

Folk Devotion in the Waterscape of the Pasig River: The 1653 and 1748 Fluvial Processions of the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje

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The *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* or Our Lady of Antipolo is one of the most prolific Marian sites or devotions in the Philippines. The image of Our Lady of Antipolo also served as the patroness of some galleon ships during the 17th and 18th century. The return of the image to its shrine in Antipolo would be occasions for a fluvial procession along the Pasig River. This paper analyzes the 1653 and 1748 fluvial processions of the *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* along the Pasig River as documented by Pedro Murillo Velarde S.J., which were reprinted in 1887 as the *Historia de la Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje*. The detailed descriptions from this account captures the waterscape of the Pasig River during the procession, which Velarde compares to a theater because of the great number of people in attendance. The account also details the performance of folk devotion particularly from the Tagalog towns participating in the procession. By focusing on the Pasig River, this study brings to the fore the value of the river as a cultural-religious space unifying the Tagalog towns that complete its waterscape. Lastly, the conclusions of this study highlight the communal experience of the procession and the role of popular devotions in the articulation of folk culture and identity especially during early modern colonial Philippines.

Keywords: *Our Lady of Antipolo, Pasig river, fluvial processions, folk devotion, waterscape*



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The devotion to *Inang Maria* is one of the most popular traditions in the Philippines. The cult or devotion to her has produced countless rituals such as novenas, processions, and pilgrimages accepted as part of Filipino heritage and culture. For some communities, the devotion to Inang Maria served as a catalyst to the process of their own place-making, the forging of their community identity, and the narration of their local histories. In this paper, the author looks at the fluvial processions of the *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* of Antipolo in 1653 and 1748 emphasizing the native participation and the manifestation of the folk devotion to Inang Maria. This article is part of a bigger study exploring the introduction and the deepening of the devotion to Inang Maria in the Philippines during the 17th and 18th century (Nito, 2020).

Deirdre de la Cruz's book entitled *Mother Figured: Marian Apparitions and the Making of a Filipino Universal* talks about the centrality of the devotion to the Virgin Mary in Filipino Catholicism. She cites the studies on the *babaylan* and the framework of conversion-as-translation as possible explanations for the depth of the devotion to the Virgin. She asserts that the high status attributed to the *babaylan* or even the *catalonan* bore the "... closest structural resemblance ..." to the Virgin Mary (de la Cruz, 2015, p. 27). In this book, she looks at some of the 19th century apparitions of the Virgin Mary as recorded in prayer books and accounts written by the clergy. Majority of the book tackles the 20th century Marian miracles, apparitions, and popular devotions as mediated by different forms of media such as hagiographies, sermons, prayer books (*devocionarios*), exempla, popular romances, and spiritual manuals (de la Cruz, 2015).

According to Rene Javellana S.J., the introduction of the devotion to Inang Maria was vigorously fostered by the different religious orders who came to evangelize in the Philippines. Each religious order would however be differentiated by their own preferred title for the Inang Maria or Nuestra Señora. "The Dominicans propagated the Nuestra Señora del Rosario. The Franciscans and the Jesuits preferred the Inmaculada or the Immaculate Concepcion. The Augustinians and the Augustinian Recollects pushed for the Nuestra Señora de la Correa or Our Lady of the Belt. These titles were associated with the devotional life of each religious order" (Javellana, 2010, p. 25). The images were either locally made or brought to the Philippines via the galleon ships from Mexico.

One of these images brought by the galleon is the image of the *Nuestra Señora de la Purisima Concepcion*, also known as the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje,

and colloquially known as the Our Lady of Antipolo. According to Barcelona and Estepa (2004), the devotion to the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje or Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage is one of the oldest Marian devotions in the country, close to four centuries already, beginning with the arrival of the image on 18 June 1626. A detailed discussion on the history of the Our Lady of Antipolo can be found in Michael Delos Reyes' (2016) book entitled *Morena Graciosa: The Devotion to the Virgin of Antipolo through the Centuries*. Citing mainly the *Historia* (1887) of Fr. Murillo Velarde S.J., Delos Reyes narrates that the image was brought to the country by Don Juan Niño de Tabora, who first saw the image in Acapulco, Mexico. Don Juan Niño de Tabora was then traveling to the Philippines to serve as its governor-general. When he died in 1632, he bequeathed the image to the Jesuits to be enshrined in their mission station in Antipolo. In addition to the book of Delos Reyes, Monina Mercado's (1980) work entitled *Antipolo, a Shrine to Our Lady* also narrates the history of the image of the Our Lady of Antipolo, especially its connection with the Manila-Acapulco galleon trade. The first voyage of the image aboard the galleons as its protectress was in 1641, the year after Governor-General Corcuera ordered that it be brought down from Antipolo after hearing about its desecration by the Sangleyes fleeing Manila in 1640 (Mercado, 1980). The table below lists down the journeys of the image of the Our Lady of Antipolo with the galleons based on the works of Delos Reyes and Mercado.

