

## Fr. Juan Antonio Cantova and the First Christian Mission in the Caroline Islands

*Augusto V. de Viana*

The Caroline Islands also known as the Carolines or *Islas Carolinas* are a group of islands located south of the Mariana Islands in the Western Pacific. The inhabitants of these islands were among the last of the native populations in the Western Pacific to be converted to Christianity. The islands shared the same irony of the Marianas though they have been reached by Spanish explorers, were practically ignored by Spanish colonizers due to the lack of wealth these islands could offer to the Europeans. There were accounts about Carolinians drifting to the Philippines. Reports about the existence of the islands and their inhabitants prompted the sending of missionaries. The task to christianize the Carolines was spearheaded by the Jesuits. Like the missionaries in the Marianas, the Jesuit missionaries, especially the Italian born priest Fr. Juan Antonio Cantova, saw their role as a divine mission in which they would save souls for Christ. The native Carolinians who initially welcomed them almost immediately turned hostile fearing the loss of their traditions, customs and religion. Fr. Cantova and his companions met their deaths in the island of Ulithi as martyrs. A notable aspect in the quest of these missionaries is the role of the natives from the Philippines who accompanied them and similarly died as martyrs.

**Keywords:** *Carolines, Caroline Islands, Carolinians, missionary, mission, voyages, martyrdom, Jesuits*

## Background: The Caroline Islands

The Caroline Islands also known as the Carolines is a group of scattered 500 islands located above the equator comprising what is now the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau which is located just 500 miles east of Mindanao. During the early Spanish period, the Carolines and the Palau islands were treated as one group of widely scattered islands. The Carolines stretch far east to the present day Marshalls. The archipelago is divided into eastern and western parts with the island of Yap as the center of a prehispanic kingdom. The inhabitants of the islands are Austronesians whose ancestors migrated from Southeast Asia about 4,000 years ago. Like the people of the Marianas, the Carolinians are racially related to the Filipinos. During Spanish rule, the islands were known as *Nuevas Filipinas* or New Philippines and were governed politically from Manila and, like the Marianas, the islands were under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the diocese of Cebu. With the conclusion of the Treaty of Paris on December 10, 1898, the Marianas and the Carolines were separated from the Philippines. The island of Guam was ceded to the United States that year while the Carolines and the Northern Marianas became German possessions the following year.



Map of the Caroline Islands. (Coordinates: 06°03'N 147°05'E)

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, early Spanish explorers who reached the Philippines already knew about the existence of the Carolines. Sixteenth century explorers such as Alvaro de Saavedra and Ruy Lopez de Villalobos passed by the islands on their

way to the Moluccas during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Saavedra, who discovered the islands a year before, tried to return to New Spain by sailing eastward through the archipelago in 1529 but was forced to turn back because of contrary currents. Knowledge about the islands south of the Marianas was scanty except from castaways and from natives of the islands who were blown to the Philippines by storms. In 1686, the Spanish explorer Francisco Lazcano passed by the islands in 1688 and named the islands Las Carolinas or the Caroline Islands in honor of King Charles II (1646-1700).<sup>2</sup>



Map showing Micronesia which includes the Carolines along with the Philippines, Polynesia and Melanesia. (From Levesque, *History of Micronesia*)



An 18<sup>th</sup> century map showing the Philippines with the islands of the Western Pacific. (From Levesque, *History of Micronesia*)

<sup>1</sup> World Geographical Encyclopedia, Vol. 5 Oceania, Polar Regions, General Geography (New York: McGraw Hill, 1994), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Fr. Lucio Gutierrez, O.P. *Archdiocese of Manila A Pilgrimage in Time (1565-1999)* (Manila: The Roman Archbishop of Manila, 1999), p. 261.

## Encounters with the People of the Carolines

Though separated by a wide expanse of ocean, there were contacts between the Philippines and the Carolines. All of these contacts were accidental and unintentional. Records about encounters with people from the Carolines were recorded in Spanish writings. Perhaps the earliest written encounters with the islanders were mentioned in 1664 by Jesuit missionaries assigned to Samar and Leyte. That year, around 30 Carolinian canoes had arrived. The people aboard the boats told the missionaries that they came from islands in the east that were populated like anthills. There were around nine landings by Carolinians between 1664 and 1669.<sup>3</sup>



Map of Micronesia showing the Caroline Islands, the Mariana Islands, the Marshalls and the Gilbert Islands. (From Levesque, *History of Micronesia*)

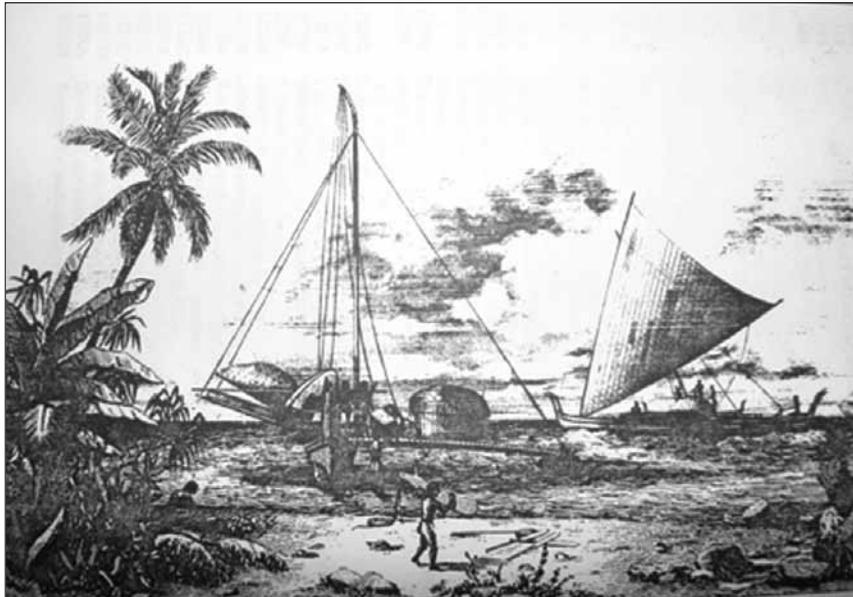
In 1671, the galleon *Buen Socorro* picked up some Carolinians who were half-dead from hunger and exposure off Capul Island in the San Bernardino Strait.<sup>4</sup> In 1674, four Carolinians landed in Carigara in northern Leyte. They made mention about two white men living in their islands consisting of a bespectacled priest who was baptizing their people. The other white man was described as a short, heavy man. The Carolinian accounts indicated that there were Europeans, most likely

<sup>3</sup> Francis X. Hezel, S.J. and Maria Teresa del Valle, *Early European Contacts with Western Carolines, 1525-1750*, *The Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. VII, pp. 25-29.

<sup>4</sup> S.H. Risenberg, *Table of Voyages Affecting Micronesian Islands*. *Oceania* XXXVI (2), p. 164. No. 200.

Spanish present in the islands.<sup>5</sup> Three castaways from the Carolines arrived in 1678. They narrated of an existence of an island empire which included 32 atolls. The men were referring to the Carolinian kingdom which had its seat in Yap.<sup>6</sup> More castaways narrated that there were other white men stranded in the Carolines, most probably they were victims of shipwrecks or were left in the islands.

In 1684, a Carolinian castaway reported that there were seven white men who arrived in the Carolines half-dead from hunger a few years back. They were nursed back to health and five of them married native women.<sup>7</sup> In 1695 six natives from Yap were stranded in the Philippines. They stayed in the colony for five months and returned to Yap after sailing for ten days. This was the first report of Carolinian castaways returning to their homeland from the Philippines.<sup>8</sup>



A Carolinian proa, one of the types used in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.  
(From Levesque, *History of Micronesia*)

<sup>5</sup> Hezel and del Valle, *ibid.*

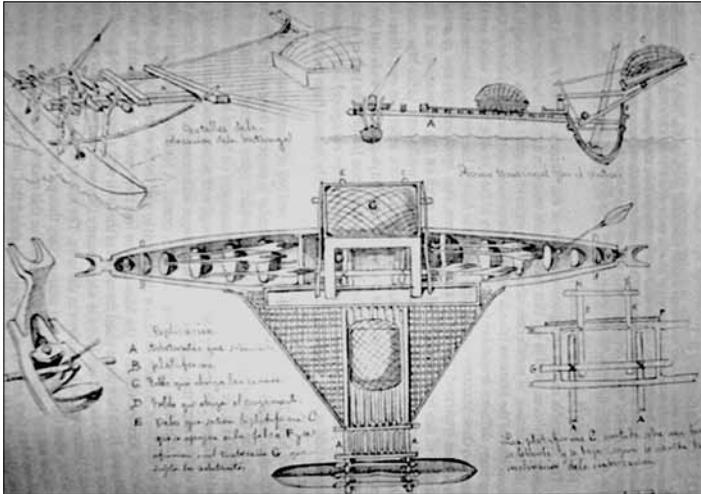
<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

The island of Yap is located 9 degrees 32'N and 138 degrees 07'E. The island measuring 100.2 square kilometers is also known as Wa'ab and is presently a state of the Federated States of Micronesia. Yap used to be the center of an ancient Carolinian kingdom and pre-colonial Carolinians come to Yap to pay tribute. The old Carolinian kingdom is noted for its giant stone coins.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> ARSI Fil. 13, fol. 333-344, *Letter from Fr. Paul Klein to Father General About the Caroline Islands, dated Manila, 10 June 1697*, Levesque, *History of Micronesia*, Vol. 8 (Dufresne: Levesque Publications, 1997). Cited as Document 1697F in HM vol. 9, pp. 40-113. This source will be hereinafter referred to as HM with volume number and pages cited.

Also: Neri, *op. cit.*, p. 141.



