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The Mysteries of Taal, by Hargrove

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The Mysteries of Taal: A Philippine Volcano and Lake, Her Sea Life and Lost Towns. By Thomas R. Hargrove. Manila: Bookmark Publishing, 1991. 204 pages, illus.

I first heard of Dr. Hargrove's underwater exploration of Taal from Ricky Jose of the Ayala Museum who asked if I had read the article on Taal in the *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology and Underwater Exploration*. Two years later Dr. Hargrove and Dr. Isagani Medina published "Sunken Ruins in Lake Taal" in *Philippine Studies* 36: 330-351.

The *Mysteries of Taal* will appeal to anyone interested in volcanoes, Philippine towns, oral history and legend, marine life, or anyone bitten by the romance of underwater archaeology — anyone, that is, who may have seen Loren Legarda's feature on the lost towns of Taal in "Peptalk" and may have felt the lure of joining this intrepid explorer in the murky waters of the lake.

Ten chapters, six appendices, notes and bibliography comprise the book. Starting with an overview spread throughout two chapters ("Untamed Taal Lake," "It Started with a Legend"), the book tells the tale of the search for the lost towns of Taal, Tanauan, Lipa, and Bauan. Four chapters bring the main narrative of the book to a close. These touch on sundry topics: the marine life of Taal, additional evidence corroborating the theories advanced in earlier chapters, a critique of the government's plan to tap the waters of Taal for agriculture, and a personal epilogue narrating the author's return to Taal in early April, before the eruption of yet another volcano, Mt. Pinatubo in Central Luzon. The six appendices cover diverse topics, e.g. the 1734 Murillo Velarde map, Juan Salcedo. But the first, "Eruptions of Taal Volcano, 1572-1977," is the most useful. Here the author documents forty-two eruptions, rather than thirty-three, the usual number cited, of this "deadliest" of Philippine volcanos.

I deliberately used the words "tale" and "narrative" in the previous paragraph because the book probably belongs to the same genre as Juan Alvarez Guerra's *De Manila a Tayabas*, or J. de Man's *Recollections of a Voyage to the Philippines* or La Gironiere's *Journey to Majayjay*. The book is written as a quest, or better still a romance with "a beautiful, mysterious, and treacherous volcano who has captivated men for centuries," by an author whose skills of observation and theorizing have been honed by his scientific background. These skills make the book fascinating reading.

On some points, the author is at the mercy of his informants, so that professional historians might have some quarrel with the author's historiography, e.g., the story of Caysasay. As narrated by the author, the tale follows the account of oral legend and tradition, in which the person responsible for finding the image of the Virgin is identified as Juan Magtibay. Canonical proceedings relating to this miraculous image, however, state a far more complex story. In a document from the Augustinian archives, it is told that around 1630, an image of the Virgin Mary was found by two

women. Devotion to this image spread and many chapels were built in honor of the Virgin. In 1639, a Chinese stonecutter, Juan Im Bim, built a shrine to the Virgin. Juan was unfortunately killed in a pogrom by the Spaniards against the Chinese during the revolt of 1639–40. Juan's body, dismembered, was hurled into the river, where a beautiful Lady (the Virgin of Caysasay) fished it out and resurrected it. It seems that in the course of time, Juan was identified as Indio, and in the telling of the tale the image of the Virgin rather than Juan, was fished out from the river. As to the origin of Caysasay from the name of the bird *casaycasay*, one must take into account the other names of the town *Casaysay*, found for instance in the Murillo map and other documents.

On the word *sapao*, both Hargrove and Medina fail to mention the earlier dictionary of San Buenaventura (1603), in which aside from giving *sapao* the meaning "a swelling of water . . . covering the land," both authorities define *sapao* as "placing one thing on top of the other, as plates or baskets on top of each other." That same meaning is found in the Noceda and Sanlucar dictionary (1760). This other meaning comes closer to the meaning popularly ascribed: "stacked stones." Has *sapao* disappeared from contemporary Tagalog? Not at all, except that the root often appears in its verb form "*nasapawan*," (a more archaic spelling would be "*nasapaoan*"), and is used metaphorically, "to upstage," rather than literally "to cover over," as in "water . . . covering the land."

The comments above do not detract from the book, which makes for a good read, nor do the typos—an obvious slip is page 142, which repeats the text on page 141—in fact, one forgets these and asks "What's next?"—a classic response to a good tale of sleuthing, which is what the book is all about.

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Simbahan: Church Art in Colonial Philippines 1565–1898. By Regalado Trota Jose. Makati: Ayala Museum 1991. 251 pages, illus.

Simbahan is a *must* reading for lovers of Philippine history, art, architecture; for curators, antique collectors, art educators; but especially for bishops, parish priests, seminarians, pastoral councils and the many custodians of our rich and opulent colonial heritage. Carefully researched and copiously illustrated, this book on colonial church architecture and art comes after three decades of abstinence, during which no national survey of colonial churches was done.