

# Biographical Literature In The Philippines

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Biographical literature has not yet come of age in the Philippines. True, there is today a relative abundance of major biographies of important personalities in Philippine history. Furthermore, we have various published biographical profiles, sketches and data on major and minor Filipino artists, writers, architects, playwrights, poets, essayists, novelists, painters, inventors, educators, physicians, lawmakers, actors/actresses, movie directors, military generals, guerrillas, economists, engineers, scientists, musicians, journalists, critics and other prominent persons in their fields of endeavor. Except for E. Arsenio Manuel's, we lack monumental and encyclopedic biographical literature like the scholarly, well-edited, and excellently-written multi-volume *Dictionary of American Biography* and *Who's Who in America*, the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* or *Webster Biographical Dictionary*. Manuel's *Dictionary of Philippine Biography*, can still be termed the germ of encyclopedic biography in the country.

Biographical literature in the country traces its origins to biographers and historians of Spanish religious orders. Historians and chroniclers of religious congregations from the 16th century up to early 20th century took extra effort in including lengthy biographies of their own illustrious members. Missionaries who conspicuously shone in virtue, sanctity, apostolate and pioneering feats, never failed to merit long accounts of their exemplary lives and apostolates in Philippine ministries in the general histories and chronicles of their Orders. These narratives are found in various lengthy digressions, in footnotes of religious chronicles and histories, written in Spanish or even in Latin and in obituaries.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, complete biographies of missionaries saw publication. These *catálogos* were based on their age-old *libros de profesiones* [book of professions], *libros de difuntos* [books of the departed], *registros de capítulos provinciales* [records of provincial chapters], duplicates of *patentes* [assignments], *oraciones* or *discursos fúnebres* [funeral prayers or eulogies] of prominent religious, prelates and bishops, and official correspondence. Friar biographers collated data, assignments to various parishes and offices, achievements (like building of churches, rectories, bridges, roads, introduction of abaca, leather tanning, grammar book-writing, devotionaries, etc.) of every religious priest and brother who worked in the Philippines since the first decades of evangelization. The "*catalogues of religious*" are most indispensable when you seek information on the friar who constructed the bridge near Camp Pantaleon Garcia, in Imus, Cavite; the religious who supervised the construction of that *mampostería*

bridge at Las Piñas, Metro Manila, or that fortress-like church at Cuyo in Palawan, or on who, when or how that existing spacious rectory in Siquijor was erected, or who planted the first bananas, coconuts, cacao to farmers-rebel returnees in Balilijan, Bohol.

Aside from general chronicles and histories of religious orders, where obituaries are assiduously recorded for posterity, the biographer or historian can consult biographical references found in provincial archives of the first five orders that came to the Philippines and were given parish assignments. In Manila, the Augustinian Archives are found in Intramuros and the Dominicans have theirs at the University of Santo Tomás. In Quezon City, the Franciscans keep their archives in San Francisco del Monte; the Jesuits at the Loyola House of Studies inside the Ateneo Campus. The Augustinian Recollects keep their digital documentary and photo archives in Quezon City. The following are indispensable sources and references:

Juan DE MEDINA OSA. *Historia de los sucesos de la Orden de N. G. P. San Agustín de estas Islas Filipinas*. Manila 1893.

Elviro PÉREZ OSA. *Catálogo bio-bibliográfico de los religiosos agustinos de la Provincia del Santísimo Nombre de Jesús de las Islas Filipinas*. Manila 1901.

Isacio RODRÍGUEZ OSA. *Historia de la Provincia Agustiniiana del Santísimo Nombre de Jesús de Filipinos*. Various vols. Manila.

Juan FRANCISCO DE SAN ANTONIO OFM. *Crónicas de la Apostólica Provincia de San Gregorio*, Manila 1738.

Eusebio GÓMEZ PLATERO OFM. *Catálogo biográfico de los religiosos franciscanos de la Provincia de San Gregorio Magno de Filipinas*. Manila 1880.

Juan FERRANDO OP, Joaquín FONSECA OP. *Historia de los Padres Dominicos en las Islas Filipinas*. Manila.