Detail of a Carolinian proa. (From Levesque, *History of Micronesia*)

Around the same year four Carolinian canoes left the island of Fais, to Ulithi to conduct trade. On their return trip the wind blew them off course. Three canoes were lost with sixteen people aboard. The remaining canoe managed to reach a town called Minay, Samar with nine men and two women. One of these died and another died sometime later. Four men surreptitiously sailed for home and were never heard from again.<sup>9</sup>

In 1696, a canoe so large that it was mistaken for a frigate because of its rather large size made an accidental journey from the Caroline Islands to the Philippines after having been lost at sea in a storm while passing between two islands. After seventy days, it arrived in the island of Samar 1,000 miles away. Aboard were men, women, children and babies numbering 35 individuals. None of whom had any idea where they were. The group landed in the town of Guiuan. They were trying to reach get to Lamotrek from Fais. Five persons died at sea while one died soon after landing. There was another account saying that there were 29 Carolinians who arrived in two canoes. It is possible that there could be multiple landings or just one group of Carolinian castaways.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Risenberg, *op.cit.*, p. 164, no. 203b.

Neri comments that there was no such place called Minay in Samar though there is one such place in Davao Oriental. It was possible that the Carolinians actually landed there.

See Wilhelm H. Solheim, Anselmo Legaspi and Jaime S. Neri, S.J. *Archaeological Survey in Southeastern Mindanao*, Manila and Honolulu: National Museum of the Philippines and University of Hawaii.

<sup>10</sup> Fedor Jagor, *Travels in the Philippines* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, Original English Edition, London, 1875), p. 184.

The length of the return trip however was highly unlikely because the Carolinians would be fighting contrary winds and currents. The island of Yap is located more than 800 statute miles from eastern Philippines. This means that they would have sailed 80 miles a day.

Fr. Paul Klein who was the secretary of Fr. Antonio Tuccio, the Provincial of the Province of the Philippines, happened to be visiting the island at that time. He used two women as interpreters who were themselves previous castaways from the Carolines.<sup>11</sup> While under the care of Fr. Klein, the castaways refused to eat rice thinking that these were small worms. The castaways stayed with the Jesuit mission for several months. Without informing the Jesuits, the castaways sailed for home in the same canoes. Pieces of wood later found on the beach indicated that boats broke up on their way to the Carolines and all the Carolinians were presumed to have drowned.<sup>12</sup>

There were indicators that there were more Carolinians in the Philippines than were actually recorded. A boy working at Fr. Klein's convent mentioned that years before the priest met the 1696 drifters, there were five castaways from the Carolines who stayed in Janda (Jagna, Bohol). They were most likely sent there by the Jesuits. Others were living at the Colegio de San Ignacio in Manila. This means that there were other castaways who arrived from the Carolines and many of them decided to live permanently in the Philippines. The servant boy who was the source of this information was himself a Carolinian castaway.<sup>13</sup>

In 1705 Fr. Andres Serrano, the Jesuit Procurator of the Philippines narrated in his *Breve Noticia* that he personally saw Carolinian canoes which drifted to the islands on eight different occasions. In a letter by Fr. Serrano to Fr. Pedro Roubinet written on Jun 10, 1710, it was reported that there were around 30 canoes from the Carolines drifted to the Philippines. The survivors reported that there were around 50 islands far to the east of the Philippines and that these were populated like anthills.<sup>14</sup> In 1708, Fr. Murillo Velarde reported that some natives from Palau were stranded in Palapag, Samar after encountering a storm that year. Another group of Carolinians arrived that same year. They were brought to Manila where they were officially interrogated about their islands.<sup>15</sup>

The existence of the islands and their inhabitants prompted authorities in Manila and the Marianas to begin attempts to colonize and christianize the Carolines. In 1683, the patache *San Francisco Xavier* made the first successful voyage from the Philippines to the Marianas. Upon its return to the Philippines the following year, the Royal Visitor Fr. Antonio Xaramillo recommended to the King of Spain that the Marianas be made as a base for the evangelization of the Carolines and that the

---

<sup>11</sup> AGI Fil. 322, Libro 11, Fol. 57-59v, in Coleccion Pastells, *Official Reactions to Fr. Clain's Report on the Caroline Islands*, cited as Document 1704D in HM10:444-446.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Hezel and Valle, *op. cit.*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Jagor, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

<sup>15</sup> Hezel and del Valle, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

return voyage to the Philippines should pass by the Carolines. The recommendation remained unimplemented until the 18<sup>th</sup> century when a patache from Manila to the Marianas was dispatched every two years.<sup>16</sup>

From his encounters with the Carolinians, Fr. Klein wrote to the Father General:<sup>17</sup>

I write to you this, my reverend Father, persuaded that you will be glad to hear news so advantageous to those of your children who have the good fortune to bring the faith to this new country. We have need of workers for there is so much work to do. We hope that you will have the kindness to send more workers to us and we will not forget us in your holy devotions...

The Jesuits then prepared to send a mission to the Carolines in 1697. Three thousand pesos were raised with alms from various religious residents for the mission and a sloop which was readied in Manila in September 1697. Aboard the sloop was a Flemish Brother Jaime Xavier, a man knowledgeable in navigational matters.<sup>18</sup> The vessel was to pass by Guiguan (Guiuan) where Father Francisco Prado resided, and in order for them to depart from said town for Palaos Islands. The Father had also prepared a large boat, used in the Visayas called *sacayan* by the natives in their language. This was a large outrigger canoe of the barangay type. In November, the sloop arrived at Balanguigan (Balangiga), a town near Guiuan. The Brother stepped ashore, and this was not with their lands were out a special providence from God, because that same night, a storm or *baguio* (typhoon) occurred, one so furious that the sloop dragged its anchors and pushed to the high sea, where it capsized, drowning all the crewmen who had been on board, as nothing was ever heard of them. Nevertheless, Brother Xavier went on to Guivan and he surveyed the boat that the Father had reserved, but he did not think it suitable to go out to the high seas with it. Therefore he returned to Manila.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, information about the Carolines and its inhabitants remained scanty. In 1700, the Ulithi atoll in the Carolines was accidentally rediscovered when a boat from the Marianas was driven there.<sup>20</sup> The islands of the atoll were named as the Chickpea Islands (Islas Garbanzos). It was earlier reached by Villalobos in 1543. In the following year, one of the Chamorro boats in Guam was sent to meet

---

<sup>16</sup> RAH 9/26/2677, *Letter of Fr. Antonio Xaramillo to the King, 29, June 1684*, cited as Document 1684L in HM 8: 142-143.

<sup>17</sup> ARSI Phil. 13, Fol. 326-332v, *Arguments against Moving all Chamorros to the Philippines. Fr. Bustillo to the Father General, dated 14 April 1702*, cited as Document No. 1702A in HM: 360.

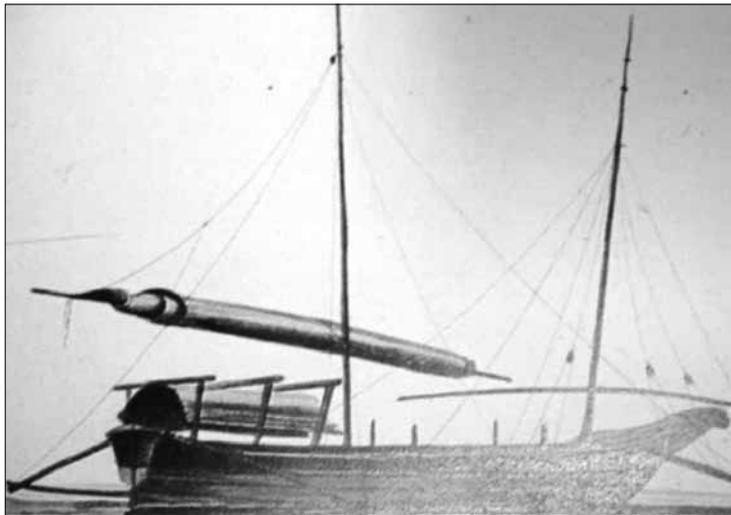
<sup>18</sup> Fr. Murillo Velarde, *Historia de Filipinas Book 1, Chapter 24, The Jesuits' Vain Attempt to Explore the Carolines in 1697*, cited as Document 1697K in HM 10: 443-444.

In his writings, Fr. Murillo Velarde mistakenly identified Fr. Xavier as a Dutchman.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> ARSI Phil. 13, Fol. 326-332, *Letters of Fr. Bustillo to Fr. General, Guam 14 April 1702*, cited as Document 1702A in HM 10;360.

the galleon which did not wish to anchor though the weather was good and it was already in the port. The boat did not reach the galleon for it went too far and became unable to make land. Aboard the said boat were 26 men, 23 of whom were Mariano Indians. All of them were able-bodied lads. The boat and its crew drifted to the Philippines and only ten of the 23 Indians managed to return to Guam aboard the patache from Manila. The returnees narrated their adventure on the boat. According to them the captain of the boat was Juan Flamenco (his real last name was Martin and he was German). On the second day, after losing sight of this island of San Juan of Guan (Guam), they sighted about 50 leagues from here, 28 islands inhabited by Indians who were naked tattooed, and as dark as mullatos. Their lands were full of the same fruit trees as in the Marianas, and they bore no weapons whatever. Their canoes were the same as those here, but not their language, because they could not understand it. However said, Captain wished to step ashore to get some water for his boat, because he carried not one drop of it, and had no weapons for his defense. Those Indians threw stones at him, with their hands (without slings, or other tools) and they prevented him from doing so. Thus he was forced to withdraw, and took a course for the Philippines.<sup>21</sup>



A patache during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Interest in the Carolines reached the monarchies and religious societies of Europe. King Philip V of Spain (1700-1746), King Louis XIV of France, the master general of the Jesuits and Pope Clement XI (1700-1721) showed great interest in organizing an expedition to the islands. In 1705, King Philip V sent a cedula to the Viceroy of Mexico and to the Governor General of the Philippines and another to the

<sup>21</sup> AGI FIL 332 Libro 11 Fol. 57-59v, pp. 182-186, *Report by Fr. Lorenzo Bustillo*, cited as Document 1704D in HM 10:444-446.

archbishop of Mexico and the archbishop of Manila ordering them to work together for this enterprise.