TABLE 1. Galleon Ships and the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje

Name of the Galleon Ship	Year of Travel
San Luis	1641, 1643, and 1647
Encarnacion	1648
San Francisco Javier	1651
San Diego	1653
San Jose	1659
Nuestra Señora del Pilar	1746 and 1748

In 1653, on the journey back to Manila on board the galleon ship San Diego, the image was given the title *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje*. The conferring of the title to the image of the Our Lady of Antipolo was an act of gratitude from the prestigious travelers onboard the San Diego—the incoming Governor-General Manrique de Lara and the Archbishop Miguel de Poblete. The passengers of the galleon ship believed that the Our Lady of Antipolo saved them during the dangerous crossing of the San Bernardino Strait. In addition to the conferring of the special title *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* or Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage, Governor-General Manrique de Lara also promised that the image will be finally going home to its mountain shrine in Antipolo (Delos Reyes, 2016). The return of the image to Antipolo included a grand fluvial procession along the Pasig River. The fluvial processions in 1653 and again in 1748 are the focus of this paper.

The theoretical considerations of this paper are influenced by the concept of waterscape and the intricate relationship between water and society as discussed in the study of Timothy Karpouzoglou and Sumit Vij (2017) entitled “Waterscape: A perspective for understanding the contested geography of water.” Waterscape essentially looks at the intimate relationship between water and society. As a concept it includes “... the way water travels in time and space and is shaped by culture and geography” (Karpouzoglou & Vij, 2017, p. 2). An example of this is Swyngedouw's study on the water history of Spain wherein waterscape is the foreground perspective for understanding how water and society is deeply intertwined. “For Swyngedouw, the Spanish waterscape reflects the intricate ways in which nature and society are ‘fused together in a way that renders them inseparable,’ producing water as a ‘restless hybrid.’ Studies that focus on waterscapes are therefore sensitive toward the dynamic processes through which water as *socionature* is continuously reworked, including its various flows and uses” (Karpouzoglou & Vij, 2017, p. 2). Waterscape as a perspective values fluidity and openness to different types of analyses. Consequently, works using waterscape has been pioneered primarily by social scientists, human geographers, anthropologists, and environmental historians associated with political ecology. Although there are other perspectives to use in studying the relationship of water and society, in this paper waterscape is the most appropriate because “the strength of the waterscape is that it brings into focus the geographical situatedness of these relations and provides ample scope for detailed empirical observation, using rich ethnographies and detailed case studies” (Karpouzoglou & Vij, 2017, p. 1).

This paper focuses on the 1653 and 1748 fluvial procession of the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje along the Pasig River as narrated by Pedro Murillo Velarde. This Jesuit priest is best remembered today as the cartographer of the 1734 Velarde Map commissioned by Governor-General Valdes Tamon in 1734 (Arcilla, 1996). Velarde arrived in the Philippines in 1723 and served as the first professor of Canon and Civil Law in the Jesuit College in Manila. Then he was assigned as the rector of Antipolo from 1747 to 1748. He wrote about the history of the Jesuits in the Philippines in a book entitled the *Historia de la Provincia de Philipinas de la Compania de Jesus* published in Manila in 1749 (Arcilla, 1993). Some chapters of this work are dedicated to the documentation of the local devotion to the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje of Antipolo. The chapters focusing on the devotion were later published separately as the *Historia de la Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* (1887). These writings of Velarde can be considered as the main primary sources on the history of the devotion to the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje. The *Historia de la Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* is not yet translated into English; the translations of some paragraphs from this source used in the succeeding paragraphs were done by the researcher.

