

from the people. But the people of Malindoc killed him, together with 3 Spanish companions. As a punishment, Captain Luis de Haya was ordered by the Spanish Government to destroy the Islands of Malindoc and Banton, which was done.

However, according to a report, dated June 1582, everything had apparently been reconstructed already, because it says: «The island of Banton lies about 1 league (= 5,3 km) from the island of Simara, or Cabras. Banton is about 8 leagues (44,5 km) in circumference and 3 leagues (= 16,7 km) wide, and has 200 people. The island is very craggy; it abounds in palm-trees, (sweet) potatoes, yams and wax. The people are traders... Donblon (= Romblon) is inhabited by nearly 250 people, and abounds in wax. This island and that of Banton come under the jurisdiction of the town of Arevalo (in Panay), and this is extended also over the islands of Sivahi (= Sibale), Similara, Buracay, Simara, Osaygan (= Tablas), (and) Sibuyan».

A 1594 report about the area, mentions that «250 *tributos* are collected from the people in Sibuyan and Cabras (= Simara), and 300 *tributos* are paid by the people of Vanton (Banton). But no one is giving religious instruction, and there is little hope of any christian teaching in the near future.

Before 1635 Romblon, and the neighboring islands, belonged to the Curacy or Parish of Acju, or Aclang (now called Kalibo) on the island of Panay, under the Bishop of Cebu. The secular priest¹ assigned to Romblon was Don Francisco Rodriguez Relator, whose task it was to go to the surrounding islands, up till Sibale, under dangerous circumstances, and at the risk of being captured by the Moros.

Because he was tired of having to flee to the interior mountains, almost every time he was at some place, to escape from the attacks of the Moro pirates he submitted to the Bishop of Cebu his resignation as Parish Priest of Romblon.

Therefore, in 1635 the Bishop of Cebu, Pedro de Arce OSA, entrusted to the Recoletos, through their Provincial Fr. Jose de la Asunción, the spiritual care of Romblon, Sibuyan, Usigan (= Tablas), Simara, Banton, Bantoncillo and Sibali (= Maestre de Campo), because there was no more Secular Priest available to take care of the spiritual needs of the people².

The first Recoleta Missionary to come to Romblon, the main station, was Fr. Pedro de San Josef Roxas, who had to visit the other mentioned islands as well. But he had hardly arrived (in 1636), or he had to escape already to the mountains of Romblon island, because the Moro pirates attacked the town, and burned down the church and convento and the houses

¹ The Spanish Secular clergy were government employees at the same time, collecting the yearly taxes. They cannot be compared with modern day Filipino Secular priests.

² Blair & Robertson 28, p. 317.

of the people, robbing all the valuables and bringing some people as captives along to be sold as slaves.

This was happening on a regular basis in the whole Bisayan area, making life for the people and the missionaries very difficult and miserable.

But there were other enemies as well, namely the Olandes or Dutch sailors who wanted to control the trade business in the Philippine seas. On July 31, 1646 an encounter took place between the Spanish and Dutch galleons on the high seas between Sibale and Mindoro. It was a battle that brought damage to both sides, but no decisive victory to either of them³.

Around 1647 the Recoleta Fr. Agustin de San Pedro was assigned to Romblon. He had been in Caraga, Mindanao, and was a valiant man who had often defended the towns against the attacks of the Moros. He knew how to organize the people, built strong defense works with their help, and had acquired the name: «Padre Capitan». Even the Moro leader Corralat (= Kudarat) was said to be afraid of him. On the islands around Romblon he built strong fortifications where the people took refuge when the Moros came. Until today the ruins of the *kutas* he built in Banton can still be seen. He died in Romblon around 1653, at 52 years of age.

Fr. Bartholome de Letona, in his description of the Philippines (around 1662, mentions that Maestre de Campo, and other smaller islands near Panay and Mindoro, were depopulated because of the continuous Moro piratical attacks⁴.

Another historical source alleges that the people of Maestre de Campo at the beginning of the 18th Century, were mostly fugitives from the Faith, but from around 1710, when a Recoleta Missionary had founded a village there, the people became faithful Christians⁵.

On the famous map of the Philippines of 1734, made by the Jesuit priest Pedro Murillo and engraved by the Filipino artist Nicolás de la Cruz Bagay, the island of Sibale is clearly indicated as well as Banton with 2 villages (Mainit and Tinaya), and other Bisayan islands.

In a letter of June 30, 1752 written by the Recoleta Provincial Fr. Matheo de la Encarnacion to Fernando VI, king of Spain is mentioned: «In the island of Banton a small stone fortification has been constructed, with permission of the authorities, at the cost of our Religious Province, and with the help of the local people, without any expenses to the Royal Treasury of Your Majesty. It is equipped with four cannons, and other smaller arms, so that we can defend ourselves. Our needs as Religious Workers are so great, that only the hope that our requests will be attended to, can assure us of consolation...»

³ Blair & Robertson 35, p. 241.

⁴ Blair & Robertson 36, p. 197.

⁵ Blair & Robertson 36, p. 176.

Moro Incursions

Among the unfortunate happenings in the history of Sibale, Banton, Romblon and other neighboring islands, are undoubtedly the destructions, killings, enslavings of people, that were caused by the Moro pirates coming from areas as Southern Mindanao, and even from as far away as Northern Sulawesi (Celebes) in Indonesia.

In Mindoro they caused the disappearance from the map of complete towns, that were at some time the biggest of the Island, like Calavite in the upper Northwest, and Dongon on the west coast of Mindoro⁶. Often Mindoro was used as a refuge and base by these Moros (as they were called), from where they could plan their raids, invasions, and murderous attacks on unsuspecting neighboring islands.

During the *amihan* monsoon they would stay on the west coast of the Island of Mindoro, at the Mamburao and Sta. Cruz rivers, and at the time of the *habagat* and the typhoon weather, the Moros stayed at the Piloto or Balete river, on Mindoro's east coast, situated 12 km south of Pinamalayan, exactly opposite Sibale.

Many records are available of the frequent attacks of these pirates all over the Central and South Philippines, and as a sample I will quote from a report written on May 24, 1755, by the Government in Manila, that combined all the information received about the Moro destructive activities during the year of 1754, especially in the northern Bisayan area around Romblon.

"On the fifth day of May of 1754, a fleet of 74 Moro boats arrived on the beaches and villages of the Bongabong District belonging to the Province of Mindoro, and stayed there for the period of two months and two days, sheltering in a large river called Piloto, from where they started going to the islands of Tablas, Simara, and Banton, all belonging to the Province of Panay [...] On Sibale, belonging to the District of Naujan, they captured 34 persons" (Folios 260rv and 263).