The Governor General of the Philippines, Domingo Zabalburu, prepared a galleon in 1706. In this expedition were four Jesuits, Fr. Jose de Bobadilla, Fr. Antonio Arias, Francisco Cabia and a lay brother. The expedition failed as supplies ran out as soon as it left the Philippines.<sup>22</sup>

In 1707, a new expedition was attempted and a better-maintained vessel was loaded with plenty of supplies and it was headed by an expert pilot. The ship returned to Manila as it was beaten by winds, storms and lack of supplies.<sup>23</sup>

In September 1710, another expedition was set up from Manila with 86 soldiers and people. It carried three Jesuits, Fr. Jacobo Duberon, Fr. Jose Cortil<sup>24</sup> and Bro. Esteban Baudin. The group was joined by a smaller one aboard a smaller vessel near Palapag. This group was headed by Fr. Bobadilla and Fr. Andres Serrano who tried to go to the Carolines in 1706. On November 30 1710, they sighted the island of Sonsorrol, part of the Palau island group. They decided to name the island San Andres in honor of the saint whose date was commemorated that day. Fr. Duberon and Cortil landed on the shore along with some other people. They planted a cross on the shore to serve as a point of reference and raised the Spanish flag to signify the taking possession of the island to the Spanish Crown. When they returned to the shore, they found that their boat was not there anymore. It was swept away by the waves towards Mindanao where it was found in Lianga Bay on January 3, 1711. Fr. Duberon and Fr. Cortil were left on the island and were never heard from again. It was believed that they and their party were massacred and eaten by the natives.<sup>25</sup>

In 1711, an expedition from the Marianas led by Fr. Gerard Bouwens, tried to reach the Carolines but again failed due to adverse winds and currents. Frustrated and sick Fr. Bouwens returned to Guam and later to Saipan where he died that same year.<sup>26</sup>

Shortly after their debacle at Sonsorrol, Fr. Andres Serrano and the government of Manila organized another mission to the Palau islands. The new expedition consisted of Europeans and mariners which left Cavite. The expedition

---

<sup>22</sup> Fr. Lucio Gutierrez, op. cit., pp-261-262.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>24</sup> Also spelled as Cortyl in other documents.

<sup>25</sup> Stoklein's Welt-Bott no. 222, *First Letter of Fr. Philippe Cazier about the Carolines, dated Canton 5 November 1720*, cited as Document 1720D in HM12:210-212.

<sup>26</sup> Fr. Muscati, Trans. Van Hamme, *Letter from Fr. Muscati to the Provincial in Manila Announcing the Death of Fr. Bouwens* (Arnhem: P. Visschers Onuitgegeven Brieven, 1857), pp. 96-197, cited as Document 1712E in HM 11:517-529.

did not manage to leave the Philippines as their boat sank off Marinduque. All hands aboard the boat including Fr. Serrano, Fr. Ignacio Crespo and Bro. Esteban Baudin drowned.

In 1715, the King of Spain issued an order for the colonization of the Carolines. In 1717, the governor of the Marianas Juan Antonio Pimentel wrote his intention to the King in leading the colonization of the Carolines. He proposed that twenty-five men would come from the Mariana garrison aboard the patache that would come from Manila the men would be accompanied by two Jesuit missionaries. His was counterproductive because sending twenty five men meant depleting his own garrison and the dispatch of two priests will similarly deplete the mission as there were only six religious left in the Marianas and that there was no new mission band which arrived since 1709. Pimentel requested for the royal provision for twenty-five men that would board the patache from the Marianas to the Carolines. The men should come from the Philippines.<sup>27</sup>

The King however admonished Pimentel from undertaking such a venture without informing first the Council of the Indies. He also said that such attempts without proper knowledge of the islands would add more expenses to the Spanish treasury. He said that Pimentel should wait first for the Council of the Indies to deliberate on this matter before carrying out any action.<sup>28</sup>

The leadership of the possible colonization of the Carolines instead was given to General Antonio Fernandez de Rojas in January 1718. Rojas was to serve as the frontier governor of the Palau islands. He submitted a plan that included the provision of one hundred Spanish soldiers and another one hundred Pampangos with good weapons, a sufficient supply of ammunition, a war train and a good sea crew. The voyage was to leave the Philippines in June or July and the expedition should first take the subsidy to the Mariana Islands. Then proceed to the islands of Panlog and San Andres the following year. The expedition did not push through because Rojas did not have enough funds to finance the mission. The Mariana mission also could not furnish men because this would deplete the garrison of the colony.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> AGI Ultramar 561, Legajo 13, *Letter from Governor Pimentel to the new Governor of the Philippines, dated Umatac 13 June 1717*, cited as Document 1717E in HM12: 71-77, E1.

<sup>28</sup> AGI Fil. 333, libro 12, fol. 149v-150, pp. 354-355; copy in Coleccion Pastells, Fil 4, pp 396-397. F1. *Letter from the King to the Governor of the Marianas, dated Aranjuez 20 June 1715*, cited as Document 1715F in HM12: 17-18.

Also: AGI Fil. 333 libro 12, fol. 149-149v, pp. 353-354; AGI Ultramar 561, Legajo 13, copy in Coleccion Pastells, Fil. 4, 395-396, F2. *Letter of the King to the Governor of the Philippines, dated Aranjuez June 20 1715*.

<sup>29</sup> AGI Ultramar 561, Legajo 13, A1. *Representation made by General Don Antonio Fernandez de Rojas, Frontier Governor of the Palao Islands, dated 18 January 1718, Exploration of the Carolines*, cited as Document 1718A in HM 12:90-96.

The Governor of Manila (the Philippines) was ordered to arrange for the exploration of the islands of the Palaos as soon as possible. In September 1710, a shipwreck happened in the island of Sonsorrol. Fr. Andres Soriano described the island which he said was inhabited by 800 Indians of so much docility that converting them will be easy. Two religious priests were going there as missionaries and a total of 12 persons and leaving them there the ship without its launch will land at the first island.<sup>30</sup>

In 1718, the patache *Santisima Trinidad* and its sloop lost its way back to the Philippines. The two vessels reached an area which appeared to be Palau where the crew encountered natives who appeared to be gentle and docile. The vessel could not dock because of lack of anchorage. Two missionaries went ashore and were never seen again. It was suspected that they became victims of cannibals. It was recommended that at least one hundred Spanish soldiers and Pampango soldiers with good weapons, a sufficient quantity of ammunition and a good sea crew should be dispatched there. The request was sent to the Governor of the Philippines, Fernando Manuel de Bustillo Bustamante. The Governor of the Marianas could not afford to send soldiers because this would deplete its garrison.<sup>31</sup>

It would take a more than a decade before a mission headed by the Italian Jesuit missionary Fr. Juan Antonio Cantova would set foot in the Carolines.

### **Fr. Juan Antonio Cantova and his Mission**

Fr. Juan Antonio Cantova was born on March 15, 1686 in the town of Stresa, Italy, which is located on the shore of a lake called Lago Maggiore. The town was part of the Archdiocese of Milan. His parents were among the well-known people of the place. His uncle was a dean of the college of St. Stephen the Great in Milan. Upon reaching a suitable age, his parents sent him to this great city under the assistance of his uncle who was described as “a man of great sainthood.”<sup>32</sup>

While studying rhetoric, he told his spiritual Father about his desire to join the religious life and to withdraw from the world to join the Society of Jesus. He had shown great fervor in joining the Society. The only obstacle to his vocation however,

---

<sup>30</sup> AGI Fil. 215; AGI Fil 333, libro 12, fol. 169-179, pp. 393-395. AGI Ultramar Legajo 13, F3. *Second letter to the Governor of the Philippines dated Aranjuez 20 July 1715*, cited as Document 1711Fin HM1221-22.

<sup>31</sup> AGI Ultramar 561, legajo 14 (Fil. 134?) *Representation made by Frontier Governor of Palao Island, Gen. Don Antonio Rojas, dated 18 January 1718*, cited as Document 1718C in HM 12:93-95.

<sup>32</sup> ARSI Phil. 30, fol. 379-416, *Carta del Fulcherio Spilimbergo, Provincial de la Provincia de Filipinas acerca de la Vida, Virtudes, y gloriosa muerte del VP Juan Antonio del Cantova de la Compania de Jesus, Muerto a los moros e barbaros Carolinas saca a la Luz publica (Biography of Fr. Juan Antonio Cantova)* cited as Document 1734C HM: 13: 326:

was his frail health. It was morally certain that he would not be able to support the heavy burden of religious studies and rigorous discipline. Nevertheless, he went to see Fr. Francisco Rasinoli, who was then Provincial of the Society in Milan to whom he told his great desire, and at the same time fearing rejection. His fear however soon vanished when he received the answer of the Father Provincial who esteemed the many qualities of Cantova's soul over those of his body. He sent him to the Novitiate of Genoa where he went with great consolation. On Marcy 28, 1703, he put on the cassock of the Society.<sup>33</sup>

After his first year in the novitiate, he returned to the great college of Milan to take courses in Theology and Philosophy. He also taught poetry and music. While undertaking his studies there, Cantova performed extremely well and never lost sight for caring for his religious perfection. He was always busy studying and obeyed the rules in the novitiate as if he was still a novice. He never broke his vow of silence. Cantova's models for his behavior were St. Louis Gonzaga who was canonized when Cantova was living in Manila. Another model was Brother John Berkman. His fellow novices saw in him a constancy in virtue, maturity and seriousness in whatever he does. Cantova's biographer, Fr. Spilimbergo, who later wrote his eulogy noted that "Cantova has never been a child."<sup>34</sup>

The priest who wrote the sketch of his life, made a eulogy of him expressing his virtue and finished the letter with these words: "And to say briefly what I feel about the Venerable Father Cantova, based on my extensive contact with him, and even in matters of conscience, I declare with complete truth, and assertion, that his reputation among the novices, when a novice, and among student, when a student, was such that I have reasons to believe very strongly that his reverence died with the baptismal innocence."<sup>35</sup>

Cantova could have contented himself being a teacher but he yearned to be sent across the seas as a missionary. He repeatedly made petitions to be included in the missions to the Indies to the Father General. The latter wrote to him telling him to go to Genoa and from there embark at the first opportunity to Cadiz where he was to find the Father Procurator of the Philippine Islands who was returning to his province. Cantova was to accompany His Reverence to his missions.

