

Batanes: The Melting Pot of Two Cultures*

The Batanes, perhaps the most picturesque island chain of the Philippine Archipelago, lie between the Babuyan and Formosa. The rough seas and forbidding landscape make the anchorage of ships always difficult, thus isolating the islands.

The development of Batanes in all its aspects, including the religious life of the people, has been strongly influenced by the unique character of the land. It was this character that confronted the Spaniards as they attempted to gain a foothold in the area in line with their overall aims of colonial conquest and pacification.

The Batanes is inhabited by the Ivatans who have kept a tradition dating back to the pre-Spanish period. They had political, cultural and economic institutions closely linked to their sources of livelihood: agriculture, fishing and commerce, etc. Their common agricultural products were camote, sugar cane, and other root crops. They raised a few cereals and some fruit trees. Agriculture was practically underdeveloped. As tools they only used two rudimentary sticks of different lengths. There was abundant fish in the sea but their catch was minimal due to the lack of boats, the use of crude fishing gear, and the rough seas. Commerce was mainly done by barter with the Chinese who came to their coasts, with people from the Babuyan and a few merchants from Aparri. Their main industry was *basi* (wine from sugar cane), earthen pots and ropes for ships.

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The Ivatans had a well-developed political system with a strong ruling class composed of the *mampus* and the *mapolons*. The masses were called *cailianes* and this term included the slaves. One could become a slave by incurring debts to the *mampus* or the *mapolons*. A heavy penalty was imposed on those who were divorced without reason, on those who gave poison instead of medicine to the sick and on those who stole gold. In these last two cases the offender could be punished by being buried up to the waist and then stoned to death.

The social classes were headed by a ruling group whose power was measured according to the amount of gold or wealth that they possessed. For this reason the *principales* hung gold around the neck of their children or wore jackets smeared with pork lard to show that they owned many animals. Thus, the loss of wealth carried with it the loss of power.

The Ivatans were rich in traditions, customs, and idiosyncracies. They worshipped a god, *Mayo* (in Itbayat, *Mapaitao*), although they did not have any complex rituals, altars or temples. They respected and feared the *anitos* whom they considered to be the souls of the dead capable of inflicting harm unless they were placated with food. They believed in a life hereafter. They feared the evil spirits (*demonio*) whom they believed to be the cause of death. From birth to death their lives were steeped in rituals. They continued burying their dead in jars until the 18th century.

It was through commerce that the missionaries from the Babuyanes came to know "of the many and good inhabitants of the Batanes." It was missionary zeal that broke the comparative isolation of the Ivatans. But evangelization and acculturation were not overly effective initially. The inclement weather as well as the insufficient means of livelihood hampered the work of the early missionaries.

In 1686, the Dominicans Frs. Mateo González and Diego Piñero visited the islands of Ivuhos, Sabtang, and Batan whose total population was then estimated at about 30,000. They were welcomed and given hospitable treatment. The natives seemed to be willing to embrace the Christian faith.

Fr. González returned to Manila to report on the results of the journey and stressed the gentle disposition and goodwill displayed by the people. Fr. Piñero was left behind to learn the language and customs of the islands.

However, the greatest drawback to the plan of evangelization proposed by Father González was the financial problem due to the high cost of transportation and sustenance of the missionaries. These heavy expenses were shouldered by the Dominican Order, but the Order soon realized that missionary work in the Batanes could not be done without the help of the government.

Then Fr. Juan Ruiz joined Frs. González and Piñero. But the harsh living conditions, especially the lack of potable water, resulted in the death of Frs. González and Ruiz. Fr. Piñero, left alone once more, had to fend for himself. He decided to return to Cagayan to look for another priest but there was neither any available missionary nor money. Consequently, the mission was discontinued. The departure of the missionaries, after four years of tedious labor, left lasting impressions on the people.

A second attempt was made by the Dominicans, Frs. Juan Bel and Alonso Amado to reestablish the Batanes mission. Seeing the adverse condition of the place, they thought of transferring the natives to Calayan and later to Cagayan, which seemed to be more advantageous, and to this end they asked help from King Philip V. The King issued a *cedula real* granting certain privileges to the Ivatans and the amount of ₱5,398.00, chargeable to the Royal Treasury of Mexico, to finance the transfer of the inhabitants.