"On the 14th day of May of the same year, a group of Moros attacked the village of Odiongan, on Tablas Island, in the Romblon District belonging to Panay, and they burned down all the houses, the church and convento, and captured 101 persons. On the 22nd of the same month 11 Moro boats arrived at the island of Romblon, dropping anchor at an inlet called Agnay, and attacked the entrance to the town (of Romblon) where the people had put up a strong defense. Because of that, the Moros were forced to withdraw to their boats and they fled away. On the high seas they encountered a big champan and started to attack it. The boat was under command of Josef Fermin de Guzman, and he caused a lot of damage to three of the Moro boats" (Folios 266^v-267).

⁶ See: "Calavite: the life and death of a Mindoro Parish", in *Philippine Quarterly of Culture & Society* 25 (1997) 156-180.

“At the same time (May 22), a group of 18 Moro boats arrived at the village of Cabolot (North of San Agustin) on the island of Tablas, belonging to Panay as well, and they burned down the church, convento and all the houses of the village, after which they crossed over to the island of Sibuyan and attacked the village of Kawit (now called Azagra), burning down the houses and destroying the cultivated fields. They captured here 95 persons”.

“On the 25th day of May, of 1754, a fleet of 57 Moro boats assembled at the island of Banton, of the same Province of Panay, at a bay called Mainit (on the west coast), from where they crossed over to the northern tip of Romblon island, and trekked over land towards the town of Romblon (that they failed to capture earlier), and attacked it unexpectedly, burning down the church, convento and the baluartes, and all the houses of the people. They carried along four bronze cannons of one pound caliber each. 67 persons were captured, and brought along in their boats, together with the sacred ornaments of the church. That is the main reason why the District of Romblon has now been abandoned, and the people have transferred to other provinces after these repeated calamities” (Folios 267-268)⁷.

But the difficulties and miseries with the Moro pirates continued unabated, as can be read in the yearly report written on July 30, 1764, by the Recoleta Provincial Fr. Miguel de la Consolación, to Carlos III, King of Spain: “...In the Province of Panay, my religious are taking care of the Capital of... Romblon with the islands of Zibuyan, Tablas and Nagosa (= Carabao island), the Capital Banton, that was burned down by the Moros, and the two islands are already abandoned, because the Moros have either captured or killed all their inhabitants”.

In a later report, written on Jan. 31, 1775 by the Recoleta Provincial Fr. Roque de San Bruno and sent to the Manila Government, we can read that in the meantime the situation in Romblon had greatly improved. Because the Recoleta Province of San Nicolas de Tolentino, realizing the great danger that Romblon might become desolated of people and priests, decided to build a strong fortress of stone, approved by the government, as a protection against future assaults by the Moros.

It was constructed at the expense of the Recoleta Province, without any costs to the Manila Government, and was kept supplied regularly with weapons, bullets and gun-powder.

Fr. de San Bruno continued (p. 61):

“At present there are three *baluartes* in Romblon, with a total of 10 cannons, although not of heavy caliber. The soldiers in charge are from among the people themselves, organized and trained by the priests

⁷ From a manuscript of 47 pages, available at the “Archivo de la Nación, Mexico”, *Filipinas*, leg. 3, Fol. 257-280.

of the area, without any help or salaries from the government, and even without food rations, whereas they pay their yearly taxes like any other town”.

“The Captains in charge of the soldiers are the *Cabezas* of the Barangays, and the Officials of the town. Every week another group is assigned to be on guard, and be always alert for any danger. The keys of the *baluartes* are turned over every night to the Padre Prior at the Convento of Romblon. The defense force is always kept in military readiness, with a continuous watch to be on the look out for the Moros”.

“In this way, Romblon has been saved from the invasions of the enemies (Moros), who did not dare to approach this town since the defense-works were constructed. Even if the Recoleta Province is spending much for its maintenance, it is for the Service to God, to the King our Lord, and the good of all the people”.

Recoletos Misionarios # 1

From the above, it is clear that the priests of the Order of the Recoletos who were assigned to the District of Romblon, including Sibale, Banton, and other islands mentioned, have made a great contribution to the stability of the security situation during the time of the Moro assaults on all the islands where a *baluarte* was constructed, and the people were organized and united by the Missionaries to defend themselves.

Although I don't have complete data on the names and the activities of all the Recoletos that were assigned to Banton and nearby islands, because my historical research has been focused mainly in Mindoro, I will just present what I could find out from my limited sources.

From the Recoleta records (SÁDABA), it seems that Padre Jesus del Rosario was the first priest assigned to Banton in May of 1746 for the usual term of three years. At that moment Juan de San Jose was prior in Romblon (since 1743)⁸ that no longer had to take care of Banton, although Romblon remained the district town where the priests of Banton went for their meetings, sick-leave.

Padre Jesus dedicated himself fully to the spiritual and material development of the Banton and Sibale. He built a beautiful church in Banton, and was constructing there a church of stone. He also went to Sibale, rebuilt church and convento, burned down by the Moros, and urged the people to resettle there. His reappointment in 1749 for another triennial did not reach him anymore, because he had died in Romblon on May 3, 1749.

⁸ Who was a diligent priest as well, and who worked in 1745 much among the Mangyans of Sibuyan, bringing them to the Faith. At one time he baptized 261 adults, making a complete census of their families. These Mangyans were originally from Southern Mindoro, and had been unable to return to Mindoro.

Miguel del Rosario succeeded him on May 5, 1749, and nothing is reported about him, except that he died already in March of 1751.

For the meantime, Ignacio de Jesus, assistant priest in Romblon since 1746, took over in Banton during 1751⁹, although he was very busy himself, but in 1753 he was made free and assigned to Banton. This was a most difficult time, especially in terms of Moro raids, and his three – year term was extended for 5 times, not only as a sign that he did his job well, but also that it was difficult to get the “right man in the right place”. Unfortunately, after having been assigned to Banton for 15 years, he got sick in 1768 and after a long illness, he died on Banton itself on May 26, 1769. Too bad we have no additional information on his prisoner work.

Again the assistant priest of the Romblon Parish took over during 1769. He was Jeronimo de Jesus, and he continued the apostolate in Banton, until he was officially appointed as the next Pastor of Banton and surrounding islands in 1770. Although in 1771, when he was assigned to Manila as Novicemaster, and Miguel de San Jose had taken his place as missionary of Banton (till 1773), he still kept a lively interest in the island, and went there whenever he could find the time for it. This made a great impression on his Superiors, and they entrusted the few novices available in Manila, to someone else, and appointed Padre Jeronimo in 1773 again for another 3 years to Banton. Later, in 1776, he crossed over to Mindoro, where he was assigned to Naujan, but less than a year later, on Jan. 23, 1777, he died in Calapan, at the early age of 42 years.