Hilario OCIO VIANA OP. *Compendio de la Reseña biográfica de los religiosos de la Provincia del Santísimo Rosario de Filipinas desde su fundación hasta nuestros días*. Manila 1895.

Francisco COLÍN SJ, Pablo PASTELLS SJ. *Labor evangélica, ministerios apostólicos de los obreros de la Compañía de Jesús, fundación y progresos de su provincia en las Islas Filipinas*. 3 vols. Barcelona 1900-1902.

Pedro MURILLO VELARDE SJ. *Historia de la provincia de Filipinas de la Compañía de Jesús*, Manila 1749.

Francisco SÁDABA OAR. *Catálogo de los Religiosos Agustinos Recoletos de la Provincia de San Nicolás de Tolentino de Filipinas desde el año 1606, en que llegó la primera misión, hasta nuestros días*. Madrid 1906.

Miguel AVELLANEDA OAR. *Continuación del Padre Sádaba o segunda parte del «Catálogo de los Religiosos de la Orden de Agustinos Recoletos de Filipinas desde 1606*

*hasta 1936*». Rome 1938.

Manuel CARCELLER OAR. *Historia general de la Orden de Agustinos Recoletos* x (1962), xi (1967), xii (1974) Madrid.

From preceding published sources, we obtain innumerable accounts of friars and Jesuits who defended their apostolic ministries and endlessly fought fierce wars against what they perceived as enemies of Spain and the Catholic faith. These precious sources indirectly provide valuable information on such freedom fighters as Palaris, Sultan Kudarat, Tamblot, Dagohoy. Present-day writers continually avail themselves of these references in writing biographies of early Filipinos who made history.

With the scanty information on great Filipinos in the colonial past, creative historians weave some spurious stories and panegyrics on their feats. They would draw some conclusions and conjecture greater feats, if only to prove their point that Filipinos did not lack courage in their libertarian struggle and loathing of foreign yoke.

Some biographers intentionally discarded pejorative information they think would diminish the nobility of their cause and patriotic motives. Historian Gregorio F. Zaide, for example, whose sources were friar chronicles, did not deliberately mention in his biographies of Francisco Dagohoy that outlaws and *remontados* from nearby islands joined the Bohol chief's fight and resorted to plain banditry and plunder against helpless lowland doctrinas and visitas where fellow Boholanos dwelt in peace (Zaide and Zaide 1988, xii). Neither does the historian inform us that Dagohoy was forced to surrender the assassin of a Jesuit parish priest to Spanish authorities because Boholano local officials vowed to eliminate the renowned rebel leader. Unfortunately, most of Zaide's biographies ended up as "admirable recitals of the accomplishments" of eminent Filipinos of the past.

A pioneering work is the two-volume *Galería de Filipinos Ilustres* written by Manuel Artigas y Cuerva, head of the Filipiniana Section of the National Library and professor of the Instituto Burgos, where Spanish was the medium of instruction during the early part of the American colonial regime. The first volume, published in 1917, had 941 pages; the second, which came out in 1918, had 530. The U.P. Diliman Library, which boasted total holdings of 950,000 volumes in 1995, has microfilmed the Artigas *magnum opus*, the original copy relegated to the hardly accessible Rare Books section.

Other useful biographical references in the American colonial period are M. M. NORTON, *Builders of a Nation* (1914) and Franz J. Weissblatt's two volumes of *Who's Who in the Philippines* (1940).

E. Arsenio Manuel (1955) recounts his pre-war experiences as library assistant at the U.P. Main Library that led to his unprecedented monumental work in Philippine history of life-writing:

*This was our daily experience: whereas it took us library workers a few minutes generally to provide reference material on questions relating to phases of American or occidental culture and life, to our great chagrin it took us as a rule much more time, often hours, sometimes days, before we could be of any assistance to students and others who had similar queries on Philippine art, literature, history, biography, or any phase of Filipino culture. It is an exaggeration to confess that often we could not provide any source material at all in weeks, nay even in months, with the resources at our command. Sometimes we succeeded in locating a reference here, or an indication there, but after great exertions and much waste of time, and after our patrons were gone! This left many of us with a guilty feeling that we were not performing our duty well. ... Sometimes we told our patrons to wait, to come the following day, go to that library or see that collector or scholar—but our efforts drove them away more curious than ever before, dismayed, discouraged, disgusted or sometimes furious! That was the daily experience of most of us at the desk who were supposed to assist anyone who had a question to ask.*

