las Islas e Indios de Bisayas...* 1668, Parte I, Lib. IV, cap. 7, Ms. Muñoz Copy. José Delgado in his *Historia* points out on page 173 of Volume I, that Bishop Arce held the bishopric of Cebu in the years 1613-1642

⁴ Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, 1493-1898, Vol. 44, "Jesuit Missions 1700-1736," pp. 54-55.

and what has transpired during the galeon voyage to the Philippines.

...every mission that goes to the Indies begins to gather abundant fruit as soon as it sails from España. I will set-down the allotment of work in which this band of missionaries was engaged, since from this may be gathered what the others do, since there is very little difference among them all.

In the ship a mission was proclaimed which lasted eleven days, closing with general Communion on the day of our Father Saint Ignatius. In this mission, through the sermons, instructions given in allocutions and individual exhortations, the fathers succeeded in obtaining many general confessions, besides the special one which the men on the ship made, in order to secure the jubilee. Our Fathers assisted the dying, consoled the sick and the afflicted, and established peace between those who were enemies.

In Nueva España the priests were distributed in various colleges, in which they continued the exercises of preaching and hearing confessions. They went to Acapulco a month before embarking, by special providence of God; for there were many diseases at that port, so that they were able to assist the dying. Thirty religious of Saint Dominic were there, waiting to come over to these Islands; all of them were sick, and five died; and in order to prevent more deaths, they decided to move from their house in which they were, on account of the bad conditions. It was necessary, due to their bad condition, to carry them in sedan-chairs. Although many laymen charitably offered their services for this act of piety, Our Fathers did not permit them to do it, but took upon themselves the care of conveying the sick, their charity making this burden very light.

In the ship *San Luys*, they continued their ministries of preaching, etc...⁵

Alzina, this "gran defensor de los Indios", as he was called by his contemporaries, worked ardently and indefatigably for the spiritual welfare and material progress of the Bisayans. When he was assigned to work among the Samareños immediately after his ordination to the priesthood, his first mission station was in Borongan, Samar or Ibabao as the eastern coast was called

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56

in ancient times. It was there that he fell deeply in love with his Bisayans and for whom he lived, toiled and laboured indefatigably for the next thirty-four years. He demanded respect, consideration and good treatment for his "beloved Bisayans", from the Spanish *encomenderos*, soldiers, *alcaldes mayores* and other civil magistrates. On occasion, he also dared to censure his own fellow Jesuits when the welfare and interests of the Bisayans demanded it.

After much effort and dedicated study, Alzina became a master of the Samar-Leyte dialect. For this he won the tender love and admiration of the people.⁶

One catches a glimpse of the extent of his labours and involvement from his classic report on the *Status of the Bisayan Mission in 1660*:

...computing my travels, not counting the one from Castille to these islands which is about 6,000 leagues, I move about without let-up, for this is the kind of life we have here. In other travels I covered more than another 6,000 leagues. If it is true that the earth has only 6,000 leagues, then I could have easily gone around the world twice.

...the people I have baptized thus far in these islands reach more than 10,000 souls with a few adults ... the annual confessions here, from the *padrón* which we constantly up-date reaches to about 290,000 in our missions, out of which about 19,000 are between the ages of twenty and thirty years of age... at one time, on a Christmas Eve, I alone distributed communion to about 900 people... the dead I have thus far interred reaches about 7,000 more or less; majority of these were children...⁷

Father Alzina wrote prolifically and extensively as one learns from his mission report. Aside from the long list he gives in this report of his Bisayan works, in his *Historia* he says:

...in the space of more than twenty-four years, I have gathered and checked, although I confess that I have not finished collecting, in a *Thesaurus* that I have made of this language, almost 20,000 words. I have gathered... all the proper and virtually universal meanings, omitting others which will be perhaps a little less used and

⁶ Murillo, *op. cit.*, fol. 353v. n. 193.

⁷ ARSI, *Phil. 12*, Ms., *op. cit.* fol.

which are peculiar to certain places and towns. Although this language is common to all the Bisayan towns, there is scarcely one town which does not have its own special words. However, there is little difficulty for one who knows well the general structure of the language.⁸

Still in this same chapter, but in another place, he reveals another interesting contribution he was working on.

...I omit the great numbers of proverbs, which in Spanish are called 'little gospels' and which is said with three or four words... I have made a book copying more than 600 of these proverbs, showing their vigor and axiomatic force...⁹

There is a very interesting, meaningful and a beautiful incident which points to Alzina's love, dedication and concern for his poor Bisayans in Leyte. ..

...one of the parishes in Leyte lacked a monstrance and a lunette. He proposed to the townspeople that they help him sow four fields of rice, each of twenty-five *gantas*; any income derived from the harvest he would match from his stipends, and thus they would pay for their monstrance. The people readily agreed. The crop, however, failed in two fields, but the other two yielded 250.00 pesos. Father Alzina added the counterpart and placed an order through the provincial procurator in Manila, for a fine monstrance to be executed according to his specified design. When the procurator made his reluctance known that the request was too costly and more suited to a cathedral in Spain than a barrio church in Leyte, Father Alzina came back with a memorable reply: 'Let the monstrance be made as ordered, for the Blessed Sacrament of the Bisayans was just as much God as that of the Spaniards!'¹⁰

Alzina's Various Bisayan Assignments and Transfer to Manila in 1670

This great Apostle of the Bisayans was not only a man of perceptive observation, prolific literary out-put, but also a missionary of wide experience. He served the missions of Bohol, Panay, Cebu, Samar and Leyte and in various capacities. We

⁸ Alzina, *op. cit.*, Parte I, Lib. III, Cap. 1.