The only thing that could derail his plans was his poor health. Though not very sickly, he suffered many serious illnesses in the course of his studies. At one point, he was diagnosed as suffering from phthisis. However by the time he left for Genoa, his health began to improve and his nature became stronger. In fact during

---

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326.

the course of the voyage to Cadiz, he was one of the strongest and the most robust of the members of the mission. During the three voyages: from Genoa to Cadiz; from Cadiz to Mexico and from Mexico to the Mariana Islands, he showed his warm zeal and apostolic spirit by keeping busy for the spiritual benefit of his neighbors without discriminating between persons.

During the voyage to Mexico, the admiral of the fleet made a vow of presenting the main-sail to the statue of Christ of Good Voyage in Veracruz. Cantova was in the company of the Father Procurator and the ship was commanded by General Antonio Serrano. There was some danger before entering the port (possibly due to a hurricane). Before finally entering Veracruz, Cantova was assigned to give the sermon of thanksgiving for the favor that was received. Such was the great esteem he gained upon arriving in Mexico. The ship bearing Cantova and his group arrived in Veracruz on October 9, 1717.<sup>36</sup>

While in Mexico, he defended his final thesis in theology in the large and famous university in the colony. He prepared himself two months for that great trial and after finishing his studies, he presented himself to the Superior of the mission and he asked that he would be asked to remain in the Marianas to do his apostolic mission in the islands.

Cantova arrived in the Marianas during the end of June 1718 and stayed there until the middle of 1722. During his stay of more than four years he suffered much for the glory of God. During his stay, the Father Vice Provincial got to know him well. He was made vice rector for the seminary for boys in Guam. This seminary was founded and funded with donations from the King who looked only to the spiritual welfare and also the material welfare of these poor natives. The boys were raised there at no cost to their parents and when they left the seminary to get married, they were dismissed and given an abundant supply of necessities. While studying at the seminary they learned how to read and write and to sing when they attended the divine offices in the churches. They are also taught good customs and efforts to give them the solid roots in the mysteries of our Holy Faith.<sup>37</sup>

Cantova took charge of this seminary with great application that it caused much wonder to see an individual with so many qualities educating the boys, teaching them how to form their letters, correcting their slates or teaching them Christian doctrines and other prayers of catechism. Later, the Father Vice Provincial appointed him to be the teacher of Spanish in the garrison. He did not let fatigue or hardship get in the way and applied himself to convince the soldier to abandon vice

---

<sup>36</sup> Prior to departure, Cantova was given a medical examination which describes to us his appearance. He was then 24 years old, with brown hair, slim and rather tall.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333.

in favor of Christian virtue. He used the same spiritual exercises of our Holy Father which he would give in the church exhorting and exciting them in private talks.

### **Conflict with the Governor of the Marianas**

While he was serving as Vice Rector of the seminary in Agaña, Cantova became involved in a conflict with the governor of the colony, Juan Antonio Pimentel. The governor assumed office from 1709 to 1720. Like many governors of the islands, Pimentel exploited the people by making them work in the fields to produce foodstuff which were sold to the passing galleons at very high profits. He paid them in inferior tobacco leaves which proved to be unsmokeable. Pimentel controlled trade in the island by dictating that the people and the soldiers of the garrison buy their needs from the government store whose goods he practically owned. Pimentel encouraged gambling among his troops until they were bankrupt. Gambling was another reason for the poverty of the garrison. Instead of trying to eliminate gambling, the governor supported it with all his power. He even offered the colony's Sargento Mayor, Jose Quiroga, a bribe from the gambling if he wanted him to go along with it and ignore the fights that broke out. In this way, the governor exhausted all the money in these islands.<sup>38</sup>

Pimentel was also engaged in the *aguardiente* (lambanog to the Filipinos) trade which he bought for a pittance and sold the same to the natives and the soldiers at high prices. The governor earned up to 500% profit. Consequently, all the Philippine and Mariano indios and Spaniards were in debt to the governor who practically claimed the entire payroll of the garrison. The soldiers were left shirtless and shoeless as the prices of commodities in the island of Guam became too exorbitant.<sup>39</sup>

The worst of Pimentel's acts involved the women of the island. The governor converted his house into a school for girls. There he lived in open concubinage with the native women. Pimentel was described to be rather old but without a wife, yet he made the girls live in his house and the girls eventually wished to live in the governor's residence. The story of the scandal in the island reached Manila and the governor's palace in Guam was known as the "Harem of the Great Turk."<sup>40</sup>

The girls eventually married some soldiers of the garrison but even after marriage the women would still stay with the governor. If the soldier-husband agreed to this arrangement he may be promoted to lieutenant or even captain. If he

<sup>38</sup> AGI Fil., 95- 1 & 2, *Two letters from Major Quiroga to the King, 1719 & 1720*, Cited as Document 1719B in HM 12: 169.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

disagreed, he would lose his position and was condemned to the stocks. Their wives make a joke of their husbands, leave them at the first opportunity and flee to the palace where they added to his collection of women.<sup>41</sup>

Governor Pimentel also influenced the religious life of the natives. He rarely availed of the sacraments especially confession and communion which he received only once a year. He publicly boasted about this behavior and he also wished that the natives do the same. The natives out of fear of the governor also avoided receiving the sacraments. The missionaries complained about Pimentel's practices and this brought them in direct confrontation with the governor's palace. Pimentel demanded that the Jesuits turn over to him the accounts of the mission. The Vice Provincial of the Order, Fr. Ignacio Ibarguen, refused, saying that he would not give over the funds for the seminary since he could not do so in compliance with the constitution of the Society of Jesus. He also said that the governor did not have the authority to review the books of the order. Jose Quiroga, the Sargento Mayor of the colony commented that the people should not imagine that he misused the funds that His Majesty gave the school.<sup>42</sup>

Cantova was accused of upsetting the people because of what he preached and what he said in the confessional. In Cantova's defense, Sargento Mayor Quiroga noted that he "heard him preach (Cantova) many times and he seemed reasonable and prudent to me. There has never been a word of his offense in the confessional. They said that the governor has charged the priests with scandal in writing but I have no desire to read this recital of calumnies."<sup>43</sup> Another reason of Pimentel's resentfulness was because the priest was trying to trick him to do more than he had to do.<sup>44</sup>

The governor also accused the priests of saying scandalous things in their sermons, delaying sacramental absolution and others. — Governor Pimentel accused the priests of making public his sins.<sup>45</sup> Quiroga noted that the governor prosecuted "those who have changed their lives as hypocrites and sanctimonious persons and he railed against the priests as inventors of novelties and rebels against the republic." He said that all of the charges of the governor were calumnies and pure invention.<sup>46</sup> Later, Pimentel ordered that Ibarguen and Cantova be exiled to the remote area of

---

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *op. cit.*, ARSI Phil. 30, fol. 379-416, *Carta del Fulcherio Spilimbergo, Provincial de la Provincia de Filipinas acerca de la Vida, Virtudes, y gloriosa muerte del VP Juan Antonio del Cantova de la Compania de Jesus, Muerto a los moros e barbarous Carolinas saca a la Luz publica* (Biography of Juan Antonio Cantova).

<sup>45</sup> Letter of Major Quiroga, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171-172.

Guam in Umatac. Later, he issued another order exiling them to Spain. The order to deport them to Spain was not carried out because there was no ship to take them off the colony.

For Cantova, the deportation order was a sensitive blow because he did not want to be exiled nor leave the Marianas as an exile. According to his eulogy, “God willed that such a deportation did not take place. The governor had time to think it over and to recognize the excess of his rash decision. He somehow talked to the father to negotiate some agreement. The governor was satisfied and withdrew the deportation order and was absolved of the excommunication he incurred.”<sup>47</sup>

Later, the governor again began to hint that he might exile. Cantova, who had become the Vice Provincial of the mission after the departure of Fr. Iburguen to the Philippines, had another conflict with the governor. A person being pursued by the soldiers hid in his church seeking asylum. The governor’s men had the fugitive pulled out from the sanctuary by force prompting Cantova to issue an order of excommunication against the governor. Though in some days Pimentel stopped talking about exiling the priest and even talked about seeking absolution for what he had done, he never showed the slightest satisfaction to the injured party. He never desisted from showing enmity towards the fathers by words and deeds.<sup>48</sup>

The stormy relationship between the priests and the governor ended when Pimentel was ordered to be arrested in 1720 and, later, found guilty of the charges against him including his welcoming of the English pirates who captured the Nuestra Señora de la Encarnacion. He was replaced by Don Luis Antonio Sanchez de Tagle. Cantova did not stay long as Vice Provincial of the colony as a new Vice Provincial arrived.<sup>49</sup>

### **More Carolinian Arrivals**

On June 19, 1721, a canoe so large that was mistaken for a frigate arrived in Guam in a neighborhood called Orote. Aboard were 24 passengers: 11 men, 7 women and 6 children. Some of them disembarked and went into the bush and made provisions of coconuts and some roots. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, another canoe arrived in Talofofu. It carried 4 men, 1 woman and 1 child and they were taken to the town of Umatac where Governor Luis Sanchez de Tagle could be found. The arrivals of Carolinians in the Marianas gave the Spaniards the idea about the Carolines.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Carta del Fr. Fulcherio Spilimbergo, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

<sup>48</sup> Two Letters of Major Quiroga, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>49</sup> Carta del Fr. Fulcherio Spilimbergo, *op. cit.*

<sup>50</sup> Two Carolinian boats actually arrived, the first landed at Talofofu on June 19, 1721 and the other at Orote the next day. Aboard the first boat were 11 men, 7 women and 6 children making

From the new arrivals, the missionaries learned that the Carolines were divided into groups called by the Spaniards as provinces. From his contact with the Carolinians, Cantova managed to write about the islands, their inhabitants and their customs which can be seen in his report.<sup>51</sup> This was added to the works of other Jesuit missionaries.