The rich description of the procession provided by the account of Velarde (1887) enables us to draw out detailed analysis and observations regarding the fluvial procession along the Pasig River going up to Antipolo. During the fluvial procession of the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje, he describes the waterscape of the Pasig River and likens it to a great theater attended by many. In the original Spanish he says “*todo el espacio como un teatro de mayor concurrencia*” (p. 31). It would seem that the comparison to a theater was spot on because of the grandness of the procession, both in terms of quantity of people who participated in it and the level of performativity involved in how the native population in particular manifested their devotion towards the Our Lady of Antipolo.

The route and stops of the processions emphasized the control of the Jesuits. According to Velarde (1887), “On the 18th (February) they embarked on a boat until San Pedro Macati, and the whole space was like a theater attended by many. On the 19th in the morning from Macati to Cainta, and in the afternoon to Taytay” (p. 29). Even if the different towns along the Pasig River prepared altars along the route, the procession only stopped in the towns administered by the Jesuits — San Pedro Macati, Cainta, and Taytay. Even if special attention was given to the towns administered by the Jesuits, the procession nevertheless attracted

participation from the towns surrounding the river and those that are connected to the river: “The towns of the river were joined by those in the Laguna de Bay and all the other surrounding towns” (Velarde, 1887, p. 32).

The river, according to Velarde (1887), looked like a floating city. In his descriptions, he says that it was so full of *sampans* and boats of different shapes and sizes accompanying the image of Our Lady of Antipolo in its procession along the river. The sampan carrying the image and the rector of Antipolo was richly decorated. There were so many flags, streamers, and pennants of different colors that seemed to be floating through the expanse of the river, fluttering in the air. He adds, “in the river so many boats of different shapes and sizes were piled up, that it was a wonder that no misfortunes or run-over were experienced crossing the bridge” (Velarde, 1887, p. 29). It should be noted that the type of boat that carries the image of Our Lady of Antipolo as mentioned by Velarde was the local sampan. The sampan is a flat-bottomed wooden boat commonly used by traders in Southeast Asia as a fishing boat, for transportation of goods, and even permanent habitation for riverine and coastal communities (Hornell, 1934).

Looking closely at the descriptions of the processions in 1653 and in 1748, one noticeable difference was that in the 1653 narrative, the sangleyes were not mentioned as participants, while in 1748 they were included among the devotees. According to Velarde (1887) in Chapter 7 of the *Historia de la Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje*: “The participation on the river was so great that it was marvelous to see in addition to the sampan, which the Virgin was accompanied by the Governor, a Spanish boat also came. Surrounding the Virgin are various boats from the natives, the Chinese, and those from the other nations in richly decorated boats with flags ... ” (p. 29).

The devotion in the river overflowed to the banks of Pasig. Taking in the whole scenario, Velarde says it was a “a huge, open church without doors.” Velarde (1887) narrates that in the 1653 procession:

The banks of the river would not be left behind in adoring the sacred image as it passes through. The banks of this mighty river were filled with altars, flags, and flowers. There were also colorful and grand altars and the ministers of the towns who waited on the banks, decorated it with layers of gold, cross and candles, waiting to welcome

the Virgin. They were accompanied by many people holding lighted candles to worship the Sovereign Lady. The many and beautiful villas of the Spaniards along the banks of the river were also filled with decorations and lights which were enhanced with sweet musical concerts to celebrate their Queen. The bells, drums, bugles, muskets and fireworks resounded everywhere, announcing this common and universal rejoicing. (p.16)

There were so many devotees waiting along the banks of the river that it seemed to be a continuous anthill and that if they were not able to show their devotion in celebrating the Señora in their town, they accompanied her by running along the banks in pursuit.

Notable among these Tagalog towns surrounding the Pasig River is the *pueblo* of Pasig. This town was specially mentioned by Velarde as excelling in their refinement and devotion to the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje. He mentions in the 1748 procession which he personally witnessed that “Pasig, one of the most populated pueblos in these islands, took great care in the celebration with such finesse. The flags and streamers were their own, some of these were decorated with images, lights, and jewelry. The two altars they set up is accompanied by sweet instruments and chords” (Velarde, 1887, p. 31).