It meant that Banton depended again on Romblon, and Lorenzo de San Jose, the assistant priest there since 1779, was the one to visit Banton occasionally until 1782, when he was transferred to Mobo (in Masbate). Romblon itself was now severely pressed because of the lack of Recoleta Priests in the Philippines, and Banton could not properly be attended to for several years, until 1789.

The records give Manuel de San Jose as the resident priest in Romblon from 1785 until 1787, and he was succeeded as parish-priest by Joaquin del Rosario in 1788. His assistant there, Narciso de Guia (at last, after 7 years), got the special assignment for Banton again on May 5, 1789, for the coming 3 years, after which he transferred to Zamboanga.

The new Pastor of Romblon, assigned there in 1791, was Santiago de Jesus, and his assistant, on October 5, 1790, was Marcelino de las Mercedes, a newly ordained priest. We can assume that he also went to Banton occasionally, although in 1793, when his parish-priest, Padre Santiago, died in Romblon, he was alone till 1794, and very hard up with all the work.

⁹ See: ORSA Document of 1752, about the small fortress that was constructed on Banton.

During the same year (1794) he was promoted as the new Pastor of Romblon, and got as his "assistant" a retired veteran missionary of 70 years old, Miguel de San Jose, who had been in Banton for two years (1771-1773). He stayed in Romblon till 1797, and retired definitely to Manila, where he died on Aug. 21, 1804.

Surely, Padre Marcelino worked out a special deal with him, so that Padre Miguel would stay in Romblon, while he as the parish-priest, who was 40 years his junior, would go to the rough apostolate of a rowing, sea-faring Missionay to the northern Islands of Simara, Banton and Sibale.

Fortunately, in 1797, Francisco de Sta. Teresa was appointed to Romblon, with a special mission of taking care of Banton, which he did faithfully for the allotted 10 years (till 1807), although no data are available about the his activities there.

In 1807, when Alonso de San Jose, a priest of 31 years old, assigned to Loon, in Bohol, heard that Banton was without a resident priest, and that this island was the poorest and most isolated place, constantly exposed to the attacks of the Moros, he "felt strongly motivated by the ardent desire to suffer for the sake of God and the salvation of souls", and he asked his Provincial Superior to be assigned to Banton, which was approved on May 13, 1808.

Soon after that, he boarded, with a lay companion, a boat in Cebu, that was coasting between the islands. However, before they reached Capiz, at the north-eastern point of the island of Panay, they were pursued by some Moros boats. The Captain decided to abandon the ship, and went with a small sloop to the shore nearby, but Padre Alonso said he was going to stay, and fight off the Moros. So the Captain went ahead and saved himself, but his companion with the priest and his helper, was soon assaulted by the Moros.

Padre Alonso and his valiant companion put up a desperate fight and managed to kill 3 of the Moro pirates, but suddenly he received such a slash of a "kampilan", that one arm and part of his body was almost cut off, and he died on the spot. His companion was made a prisoner, but managed later to escape. He told the whole story of the tragic death of Padre Alonso to the Recoleta Superior.

When Padre Francisco heard about the ordeal of his confrere, he offered to return to Banton until a new replacement was available. In 1809 Manuel de la Consolacion was appointed as the new replacement, and Padre Francisco went to Cebu. Unfortunately, the new missionary, Padre Manuel, didn't last long, because already in 1810, he died in Banton.

From 1810-1815 there are no data available of the Mission of Banton, and if no priest were assigned there, it was probably taken care of, as usual, by the priest of Romblon, who since 1802 was Juan de San Agustin, and who stayed there till 1818.

In 1815 Pedro de la Virgen del Carmen was assigned to Banton, but the work there might have been too strenuous for him, because he died there soon, on Nov. 6, 1816, at the age of 40 years, and again Padre Juan of Romblon took care of Banton, at least until 1818, or maybe his assistant priest Alejandro del Pilar, who was in Romblon till Feb. 1819, and after that, his successor, Miguel Martinez, who stayed in Romblon until 1834.

However, in 1821 a new priest, Lorenzo de la Fe became the next parish-priest of Banton, where he remained until 1825. He then was assigned to Cebu, and for two years the people of Banton had to wait for his successor, who arrived on Nov. 10, 1827, in the person of Alejandro del Pilar who had been assigned to Romblon before (1825-1826).

But he only managed to stay in Banton for just a bit more than one year, because he died there two days before Christmas of 1828, at only 35 years of age, and the 10th of his priesthood.

His successor was Jose Aznar de la Virgen de los Dolores who came in 1829 to Banton on his first assignment as a young priest of 23 years old. But he was a tough guy and stayed in Banton for 14 years (till 1843), after which he still went to Irirum in West-Mindoro, and died later in Loay (in Bohol), at the age of 50.

He was the one involved in a case in 1834-35 (see below), when two of his faithful parishioners were picked up from the island of Sibale, suspected of being criminals, and were put into prison in Manila. On the strength of his written statement, these two men could return home to Banton, after six months of "sightseeing" in Manila.

Aside from this incident, there are no other data available about his pastoral work in Banton. For interest sake follows now part of a Recoleta report of 1829.

Situation Report of 1829

A Spanish manuscript of Oct. 25, 1829, written by a Recoleta Missionary of Mindoro for many years, Fr. Pedro de Sta. Rita, describes the efforts to increase the population of Mindoro and neighboring Bisayan islands. I will quote some interesting portions of it:

"The island of Banton, at a short distance of Pola or Pinamalayan (65 km.), is not only useless to its population because of its great infertility, but also because of all its shores, where even the Moros could not find a permanent landingplace for their boats, because it is without a decent bay, without rivers, but only with a steep, rocky shoreline".

"All around the island, not a single shelter can be found for any type of boat, and actually this is the reason why there is a settlement of more than 400 *tributos* (= more 2,000 people), who were afraid of the Moros

and took refuge on that place, coming from a small village (Banton) formerly belonging to Romblon, but now separated from it, and established in 1772¹⁰ as a separate parish, with its annexes some villages on the island of Tablas nearby”.

“Its inhabitants have cultivated the small, infertile patches of land they could find, and are growing a kind of rice they call *bigá*, the only product the poor people have, to keep themselves alive”.