The Carolines were described as having several provinces. The first province consisted of the Torres Islands or Hogelu which was the name of the main islands. Its inhabitants, who were blacks, mulattoes and whites, were ruled by a king whose dominion encompasses many populated islands distant from 8, 15, 30 leagues from each other.<sup>52</sup>

The second province consists of 26 islands, 14 of which are well-populated. Their names were Ulee, Eurrupuc, and Farriolep. The latter was discovered in 1696 by pilot Juan Rodriguez when he ran aground at Santa Rosa bank it was distance over 45 degrees from Guahan (Guam). The drifters to the Marianas came from this island.<sup>53</sup>

The third province is a complex of islands about 25 leagues in length and 15 in width, first of which is called Fais, discovered in 1712 by Captain Fernando de Egui.<sup>54</sup>

The fourth province is located about 30 degrees leagues west of the third one. The Island of Yap is the main one and it is more than 40 leagues in circumference. It

---

a total of 24 persons. Immediately the mayor of Inarajan was notified. He, along with the father minister named Muscati and a few natives, arrived to meet with the guests. The newcomers especially the women were frightened and uttered many shouts. One of the men, more daring than the rest, approached the father and offered him a few small gifts from his island, which consisted of a few pieces of coral, the type used to make bracelets and some reddish or yellow paste which they used to rub on their bodies during festivities.

The second boat carried four men, one woman and one child they were taken to the town of Umatac. When they were brought in contact with the other drifters, they showed great joy at recognizing one another. It was learned that the two crafts were part of four canoes which left the island of Farriolep- to go to the island of Ule (Woleai) where they met a strong westerly wind and were forced to seek their way separately for 20 days. One of the unfortunate men died within a few hours. Just before dying, he received baptism. His clothes were a piece of cloth open in the sides that covers the shoulders and the chest and reaches down to the knees. The women wore a piece of cloth that encircles the waist and passed between the legs. The same as the men who used a sort of skirt that reached down to the calf of the legs. They had holes in the ears from which they hanged some flowers, aromatic herbs, coconut nuggets, glass beads and some large rings of various types. They were well shaped, rather tall, proportionally fat, with frizzy hair, flat noses, big and lively eyes and a well-furnished beard.

<sup>51</sup> AGN Historia Jesuitas, Vol. 308, fol. 413-422, *Report of Fr. Cantova Regarding the Arrival of Carolinian Canoes in 1721*, cited as Document 1722D in HM12:423-474.

<sup>52</sup> AGI Ultramar S61, *Letter from Governor Sanchez to the King Agaña 1721, Treatise on the Carolines*, edited by Governor Ibanez, cited as Document 1721C in HM12: 246.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

is well populated and very fertile. One can find *camotes* and other root crops brought from the Philippines by a Carolinian who had drifted over there by a similar incident. They have multiplied so much that they can be supplied to the other islands of the archipelago.<sup>55</sup>

The fifth province is about 45 leagues from the island of Yap and consisted of a large number of islands called Palaos and Panleau (Palau) inhabited by the Indians.<sup>56</sup> There are seven islands lined up north to south. Their lord held court at Yalap (Galap island) the people of this large town are so inhuman and barbarian that they eat human flesh. Some 25 leagues to the southwest are two islands of San Andres called by the natives as Sorol and Cadocopul (Tobi Island).<sup>57</sup>

### **Fr. Cantova in the Carolines**

Upon arriving in Inarajan, Cantova brought the Carolinians to Talofofu. He brought them to this port town to give them shelter and necessities. He baptized those who intended to stay in the Marianas. Later, the castaways decided to return to their islands. It was an opportunity for the missionaries to go to the islands and Fr. Cantova decided to go with them to start the first mission in the Carolines. The voyage was dangerous because previously two Jesuits were lost on their way to Sonsorrol. Governor Tagle provided Cantova with a launch and an escort of 14 to 16 soldiers who would also serve as sailors. Along with the two Carolinian canoes, the launch sailed towards the Carolines. An Indian chief was forced to stay with Cantova as a hostage. On the way, the launch lost sight of the two canoes and it was decided that the launch should return to the Marianas.<sup>58</sup>

The small boat bearing Cantova and his group was not able to gain the latitude of their origin and it went off course. The supply of drinking water aboard the launch was running out and the boat allowed itself to drift towards the Philippines. Fortunately, the supply of drinking water was replenished by rainfall otherwise Cantova and the rest of the men would have died of thirst. He arrived in Manila and his arrival in this city caused a great stir. Soon after his arrival, Cantova professed his four vows on August 15, 1722. Now an ordained priest, Fr. Cantova stayed in the city for the next seven years. During his stay in the capital of the Philippines, he was assigned as chair of theology and served as a teacher in the Jesuit College of the city for the next six years. He labored for the glory of God. Aside from serving as a teacher he became the prefect of the sodality of the Spaniards and introduced the

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>56</sup> This is the present Palau islands.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Carta del Fr. Fulcherio Spilimbergo, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

custom of having the entire sodality visit hospitals and prisons to give food, clothing and money to the sick and to the prisoners. Community leaders of the city flocked to the sodality in a pious exercise. He also went outside to hear confessions for the sick and the dying. Another of his achievements was the opening of a *beata* (beaterio) or a house for poor Indian women. These beatas or female inmates increased to one hundred. The beaterio he founded in Manila lasted until 1835 when it was suppressed.<sup>59</sup>

In 1730, Fr. Cantova returned to the Marianas. Despite his first failure, he was undeterred to establish a mission in the Carolines. Mariners from the Marianas tried to reach the islands. Sighting of the islands of Palau was difficult. In many instances, the sailors had to attempt to reach the islands by zigzagging while fighting the contrary winds and currents until they reach the approximate distance of the islands which were nowhere to be found. For these reasons the islands were called *Islas Encantadas* or Bewitched Islands as if the devil did not want the inhabitants there to be christianized.<sup>60</sup>

It was decided that a small boat be built in the Philippines and sent to the Marianas in pieces where it would be reassembled for the use of the missionaries intending to sail to the Carolines.

While Cantova was in Manila, another group of Carolinians arrived in the Marianas in 1725. Among the castaways was a man named Digal. Digal showed a great desire of becoming a Christian and met Fr. Cantova after his return from the Philippines. After instructing him about everything a Christian must know, he baptized him. Cantova met Digal and heard about the sad state of his people. Fr. Cantova decided to bring the light of the Holy Gospel to his islands.<sup>61</sup>

Fr. Cantova succeeded in obtaining permission to go to the Carolines. On February 4, 1731, Fr. Cantova, accompanied by fourteen Indians from the Mariana colony, left to establish the new mission in the islands. He was accompanied by Fr. Victor Walter, a German Jesuit. After a safe voyage of about a week, he arrived in one of the Caroline islands called Falelep which Cantova placed under the protection of St. Ignatius de Loyola.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.

<sup>60</sup> Stocklein's Welt Bott, XVII, No. 540, *Report on the Caroline Islands by Fr. Joseph Kropf dated Acapulco, 6, March 1732*, cited as Document 1732A in HM 13: 239-251.

Also: AGI Fil. 320/AHN Ultramar 5352, part 2 Official Report on Fr. Cantova's Expedition to the Carolines. The document came from one of the Jesuit papers which were seized in Manila following the expulsion of the order from the Philippines in 1768.

<sup>61</sup> Carta del Fr. Fulcherio Spilimbergo, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

<sup>62</sup> ARSI Phil. 13, Fol. 365-366v, *Extract of Letter from Fr. Wolfgang Berchtold to Fr. Maliardi Events at Ulithi, as reported in the Philippines, dated Mexico, 1, March 1734*, cited as Document 1734B in HM13:292-295.

One of the Fathers stepped ashore with a good guard of soldiers and was politely received by the Carolinians. Fr. Cantova began to preach the Faith of Jesus Christ to these islanders in their own language. Digal taught the good father his own language while he was in the Marianas. He acted as his interpreter and guide. While instructing the older adults in the Christian Faith, many small children of both sexes were brought to him and the two Fathers baptized 107 of them.<sup>63</sup>

While Fr. Cantova and his companions were initially successful in their effort to convert the natives to Christianity there was a lack of everything in Falelep, even drinking water. The people survived by eating fruits grown by the local people. It was decided that some of the members of the mission should return to the Marianas to get more supplies. Fr. Cantova was to remain in the islands while Fr. Walter should go back to the Marianas.<sup>64</sup>

On the way back to the Marianas, a storm hit the boat and it was pushed west to Manila where Fr. Walter had to wait for the next vessel bound for the Marianas in 1732. On the way to the Marianas, the boat was hit by another storm and it was wrecked in the town of Merizo in Guam. Only a few people aboard were rescued.<sup>65</sup>

Fr. Walter was not discouraged by the mishaps he experienced and not wishing to abandon the companions he left behind in the Carolines, obtained another vessel with a good supply of provisions. He was accompanied by Bro. Lewin Schreiber and left Merizo on May 31, 1733, attended by 44 persons with 42 other soldiers and seamen. After battling strong currents and winds for three months, Fr. Walter arrived at Falalep on 9 June 1733. A canon shot was fired to signal their arrival but no one from the mission came out to meet them. The boat went within pistol shot of the shore and the group could not see the cross that Fr. Walter himself planted before. It had been demolished and the hut of Fr. Cantova which was built near the shore was razed to the ground.<sup>66</sup>

Fr. Walter and his companions began to ask the natives what happened and where Fr. Cantova was. "So suspicious of any contact, none of the Spanish wished to step ashore."<sup>67</sup> However, in the ship Fr. Walter questioned some of the islanders as to what happened to Fr. Cantova, the missionary and of the other Spanish in his company. They answered with coldness and tricky words. One of them admitted that the Father had moved from there with his companions and gone to another island.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> AGI 69-2-2, Fil. *Report made by Governor Valdes Tamon dated Manila, 6 July 1734*, cited as Document 1734B in HM: 296-298.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

The story made Fr. Walter suspicious. He decided not to come ashore and lured the natives to board his boat. He promised to buy some fruits from the natives and that he would pay them well. He hoped that one of the natives would come aboard his boat and tell him what happened to Fr. Cantova and his companions.<sup>69</sup>

The ruse worked. Using tobacco and biscuit to lure the islanders aboard the sloop canoe laden with fruits, 19 persons came aboard. One climbed aboard the Spanish ship with his load where he was welcomed with caresses and a host of various gifts from Europe. Upon seeing these, one of his companions also climbed aboard, but right after boarding the sloop, he became agitated and threw himself overboard and swam back to his canoe. He was returning to the beach for an unknown reason. Immediately, the Spanish grabbed the Indian who remained aboard the ship and placed him in irons so he could not escape. With a strident voice, he let his people know that force was being applied on him.