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ Horacio de la Costa, S.J., *The Jesuits in the Philippines 1581-1768*. "The Long Haul," chapter 19, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1961, p. 465.

know from his writings that his first assignment was in Borongan, Samar; from the triennial Jesuit catalogues we are able to locate several of his other assignments. We know, for example, that in the year 1640 he was assigned to the small island of Laoang, off the mainland of Northern Samar. He transferred the old settlement to where the present town is situated.

In 1643 he laboured in Carigara, Leyte where he was also the Rector of the residence. In the year 1653 we find him working and ministering in Catbalogan, Samar, where he was nominated Rector in 1656.

The records show that in 1659 he was assigned to the *cabe-cera* of Palapag, Samar; however, from scattered evidence it seems that by late 1658 he was on sick-leave in Manila and remained there until about the first or second month of 1660. Although the official *Catalogus* for 1662 shows him assigned in San Miguel Parish in Manila, we learn from his own letter of 1660 that his period of convalescence was not doing him any good so he returned to his mission station in the Bisayas. And so, in the year 1660 he resided in Palapag, Samar where he penned his memorable report on the *Status of the Bisayan Missions*. It also seems that during these years he served as Vice-Provincial of the Bisayan Missions.¹¹

The old baptismal register of San Miguel Parish of Manila throws additional evidence on the whereabouts of Father Alzina. The volume for 1670 shows him performing a baptism on July 17, 1670 with his signature:

A 17 de Julio de 1670 Bauticé a Juan Baptista Pasuno, natural de Macasar, de 40 años poco más o menos, hijo de Padres Moros, quo no conoce. Padre Alonso de los Angeles —

Franco. Alzina¹²

The above-citation was the first entry of Alzina; further in the same register, one is able to locate four entries, the last of which reads:

A 14 de dicho mes y año Bauticé a Teresa Malis de 8 dias, natural de este pueblo, del Barrio de San Joseph,

¹¹ ARSI, *Phil. 4 Catalogus, op. cit.*, ms fol. 46, 1662.

¹² San Miguel Parish Baptismal Register, Volume 1670, fol. 56/0.

hija de Andrés Hernandes, y de Mónica Petrona, Vecinos de él. Padrinos Sebastián Gutierres y Theresa Vegas.

Ignacio Alzina¹³

And so the very last entry made and signed by Father Alzina is dated April 14, 1674. Apparently he was in residence in San Miguel Parish struggling with ill-health, however, assisting in the parochial ministry.

Finally, the official Jesuit triennial *Catalogus* for the year 1672 shows that he was assigned to San Miguel as minister to the *Indios* or as the Catalogue has it, 'operarius indorum'.¹⁴

It is rather strange that the Jesuit historian Pedro Murillo Velarde, who gives so many lengthy and varied details about many of the missionaries who laboured in the missions of the Philippines, allots only a short paragraph to Father Alzina and merely states that he died in Manila on July 30, 1674.¹⁵

Again, it is rather strange that for a man of Alzina's missionary stature and writing calibre, so little is known about the circumstances of his demise. Certainly something must have been written, but thus far it has not been unearthed.

Alzina's Monumental Work: HISTORIA DE LAS ISLAS E INDIOS DE BISAYAS . . . 1668

It is very evident from a study of Alzina and from the perusal of his masterful piece of history that he dedicated his talents and abilities not only to the task of evangelization, but also to the study of the language and to an intense inquiry and written record of the ancient Bisayan past.

There is absolutely no doubt about the fact that Alzina was a perceptive, keen observer and an extremely sensitive person to the thinking patterns of the Bisayans and to the circumstances of life around him. He made heroic efforts to understand the heart, the mind, the feelings of his people and treated them all,

¹³ *Ibid.*, fol. 64v

¹⁴ ARSI, *Phil.* 4, *Catalogus*, fol. 61v.

¹⁵ Murillo, *op. cit.*, fol. 353v.

child and adult, alike; that is, with great reverence and deep respect.

Prompted with a deep interest and patient inquiry with the elderly folks, Alzina was able to unearth and record much of the ancient past of the people living in Cebu, Bohol, Panay and particularly and primarily those living on the Islands of Samar and Leyte.

We learn from his *HISTORIA* that he began gathering his material for an eventual history of these regions immediately upon arrival to the Bisayas in Borongan, Samar in 1634. However, it was only after some thirty-three years of personal investigation, observation and experience that he began re-arranging, organizing his abundant notes and the manuscript for writing a systematic and a thoroughly comprehensive cultural history and a history of the evangelization of the Bisayan Region.