“When the Moro raids are becoming less frequent, because of the navy boats from Mindoro that are coming around, this people will be going to the low-lying island of Simara, where they have a few caingins, that during the time of the rice harvest they often have to abandon to the Moro pirates when they are suddenly appearing. If so, they can only escape from them, when with their bangkas they can reach Banton ahead of the pirates”.

“Realizing how hard it is to have to escape like that every time, they have started now to set up a small village on the island of Simara (that in the meantime has been captured already several times by the Moros). But because they have no other land to cultivate, and don't like to give up their little island, notwithstanding that every year they are being captured as slaves”.

“The same people (of Banton), have tried to settle down on the island of Maestre de Campo (or Sibale), because they can cultivate a little piece of mountain slope there. Three or more times during the 16 years I have been in Mindoro, they have tried to build a village there, but every time they became the victims of the Moros. Nevertheless, as the priest who is staying in Banton has told me, they keep trying to settle down, again and again, on Maestre de Campo, and in the course of time, the same ill-fated luck will be their lot as well”.

“Those inhabitants of Banton have been cordially invited, several times already, to cross over to the island of Mindoro, and come to Balete and start a new life there, with plenty of land to be allotted to them, and all the conveniences that a Filipino could obtain. But everytime they excuse themselves saying they already started building their *Cota*, a stone wall to defend themselves in Banton, and also, that they had already built a church of stone.

“It is true, that by staying there, they would not have to build anymore these two most important constructions needed for their protection. But on the other hand, if they would be in Balete, whether altogether in one place, or in two separate villages, there would be enough people available to work on a defense project, and build the same fort they would have constructed there. Moreover, they would have the great advantage, that at whatever place they would settle down, from the Point of Pinamalayan till the town of Bungabon, not only would they have plenty of land to cultivate, level and fertil land at that, but that aside from the trees (for

¹⁰ This is not correct. It happened already around 1746 ¡See!

house construction) and bee-wax (for paying their taxes), they would find food immediately with the *yoro* (sago-flour) of the *buri*-palm, or of the *cabo-negro* (sugar-palm) that are plentiful in the whole area. Still many more advantages they would enjoy after a few years, as the fruits of their work and efforts. After all, the Moro inhabitants of the past, stayed in the Balete area for so long a time, because of all these advantages" (pages 9-12. End of the report).

Follows now a synopsis of an official government report about their survey of Sibale, and subsequent happenings.

Criminals in Sibale?

In the National Archives in Manila (NAM), there is an interesting Manuscript (EdP. Leg. 8914) dealing with the period of 1834 till 1836, when the Central Government wanted to open up the island of Sibale for immigration, especially from Banton. I will quote from this extremely interesting Manuscript that relates part of the histories of Sibale and Banton.

On July 18, 1834, the Manila Government sent a request to José Atienza, the governor and the military commander of the province of Mindoro, to explore the possibility for settling people on the island of Maestre de Campo (= Sibale) by means of immigration.

On September 5 of the same year, Atienza instructed the *gobernadorcillo* (= "little governor", or village head) of Puerto Galera, Thomas de Castro to go to Sibale, explore the island, and find out for himself if there was a settlement, and how many *tributos* were being for a living, and if they had made any defenseworks against the Moros, etc. And to submit to him a complete report about it.

Three days later, on September 8, de Castro, together with two companions, boarded the government *Lancha* * 18, that stood under command of Captain Don Antonio Cruz, starting from Puerto Galera at 8 o'clock in the evening. This was a big sailboat with a crew of its own, and a small detachment of soldiers, and they arrived at the excellently sheltered bay of Concepcion, on the south-eastern corner of Sibale, on Sept. 11, 1834 at around 6:00 in the afternoon.

Early morning next day, Thomas de Castro was going to explore the island of Sibale, and requested Captain Cruz to assign to him one officer with two soldiers, and 3 government officials from Puerto Galera, as assistance and witnesses to his exploration of Sibale. They went around the island the whole day, but didn't meet anybody, nor did they see any settlement or agricultural cultivation, and they returned to their boat in the late afternoon.

The following day they went around the whole island with the *Lancha*, and at a north-eastern point they saw two men on the beach, near a little

bay. They lowered a small boat (*falua*) and rowed to the shore. The two men saw that and they met them half-way with their *baroto* (bangka).

The Captain was asked for permission to have them questioned and affidavits made at the *aplaya*, to know the place where they were staying, but the weather turned very bad, and the steep rocky shore was unsafe for an anchorage. Therefore, the next day, the 14th of September, the Captain decided to go to the town of Pola, in Mindoro, taking the two men along, for the planned investigation.

On Sept. 15, Thomas de Castro interrogated first Nicolas de Tolentino, an old man of 60 years, with the help of an interpreter, after first taking his oath with the Sign of the Cross. He said that there was no village on Sibale, but that he came from Banton (or Bantuin, as he called it), belonging to the province of Capiz, and had paid his taxes to the *Cabesa* de Barangay of Nicolas de Jesus. His grandfather was Mateo Trinidad, and their parish-priest was the Recoleta Fr. Jose de Ntra. Señora del Carmen¹¹.

According to Nicolas de Tolentino nobody had tried to settle down on Sibale, but in the past, with permission of the government, a certain Cabesa Don Mariano had tried to establish a village on Sibale.

Nicolas and his companion had their *caingin* on Sibale, and stayed there during the week, but on Fridays or Saturdays they returned to Bantuin to attend Mass on Sundays, and after that they went back again to Sibale.

He had used 30 *gantas* of rice seeds for his field, but worked on it with a group of 11 persons, 6 of whom were his relatives. During the harvest season he had harvested 50 *cavans* of rice, and brought that to Bantuin.

From the *gobernadorcillo* of Bantuin he had received permission to go to Sibale, and had only gone to the beach to find out if there were pirates, or boats of the Moros. That's why he had left his permit at the house near his *caingin*, and had no more time to get it, because of the hurry to get away due to the bad weather.

The other man was Martin Garcia, a *soltero* of 23 years, and he declared under oath that he was not a resident of Sibale, but had come along with his father Domingo Garcia who was one of the group working in the *caingin* at Sibale. He didn't know how many *gantas* of rice his field was.

There was no settlement or any *baluarte* on Sibale, but Cabesa Nicolas de Jesus had said he was willing to start a village some time, if the government gave its permission. He belonged to the Barangay on Bantuin of Cabesa Pedro Cavillera, and his grandfathers were Domingo Javier and Ignacio Cavillera.

¹¹ Apparently the Priests were only known by their first names, therefore he was mistaken here with the surname, although a former priest of Banton was Pedro de la Virgen del Carmen, but he had died in Banton 18 years earlier, in 1816!