The islanders around the boat immediately armed themselves and let themselves be seen with weapons aboard various canoes at some distance from the Spanish ship. Muskets were fired to keep them away from the sloop. A few islanders were killed and many more were wounded. Finally, it was understood that the islanders were hostile and it would not be prudent to go ashore. The boat tried to sail for Yap. Not finding the island after three days, It was decided that the ship should proceed to Manila.<sup>70</sup>

During the voyage, they learned that the islander from Falelep knew everything about what happened to Fr. Cantova. The man named Bigal (Digal) whom he baptized, was the first to turn traitor. He plotted with the chiefs of that island to take the life of the missionary father, and those of his companions. Having arranged this deed, the traitor almost immediately approached Fr. Cantova with a story that on the nearby island of Mogmog,<sup>71</sup> there was a poor old man who was dying and wished to receive baptism. Fr. Cantova made haste to go to Mogmog accompanied by two Spaniards. Upon stepping ashore while he was trying to find the dying man's house, he was surrounded by a band of armed Indians. Instantly, the Father stopped and asked what was the meaning of the weapons they were carrying. The natives answered that they could no longer tolerate the preaching of the new law so opposed to their own, in which they wished to live, and die, like their ancestors. That said they raised their spears as if to fight.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

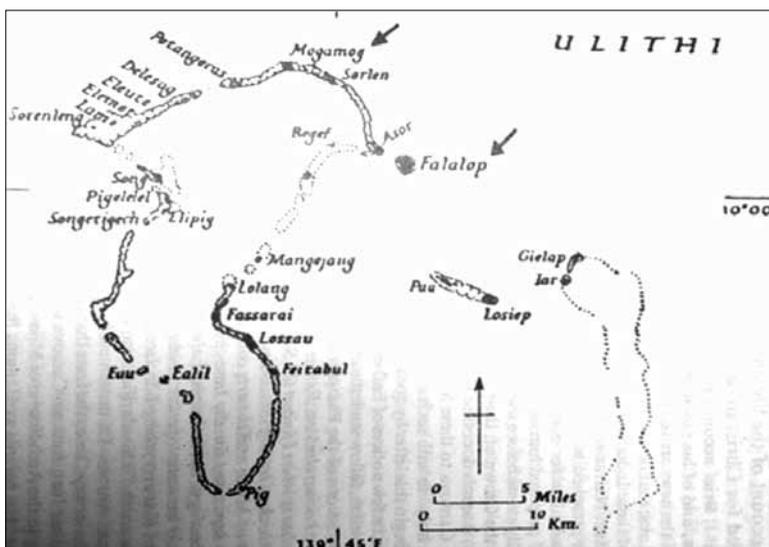
<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> This island is part of the Ulithi lagoon.

<sup>72</sup> The report of Governor General Tamon Valdes had more detail:

When Fr. Cantova asked the armed natives why they were carrying their weapons, the natives answered that they could no longer tolerate the preaching of the new law so opposed to their own, in which they wished to live, and die, like their ancestors. That said they raised their spears as if to fight.

Fr. Cantova immediately knelt down and raised his hands to heaven and recommended his soul to God. His Spanish companions did the same. In one instant, the Indians were upon them and they killed Fr. Cantova with three spears through the chest and did the same thing to his two Spanish companions. The assailants stripped Fr. Cantova of his clothes. They marveled at the whiteness of his skin. They wrapped the body in a mat and buried it in a little hovel, which was a method of internment the natives bestow only on their chiefs. The bodies of Fr. Cantova's companions were placed on a boat which was pushed into the sea.<sup>73</sup>



Map of Ulithi Atoll. Fr. Cantova was killed in Mogmog in 1731 while his mission was established in Falalap. (From Levesque, *History of Micronesia*)

After killing Fr. Cantova and his companions, the assailants proceeded to Falalap. The soldiers, seeing the armed natives approaching them, fired with the small field pieces they placed at the gate. This discharge did not frighten the barbarians, though it killed four of them. They advanced. The soldiers made a gallant defense until they were all killed. Their bodies were buried by the seashore. Eight Spaniards and four Indians from the Philippines died with Fr. Cantova that day. Only one person, a Tagalog boy named Domingo Lisardo who was Fr. Cantova's sacristan, was spared. He was given to one of the chiefs of the island who adopted him as his own son. Meanwhile, the Carolinians distributed the spoils of the deceased and made a few presents to the King of Yap. They then burned down the huts of the missionaries.<sup>74</sup>

See AGI, Fil. 69-2-2/Fil. 320. B2 Report by Governor Valdes Tamon dated 6 July 1734, cited as Document 1734B in HM.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

Not long after the massacre of Fr. Cantova and his companions according to a Carolinian prisoner, the people of the islands were afflicted by an epidemic which killed many people. This made the survivors consternated and repentant for the infamy they committed on some men from whom they had received all sorts of benefits.<sup>75</sup>

With the disaster in the Carolines, the Spaniards desisted from establishing a mission in the islands until the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The missionaries destined for these islands were sent instead to Inayuan and Sipalay in Negros Island in the Philippines.<sup>76</sup> It would take another century before Spain would firmly establish a foothold in the islands and this task would be accomplished by the Capuchins.

### Analysis and Conclusions

The Caroline Islands represented another area for Spanish colonial expansion in the Western Pacific. Although early Spanish explorers knew about their existence, little was known about the islands and their inhabitants. Historical accounts told them that the islands existed and that there were people living there who could be converted to Christianity. At a distance of 800 miles from the nearest point in the Philippines the Islas Carolinas are very close to the Philippines. Yet despite their proximity, the islands were not colonized due to several factors.

One factor was the lack of material incentives. The islands had little things of value such as precious metals, spices or silk. The Moluccas and the Philippines which lie to the west had more to offer. Some of the islands did not have a good supply of fresh water and the natives got their water only from coconuts.

Another factor was nature itself. It was very difficult to sail from the Philippines to the Carolines because of contrary winds and currents. A large ocean current called the North Pacific Equatorial current moves westward from the coast of Panama to the Philippines. There are also winds coming from the east. In the age of sailing ships, it is very important to take these factors into consideration and to oppose the winds and currents would mean courting disaster. Many ships were lost, fighting the contrary winds and currents. Voyages from the Philippines to the Carolines, like the ones to the Marianas, one had to follow a circuitous rather than a direct route. In following this route, it would take longer to sail from the Philippines to the Carolines than from the Carolines to the Philippines. Historical accounts placed the former at 26-28 days while the latter at 8 days only. This is due to the currents that existed between the Philippines and the Carolines.

---

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Letter from Fr. Nicholas Du Beron to Mr. Jacques Cortyl regarding his brother (Fr. Jose Cortil) lost at Sonsorrol, Les Kiekens les Anciens Missionnaires aux Iles Philippines précis Historiques, 1881, pp. 482-483, cited as Document 1755A in HM 13:380.*

Another factor concerned the resources of the Spanish colonizers. Sending men and ships to the Carolines represented a heavy drain among the Spanish colonizers. It was important for the Spanish colonizers to send men who were already trained or devout Christians including indios from the Philippines. They, after all, had the double mission of expanding the domain of the King as well as saving souls for Christ. The men who would go in the missions must know some sort of trade such as farming, fishing and construction to sustain and build the nascent colony. Another important qualification was that the men must be knowledgeable in military things to defend themselves against hostile locals. These qualified personnel were needed elsewhere to pacify the rest of the Philippines; to defend the colony from the Dutch, British, Japanese and other foreign threats as well as homegrown ones. Trained manpower was also needed in Spain's ventures in other more profitable lands such as the Moluccas, Cambodia and even China. They were also needed to build churches and galleons. The colonization and the evangelization of the Carolines including the Marianas were actually at a very low priority in the allocation of resources. The Spanish authorities had ships and men but hardly anything available for these tiny specks of land in the Pacific. Sending men to the Carolines from the Marianas and the Philippines would drain the manpower in these colonies. For the religious, the Carolines also represented another drain in the manpower. They were needed to minister the people of the Philippines who were more numerous. The workers in the proverbial vineyard of God are really very few.

Aside from the material and human resources, the Carolines represented a financial drain. Ventures to secure the islands would be very costly that even General Antonio Fernandez de Rojas, the man chosen by the King to lead in the colonization of the islands, declined the honor of being the conquistador of this frontier territory. He did not have the adequate funds to undertake the venture. Even the government of Spain was conscious about what could be called a "return on investment." Any disbursement from the royal treasury must have had a tangible and foreseeable return.