Alzina's *HISTORIA* is doubtless a true, meticulous and most exhaustive achievement of a very erudite man. In it he covered and detailed every possible aspect of human life among the Bisayans in the seventeenth century. He also thoroughly delineated and described every facet of the physical aspects of the Islands: the climate, plant-life, animal-life, sea-life, vegetation and the total natural environment of the region. In Part II of his work, we find recorded the entire task of evangelization, the history of the towns, the growth of the Christian communities, its difficulties and its glories; the Moslem depredations, natural calamities, famines, sickness, diseases and a thousand different related matters.

All in all, his *HISTORIA* is indeed a tremendous work and an incomparable contribution to our age and to posterity; a beautiful tribute to the wisdom and culture of the Bisayan peoples and its Region. There is no doubt that his history is the most valuable, most complete document of the Bisayan culture and history brought to light thus far.

It seems that Father Alzina began re-writing his history in a very well-organized manner only in the latter part of 1668. The first part of this unique, masterful and exceptional work of great merit was completed sometime in the year 1669, when Alzina was already sixty years old.

Presumably, the second part of this valuable work was also organized and re-written immediately upon the completion of the first part. "The first part should be properly called: THE NATURAL AND MORAL HISTORY OF THE BISAYAN PEOPLES AND ITS ISLANDS," and the second part, "THE PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH IN THE BISAYAN REGION".¹⁶

Apparently on May 21, 1672 Alzina's *HISTORIA* was ready and had the necessary approbations for publication, however, it was never actually printed. What more, the original of Alzina's PART ONE has not been located as yet and is seemingly lost; a fair copy of PART TWO has been discovered but is fragmentary and badly mutilated. In fact, of this part which had originally five books, only three are still extant and preserved. The discovery of the first part, which is a copy of the original and the recovery of the second part, the work of an amanuensis, has an interesting history all by itself.

... the distinguished founder of the Archivo de Indias, Juan Bautista Muñoz ... while in Seville in 1784 ... recorded his discovery of parts of Alzina. Muñoz says that Part I was in the possession of the *Real Sociedad Médica of Seville*, of which he was a member. Significantly, he says, it was written in double columns on silk paper apparently in the author's own hand, in 393 folios. Besides these pages there was a dedication by the author to Saint Francis Borgia; his own introduction of his works and three approbations: the first by Fray Baltazar de Jesús or de Herrera, Augustinian, dated October 15, 1671; the second by Fray Baltazar de Medina, Franciscan, September 25, 1671; and the third by Nicolás Bara, a secular priest and Governor of the Bishopric of SS. Nombre de Jesús in Cebu, to whose jurisdiction belonged the Bisayan Islands, dated May 21, 1672.

A note preceeding the fragmentary Parte II, specifies that there were twenty drawings in color inserted in their proper places. Thus far, the Original of Part I, if it still exists, has not been located. Moreover, there are no descriptions of it in the catalogs of the Muñoz collection, or others which mention the *HISTORIA*. Fortunately,

¹⁶ *Sección Bibliográfica*, "Biblioteca Nacional Filipinas," Year II, No. 13, pp. 23-24. Edited Manue Artigas y Cuerva: Manila, 1909.

the loss is not irreparable due to the existence of a careful Muñoz Text and Copy of all of PART I.

A copy of PART II was also found by Muñoz in Seville but under far different circumstances. He says in this prefatory note that he discovered the remnant in a *botica* of that city, and he enumerates the pages which had escaped the disaster of being used for wrapping powders and ointments...¹⁷

Presently the first part of Alzina's *HISTORIA*, with its four books, is well preserved in the *Biblioteca de Palacio* in Madrid. The fragmentary portion of the second part is preserved in the *Real Academia de la Historia*.¹⁸

The question now arises, how did the Alzina manuscript find its home in the Real Sociedad Médica of Seville? Doña Ma. Louisa Martín-Meras and Doña Ma. Dolores Higuera of the *Instituto Histórico de Marina* solved the riddle and clarified all the speculation. And not only this, few years ago they published a facsimile of PART I, Books I and II of a fourth copy of the Alzina Original which they discovered in the defunct *Depósito Hidrográfico*, presently in the *Museo Naval*.

...to the question, as to how a manuscript by a Jesuit was seen by Muñoz in 1784 in the *Sociedad Médica*, there is a very simple answer: the Sociedad Médica was created by Charles II in 1700, had its seat since 1768 in the Jesuit College of Sevilla which they left when they were expelled, leaving behind all the existing sources...¹⁹

¹⁷ See two excellent articles on the discovery and whereabouts of the *HISTORIA...1668*, in *Philippine Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (July 1962): "Alzina's Historia de Visayas: A Bibliographical Note," Evett D. Hester, pp. 331-365 and "More About Alzina's Historia de Visayas," Paul S. Leitz, pp. 366-379.

¹⁸ This writer has acquired, in microfilm, the entire Alzina: PART I from *Biblioteca de Palacio* and a fragmentary copy of Part II from *Real Academia de la Historia* in the years 1968-1969. The writer himself had made photo-copies of the microfilm, had transcripts of the Spanish made with preliminary English translations of a great bulk with the untiring assistance of Sr. Clara Lotho, Poor Clare Nun of Cabuyao, Laguna. The task is gigantic and extremely difficult.