Those pressing problems eventually gave rise to four voluminous editions (1955, 1970, 1986 and 1995) of the *Dictionary of Philippine Biography* -- a work no researcher on Philippine history, culture and civilization can ever dispense of -- done in close collaboration with wife Magdalena and relatives.

The *Philippines Who's Who* written in 1957 by D. H. Soriano and Isidro L. Retizos published biographical facts about the lives of 400 Filipinos and members of the foreign community whose careers and achievements merit recording. The compilers proffered the *raison-d'être* of their effort: “*For many years now, there has been an imperative need for a simple and handy guidebook on notable living Filipinos and prominent residents of the Philippine who are successfully established in their various professions and callings. Students and scholars, businessmen here and abroad, organizations and associations everywhere, and the general public have the need for such a book—to save both time and effort in gathering concise essential facts about well-known people in this country*” (Soriano and Retizos 1957, ii).

The forerunner of the *Filipinos in History*, now in five volumes, published by the National Historical Institute was *Eminent Filipinos* (1965). This fine book was a collaboration among Hector Villaruel, Eulogio Leño, Alfredo Germán and other history researchers of the National Historical Commission, successor of the National Heroes Commission and Jose Rizal Centennial Commission. The book was the first publication of the National Historical Commission. Carlos Quirino, then Director of the National Library, wrote the preface of the book. He dubbed its contents “*capsule biographies in a readable and easily accessible form.*”

*Eminent Filipinos* contained the biographies of 230 persons. Quirino proffered the aims of the laudable life-writing project in his preface: “*Scores of men and women have*

been buried in the obscurity of the past. Their lives have been resurrected from musty archives and forgotten volumes and from the memory of the still living few in order that their deeds may serve as a guide and inspiration to our people.” The two criteria for inclusion in the compilation can be further culled from the same preface: First, “these persons were prominent in the events of their time”; second, “they had acquired eminence in their respective professions” (Villaruel *et al.* 1965, vii).

The prolific historian, biographer and bibliographer Gregorio Zaide authored the *Biographical Dictionary of the Philippines*. His *Great Filipinos in History* published in 1970 inexplicably included the biography of Datu Kalantiaw, reputedly the author of the penal code dated 1433. Two years earlier, William Henry Scott exposed the pre-Hispanic Code of Kalantiaw as a hoax during the defense of his doctoral dissertation in June 1968. Zaide was a member of the panel that included Teodoro Agoncillo, Horacio de la Costa, Marcelino Foronda and Nicolás Zafra (SCOTT 1992, 167-168). *Great Filipinos in History* appeared in a revised edition in 1988 as *Rizal and Other Great Filipinos*, with the historian’s daughter as co-author. It contains the biographies of forty heroes and heroines led by José Rizal. Sonia Zaide sums up the purpose of the new edition: “It is the authors’ hope that these biographies of famous men and women in Philippine history may serve to inspire the younger generations of Filipinos to love and serve their country” (ZAIDE AND ZAIDE, xii). The 1988 Zaide biographical collection exorcised the ghost of Datu Kalantiaw which, amazingly, Carlos Quirino resurrected in his *Who’s Who in Philippine History* (1995). Quirino’s latest book was published by the Tadhana Books chiefly for students, expats and the unlearned in history.

Today there is but one regional biographical reference -- the *Bicol Biographical Encyclopedia* which appeared in 1968. It is nothing more than a compilation of sketchy biodata of Bicolanos who occupied high positions in government and in the private sector. Still, Sen. Dominador Aytona vaunted in his foreword: “The publication of the *Bicol Biographical Encyclopedia* is indeed a welcome event as it definitely fills and information gap on outstanding and rising personalities of the Bicol Region” (BICOL RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION CENTER 1968). After all, any work *sui generis* is always hailed by everyone. As the Spanish proverb says: *En el reino de los ciegos, el tuerto es rey* [In the kingdom of the sightless, the one-eyed is king].