The missionaries operated under these trying conditions. Members of the Jesuit order were chosen for the task of evangelizing the islands of the western Pacific. Many of them would have lived long comfortable lives as laymen, since a number of them such as Fr. Cantova, were children of respected citizens in their own countries. Even as religious, they would have lived instead as teachers and ministers in their countries. Instead, they chose to be sent as missionaries in the largely unknown lands in the Indies. Even as missionaries in the East, they would have preferred ministering in the towns of the Philippines. Instead they preferred to serve the other souls in areas which hardly appeared on the map. The natives here were as important as those in the Philippines. The missionaries took pity on the islands because they felt that they were deprived of salvation. These were the natives who

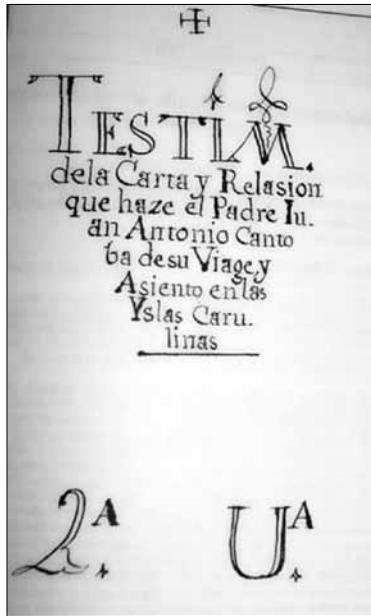
lived beyond the Spanish colonies, such as the Marianas and the Carolines. To the missionaries, even the most humble soul deserved saving. Undeterred by the various obstacles they worked to bring the Gospel to the farthest ends of the earth. They saw their work as contributing to the glory of God and the obstacles they met as trials set by the Divine.

Aside from the hazards of sea travel and hostile natives they also had to deal with enemies among the colonizers especially the civil officials. In the age of conquest the missionaries were a moderating factor. They denounced the abuses of the government officials and protected the people and the institution they stood for. Similar situations like the one experienced between Fr. Cantova and Governor Pimentel took place in colonies like the Americas and the Philippines. The Dominican Fr. Bartolome de las Casas in the Americas and the Jesuit Fr. Martin de Rada in the Philippines, presented memorials to higher officials including the King to improve public governance and to intensify their religious missions. The missionaries also gathered important information in their journals and other papers such as letters, reports and records. In doing so, they left an important trove of primary source information for historians. They provided what was like during the early part of Spanish domination.

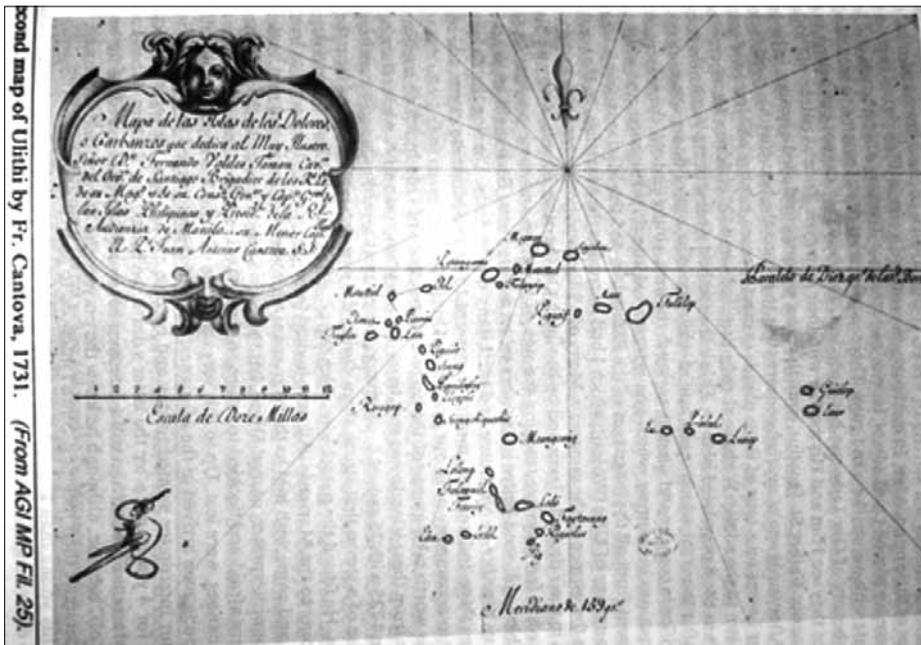
The missionaries ventured to these largely unknown islands and while some were turned back by the adverse natural conditions, others set foot on the islands and were never heard from again. To the missionaries, martyrdom while spreading the Gospel, was a great honor. In spreading the new religion however, the old one of the natives, along with their practices contrary to Christianity had to go. This demand of the missionaries to change the customs and traditions of the natives were met with resistance by the inhabitants. The result was often fatal for the missionaries. A number of religious, their lay assistants and soldiers died in the missionary effort. Another result of the missionary venture was the destruction of the native customs which were deemed to be inimical to Christianity. This aspect was denounced as satanic or works of the devil by the missionaries. This was the mode of thinking at that time and it would have contributed to the martyrdom of the missionaries. It would have been different today as aspects of the aboriginal culture might have been preserved as historical record. However, the old religious songs and practices and even the material religious objects were lost to history.

The disaster at Ulithi Atoll, which resulted in the massacre of the Spanish mission, represented one of the last attempts to establish a colony in the Carolines in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The lull in the missionary and colonization activity was not solely because of the hostility of the natives. Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Spain was in a gradual and downward spiral as a world power. The Jesuits who were the missionaries in the western Pacific area would be expelled from Spain

and all its colonies by 1768. They were replaced by the Capuchins and it would take them some time for them to renew the missionary enterprise began by the Jesuits.



Cover page of the report of the settlement of Ulithi atoll dating back to 1731, the year of Fr. Cantova's arrival. (From Levesque, *History of Micronesia*)



Map of Ulithi drawn by Cantova in 1731. (From Levesque, *History of Micronesia*)

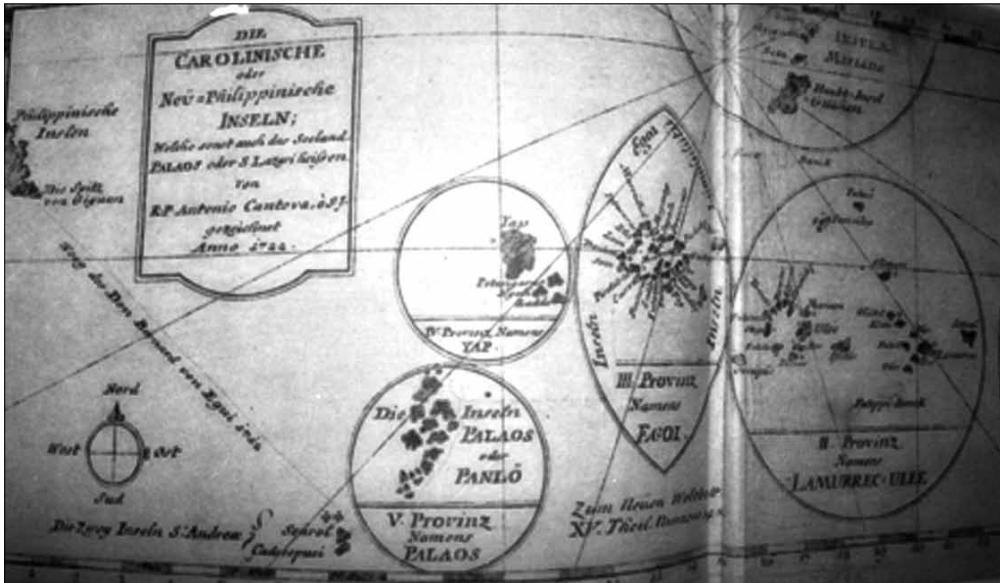
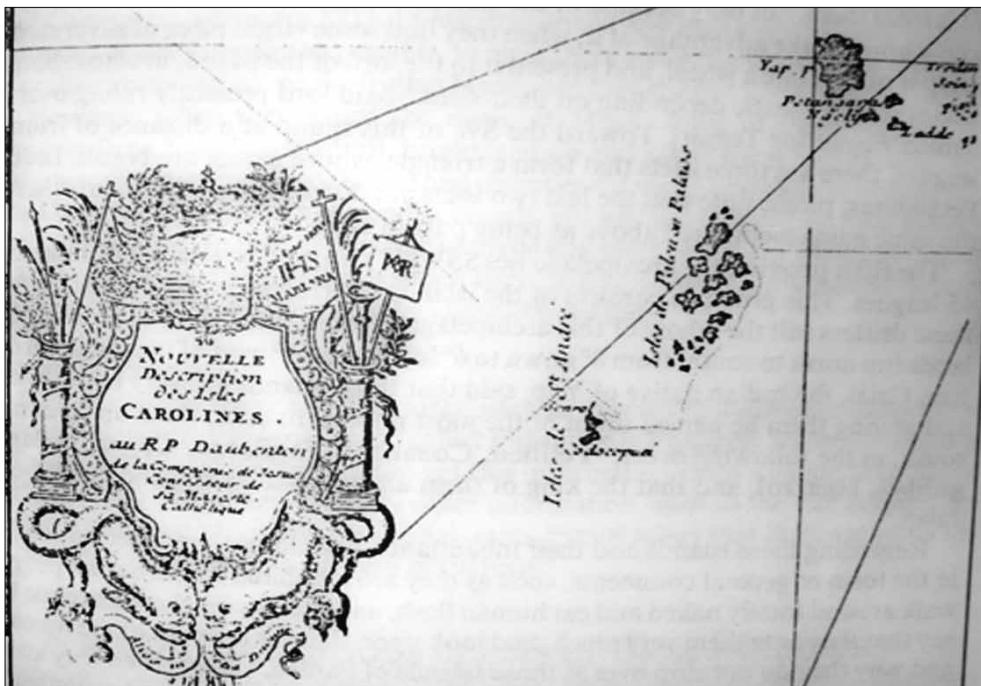


Chart of the Carolines based on the drawings by Fr. Cantova. A detail in this 18<sup>th</sup> century map showed its acknowledgement to Fr. Cantova. (From Levesque, *History of Micronesia*)



The chart of the Western Carolines drawn by Fr. Cantova in 1722 which shows the track of the patache Santissima Trinidad. (From Levesque, *History of Micronesia*)

By the 1880s, other powers would seek domination over the Carolines. Though these islands were claimed by Spain by right of discovery, they remained unoccupied and European powers like Germany, Great Britain and France disputed the Spanish claims. They contended that these islands were up for grabs since they were unoccupied and Spain had no effective control over them. Already the Germans landed at Yap as the first phase of its colonization. Germany occupied Yap and claimed it as its territory. Spain had to occupy the islands in order not to lose them to its rivals. Spain did not occupy any of the islands until 1886. Spain then sought the arbitration of Pope Leo XIII who decided in favor of Spain. The Germans on the other hand were given free trading rights. With Spanish occupation came Christianization. This task was accomplished by the Augustinian Recollects. Spain held the islands until 1899 when these were sold to Germany following Spain's defeat to the United States in the Spanish-American War in 1898. The islands along with the Northern Mariana Islands were sold for 5 million dollars.