¹⁹ Ma. Luisa Martín-Mera and Ma. Dolores Higuera, *La Historia de las Islas e Indios Bisayas del Padre Alcina — 1668*, Instituto Histórico de Marina (Madrid, Gráficas Lormo — Isabel Méndez, 1974), p. xviii. This is an excellent and a scholarly introduction to a study of Alzina.

Prior to the discovery of the *Museo Naval Copy*, there were three other existing copies of Alzina's Original PART I: the Muñoz Copy, the San Cugat Copy and the Lenox Copy.

Doñas Meras and Higuera describe their discovery in this manner:

...this copy originally belonged to the defunct *Depósito Hidrográfico* and was included in the inventory made by the librarian Juan Santiago Lobo in 1858 ... it was catalogued together with the materials gathered by the Malaspina Expedition in the Philippines. The stains of humidity and the deteriorated condition of the paper make one believe that it had been exposed to the climate of those islands for a considerable length of time. A superficial examination of the script seems to indicate that it belongs to the first half of the 18th century.²⁰

...this *Museo Naval Copy* was made from the preserved other copy at San Cugat del Valles in Barcelona and was transcribed in the Philippines.²¹

In conclusion perhaps it would be well to state that Alzina's *HISTORIA* has a tremendously interesting history all of its own and is still making history today. Perhaps the Original of Alzina's Parte I, may still be discovered and recovered. What more, it would be real boon to our present-day linguists, if some should locate Alzina's 20,000 word Samar-Leyte *Vocabulario* together with his 600 Waray-Waray proverbs, *Pasión* and *Comedias* he had written.

The Literary Style of Alzina in His HISTORIA... 1668

The literary style of Alzina reveals itself best from his own writing, naturally. It is from there that we learn about his method of exposition, his aims and purpose. It was a difficult task indeed and common to all the historians of the Indies in describing matters and animals which up to that particular time have never been seen. It necessitated the use of words which were not adequate to the concepts and looking with eyes which were not accustomed to seeing such marvels.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xxix

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxxi

Although an erudite writer, Alzina confesses his mediocrity with the naturalists and historians of the ancient times, even though he had the advantage of personal contact with the Bisayans for so many long years and had an excellent command of the language of the people²².

I admit that not even my style nor genius or ingenuity has anything to do with the First (Pliny) much less the wisdom to compare with the Second (Pliny), but it cannot be denied, that what I propose to write in this *HISTORIA*, I am more experienced than many and have more desire to make known such information as the facts on hand reveal...

And thus, in spite of being motivated in the beginning with mere curiosity more than anything else, I was for more than thirty-four years living in and about these Bisayan Islands, running from one island to another, mingling in the daily lives of the natives of whom I write, communicating with these Bisayans, the inhabitants of these islands, thus informing myself and taking notes on such personal contacts, helped by the knowledge of their language which is the key that best opens all the secrets.²³

It may be said that the empiric and the direct method of question were employed by Alzina and dominate his entire work and as such no others could boast of this approach. In this regard, he was truly a pioneer.²⁴

I have not followed any author, nor do I have someone to imitate. There was none, nobody to serve as a guide for me. And if ever there was anyone who has written of what I have here treated so clearly and distinctively and factually, it is but perhaps superficial and casual; it is information gathered and acquired in passing, hurriedly. Such writings gathered from passing visits will always be exposed to deception rather than to the truth...

Most of what I write, I do so as an eye-witness and not only on a few or certain occasions with the desire to verify the truth of what I have heard from others or read from some sources. When I write from hearsay, I specify that such was gained from hearsay because in

²² Meras-Higueras, *op. cit.*, Cap. III, p. xcvi.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xcvi.

these matters it is very easy to add or subtract and as such these cannot be legitimate and cannot deceive, if ever I have tried to say something quite certain.²⁵

In cases not confirmed by his experience, he makes use of the relations of the Bisayans and consigns only the versions that merit the highest credit.

In the matters and cases about the Bisayans especially those regarding their past, since we do not have other teachers or experts, it is imperative to follow what they say and even then I incline always to the part which appears to me they give more attention and emphasis and for this reason, I use their exact words and the significance in their own language . . . this is my practice in many matters. . . .²⁶

The simple style is adapted to the eminently narrative character of the work.

The style is current, without any affectation. If, however, there exists a little, it is smooth, sincere and gentle, so that one is not bored, confused or required to put more attention than really necessary.²⁷

However, in spite of the simplicity of narration which has been chosen to develop his work, he makes great effort to adjust it to the models of the classicists.

There might be a few digressions . . . they are always brief which to some appear like grains of salt and if it becomes a bit tiresome or offensive, it could readily be omitted, because it is not essential to the narrative . . . Neither do I deny that in whatever I could and have reached, I have always tried to submit to the conditions which all who understand admit as necessary to all history.²⁸

This is the viewpoint of the author about his work and his method. Our impressions do not but corroborate all the affirmations of Alzina since he brought them to actual practice as may be proved by reading his *Historia*.