Thomas de Castro mentioned in his report that he and Captain Cruz had a good impression of the two men, but had to bring them along as they were ordered to do so by the Governor of Mindoro.

All these affidavits were submitted to governor Atienza in Puerto Galera on Sept. 23, and the two men had to come along. The Governor still added his own report to it, and this, together with the two men under escort, were brought to Manila. They arrived there on October 9, 1834, and the two men were put into prison right away.

The whole report was now studied by the different government officials, and on Oct. 31, they requested that more information should be obtained from the two men about their doubtful activities, their civil status, and whether they had complied with their Church obligations (including the paying of government taxes!).

Therefore, on Nov. 4 Martin Garcia was questioned in prison, but Nicolas de Tolentino in the hospital, because he got sick in prison. They repeated that they had obtained proper clearances from the local government at Bantuin permitting them to go to Sibale, but their papers had been left behind in the little hut they had built there.

On Nov. 17 the Manila government decided to get verification from Capiz, requesting them to contact the priest at Banton as well. The two men were now transferred to the navy prison in Cavite, waiting for the response from Capiz for their eventual release.

On Feb. 7, 1835 Fr. José Aznar de los Dolores, the parish-priest of Banton was notified, and Francisco Salvador as well, the *gobernadorcillo* of Banton on Feb. 9, and both were requested to give their opinion of the two prisoners.

Fr. José, the Recoleta Priest of Banton, had been there since 1829 (and was going to stay there till 1843). He responded to Capiz on Feb. 21, and declared that he knew the two men well, and that they were respectable citizens and good Christians and fulfilled all their obligations regarding the Church and the State.

He thought it a good idea to start a settlement on Maestre de Campo, but Banton should also be helped, because the Moros had attacked the place twice already recently, and they badly needed weapons to defend themselves.

Francisco Salvador, the *gobernadorcillo* of Banton, wrote on the 25th of February, 1835, that the two men belonged to the Barangays of Banton and had paid their taxes, and faithfully had fulfilled their Christian obligations. They had gone to Sibale for fishing and making caingins, but that they had been given proper permission for that.

Based on that information, the Capiz government recommended on March 2 to the Manila Government that the two men in prison should be released, and be permitted to return to their families in Banton. And with

this last report Manila was satisfied and Nicolas de Tolentino and Martin Garcia were supplied with the proper permits and returned to Banton, after almost half a year of imprisonment.

Beginning May 1835, Don Miguel Duran, the new governor of Capiz, came upon the file about the exploration of Sibale whether it would be advisable to start again to establish a settlement there, and thought that this file had not properly been concluded yet. He therefore decided to give his opinion on the matter, and on July 20, 1835 he sent to the Central Government in Manila his strong recommendation for the immigration of settlers from Banton to Maestre de Campo. The advantages that a new settlement on Sibale would give, were: 1) that the Moros would be deprived from a shelter and a base for their piratical attacks; 2) that it would give a safe harbor to Bisayan shipping on their way to Manila, especially during the time of typhoons and stormy weather.

The distance from Banton to Sibale would be about 20 to 23 miles, and with good weather the people could go there with their *banquillas* (= bangkas). However before the immigration should start, an advance group should go to Sibale provided with weapons and should start constructing two *Baluartes*, or defense works.

Manila did not like to make a decision on the recommendation of an inexperienced new governor, but sent the whole file to the Provincial Superior of the Recoletos in Manila on Aug. 25. The Recolecto Provincial at that time was Fr. Miguel Martinez. He had been parish-priest of Romblon for 15 years, and knew the local situation from his personal experience. On Aug. 31, 1835 he submitted his well-founded report.

From the beginning he made it clear that he was absolutely against the immigration project, because of the lack of security that could not be guaranteed by the Government. He believed:

“... That the Moros would fiercely attack any new settlement that was established. They would burn it down, and capture its population, and do this repeatedly until nobody would dare to stay there any longer. Such was the situation at the moment, especially in Banton where over the years some 200 families has already been sacrificed by the Moros at the different settlements”.

“They say: it happened because the people have no weapons to defend themselves. Certainly, but weapons alone are useless for their defense if no one is taking care of these. Moreover, the Moros know how to surprise the people, and attack them unexpectedly in thousand different ways, before the people even have the chance to use the weapons”.

“The island of Maestre Campo is so small that it cannot sustain with its own products a town of 300 *tributos* (equivalent to 1,500)¹², and

¹² In the 1939 Census the total population was 1,754 “souls”, tat increased to 2,147 in the 1948 official Census.

therefore there could be no development, and no defense force, nor would there be a priest to teach them the Faith, or defend them against the Moros. The distance from Banton is more than 6 leagues (= 33.4 km), and the priest of that place could not possibly go to Sibale, because he is too busy already with the villages on the islands of Simara and Tablas”.

“The island of Tablas is quite big and it can accommodate many new towns. It has fertile lands and plenty of rivers and harbors. It is unequalled as to fisheries, and is superabundant in trees of any kind, whereas it only has 100 *tributos* (or 500 people), divided over 3 villages. Indeed, the island of Tablas is inviting to be settled down for better reasons and greater advantages than Maestre Campo could offer, without having to be afraid that the means for protecting and feeding several thousands of its inhabitants would be lacking”.

“Finally, to establish a town-site in Maestre Campo, with a sea-crossing of 6 leagues from Banton, its capital, without a resident priest, appears to me like looking for a place of lawlessness, distrust and lack of religion, and a nest of smugglers, Tagalogs or Bisayans, just in case it is not yet destroyed by the Moros, as I said before. This is my opinion”.

This strong negative reaction was mulled over and discussed among the various Government offices in Manila, and on November 5 of 1835 they presented as their final decision:

“In view of the fact that notwithstanding this is the third effort to establish a settlement on the island of Maestre de Campo, those who are in favor and have been proposing this, have actually not given any proof that there is a need for it, nor that it can be accomplished without immense expenses and resources. On the contrary, the Recoleta Provincial is the only one who has supplied the Government, at our request, with solid data based on a thorough knowledge of the situation. Therefore it is our founded opinion that the establishment of a town-site on such a small, poor, Moro-exposed island as Maestre de Campo, is out of the question. It might be better to look into the possibility of additional settlements to be founded on the much bigger island of Tablas, as suggested by the Reverent Fr. Provincial”.

The Provincial Government of Capiz was informed of this decision on March 15, 1836, with the advice to discourage any farther emigration from Banton to Maestre de Campo, which concluded this manuscript government file.