Quiapo and San Pedro Macati were also specially mentioned. Both towns supposedly excelled in offering up dances to the Our Lady of Antipolo during the procession and in the celebration in Antipolo. In the 1748 procession, “Various dancers and singers came from other towns. Quiapo's gracefully dressed singers performed a Tagalog verse which is part singing and part reciting. It was a great enjoyment participated by many and presented as a special gift to the sovereign Virgin. Almost all the people of San Pedro Macati attended the celebration, with two dances from the children of the said town which was received with satisfaction of those around, ...” (Velarde, 1887, p. 32). Besides the aforementioned towns, Velarde also mentioned the following pueblos as participants in the procession and the festivities in Antipolo: Taytay, Cainta, Mariquina, San Mateo, Pasig, Moron (Morong), Baras, Angono, and then some from the provinces of Pampanga, Bulacan, Cavite, La Laguna, Tayabas, and Batangas.

The narratives of Pedro Murillo Velarde showed the reception and devotion to the Our Lady of Antipolo by the different members of the colonial society. He mentions in his account the participation of the Spanish population, especially the ones outside of Manila, in the procession. However, the focus of the narrations is the overwhelming devotion of the native population and their affection for the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje. The towns mentioned in the account attest that the devotion to the Our Lady of Antipolo was a shared Tagalog devotion. Even though it was known as the Our Lady of Antipolo, the fervor for the image went beyond the town of Antipolo. The different towns from Manila to Macati and then Cainta and Taytay were not just connected by the river but also by the devotion to the image of the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje. The image and the shared devotion became a means in widening the sense of community of the natives beyond their own town or pueblo.

While the devotion connected them to *others* beyond their own pueblo, their participation in the procession and the festivities were also opportunities to showcase their local identity which sets them apart from the other towns. For example, the towns of Pasig, Quiapo, and San Pedro Macati were singled out in the account for their performances during the procession and festivities. The various dances and the singing in the procession attest that, in the performance of the devotion to the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje, they were also articulating their folk identity and adapting their own local art form into the practice of religion.

The fervor for the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje evident in the account of the processions begs the question—why do the native population identify with the Virgin of Antipolo and the fluvial procession along the Pasig River? To answer the first part of the question, writers have attributed the identification of the masses with the Our Lady of Antipolo to her color. The image which stands more or less 41 inches is made of dark wood, earning her the title *Morena Graciosa* or the Gracious Brown Virgin. According to earlier studies, her color made it easier for the natives and the masses to accept her as their Inang Maria (Mercado, 1980; Brainard, 2012; Delos Reyes, 2016).

Refocusing our attention to the Pasig River, in this narrative of the procession we see the devotion and the affirmation of that devotion happening not in the plaza or in the church within the plaza but in the river. The whole waterscape of the Pasig River, which includes not just the river with all the boats but also the participation

from the banks, widens the space by which the devotion is practiced. The water element in the narrative of the fluvial procession breaks the typical centeredness of faith in the town plaza where the church is located. The river, which is often found in the periphery of the town as created by the colonial state, now becomes the center of the narrative and is even considered as a sacred space. With all the altars along the banks of the Pasig River, Velarde (1887) describes the waterscape like a church without walls.

The fluvial procession of the Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje along the Pasig River highlights the centrality of the river to our culture and way of life. In this practice, it is evident that the Pasig River was not just used as a thoroughfare of goods and people, it was not just a space for economic activities, but also a religious space. In bringing to prominence this narrative of the fluvial procession, we see how much the Pasig River and its banks became an important context in the performance of the folk devotion to Inang Maria. Although we do not have any record of the fluvial procession being done in the 19th century, it is interesting to note that in the drama *Junto al Pasig* written by the young Jose Rizal (1880), there is a line in the fifth scene that says: “*Ya la Virgen de Antipolo/ Las aguas, surca del río; Saludala en canto pío.*” Or in English “Here comes the Virgin of Antipolo / The waters of river furrowing for her/ Greet her with a pious song.”

The procession of the Virgin of Antipolo along the Pasig River is now a forgotten practice. Now that the river is being threatened with the construction of an expressway above it, the narratives that highlight its centrality to our Tagalog culture is even more necessary. To revive the Pasig River, it is important to also recognize it as a cultural-religious space and that it was once a part of our devotional landscape.

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