²⁵ Meras and Higuera, *op. cit.*, p. xcvi.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

His expertise already acknowledged, Alzina frequently utilizes citations from Pliny, Horace and Saint Augustine. His quotations in Latin are extensive and heavily laden with Scriptural passages and comparisons.

However, what dominates in his work is the naturalness of the narrative, simplicity, fruits of observation, experience of the the popular or common knowledge. So with the quotations in Latin, which frequently appear mixed with refrains of the popular idiom: some phrases in the Bisayan idiom, commonly used among the natives which are moral in content or emphasis and about the peculiarities of certain animals or rare plants.

The minute descriptions are interrupted with frequent digressions of anecdotal type which are always of interest and serve to break the monotony of the pure descriptive passages.

It seems that Alzina had for his intent to make a living document not only of the nature of the Bisayans but of the truth as it appeared. On the other hand, it is important to contrast this evident desire for the truth with the frequent testimony of portentous facts of all types such as the 'woman who gave birth to a crocodile' or the 'tree whose shade poisons people' and others including the interventions of the devil. Facts which are incredible and which we must attribute, without doubt, to the common belief of the epoch to accept the extraordinary because as Esteve Barba writes and observes:

That which refers to the beliefs, one must take into account various circumstances that justifies them: first, the epoch wherein the fantastic did not appear as such, but as part of the ordinary. To these writers the fantastic, the incredible happenings were not understood to them as to us moderns.²⁹

Alzina's HISTORIA from the scientific point of view is very great since he includes in his work all the possible points of view or all the valid ones to be able to give the information necessary about the native and his ways. Thus, even if not subject to systematic method of investigation, he contemplates

²⁹ *Historiografía indiana*, Madrid, 1964, p. 9 as quoted by Meras and Higuera, op. cit., p. p.c.

all the facts actually considered necessary for a serious study in the field of ethnology.

He goes about analysing the ways around which the native moves about, the resources which this natural means places at his disposal, the plants studied meticulously in long descriptions which embrace the physical aspect to its peculiar characteristics. He studies also the medicinal properties of the plants, the antidotes and in general all the remedies at the disposal of the natives to combat sickness or accident. From oral tradition, he gathers information on the origin of the Bisayans, their discovery and names; about their stature, factions, ancient manner of dress, their jewelry, embellishments and houses. He also treats largely of of their customs and various rituals.

In Books Two, Three and Four, he writes about the Bisayan language, its characteristics, about their arts and the sciences they employed, their music, instruments and home and farm implements; about their manner of cultivation, cosmogony, religious organization, propitiatory sacrifices, superstitions and funeral rites. And so with their uses of witchcraft and enchantments among themselves, their vices and common sickness as well as their forms of government, contracts, money, marriage and wars.

The wealth of information is almost exhaustive; nothing has been left out, nothing that could directly or indirectly interest or make known of the Bisayans, has been omitted.

The organization of the work is very systematic and the information, in general, contains sufficient scientific matter, even if at times, Alzina appears less scientific in the exposition and mixes anecdotal or extraordinary events very difficult to justify in the scientific field, and this he does in his descriptions.

However, the work in general, in our judgment merits the qualification of scientific for its method of work and organization of materials and is of priceless value for all anthropological, ethnological, historical interest and in the cultural areas.

Finally, Alzina's work provides the students of distinct fields an interesting material besides its voluminous content susceptible to a monographic elaboration by the distinct experts and fundamental for whatever approximation to the historical knowledge in the area of the Bisayans.³⁰

³⁰ Meras and Higuera, *op. cit.*, p. cii.

THE CONTENT MATTER OF ALZINA'S MONUMENTAL
WORK: *HISTORIA DE LAS ISLAS E INDIOS DE BISAYAS* . .
1668

What follows here is the first English translation of the entire contents of the author's content material. First, however, it would be well to give here the complete title of the work as found in the Muñoz text:

HISTORIA DE LAS ISLAS E INDIOS DE BISAYAS, parte mayor y más principal de las islas Filipinas: dividida en dos partes: la primera natural, (del sitio, fertilidad i calidad de estas islas, y sus moradores, etc.) la segunda eclesiástica i sobrenatural, (de su fee i aumentos en ella,) con el magisterio y enseñanza de los PP. de la Compañía de Jesús. In doctrina glorificate Dominum in insulis maris nomen Domini. (Isai. 24). Recogido uno i otro i compuesto por el P. Francisco Ignacio Alzina, de la mesma Compañía, después de más de 30 años en ellas i entre ellos de ministerio. Ad maiorem Dei gloriam et Mariae matris eius sine labe conceptae. Año 1668.

PART I — BOOK 1

The characteristic, beginnings and origin of the Bisayan Indios, the productivity of the islands and the terrain. The native trees, plants and fruits and their particular qualities.

Chapters

1. Concerning the name BISAYA, its meaning and the origin of these islands.
2. Concerning the stature, appearance, features and the ancient manner of dress of the Bisayans.
3. A continuation of previous material and treatment of their ornaments, their houses, their adornment and their nudity.
4. Concerning their customs of tattooing, who does it and when and why.
5. Concerning the location, characteristics and the climate of these Bisayan Islands.

