

BOOK REVIEW

Bernardita Reyes Churchill (Executive Editor), Eden M. Gripaldo, and Digna B. Apilado (Associate Editors). (2011). *The movement for independence in the Philippines, 1896-1898: Calendar of documents in the archives of the Cuerpo de Vigilancia de Manila. Quezon City and Intramuros, Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts and the Philippine National Historical Society. [707 pp., ix pp., with illustrations and photographs.]*

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The *Calendar of Documents in the Archives of the Cuerpo de Vigilancia de Manila* is a research guide with a brief summary of each item in the 5,506-page Manuscript Collection of 19th-century official Spanish documents originally known as the “Katipunan and Rizal Documents.” Totalling 1,860 documents, the Collection consists of manuscripts, printed materials, transcripts, intelligence reports, newspaper clippings from Spanish and Philippine dailies, and photographs covering all aspects of the Philippine Revolution from 1896 to 1898 (p.ii). The bulk of the documents are in Spanish and those written in Tagalog are translated into Spanish. A handful is in Bicolano, Cebuano and Ilocano. (p.v).

Former Philippine Ambassador to Spain, Isabel Caro Wilson, first brought the Collection to the attention of Carmen D. Padilla, then Executive Director of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA). In 1995, NCCA purchased the Collection from Enrique Montero and his wife, both Spanish historians and collectors/dealers of antiquarian materials in Madrid. Montero acquired the Collection from the descendants of a retired Spanish general who was posted in the Philippines and who brought the Collection back to Madrid upon completion of his tour of duty. The late Filipino historian based in Madrid, Antonio Molina, attested to the authenticity of the documents and Montero’s legitimacy of ownership (p.i).

The *Cuerpo de Vigilancia* was an intelligence unit formed during the term of Governor-General Ramon Blanco in 1895, at the height of the popularity of the Katipunan Movement and the eve of the outbreak of the Philippine Revolution. As rumors of late-night meetings, secret gatherings, and

arms deals from Hong Kong and Yokohama spread, the Spanish population, especially the friars who had always anticipated the possibility of a revolution, started to feel ill at ease. Blanco, who was not particularly sympathetic to the friars, remained unperturbed, or so it seemed, which further agitated the friars. Despite his seeming composure, historian Teodoro Agoncillo notes that Blanco banished in the same year several prominent men in Malolos who were suspected of being sympathetic to the Filipino cause (1990, p.169).

Perhaps Blanco wanted to dignify the anxiety and fear of the friars or was himself convinced of the possible truthfulness of the rumors when he sanctioned the Cuerpo de Vigilancia to: closely monitor the activities of persons suspected of subversion; report on all kinds of rumors; intercept communications; monitor newspaper reports; compile confiscated revolutionary materials; and collect photographs of the revolutionaries (pp.1-2). Apart from the locals, *insulares*, *peninsulares*, Chinese, *mestizos*, and other foreigners in the Philippines fell under the gaze and glare of the Spanish colonial government. The agents of the Cuerpo, whose names are provided in the files, included *Indios* and mestizos, and were instructed to “be unobtrusive and not to intervene in any incident but only to report it to headquarters” (Manuscrito A-9, p.292).

Of particular interest in the reports was the singling-out of members of Masonic lodges. Manuscrito A-10 reads:

The Philippine Revolution: Masons, propagandists [*laborantes*], suspicious persons [*personas sospechosas*], and subversives [*filibusteros*]. Statement of detainees charged with conspiracy, deportees, those affiliated to Masonry, those branded as separatists, suspicious persons, propagandists, conspirators, subversives or separatists, those whose correspondence should be intercepted, members of the Supreme Council, persons who are members of juntas abroad, and Masons affiliated with the Lodges *Luz de Oriente*, *Modestia* and *La Liga Filipina*. Manila 1896-1897. (p.294)

If we may recall Philippine history, Masonry provided Filipino propagandists in Spain with an organizational structure and a platform to organize and unite as they campaigned for reforms in the Philippines in the 19th century. In 1890, the all-Filipino *La Solidaridad* Lodge was established and became the fulcrum of propaganda activities in Spain. Eventually, leading Filipino Masons established local lodges in the Philippines.

Manuscript A-4 [Copies of Secret Surveillance/Intelligence Reports [*Informes*] from April to August 1896. Manuscript of 156 pages.], reads:

Información Secreta #5
Manila, May 2, 1896

Pedro Serrano [Laktaw] [selected by Filipino masons in Spain to establish, with Antonio Luna, a Masonic Lodge in the Philippines] should be watched for being anti-Spanish and a separatist. In Madrid, he was a great agitator, a close friend of [Miguel] Morayta [Spanish member and president of Hispano-Filipino Association], who is a rebel and Mason and active member of the *Circulo Hispano-Filipino*. [Pedro] Serrano is also a member of the *Sociedad Ciclista*[,] which is under suspicion.

Apart from the Masons, suspected persons included those identified with *La Propaganda*, *Asociación Hispano-Filipino*, *La Liga Filipina*, and the *Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* (KKK) (p.iv). An organization chart of Masons and revolutionaries purported to have organized the conspiracy in the Philippines is included in the Files (Manuscrito A-11, p.309).

Other interesting entries include notes on amulets worn by the revolutionaries, cases of ‘immorality,’ Felipe Buencamino’s pledges of love and loyalty to Spain and the severe denunciations he received from the revolutionaries and fellow members of the Malolos Congress, the explicit prohibition of Jose Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere* in the Philippines, and thousands of other documents on the lives and frailties of the personalities and ordinary men and women whose involvement, directly or indirectly, provide a broad yet detailed rendition of the events surrounding the Filipino campaign for independence. At the same time, the reports also allow a glimpse as to how Spanish colonial officials asserted colonial authority even in the most mundane aspects of everyday life in the Philippines. For instance, the last entry in Manuscript A-4 (cited above), reads:

Report says that in some towns in Bulacan, there are groups of cyclists who are members of [propaganda] associations in Manila (p.144).

As a research guide the book only provides summaries of the files in the collection. Researchers and scholars will have to read the original documents at the NCCA. In addition, since the materials in the Cuerpo may be suspect, as intelligence data include rumor, the work of the historian is unfinished.

As I reflect on the knowledge that this valuable new synoptic guidebook book took almost a decade to complete and with it are 10 years’ worth of dedication, unfailing commitment, and stubborn persistence from those who

were part of this project, I am reminded and feel overwhelmed by the task and the territory of the historian.

Reference

Agoncillo, T. (1990). *History of the Filipino people* (8th ed). Quezon City: GAROTECH Publishing.

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