One of the most ambitious and highly successful life-writing undertakings of late is the publication of the *CCP Encyclopedia of the Philippine Arts* (1994) by the Sentrong Pangkultura ng Pilipinas. Despite the unsavory brickbats hurled at it by some critics, the 10-volume collection is an unprecedented enterprise in Philippine biographical literature. Nowhere but in this encyclopedia can we find countless brief biographical sketches of Filipino artists and writers selected and drawn mostly by university faculties and experts. Inclusion of biographies was based on strict criteria. It is the single local encyclopedia most sought after and consulted by U.P. faculty, graduate and undergraduate students. At the U.P. Diliman Library’s General References Section,

two hardbound sets of the ten-volume collection are available and a softbound set kept as preservation copy. The work is doubtless the most important biographical reference today.

*Tabanan Books for Young Readers* published the *Great Lives Series* of twelve personalities “who made a difference in Philippine history.” Written in readable English, it uses simple words for its intended market—young readers—to understand.

Without any trace of doubt, the 1976 National Artist in Literature and 1996 Ramon Magsaysay Awardee for Journalism and Literature, Nick Joaquin or Quijano de Manila, is the most sought after biographer nowadays, “commanding the highest price” (DE VERA 1996, C2). His style is the successful marriage of creative writing and journalese. Every subject of his biography comes out alive in the pages, speaking out to the reader so personally, so intimately that soon the reader is enmeshed in his narrative. Joaquin’s forte is the personal interview; that’s why there is an avalanche of direct quotations. In his books there are minimal footnotes and these are mostly based on journalistic accounts. There is hardly a bibliography. Nick Joaquin’s would rather call his life-writing output *oral biographies* (JOAQUIN 1996: 18). His astounding body of work includes *Jaime Ongpin, the Enigma*; the campaign biography of Salvador Laurel, *Doy Laurel in Profile* (1985); *A Question of Heroes* (1977); *The World of Rafael Salas* (1990); *La Orosa: The Dance-Drama That is Leonor Goquingco* (1994); *One Woman’s Liberating: The Life and Career of Estefania Aldaba-Lim* (1996).

Jose Rizal is doubtless the most written about personality in our history of biography. His life and works have always been the biographer’s favorite subject decade after decade. Next to Rizal, we have the presidents of the Philippine Republic who are truly a blest bunch. All of them have full-length biographies or biographical sketches in textbooks. Books on Philippine presidents in English and Filipino, like Bananal’s *Philippine Presidents* are apparently bestsellers. They are always out of stock in our local bookstores. Ferdinand E. Marcos, the most maligned of our presidents, justifiably or not, is the subject of countless post-EDSA Revolution literature. Among the pre-EDSA ones are: Hartzell SPENCE, *For Every Tear a Victory* (1964) (special-purpose biography or campaign biography); Jose N. NOLLEDO, *The Life of Ferdinand Edralin Marcos: An Analysis* (1966); Francisco TATAD, *Marcos of the Philippines* (1975); Victor NITUDA, *The Young Marcos* (1979).

A list of biographies of other Philippine presidents includes:

On Manuel L. Quezon: Carlos QUIRINO, *Quezon: Paladin of Philippine Freedom* (1971);

On Jose P. Laurel: Juan COLLAS, *Man of destiny. The Story of Jose Paciano Laurel* (1944); Teofilo DEL CASTILLO, *The Saga of Jose P. Laurel, His Brother’s Keeper* (1949); JOSE P. LAUREL MEMORIAL FOUNDATION, *Jose P. Laurel. Leader for*

*All Seasons* (1970); Rose LAUREL AVANCEÑA, Ileana MARAMAG, [eds.], *Days of Courage. The Legacy of Dr. Jose P. Laurel* (1980).