Recoletos Misionarios *2

After the departure in 1843 of Banton's parish priest, Padre Jose Aznar for Irirum, in West Mindoro, his successor in Banton in the same year was Pedro Guillermo, and he also remained there for quite a considerable time,

15 years (even longer than his predecessor), until 1858. After that he went to Odiongan, on the Island of Tablas, as its first parish priest, because it had just been created a separate Parish. Unfortunately, however, he died there after only a few years, on July 14, 1862.

It should be mentioned here, that in the meantime the infamous Decree of Nov. 21, 1849 had been implemented by Governor-General Narciso Clavería, for the compulsory imposition of "*Apellidos*" or surnames on those who "did not have a proper one". It resulted in the surnames of the total population of Banton, and their neighboring Bisayan Islands (and partly also the South of Mindoro), that were all starting with the alphabet letter "F"¹³.

On September of 1858, Pablo Bienzobas took over in Banton for a short time, after his assignment in Sablayan, in West-Mindoro, where he had been the resident missionary for 5 years. After only one year however, in 1859, he left and would become the resident missionary of Puerto Galera, Mindoro. (But he would be back in Banton during 1870, after an absence of 10 years).

On July 11, 1859, his successor in Banton was Manuel Alonso, and he was supposed to stay only till 1860, when he was to be transferred to Basilan. But because there was no replacement for him available for Banton, he decided to postpone his departure till Jan. 1861. But even then, no one was available yet for Banton, and maybe the parish priest of Odiongan, Pedro Guillermo, took additional care of Banton during the absence of the priest there. After all, he had been there himself, and still knew the Bisaya variety that was the same as the one spoken in Odiongan, a rare linguistic gem as compared with the neighboring Bisayan dialects.

However, on Dec. 31, 1861, Eustaquio Ruiz received the appointment as the next parish priest of Banton, and he stayed there until end April of 1862. He still could introduce his successor, Ignacio Noguerras, who was appointed already on Feb. 8 of the same year. Maybe the introduction in the local language was needed, because the new Pastor to be had been learning his Bisaya for one year in Tagbilaran, and in Banton he might not be understood too well with his Cebuano knowledge.

During his stay in Banton, another government effort would be undertaken to resettle Maestre de Campo, but Padre Ignacio's name is not mentioned in the official records.

Sibale Revisited

In 1864, less than 30 years after the first official Government survey of Sibale of 1834-1836, another effort would be undertaken to establish

¹³ "F", a fricative labio-dental sound, was not part of their own Bisayan dialect, and was usually pronounced as "p".

settlements on Sibale (or Maestre de Campo, as the Spaniards called the island). By that time the security situation had certainly greatly improved concerning the Moro attacks, because the Spanish Government had introduced in 1860 a total of 18 steamboats for use in the Philippine Archipelago. They were challenging, and gradually defeating the smaller and slower boats of the Moro pirates, that were only equipped with sails and oars, wind and manpower.

On Aug. 12, 1864, the Provincial Government of Cebu instructed the Commander of Romblon, to submit a report on the location, extension, soil composition, coastal anchorage, productions, inhabitants, etc., of the Island of Maestre de Campo, so that there the authority of the Government could firmly be established, because they had been informed that said island was a hideout of criminals.

The *Comandancia* of the Romblon District wrote on Jan. 19, 1865, that for the time being it was impossible to submit a report about Maestre de Campo, because it was 40 miles (= 74 kms) away from Romblon, and the only boat available was a "*baroto*", too small to cross the stormy sea due to the *amihan* monsoon season. As soon as the weather would clear up, the said island would be explored, and a report submitted.

The reply from Cebu on Feb. 23 was, that the weather situation was understood, but that an estimate of expenses for the construction of a bigger boat (*Barangay*) to be used by the *Comandancia*, to visit all the islands belonging to it, should be submitted, as well as the possible estimate for a budget needed for salaries to its personnel and maintenance.

On April 12, Commander Eduardo Asuero of Romblon, submitted the official report of his survey of Sibale, that he conducted from his boat, going around the island. He gave the data for its location, extension, soil composition, and productivity, with the remarks that he found the land uncultivated, as far as he could observe that from the sea, but a great number of coconuts, cacao, tobacco, and all kinds of root crops could be produced there. A few coco palms were there, but allegedly planted by the people of Banton, and abandoned later, for fear of the Moros and the criminals, that were hiding on Sibale.

He also saw some 6 to 8 huts, without any people, but its inhabitants, criminals undoubtedly, had probably fled to the interior mountains already when they saw his boat approaching. The harbor on the south-eastern point was excellent, and there were plenty of fresh-water springs available, but no rivers.

He further remarked that the people of neighboring Banton that he also visited, were mainly occupied with boat-making, although they had no harbor there to shelter them. The lumber for those boats they even had to get still from Tablas. They could grow very little on Banton, although they

tried very hard. Therefore, they would be very eager to transfer to Sibale, if they could be sure of its safety, and they should be supplied with fire-arms for protection against the criminals. Moreover, the *Tercio Civil* or civilian police force, should be stationed on Sibale as long as the community of settlers would still be small. The locality of the future town should be determined by the position of the harbor.

On June 14, 1865, this report was forwarded by the Cebu Provincial Government to Bishop Romualdo of Cebu for his comment, and in his reply of August 3, he wrote that the survey was only made from the sea, by going around the islands with a boat, and therefore it would be difficult to suggest proper ways to subdue these alleged "criminals". "Alleged", because there was no proof of it, and they would have their cultivation if they were staying there, but cultivations were not observed, according to the survey.

A real survey of the interior would be needed to find out if people were living on Sibale and if they were criminals. A small group of people with some soldiers could easily determine that in one week and a half of exploration. Only after that, would it be known if the people were peaceful, or if they had to be subdued with weapons, and then it could be considered whether a priest should be assigned there or not.

The reaction of the officialdom of Romblon to this reasonable comment of the Bishop of Cebu was rather negative, and it was thought that:

"... only with a big boat and a large party, with at least 8 soldiers, the survey could be conducted, because of the risk that they would be confronted with by a strong opposition of seasoned criminals who would know the terrain very well. That's why an inspection from the sea had been conducted first.

"Even if they were not criminals but only tax evaders, they could easily hide themselves and remain undetected even if a group of twelve men would be looking for them.

"As to the cultivations that the good Bishop thought should be there, maybe he didn't know that the native Filipino could survive very well on rootcrops, that he could find everywhere in the forests, supplemented by fish and shells from the shore, and even honey, etc. That would be available.

"The best indeed would be: to go with a fleet of boats to Sibale, surround the Island, spreading out along the beaches, and first destroy all the *bangkas* they could find, to prevent anyone from escaping, and then reassemble at one point and go to the interior. Once the inhabitants, criminals or not, would have noticed that they were outnumbered by a strong force with superior weapons, they would rather like to surrender, than to be killed off.