6. Concerning a special treatment about the productivity of these islands
7. Concerning their meals, what they use as bread and which they have never known in these islands and what they use as its substitute.
8. Concerning root-crops like the sweet potato which is used as bread or a substitute for it.
9. Concerning the plants which they call *plátanos* and their differences; all are edible. Also about the plant itself, its description and its fruit.
10. Concerning another class of plants, which even though it does not provide the natives with food, does provide them with material for clothing.
11. Concerning fruit trees, not only those which are cultivated but those which grow wild in the forests.
12. A continuation of previous material concerning the various kinds of good fruits.
13. Concerning the main different kinds of oranges which are found here and their quality and abundance.
14. Concerning the palm tree called or known as the coconut and about its great usefulness.
15. Concerning the age and qualities of this palm and the different varieties.
16. Concerning other species of palms especially those known as *nipa* and *lumbia*.
17. Concerning the palms which they call *buri* and others which resemble it.
18. Concerning the palm known as *bonga* and other different kinds.
19. Concerning the *bejucos*, as the Spaniards call them here which are a species of palm, and others like the willow.
20. Concerning other valuable woods, their value as building materials and the different kinds of which there are here and all very useful.

21. Concerning the tree called *tiga* and other seemingly incorruptible woods of these islands.
22. Concerning the tree, *nonoc*, which has the most widely extended crown in these parts and does not grow on land, and about the superstitions concerning it.
23. Concerning other aromatic trees and plants which are in these islands and their names and uses.
24. Concerning other fragrant and aromatic herbs and roots of many colors that there are here.
25. Concerning the many injurious roots, shrubs and woods that there are in these islands and about their antidotes.
26. Concerning a brief summary of the best known medicinal roots, leaves and plants, etc.
27. Concerning other fruits, herbs, roots or woods of various remarkable and extraordinary qualities.
28. Concerning the *bamboo* of this land, its size and variety and the uses which are made of them.
29. Concerning the sweet canes, their variety and size; other plants which resemble them and various garden plants.

PART I — BOOK 2

Concerning the animals, birds, fish, snakes and other remarkable reptiles of these islands; about what there is worthy of being known in the three elements of land, air and water; and something about fire.

1. Concerning the quadrupeds known in Spain and their differences from those which have been raised here.
2. Concerning the buffaloes, deer and wild hogs that are found in these islands and their varieties.
3. Concerning the elephants which are found here, and the facts about them which are very different from what others have written.
4. Concerning the other smaller quadrupeds which there are here; some similar and others different from those in Europe and about their peculiarities.

5. Concerning the civet cat and of the animal with the must, a kind of a rat and about the varieties of cats that are here.
6. Concerning the monkeys or "machines", their species, variety and grandeur.
7. Concerning the crocodiles or *caymanes*, their ferocity, size and habits or craftiness.
8. Concerning the second class of *caymanes* and other varieties of lizards found here.
9. Concerning the monstrous snakes that there are here; their variety and great number; about their poison and other remarkable matters.
10. Concerning the smallest of the snakes in size and the most poisonous to be found here and about other poisonous reptiles.
11. Concerning wild silkworms and other remarkable small animals and water worms and about the great variety of ants in these islands.
12. Concerning their knowledge about the next life; whether they knew about good and bad spirits and about souls and their immortality.
13. Concerning their priests and priestesses and how they attain this dignity; whether they have anything resembling temples in which to make their sacrifices, etc.
14. Concerning their sacrifices, where, how and for what reasons they performed them.
15. Concerning their superstitious rites that the living performed in order to know if they were fortunate; about what they practiced with respect to their dead.
16. Concerning their burials and burial places and the things which they placed with their deceased.
17. Concerning the *paglehes* of these Indios, what kind of sacrifices they were and why they were related especially to pregnant women and to those in childbirth.
18. Concerning the wizards, *onglos*, and other similar creatures in their antiquity and whether they still exist today.

19. Concerning their witches or their existence; what might be those that they call *barangan* and *dalondonga*; and whether there are any at present.
20. Concerning the vices and evil inclinations of the spirit of these people which are the most common and most general among them.
21. A continuation of the previous and other natural characteristics of these *Indios*.
22. Concerning the vice of drunkenness and the kinds of beverages that cause it.
23. Concerning other defects of nature and illnesses which are peculiar to these Bisayans and the Philippine *Indios*.

PART I — BOOK 3

A treatment about these *Indios*, their language and writing; their sciences and arts which they knew; whether or not they had a knowledge of the true God, or their pagan religion, rituals and sacrifices in the spiritual order; about their customs, abuses and superstitions; about their natural vices and other passions and inclinations of the spirit and about their illnesses and the condition of their bodies.

Chapters

1. Concerning the Bisayan language; whether, perhaps it is one of the seventy-two primitive ones; about its initial confusion; its elegance, richness, exactness and its special characteristics.
2. Concerning the alphabet and method of writing of the Bisayans; about the different and distinctive kinds of poetry in which they take great pride.
3. Concerning the acquaintance with some of the liberal arts sciences; what they were and with what proficiency they were known.
4. Concerning their music and peculiar instruments; about their arithmetic and some beginnings of other sciences.