It was decided by the colonial authorities that the transfer would be voluntary and that those going to Cagayan should be provided upon arrival with a house and lot. The transfer was made on small scale, but the transferred natives were strongly attached to their homeland and soon became restless. They found ways and means to return to their islands and the plan had to be abandoned.

Through the Provincial Council of Manila in 1771, the Dominicans petitioned Charles III to annex the Batanes to Spain, so that the islands might enjoy the same privileges as the other provinces. In view of this proposal, Charles III asked for a formal report from the missionaries, from the alcalde of Cagayan, and

from the merchants who had traded with the islands. The King sought data on the number and condition of the people living in the area; the geographic characteristics, products, and resources of the place; and the reasons why the missionaries had previously abandoned the islands.

In 1782, the then governor-general of the Philippines, José Basco y Vargas decided to effectively carry out the King's decision and began to plan accordingly. He sent an official to assemble the *principales* in the islands and ask them "if they would be willing to submit to the two Majesties, God and King." Their affirmative reply encouraged the preparation of an expedition for the annexation.

In 1783, Basco sent José Huelva Melgarejo as governor of the islands. The expedition included also: Joaquín Castillo, two sergeants, a number of soldiers, a schoolteacher, 25 carpenters, masons, stone workers, and ironsmiths; and two missionaries, both Dominicans, Frs. Baltasar Calderón and Bartolomé Artíguez, O.P. The expedition left Aparri on May 26, 1783. They arrived in Ivana on June 3. On June 26, they officially took possession of the islands, hoisted the Spanish flag and planted the cross, and named the capital "Santo Domingo de Basco."

At the beginning, the expedition met great difficulties in evangelization and acculturation. The clash of two opposing cultures became evident. There was an uprising led by Aman Dangat in Ivuhos and Sabtang which brought strong Spanish counter-measures. The natives were forced to live in Basay island for more than forty years by way of punishment, although they kept their properties and could return to cultivate their lands.

After the annexation, the Batanes came to be known as the smallest, poorest, and remotest province of the country. Nevertheless, acculturation set in, exemplified by native participation in local politics. Dwelling places were no longer built in the mountains but on the plains near the sea as ordered by Governor del Amo. The governor also organized the island of Basay and chose four places to develop as towns: Santo Domingo de Basco, San José de Ivana, San Antonino de Itbud and San Carlos de Mahatao. The people were ordered to live in these towns.

The towns were established on a predetermined pattern. The streets were marked off with ropes, in accordance with Basco's ordinances. The plaza was formed by the church, the school, and the residences of the governor and the *alcalde*, together with those of the *principales*.

In the first expedition, Governor Basco sent to the Batanes laborers and artisans who were skilled in stone-cutting, carpentry, and iron work. Their task was to construct the public buildings and to teach the natives some skills. The traditional hut of the Ivatans (*gingin*) was built low and made of *cogon*. Later, with acculturation, bigger houses were constructed, using local materials: lime, sand, stone and *mago*. There was a progressive development of houses as the town grew. Public buildings were erected for administrative purposes: the *casa real*, the courthouse, the military headquarters, forts and schools.

The meeting of two cultures gave rise to new modes of communication and, also, to new needs. The new religion required a place of assembly. Chapels and churches sprang up, first of wood and *cogón*, and later of stone. The architectural orientation was baroque with strong Mexican influences. Bridges provided uninterrupted connection between towns. The communication between the islands was improved by the construction of larger boats called "pontines."

From the many autonomous groups ruled by *mampus*, and *mapolos*, the people evolved into a single unified community under a single head, the *alcalde*. The election of the latter took place as soon as the towns were pacified.

In relation to the economy, the governors concentrated on the development of agricultural products such as coconuts, white mulberries (for silk), *abaca*, cotton, tobacco, corn and indigo. New techniques were brought in. The cultivation of the silkworm from China was introduced by Governor Basco but it did not prosper. Governor Félix Berenguer de Marquina, who took over the colonial administration, discontinued the silkworm project. He opted for a practical agricultural program which could be done with whatever local resources were available.