"Under strict security these people then would be conducted to Romblon, and be handed over to the authorities for questioning. Thus, with the elimination of undesirable elements among the settlers from

Sibale, only then the people of Banton could go there to establish a village, with the usual local government in charge, controlling the safety of the new settlers”.

This report was duly received in Cebu, but not acted upon because there was a change of government officials there. Once this was installed, it decided to present the case to the Central Government in Manila for their opinion and final decision. Therefore, the whole file was forwarded to Manila on Jan. 19, 1866, and from there it was passed on to the General *Comandancia de Marina* on February 19, that gave its response on March 2, 1866, through its highest representative: the General Commander Jeronimo de Pavia, who wrote (among other things):

“The poor people of Sibale are not criminals that should be rounded up in a military raid, and then turned over to the judiciary for trial. I believe that they are a group of unfortunate people, without fixed residence, and afraid of being listed as tax-payers, and they have to be treated with understanding and Christian charity.

“Those not acquainted with the ways of living of these people, don’t understand the terrible condition there are in, of being isolated and alienated from an organized township. They are deprived, degraded, hungry and sickly, and might have taken refuge on Sibale already during an earlier generation. For a long time there has been talk already about the miserable and abominable inhabitants of Sibale, who are considered to be almost more animal than human beings.

“The Reverend and Virtuous Prelate of Cebu was advising to solve this problem, using his good reason and common sense, in accordance with established tradition, but apparently his respectable opinion could not be accepted!

“The island of Maestre de Campo lies along a sea route where all the navy boats are passing to Iloilo and Cebu, and farther still to Mindanao, and it would not cost anything to ask the Commander of one of these boats to enter the harbor of Sibale, a very good one, at its south-eastern corner, and disembark a group of men to inspect the island without molesting anyone, or destroying anything.

“Once it is clear what the situation is, those families who would be interested to migrate to Sibale, should be assembled, together with their belongings, in Romblon¹⁴, and in one of the coming months, when the weather conditions will have improved, I will send a steamboat to Romblon¹⁵, to bring the new settlers, who have volunteered, to Sibale.

“When they have arrived in Sibale, they should not meddle immediately with the affairs of those who are already living there, because

¹⁴ Including those coming from Banton, because it would be impossible to anchor and embark there.

¹⁵ This would be a rare occurrence because they had only recently (1860) been introduced in the Philippines!

they would run to the mountains right away. Later on, once they would have been contacted and well treated, all of them will form a big family in the end, and then Sibale would be normally increase in population, like any other island of the archipelago.

"But I would like to reiterate to the Commander of Romblon, as well as to the one in charge of the navy boat, and to anyone in authority at the new settlement to be in Sibale, and recommend this most urgently, that they will not burn or destroy any thing, and especially not try to force or dictate the original inhabitants, who as human beings, are maybe the most worthy of the best of compassion that can be shown to them.

"It is absolutely wrong to say that the few and unfortunate people living in Sibale now, are pirates. What has happened is, that this almost deserted island has been a shelter for the Moro pirates, when they conducted their invasions in the archipelago. The inhabitants of Sibale were fleeing from the Moros, like they are fleeing from us, and from all those who will be invading their island, because they are full of fear, and expect to be harmed by any type of people that is coming close to them.

"Therefore, I repeat, in my opinion there should not be any damage inflicted on them, but the people there should be left alone, and in due time they will get befriended with those of the new settlement-to-be in Sibale (SGD) Jeronimo de Pavia".

On March 17, 1866, the Manila Government expressed its satisfaction and total agreement with this proposed arrangement of the General Commander of the "*Marina*", and hoped that in due time a report would be submitted to them on the result of this important undertaking.

The last information available regarding this interesting report, dates from April 5, 1866, when Jeronimo de Pavia gave his instruction to the Commander of the steamboat "*Reyna de Castilla*" as follows:

"On April 8, 1866, you are to proceed with the steamer under your command to the harbor at the S.E.¹⁶, of the small island of Maestre de Campo, and observe any particulars of its entrance and exit, its depth, the best place for disembarking, a river or proper watering place for the provision of drinking water, and any information of importance, to be used for drawing up a detailed report of the locality.

"I wish to stress the point, that in case there would be any inhabitants there, they should not be molested or disturbed in any way; on the contrary, they should be made to understand that the creation of a village, like anywhere else in the archipelago, would be of great advantage to them as well.

"If all this has been accomplished, you are to proceed to Romblon Harbor, and upon arrangement with the local military Commander, you can take on board, with destination to said harbor of Maestre de Campo,

¹⁶ The original manuscript reads "S.O." or "*Sud-Oeste*", that means: "South-West" (Sic!), but that must be clearly a writing error of the secretary!

all those settlers and their belongings, who wish to immigrate to the island of Sibale. If needed, you may expect it to take 8 to 10 days for the people to assemble for that purpose.

"However, once that time limit has passed, and no one is willing to change his residence, you are to return to this Harbor (Cavite), after proper communication and arrangement with the Commander in Romblon. This is my order to you for the purposes above indicated".

He still sent a copy of this order to the Manila Government, which was endorsed on April 6, 1866, and sent to the Commander of Romblon for his information.

This brings to a close this important manuscript of 54 pages available under the section of "*Ereccion de Pueblos de Romblon*", Legajo 19, * 4, at the National Archives in Manila.

Unfortunately, I have no further information whether this official resettlement project for Sibale was successful or not, or whether maybe another official effort was undertaken at a later date, or whether the people of Banton simply went to Sibale in separate groups, as they had been done before, and in this way gradually increased the population of Sibale¹⁷.

It is interesting to notice that in the following events around Banton and Sibale, no mention is made of the huge government effort to the "*Repoblacion*" of Maestre de Campo.

Recoletos Misionarios * 3

Ignacio Nogueras stayed in Banton for 5 years, until March 13, 1867, when he was appointed as parish priest of Odiongan, where the language barrier did not exist. Unfortunately, he died in Odiongan eight months later, and was succeeded by Mateo Bernad as the new Pastor of Odiongan at the end of November of 1867.

In the meantime, the people of Banton had to wait until April 24, 1868, when the same Mateo Bernad of Odiongan was now assigned to the rocky island-parish of Banton, where he stayed until 1870.

When the former missionary of Banton in 1858, Pablo Bienzobas, had become the Recoleta Provincial in 1867 for the term of 3 years, and had completed that, he was happy he could return in 1870 to his beloved Banton, and he stayed there for 5 years, until 1875, when he had to go to Manila as a sick man, and where he died on Feb. 5, 1876, 52 years old.