5. Concerning agriculture; the method of working the soil and reaping its harvest which these natives have employed and are now using.
6. Concerning other mechanical arts which they knew in ancient times and have preserved to the present day with some improvements.
7. Concerning their looms and an account of other arts like the working of precious metals which here are of gold alone, etc.
8. Concerning the building of ships such as these natives used; their shape, tonnage and classification.
9. Concerning the rest of the work done on the ships until they are launched into the waters.
10. Concerning the differences of size of the ships they had; their lightness, their oars, and methods of voyaging, etc.
11. Concerning the knowledge of Bisayans about the true God and what concepts they had about divinity.
12. Concerning the mining of gold, silver and other metals; about precious stones; colors for dyeing and other matters of value.
13. Concerning the sea of these islands and its notable characteristics; its ebb and flow, currents, etc.
14. Concerning the abundance, variety and goodness of the many fish that are found in these islands.
15. Concerning the fish of greater size that are here and their varieties and qualities.
16. Concerning the turtles of these seas, their great size and varieties.
17. Concerning other fishes like the *Sabinduyong*, the swordfish and others; the method of catching them.
18. Concerning other noteworthy fish, although smaller than these mentioned; their special characteristics, good and bad; and about those that are found in the rivers of these islands.
19. Concerning the various kinds of shell-fish, oysters, and other that the sea produces here; also about the kinds of pearls found in the sea.

20. Concerning the remarkable things that are found in these rivers and the mode of fishing in them.
21. Concerning amber and its origin and how many kinds are found in these seas; about its abundance.
22. Concerning salt and its differences; about the method of making it here.
23. Concerning the birds in general; about their abundance and variety; about those that are found here as well as in Spain and how they differ.
24. Concerning other birds, native in these islands and found only here.
25. Concerning other marsh birds which live both in the water and in the air; their varieties and differences.
26. Concerning birds of prey; night birds and the variety of owls that there are in these islands.
27. Concerning various kinds of wasps, locusts, butterflies and other bloodless insects over there.
28. Concerning bees and their differences; their manner of reproduction; about the abundance of wax and honey in these islands.
29. Concerning the more usual winds here and their qualities; about the furious hurricanes (buhawi) which they call *baguio*.
30. Concerning fire, fiery elements, lightning and other atmospheric phenomena of these islands.

PART I — BOOK 4

Concerning their settlements and their houses; whether they had towns or villages and of what kind; whether they had kings and why they did not; concerning their customs, laws or usages, as we call them; concerning their battles, how they made slaves and punished crimes and other customs peculiarly theirs; whether there were giants in these islands or pygmies and other monsters, etc.

Chapters

1. Concerning their towns and whether they had them and how they lived together; what sort they were and how they were laid-out; how they lived in them.
2. Concerning another settlement of Ibabao [Samar]; about its age, and why it was destroyed and about the many other settlements they had which were small.
3. Concerning their particular style of houses and dwellings; the different kinds they have and the reasons for these.
4. Concerning their kings and whether they had them; what manner of political structure; what kind of nobility and grades of it; and about the differences there were among these.
5. Concerning the kinds of bondage that existed among these Bisayans; with what justification and the reasons why they became slaves or the manner in which they were made slaves.
6. Concerning the different kinds of slaves they had; a matter which those who confess them and judge their disputes should understand; and how they dealt with them.
7. Concerning their manner of governing themselves; their interdependence of one with the other, especially of their chiefs or *datos*; what laws they had and what instruction they had for them.
8. Concerning their trade and commerce; what money they used; what property they had and in what their wealth consisted.
9. Concerning the festivals, feasts, dances and other amusements of the elderly people, of the young and of children.
10. Concerning their wars and of their type of arms, both offensive and defensive which they used.
11. Concerning their manner of fighting in their wars and if there were some courageous and outstanding men among them of strength, valour, agility, etc.
12. Concerning their marriages and the very special conditions contained in this contract.
13. Concerning matrimony in reference to its performance; what they ordinarily did on this occasion and afterwards.

14. Concerning the nature of the title which married people had over their goods; whether the husband was the lord or not over what belongs to his wife and about his sisters and of the inheritance of goods of their elders.
15. Concerning the durability and stability of their marriages; their ancient customs examined to see whether this matter can be better known and understood.
16. Concerning the difficulty which some women of noble rank and high reputation had in ancient times in getting married; the endeavors of some men and the abductions of other women.
17. Concerning the existence of real giants in these islands and whether they exist today; about people of gigantic proportions; and whether there were or are those who eat human flesh and whether there is contact with the *sandogos*.
18. Concerning the pigmies; whether there were any here or are still; about other monstrosities of nature.

PART II — BOOK 1 (Fragmentary)

This second part of Alzina is not the original of the author, but a copy. However, of the five books only fragmentary and scrambled portions of Books one, two and three are extant.