After the sinking of the *paquebote Nuestra Señora del Rosario* on May 28, 1789, with the loss of ₱10,000 to the Crown, the policy of abandonment advocated by Governor Berenguer de Marquina was pursued. His proposal was to leave the Batanes with a few officials and missionaries and to direct the money that the crown was spending there for the colonization of Mindoro. He feared the Moros who were living in Mindoro and the threat of a French conquest of the island. Thus, the abandonment of the Batanes was increasingly considered.

The plan was pursued and a native provisional *alcalde mayor*, Valerio Bermúdez, from Cagayan, was chosen head of the politico-military government of the islands. With a salary of ₱36.00 per month, he begun a new way of governing the islands, an era that might be called, "The administration of the *Alcaldes* (1799-1851)."

Under Bermúdez, the islands stagnated. In 1810, with the well-being of the people in mind, Fr. Francisco Albán attempted to transfer the inhabitants to Luzon. The plan was discussed and many found it reasonable. But when Fr. Albán asked them for a written consent, only 40 persons signed. Hence, the plan was never carried out.

The administration of Bermúdez can be summarized in a sentence. It was a period of neglect. The government in Manila failed to send the necessary wages. Even the street lamps had no oil since government boats no longer visited the islands and private-owned boats rarely called on them.

After Bermúdez, the successive *alcaldes* tried to develop the islands. Alcalde Luis Lima brought in a large number of Chinese who were then considered in the Philippines to be skillful and expert agriculturists. However, the project failed due to the harsh weather and barren soil. The attention of the *alcaldes* was focused on the improvement of towns, the construction of new buildings, the opening of new roads leading to the fields and the maintenance of cleanliness and sanitation.

With the restoration of the governors in the middle of the 19th century, local politics took a new turn, and with the *gobernadorcillos*, *tenientes*, *alguaciles*, *jueces de policía*, *jueces de se-*

menteras, and *jueces de ganado* the political and social life took a turn for the better.

Power was in the hands of the natives from the very start. And these were the same ones who would awaken the masses and, later on, take up arms and join the *katipuneros* against the Spanish administration.

For sometime, the economy of the Batanes was dependent on the central government. The few natural resources of the islands could not even support the provincial government. In documents, mention was often made of the fact that there was no money in the coffers of the towns. Oftentimes, money had to be asked from the general treasury. There was virtually no income of any kind. Only in the second half of the 19th century, when the payment of tributes was required from the natives, would there be some money.

The Batanes was unique in the overall scheme of colonial administration. For a long period, the tributes were not collected due to the poverty of the province. But by 1850, during the term of *Alcalde* Lima, various agricultural projects were initiated to increase the production of crops for both consumption and trade. The Ivatans were to pay a tribute of two and a half *reales* yearly, in cash or in kind.

Other sources of income were some buildings, cargo taxes, reserves, rentals, sale taxes, and the contribution of one-half *real* by every individual. However, the money was still insufficient to cover the expenses of government and evangelization. Whatever amount was collected was used for the salaries of the governor, the police officers, and the military; and for the oil used by the vigilantes in the maintenance of the *casa real* and the jail.

In 1856, the balance in the provincial coffer was only ₱29. In 1874, the taxes collected amounted to ₱8,968.00, ₱2,982.00 of which went to the town treasury. The ₱5,989.00 contributed by the Central Government was not even enough to cover expenses for that year. Thus, whenever calamities struck, the islands suffered and hunger among the people was frequent.