On Sergio Osmeña: Vicente ALBANO PACIS, *President Sergio Osmeña: A Fully Documented Biography* (1971);

On Manuel A. Roxas: Felixberto G. BUSTOS, *And Now Comes Roxas* (1946); Marcial P. LICHAUCO, *Roxas: The Story of a Great Filipino and of the Political Era in Which He Lived* (1952).

On Ramón Magsaysay: Jesus V. MERRITT, *Magsaysay, Man of the People* (1953); Felix B. BAUTISTA, *Magsaysay: Friend of the Common Man* (1957); Carlos QUIRINO, *Magsaysay of the Philippines* (1958); Marvin GRAY, *Island Hero: The Story of Ramon Magsaysay* (1965); Jose V. ABUEVA, *Ramon Magsaysay: A Political Biography* (1971); Aurelia DEL FIERRO, *Magsaysay, The Leader of the Masses* (1972).

On Diosdado Macapagal: Quentin James REYNOLDS, *Macapagal The Incorruptible* (1965); Sol GWEKOH, *Diosdado Macapagal. Triumph Over Poverty* (1962).

Former first lady Imelda Marcos' humble beginnings and extravagant lifestyle have found their way into international best-selling biographies, mostly unauthorized: Carmen Navarro Pedrosa's *The Untold Story of Imelda Marcos* (1969) and *Imelda Marcos* (1987); Kerima Polotan's *Imelda Romualdez Marcos* (1970); Isabelo Crisostomo, *Imelda Romualdez Marcos: Heart of the Revolution* (1980); Ileana Maramag's *Imelda Romualdez Marcos* (1982); Beatriz ROMUALDEZ' *Imelda Romualdez Marcos*.

Group-biography is still an uncultivated lot in our country. We solely have a couple of famous biographical writings under this classification: Nick Joaquin's *The Aquinos of Tarlac: An Essay on History as Three Generations*<sup>1</sup> (1986) and Wilfrido Ma. GUERRERO's, *The Guerreros of Ermita*.

Eminent persons in recent history have their inspiring lives and deeds narrated in Teofisto GUNGONA JR., *Gallant Filipinos*, and Leonardo NUDAL, *Remember Them Kindly: Some Filipinos During World War II* (1996).

Biographies of Roman Catholic saints and candidates for sainthood are a rare lot in the Philippine arena. The reason is quite obvious: there is a dearth of men and women whose holy lives could have been the object of biographers's interest. We have, nonetheless, some notable hagiographic pamphlets and articles. Of Saint Lorenzo Ruiz, we cite the brief biographies by Fidel Villaroel OP and Celso Carunungan. The exemplary life of Mother Ignacia del Espíritu Santo has attracted wide readership due to Marcelino Foronda's *Mother Ignacia and her Beaterio* (1975), Ma.Rita Ferraris's *The Beaterios for Native Women in Colonial Philippines* (1987), and lately *Mother Ignacia*

(1995) of Tahanan Books for Young Readers *Great Lives Series*. The martyrdom of Mindoro's first American bishop William Finnemann SVD at the hands of the Japanese Kempei Tai is the subject of *A Hero Deserving a Halo* (1992) by a confrere, Peter Michael.

A young Filipino Christian hero Pedro Calungsod who hailed from Cebu and later died in Guam together with the Jesuit missionary Saint Luis de San Vitores, has already found biographers. The Visayan martyr was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1998 in Rome. The lives of two candidates for beatification from Calumpit, Bulacan—Mother Dionisia Talangpaz and Mother Cecilia Rosa Talangpaz—who founded the Congregation of the Augustinian Recollect Sisters in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, are detailed in the book *Stars of Peace: The Talangpaz Sisters* (2001), by psychiatrist-historian Dr. Luciano P.R. Santiago.

## Endnotes

- 1 Joaquin says he did not want write the book as history in the usual sense of the word: “I was no scholar and I certainly did not want a scholarly treatise. I was a newsman and I wanted a journalistic account of those three Aquino generations. I went about it in my usual newsmanly way: tape recorder and legwork. I interviewed as many people as I could who had the information I needed.” He prefers to classify this work as literature.

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