Chapters

16. [Evidently] Concerning the Sumoroy Rebellion in Palapag, Samar in 1649 [a fragmentary conclusion of the chapter only].
17. Concerning some other attacks by the enemies (Mindanaos and Caragas). Persecutions of this Christianity; and a misfortune which befell one of our brothers.
18. Concerning the capture of the cabecera of Carigara [Leyte] by the Sanguiles, and how they captured the Father Rector of Dagami.
19. Concerning Palapag and how it began to pay its tribute to his Majesty; the meeting of the towns of Catbalogan; about the uprising in Bohol and Baybay [Leyte].

20. Concerning the disposition of the *Cabo Superior* and how he decided to punish the rebels of Bohol, the corregidor of Leyte and those of Baybay.
21. Concerning the first arrival to these isles of the Pintados of the Camucones and how they plundered the Cabecera of Catbalogan.
22. Concerning the Joloans who also came to plunder these Islands; how they succeeded in plundering a shipyard and advancing as far as Catbalogan, even though in vain; and about the Camucones' arrival to Ibabao.
23. Concerning a certain courtesy or refinement shown by the Bisayan Chiefs to His Catholic Majesty at the beginning of their conversion.
24. Concerning the liberality with which His Majesty favoured and returned the friendly gestures of the chiefs of these islands; His excessive expenses to preach the Gospel and to teach the natives the Faith.

PART II — BOOK 2

A treatment of the general reduction of the old towns, which today still exist in the *cabeceras* and *visitas*; about the manner of life of the ministers and their manner of teaching and other related matter pertinent to the dissemination of the Faith among the natives in these Bisayas.

Chapters

1. Concerning the necessity of reduction of towns and about joining the smaller ones into big and better towns in order to facilitate evangelization.
2. Concerning the division into residences and cabeceras; the explanation and reasons for such a creation.
3. Concerning the manner of the reduction of the towns in particular and the first division of these into four cabeceras in these two islands [Samar and Leyte].

4. Concerning the manner of living among the Father ministers in these residences, cabeceras and visitas and the mode of ministry among the natives.
5. Concerning the ordinary sustenance of the ministers and the sources of their necessities in upkeep.
6. Concerning the manner of income and expenses among us; about the alms and stipends necessary for our sustenance.
7. Concerning the necessary provisions with its particular economic and the many needs and ordinary expenses and how these are taken care of.
8. Concerning the possessions of the churches; whether there are properties in our ministry, who the owners are and how these properties are kept up.
9. Concerning the manner of administration in these towns; our mode of life in these towns, the spiritual undertakings and the teaching of our ministers.
10. Concerning the teaching of the various states in life, age-level and the special distinctions we make among the *olitaos* and *daragas* and who these are.
11. [The entire chapter is missing]
12. [Only a small portion of this chapter is extant; the end of the chapter]
13. Concerning the celebration of Christmas and other feasts until Lent and the differences in the *fiesta* days here.
14. Concerning the practices during Fridays and Holy Week and during the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ.
15. Concerning other festivities of the year; those which these natives have here and especially the Feast of Corpus Christi.
16. Concerning other occupations of the ministers and particularly those for each month, week and day.
17. Concerning the Confraternity of Congregation of Our Lady as it was introduced here in these ministries by the Society and its importance and need here.

18. Concerning the administration of the Holy Sacraments and its peculiar mode of administration here.
19. Concerning the annual confession and Communion by precept; dispositions necessary for the proper reception and the spiritual graces of both, etc.
20. Concerning the finalization of the Sacraments (other) and the observations of ministers and about the helpers these ministers have to aid them.
21. Concerning the other works of mercy, corporal and spiritual with which the ministers occupy themselves; and about the hospitals and seminaries which they founded in the beginning.
22. Concerning other aids and remedies which are used for the increase of the Faith and about the good customs of the natives.

PART II — BOOK 3

1. [Missing]
2. [Missing]
3. Concerning the other two towns of this coast, Sulat and Tubig; their special physical and spiritual peculiarities.
4. Concerning the western coast of this islands as far as the Point of Baliquatum; the towns of Bobon and Catarman which are the extremities of the Palapag Residence.
- 5-10. [All missing]
11. Concerning [incomplete and seemingly]... matters of forced labour in ship-building and about the Palapag revolt...
12. Concerning the violent death of Father Rector; the insurrection declared and its movement and resulting damages to the towns.

- 13-15. [All missing]
16. [only one folio and unidentifiable]
17. Concerning the pacification of the town of Palapag and others; about the reduction of some and the towns which persist till today.
18. Concerning the Residence of Samar and its towns and the peculiarities of each.
19. Concerning the Town of Bangahun [now Gandara] and that of Tinagob [now Dapdap, Samar] which was the first cabecera of this residence.
20. Concerning the Towns of Catbalogan, the cabecera of this residence and other things about the Town of Tinagob.
- 21-23. [All missing]
24. Concerning the other two towns on the south coast of this Island [Samar] and near the eastern coast.
25. Concerning the Town of Guiuan and the last on this island and the first to acknowledge the first discoverers.
26. Concerning the increase of Faith in this town and other things about the good customs here and about the miraculous image of our Lady which is here [Incomplete]

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