As a result of the open trade policy at the start of the 19th century, the foreign demand for certain agricultural products increased. A subsequent shift in the Spanish colonial policy ensued, producing significant changes in the economic and social development of the islands. From subsistence farming, the islands shifted to commercial agriculture. Agriculture was promoted by the introduction of new farming implements as well as of new products. Arable and grazing lands were increased and new breeds of animals were introduced. Consequently, commerce with Cagayan, Ilocos and Manila increased. However, the development of small-scale industries was very limited. The manufacture of *bolos* and knives was confined to local needs owing to the lack of proper technological techniques. But the manufacture of *basi* from sugar cane was quite encouraging. There were no mines developed in the islands, inspite of reports that minerals including gold and iron were found in the area. Consequently, the people were still dependent on metals coming from Cagayan. Fish and marine products, although abundant, were not tapped in commercial quantities due to the rough seas. The comparative lack of communication with Luzon prompted governor Federico Saavedra Alvarez of the Batanes to propose that more ships from Luzon should call on the islands. Regular communication was necessary so that the islands would not be cut off from the rest of the archipelago.

One aspect of Ivatan life that was transformed was the language. Before the arrival of the Spaniards, the Ivatans had no written literature. The Ivatan dialect was greatly influenced by the Spanish language in the transformation of certain sounds and in the adoption of many words. Fr. Antonio Criville O.P., (+ 1813) wrote the first grammar, *Gramática para estudiar Ivatan*, and initiated the compilation of a Vocabulary and the translation of religious books into Ivatan.

Education was thought to be crucial to the development of the province. In fact, as far back as the first expedition of Basco, a schoolteacher was included among the matters, showing the importance of education in the overall plan of pacification. The governor and the missionaries spearheaded the construction of schoolbuildings, even subsidizing them from their own personal resources. Bridges were built for easier communication and to

allow the children to attend classes during rainy days. However, the scarcity of school materials, hampered the educational progress of the province, especially where the training of native teachers was begun. It was therefore necessary, during the term of Governor Serra, to send qualified natives to attend the Normal School in Manila.

Towards the end of Spanish rule, the educational system took great strides and schools offered a complete curricular program consisting of three levels of education. A school for adults was opened on October 1, 1873, and the education of the children was made both compulsory and at the same time free from tuition fees. The attendance of local government officials in examinations, programs, and in the awarding of prizes was required to show the interest of the government in the cultural development of the natives.

During the first contact with the Ivatans in 1686, the population was calculated to be around 30,000. During its annexation in 1783, there was an abrupt decrease to only 12,000, according to the first reports of Governor Huelva to Governor Basco. This decrease was due to the smallpox epidemic in 1777 and to the emigration of people to other places in Luzon.

The Spanish presence did not result in a radical demographic change. The problem of Spanish *mestizos* did not exist there. Still, the number of people in the islands kept decreasing due to migrations and epidemics. There was a demographic change involving the menfolk. Formerly, the missionaries and the governor had urged them to leave the islands, but they never did. Later, many men sought work elsewhere and migration went on unchecked. It thus brought about economic as well as moral decadence. To remedy the problem, the governor took steps to limit the number of persons who could migrate to Luzon. Still in 1898, when the Katipuneros landed in the Batanes, the inhabitants numbered only 8,278.

The latter part of the 19th century which was marked by economic advancement in the lives of the Filipinos, brought about the introduction of new elements in Ivatan society. At this time, the Batanes had a small export of oil, *ube*, *camote*, onions, garlic, pigs, bulls, carabaos and other products, principally to Aparri.

Export in 1890 consisted of 500 bulls, 300 horses, 350 jars of lard, and 250 *piculs* of garlic. Itbayat sold cotton and hemp. During this period, the Ivatans began to sell their products in Manila where prices were higher.

The livestock industry contributed much to the treasury of the islands. The breeding of cattle, hogs, sheep, and goats increased and this helped the local income. Animals became the most important export of the Batanes at the close of the Spanish period.

Due to their location, the Batanes were often considered as a key point in trade and commerce. They were close to mainland China and Formosa, and were alongside to the route of the galleon route. But their geographic importance was lessened by lack of ports, by storms, by lack of industries and by the poor soil. Nevertheless, Spanish rule, despite its failure to bring about massive economic progress, left indelible marks on the life of the natives. Two divergent cultures made contact in the islands, and integration, essential to the shaping of a community, took place.