One aspect of particular interest in the story of Fr. Cantova and the Carolinians is their relationship to the Philippines. Many Carolinians went to the Philippines as accidental castaways or drifters blown to the islands by storms and adverse winds and currents. Records in the Philippines bear witness to these accidental immigrants. Today, a study of the culture of the Eastern Visayan region shows an intermingling of Carolinian and Filipino influences. Some words in the Waray or the language of the Eastern Visayas had Carolinian influences. The word "Palawan" (palau) refers to the taro plant. perhaps this connection could be the subject of future studies. There is also an influence from the Philippines in the Carolines which reached the latter islands before Spanish colonization. The sweet potato (*camote*) was introduced into the island of Yap before the Spanish contact. The historical account by Ibañez narrated that the sweet potato and other root crops were already thriving in the Carolines in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. These plants introduced into the Philippines by the Spanish colonizers got it from American Indians from Peru or Chile. It turned out that the castaways who were blown off course to the Philippines brought the plant on their return trip to the Carolines. The Ibañez account says that the island of Yap was exporting the product to the other islands.

When the Carolines became a Spanish possession, it was politically administered from Manila. Ecclesiastically the islands, along with the Marianas, were part of the diocese of Cebu. During its occupation by Spain, many Filipino indios went there as soldiers, settlers and assistants of the missionaries. Exiles were also sent there among whom were those accused of complicity in the 1896 Philippine Revolution.

Finally another significant aspect of the missionaries in the Carolines is that many of them spent some time in the Philippines. Fr. Cantova himself spent seven years in Manila, did charitable work by organizing visits to hospices, hospitals and

prisons and even founded a *beaterio* for women. Many of the missionaries were not from Spain but from European nations allied with the ruling Hapsburg dynasty in Spain. For teachers, it would be unwise to call them “Spanish missionaries” when in fact a number of them like Fr. Cantova came from Italy; Fr. Walter came from Germany, etc. Aside from the foreign missionaries many natives or indios from the Philippines went to the Carolines as lay assistants and soldiers just like the companions of Fr. Diego Luis de Sanvitores in the Marianas. This showed that while the Philippines was an area of Christianization and colonization, it was itself a base of evangelization and conquest of other lands. The role of these natives deserves further study. ■

### Sources

Archival Sources appearing in *History of Micronesia* edited by Rodrigue Levesque, 20 Vols. Dufresne, Quebec, 1997-2002.

#### AGI (Archivo General de Indias)

AGI Fil. 322, Libro 11, fol. 57-59v, in *Coleccion Pastells, Official Reactions to Fr. Clain's Report on the Caroline Islands*, cited as Document 1704D.

AGI FIL 332 Libro 11 Fol. 57-59v, pp. 182-186, *Report by Fr. Lorenzo Bustillo*, cited as Document 1704D.

AGI Fil. 333, libro 12, fol. 149v-150, pp. 354-355; copy in *Coleccion Pastells, Fil 4*, pp 396-397. F1. *Letter from the King to the Governor of the Marianas, dated Aranjuez 20 June 1715*, cited as Document 1715F.

AGI Fil. 333 libro 12, fol. 149-149v, pp. 353-354; AGI Ultramar 561, Legajo 13, copy in *Coleccion Pastells, Fil. 4*, 395-396, F2. *Letter of the King to the Governor of the Philippines, dated Aranjuez June 20 1715*.

AGI Ultramar 561, Legajo 13, A1. *Representation made by General Don Antonio Fernandez de Rojas, Frontier Governor of the Palao Islands, dated 18 January 1718. Exploration of the Carolines*, cited as Document 1718A.

AGI Fil. 215; AGI Fil 333, libro 12, fol. 169-179, pp. 393-395. AGI Ultramar Legajo 13, F3. *Second letter to the Governor of the Philippines dated Aranjuez 20 July 1715*, cited as Document 1711F.

AGI Ultramar 561, Legajo 14 (Fil. 134?) *Representation made by Frontier Governor of Palao Island, Gen. Don Antonio Rojas, dated 18 January 1718*, cited as Document 1718C.

AGI Fil., 95- 1 & 2, *Two letters from Major Quiroga to the King, 1719 & 1720*, Cited as Document 1719B.

AGI Fil. 333 libro 12, fol. 149-149v, pp. 353-354; AGI Ultramar 561, Legajo 13, copy in *Coleccion Pastells, Fil. 4*, 395-396, F2. *Letter of the King to the Governor of the*

*Philippines, dated Aranjuez June 20 1715.*

AGI Fil. 320/AHN Ultramar 5352, part 2 *Official Report on Fr. Cantova's Expedition to the Carolines.*

AGI 69-2-2, Fil. *Report made by Governor Valdes Tamon dated Manila, 6 July 1734,* cited as Document 1734B.

AGI Ultramar 561, Legajo 13 cited as Document 1717E in HM12: 71-77, E1. *Letter from Governor Pimentel to the new Governor of the Philippines, dated Umatac 13 June 1717.*

AGI Ultramar 561, Letter from Governor Sanchez to the King Agaña 1721, *Treatise on the Carolines,* edited by Governor Ibanez cited as Document 1721C.

### **ARSI (Archivium Romanium Societatis Iesu)**

ARSI Fil. 13, fol. 333-344, *Letter from Fr. Paul Klein to Father General About the Caroline Islands, dated Manila, 10 June 1697,* Levesque, *History of Micronesia,* Vol. 8, cited as Document 1697F.

ARSI Phil. 13, Fol. 326-332v, *Arguments against Moving all Chamorros to the Philippines. Fr. Bustillo to the Father General, dated 14 April 1702* cited as Document No. 1702A.

ARSI Phil. 13, Fol. 326-332, *Letters of Fr. Bustillo to Fr. General, Guam 14 April 1702,* cited as Document 1702A.

ARSI Phil. 30, fol. 379-416, *Carta del Fulcherio Spilimbergo, Provincial de la Provincia de Filipinas acerca de la Vida, Virtudes, y gloriosa muerte del VP Juan Antonio del Cantova de la Compania de Jesus, Muerto a los moros e barbaros Carolinas saca a la Luz publica (Biography of Fr. Juan Antonio Cantova)* cited as Document 1734C.

ARSI Phil. 13, Fol. 365-366v, *Extract of Letter from Fr. Wolfgang Berchtold to Fr. Maliardi Events at Ulithi, as reported in the Philippines, dated Mexico, 1, March 1734,* cited as Document 1734B.

### **RAH (Real Archivo de Historia)**

RAH 9/26/2677, *Letter of Fr. Antonio Xaramillo to the King, 29, June 1684,* cited as Document 1684L.

### **German Sources**

Stocklein's Welt-Bott no. 222, *First Letter of Fr. Philippe Cazier about the Carolines,* dated Canton 5 November 1720, cited as Document 1720D.

Stocklein's Welt Bott, XVII, No. 540, *Report on the Caroline Islands by Fr. Joseph Kropf dated Acapulco, 6, March 1732,* cited as Document 1732A.

### **Mexican Sources**

AGN Historia Jesuitas, Vol. 308, fol. 413-422, *Report of Fr. Cantova Regarding the*

*Arrival of Carolinian Canoes in 1721*, cited as Document 1722D.

### Other Archival Sources

*Letter from Fr. Nicholas Du Beron to Mr. Jacques Cortyl regarding his brother (Fr. Jose Cortil) lost at Sonsorrol*, Les Kiekens les Anciens Missionnaires aux Iles Philippines précis Historiques, 1881, pp. 482-483, cited as Document 1755A.

Fr. Muscati, Trans. Van Hamme, *Letter from Fr. Muscati to the Provincial in Manila Announcing the Death of Fr. Bouwens* (Arnhem: P. Visschers Onuitgegeven Brieven, 1857), pp. 96-197, cited as Document 1712E.

Velarde, Fr. Murillo, S.J. *Historia de Filipinas Book 1, Chapter 24, The Jesuits' Vain Attempt to Explore the Carolines in 1697*, cited as Document 1697K.

### Other Sources

Gutierrez, Fr. Lucio, O.P. *Archdiocese of Manila A Pilgrimage in Time (1565-1999)*. Manila: The Roman Archbishop of Manila, 1999.

Hezel, Francis, X. S.J. and Maria Teresa del Valle, *Early European Contacts with Western Carolines, 1525-1750*, The Journal of Pacific History, Vol. VII.

Risenberg, S.H. *Table of Voyages Affecting Micronesian Islands*. Oceania XXXVI (2, p. 164. No. 200..

Jagor, Fedor, *Travels in the Philippine*. Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, Original English Edition, London, 1875.

Solheim, Wilhelm, H. Anselmo Legaspi and Jaime S. Neri, S.J. *Archaeological Survey in Southeastern Mindanao*, Manila and Honolulu: National Museum of the Philippines and University of Hawaii.

World Geographical Encyclopedia, Vol. 5 Oceania, *Polar Regions, General Geography*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1994.



Augusto V. de Viana is an Associate Professor at the University of Santo Tomas. He obtained the degrees, Bachelor of Arts in Asian Studies, Master of Arts in History *Cum Laude* and Doctor of Philosophy in History *Magna Cum Laude* from UST. Before joining UST, he was the Chief of Research, Publications and Heraldry Division of the National Historical Institute. Among his published books are *Kulaboretor!* and *In the Far Islands*. He has published various articles in prestigious journals including *The Micronesian*, the journal of the University of Aubury, Australia and the *Ad Veritatem*. He can be contacted at [avdeviana@mnl.ust.edu.ph](mailto:avdeviana@mnl.ust.edu.ph) or [augustodeviana@gmail.com](mailto:augustodeviana@gmail.com).