

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

History Mistranslated

Review Author: Jose S. Arcilla

Philippine Studies vol. 19, no. 4 (1971): 747–749

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

cialists to call the attention of their other colleagues in Southeast Asian studies (or at least the Yale and Cornell libraries) to additional reference sources locally published. The best compliment to a work like Johnson's *Guide* may well be the seemingly perverse wish that it may soon become out of date and in need of a supplement.

EDILBERTO DE JESUS, JR.

HISTORY MISTRANSLATED

HISTORY OF THE PHILIPPINES AND OTHER KINGDOMS, by Marcelo de Ribadeneira, O.F.M. Translated by Pacita Guevarra Fernandez. 2v. Manila: The Bookmark, Inc., 1971. xxiv, 523 pp.; xxvi, 321 pp.

As everyone knows, the heritage of classical culture was saved, not by the thundering Roman legions, but by the silent monks of medieval Europe who spent hours copying and transcribing the ancient texts of Greece and Rome. A similar work of preservation is being attempted by the Historical Conservation Society of the Philippines, whose members re-edit and translate histories of the Philippines that are now hard to come by or are out of print.

One of their latest publications is a two-volume bilingual edition of the work of the Franciscan Fray Marcelo de Ribadeneira, *Historia de las Islas del Archipiélago y de Otros Reynos*, first published in Barcelona in 1601.

The first question that comes to mind is why this book was singled out for translation into English. The bibliographer and historian of the Philippines, Wenceslao E. Retana (1862-1924) has already passed judgment on the work: "The major portion of this work is concerned mainly with the martyrs of Japan. And the part [which Ribadeneira] dedicates to the Philippines has some errors...which is not surprising, since, besides its early publication date...the author does not speak on his own account." (Retana, *Aparato bibliográfico*, I, 51). This seems to belie what is asserted in the translator's introduction that Ribadeneira was "an eye-witness to most of the major events he so painstakingly chronicled." (Vol. I, page viii)

A more serious drawback of the present two-volume edition is the English translation itself. The translator has "preferred to translate the text paragraph by paragraph...[because this] translation makes it easier to avoid the involved sentences and roundabout methods of expression preferred by the original chroniclers who were soldiers and missionaries rather than professional writers." (Vol. I, page vii) One wonders just what is meant, for it so happens that, except for Morga in

the sixteenth century and Montero y Vidal in the nineteenth, all histories and chronicles about the Philippines were written by "missionaries rather than professional writers." That their writing was "involved" and used "roundabout methods of expression" was due to the style of writing of that age.

The present reviewer cannot see how in this English version of Ribadeneira, "the sense of the narration is preserved." It is a series of mistranslated and misinterpreted chapters. The first lines of the prologue, for example, are translated:

After the glorious triumph of six holy brothers and companions who now enjoy the halo of martyrdom, and who are now preachers of celestial glory after their honorable victory in having been crucified together with twenty blessed Japanese, I, with three other friar confessors was thrown out of Japan and exiled in the city of Macan, Greater China, where we stayed nine months offering to Our Lord our little crown that we garnered for His Holy Law.

Perhaps a better version would be:

After the glorious triumph of my six saintly brothers and companions who now wear the halo of martyrs and preachers in heavenly glory, and [after] the glorious victory over seen and unseen enemies which twenty blessed Japanese had obtained through the cross together with [the Franciscans] who had been crucified for the Christian Faith, I was expelled from Japan with three other Friars (all confessors of the Christian Faith) and exiled to the city of Macao in mainland China, where we stayed for nine months, offering to the Lord that slight wound-which we suffered for the sake of His holy law.

The opening line of chapter XXI, Book II, is translated as follows: "One of the rare operations of the Holy Spirit consists of drawing out from among madding crowds, a few young souls, and from their earliest years train these in the career of spiritual perfection." Unfortunately, the Spanish original gives a totally different text: "*Entre las maravillas que el espíritu del Señor hace, es una el ser tan favorable y liberal con los hombres de poca edad, que sobrepujando a las leyes de carne y sangre y a las malas inclinaciones que se heredan del viejo Adán, como de salto uelan a la perfección.*"

There are many other mistranslations, and it were tedious to detail them here. The present reviewer has also noted errors of fact. For example, "Iliquo Islands" is referred to in a footnote as Ilocos islands. (Chapter I, Book IV, Vol. II, pp. 321, 656). Could this be perhaps *Lequios Islands*, which Magellan was supposed to have been looking for when he sailed out from Spain in 1519 and landed in Limasawa Island two years later?

There are also a number of printing errors: among them, "Philip I" (Vol. I, p. 326) should be "Philip II"; "in instrument" (Vol. I, p. 334) should be "an instrument." And perhaps it would have been better to print the English alongside the Spanish text for better reading.

These are minutiae. What bothers the present reviewer is that if the intention was not to translate, but to simplify and modernize the Spanish text for today's reader, there seems to be no point in issuing this particular work. There are other more important writings, both printed and still in manuscript, which could have been stylized for modern reading. The fifty-five volumes of Philippine historical sources edited by Blair and Robertson need updating and supplementing to cover the history of the Philippines from 1900. Or, if energy and financial means are still available, many unread (and probably forever unused) manuscripts in the National Archives, or the Dominican Archives in Quezon City, are still waiting for an editor.

Lest this reviewer appear too negative, it is good to note that there are a number of people who are interested in preserving our national heritage. For this the HCS deserves praise and support.

JOSE S. ARCILLA

THE DIPLOMAT PAR EXCELLENCE

THE ITALIAN DIPLOMAT: AND ITALY AND SCOTLAND. By Alfred Stirling. Melbourne. The Hawthorn Press. 1971. Pp. 93. Two photographs. Two indices.

Many years ago, when the present reviewer was a young schoolmaster tutoring his students in All Things Knowable (from ancient Latin and Greek to Modern European History), it used to be very amusing to hold a public debate on such questions as: "Resolved: That Bismarck was a Greater Scoundrel Than Cavour." Such questions (eminently debatable) were invented by the present reviewer as a device to compel his students (without their realizing that they were being compelled) to read extensively into the exciting stories of how Bismarck united all of Germany under Prussia, and how Cavour united all of Italy under the House of Savoy. Neither process was easy, and various means—fair and foul—were used to bring about objectives that in themselves were not undesirable.

Mr. Stirling's essay on "The Italian Diplomat" recalls to mind those stirring days when Italy was seething with movements and counter-movements for and against unification. The "Italian Boot" was then a conglomeration of distinct states—some of them independent