By the end of the 19th century, the Batanes had six important towns. Town life was active and there was much interaction among the different towns. There was an interior road that united all the towns and there was another road along the coast. In Sabtang, there was a main road from San Vicente to Nakanmuan, which passed through other population centers. In Itbayat, one road led from Sta. María de Mayan to Chinapuliran. Bridges were also indispensable in the islands and they were made often of wooden planks supported by stone masonry. In the island of Basay alone, there were 13 bridges by the end of the 19th century.

The most important project in 1890 was the water supply of Santo Domingo de Basco. The perennial problem of looking for potable water was resolved. In spite of construction difficulties, the islands could also boast of many buildings. The local governors often urged on the governor-general in Manila various recommendations for the development of the islands. One was for government boats to come three or four times a year for deliveries, instead of once a year. It was also suggested that the mailboat should come every three months, instead of every six months. The officials also proposed the increase in the production of *abaca*,

coffee, cotton, peanuts and *cacao*. However, the farmers preferred to grow *camote*, garlic, onions, and root crops.

One recommendation was to transfer of the capital from Santo Domingo de Basco to San Bartolomé de Calayan and to fuse the Batanes and the Babuyanes into one province. Calayan was highly regarded because of its rich natural resources.

To improve public health in the Batanes, a doctor and a pharmacist were employed. Two infirmaries were also opened. But improvements in health and sanitation were few and slow in coming. As late as 1896, the islands still lacked many basic services that were available in other provinces.

Participation in government and church activities gave the Ivatans a sense of responsibility, a consciousness of group unity, and a recognition of individual rights. This, in turn, promoted social, cultural, and political development of the Filipino community, which would assert the dignity and worth of the individual in the Revolution.

It is a fact that the political, social and cultural development of Batanes and the Christianization of practically the whole group of islands towards the end of the 19th century were as much a native as a Spanish achievement.

The arrival of the *Katipuneros* in 1898 bridged the great gap between the Batanes and Luzon, and put an end to Spanish rule with the concomittant social, political and cultural changes. Perhaps, the *Katipunans* leaders in their struggle for independence never dreamed that they could have followers in such a far-away region. Many Ivatans migrated to Manila where they learned about the activities of the *Katipuneros*. Thus, the aspirations of the Tagalogs became known and were welcomed in the Batanes.

On September 18, 1897, the revolutionaries came on board the *Compañía de Filipinas*. Anticipating resistance in Basco from Governor Julián Fortea, the *Katipuneros* decided to land in Ivana. They contacted the leaders of the town who knew about their coming and were awaiting them. They entered the town, hoisted the *Katipunan* flag on the church tower and rang the bells. The revolutionaries led by Rafael Perea spent the afternoon searching for the missionaries who escaped and were hidden by people who provided them with food and news. That same night, the *Katipuneros* moved on to Basco.

Knowing of their coming, Fortea, a military man, thought that his duty was "to defend his province to the death." The revolutionaries assured the Filipino officials, like the *gobernadorcillos*, "that they were their brothers and that they would break the chain of tyranny." They sent word to the Filipino soldiers of the governor not to fight against them and, instead, to capture the governor or to kill him if he put up any kind of resistance. The soldiers were more than glad to comply as proved by later events.

After visiting the soldiers, the governor and his companion were ambushed by the same. Fortea got away, put up a fight in his residence, and was killed. The attack was planned by Corporal Marcelino Romero, with the help of a principal conspirator, Teófilo Castillejos.

The next morning the *Katipuneros* arrived in Basco. They hoisted the flag on the church facade and then looted the convent. They took all the missionaries prisoner.

The new government then held elections. Teófilo Castillejos was elected *jefe provincial* and Juan Abad became the *presidente local*. On September 25, the *Compañía de Filipinas* sailed from Basco, for Cagayan. Aboard were the missionaries, some Spaniards and the new Ivatan officials. The latter were to take the oath of office before Colonel Tirona in Aparri.

The Ivatans believed that only the revolution could give them what they had always wanted most, freedom. For the Ivatans, this was more important than the sufferings accompanying the transition from Spanish to Filipino government. The struggle between the Ivatan and Spanish cultures, sometimes out in the open and at other times silent, had given rise to the modern Ivatan with a strong sense of Filipino identity.

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