¹⁷ In: "Bibliography of the Philippine Islands", Washington, 1903, in the Map Section, p. 321, * 426, it reads: ...In Maestro (!) de Campo I., Port Concepcion. Surveyed under the direction of Captain d. C. Montero, Spanish Navy, 1869. Map 1898, in Washington, U.S.A.

He had been very interested in the Bisayan language variety of Banton, and had worked out an “*Arte Bisaya*”, or “Grammar of Banton Bisaya”, a manuscript of 43 folio pages. (I wonder what has happened to that! A.P.)¹⁸.

In the meantime, on April 27, 1874, Juan Lopez, a young, newly ordained priest of 23 years, had been appointed for Banton as assistant for the sickly Padre Pablo, and also in order to learn the Banton language that Padre Pablo knew quite well. But after he had retired to Manila in 1875, as related above, Juan became the parish priest of Banton and stayed there till September of 1877. (In 1881 he would still be back in the area as parish priest of Romblon).

In 1877 Vicente Angós took over in Banton from Padre Juan and remained there for 8 years until 1885. He would “keep in touch”, because in 1891 he would become the parish priest of Looc on Tablas Island.

Blas Martinez, on June, 1885, was the next priest in charge of Banton. He had earlier been parish priest of Odiongan (1879-1883), and therefore was well prepared for his new assignment as far as the language was concerned. In 1887 he left Banton for his new task as Pastor in Corcuera, the Capital of Simara, the southern neighboring island, and later be back again in Odiongan. When afterwards he was in Azagra on Sibuyan (1896-1898), the Tagalog “*revolucionarios*” were in control of the Romblon District, but Padre Blas managed to escape capture as a Spanish enemy, by going to Iloilo and from there to Negros Island. But there he was taken prisoner, together with his other Recoleta confreres. Fortunately, they were treated rather leniently there (unlike those that were brought to Lucena as prisoners), and they were released in 1899, after which Padre Blas returned to Spain.

In 1887, the next parish priest of Banton was León Inchausti who did not stay long, because in 1888 he was transferred to another Bisayan parish, Sierra Bullones (Bohol). However, he would be back in Banton later.

In May of 1888, Sandalio Majuelo, coming from Romblon where he had been an assistant priest, took over from Padre León as the new Parish Priest of Banton, and was the one in charge there till June 29, 1891, after which he would be assigned again, in 1892, as assistant to the parish of Romblon.

On June 13, 1892, Padre León, after a short stint in Azagra (Sibuyan) and Romblon town, returned to Banton as parish priest, and he remained there until October of 1897. That same year still, he was transferred to Spain, blissfully unaware that soon the Philippines would explode into the *Revolucion* against Spain, that would affect and afflict very much the Recoleta missionaries as Spanish Nationals.

¹⁸ SÁDABA, “*Catálogo de los Religiosos Agustinos Recoletos ... de Filipinas*”, Madrid 1906, 445.

The next Pastor of Banton, taking over from Padre León, arrived on Sept. 29, 1897. He was Julian Ortiz, and came from the parish of Romblon where he had been assistant priest, and before that, an assistant in Cajidiocan (Sibuyan).

Padre Julian stayed in Banton only until July of 1898, because he was ordered to go to the capital Romblon, due to the revolution. In Romblon Town he was imprisoned, together with other Recoleta missionaries, by the Tagalog "*revolucionarios*" in charge of the Romblon District. Afterwards they were transferred to a prison camp in Lucena, formerly Tayabas, where they had a difficult time with sickness (malaria), lack of food and sanitation, and unfair treatment. Several Missionaries of the Romblon and Mindoro Districts died there.

Padre Julian was lucky to get out from there alive, on March 1, 1900, and went to Manila for recovery, after which he was assigned, in 1902, to work in Negros. He was the last Recoleta priest to have worked in Banton as a spiritual Father to the people, after this island had existed as a separate and individual Parish for 152 years, since its creation in 1746.

Banton, and its neighboring islands of Sibale and Simara, were certainly among the most difficult and challenging assignments of the Northern Bisayan area. Its valiant Pastors, several of whom were buried there, or had suffered greatly from the relentless misery brought upon them and their flock, by the Moro invasion, have to be saluted for their spiritual stamina and human bravery.

No data are available to me about the pastoral appointments to Banton after the American annexation of the Philippines. But the big problem of the lack of priests, due to the return of many Spanish missionaries to their home country, paralyzed many parishes in the Bisayas and on Mindoro Island.

Politically, Sibale became independent from Banton around 1903, as evidenced by the National Census of that year.

In 1924, on March 6, Government Act 3131 authorized the separation from the province of Romblon, of the Municipality of Concepción on the Island of Maestre de Campo or Sibale, and its annexation to Mindoro Province¹⁹.

Under the SVD

When in 1937 the SVD "de facto" took over from the Recoletos the spiritual administration of the newly created Apostolic Prefecture of Mindoro, they "inherited" as well the islands of Maestre de Campo, and Caluya with its neighboring islands, its first administrator was Bishop William Finnemann

¹⁹ See: "Historical Calendar", Nat. Hist. Comm., Manila 1970.

SVD. I am presenting here part of his handwritten letter to the Provincial Superior, Fr. Miguel Anspach, SVD, relating his first visit of the Island of Sibale.

Concepción, Romblon, June 16, 1937

Dear Father Provincial,

This is just to let you know that, with our arrival at Concepción, we reached the last of the towns to visit of the Prefecture.

This place, we are told, saw no priest ever since 1898. It goes without saying that Aglipayans were here like in other places. One of them, pretending that he was a Roman Catholic priest, had a good number of baptisms and marriages; but no sooner did the people find out his real affiliation, than they refused to hear him. In spite of all abandonment, this town has kept its faith to an astounding degree.

For the reception last night everything was prepared according to Rubrics, better than in some places that have permanent priests. People pray, keep their church in comparative good condition, have singers who know how to assist at High Mass, Libera, etc. I have seen no place that has kept up religious practices so well.

The town has a language of its own, has hardly connections with Romblon, but easy access to Pinamalayan from which town it takes only 3 hours in a motor boat. So I wish that Fr. Rixner visit it from time to time.

We stay here till Friday, June 18. Then we return, and I shall be in Calapan for a long time to attend at the needs of the town and the Prefecture.

A word about Caluya. This is the poorest place in every respect, religiously especially poor. People are Visayans and understand no Tagalog or very little. It is hard to reach. The towns belong politically to Antique, but is nearest to Capiz. We were told that Buruungan, Capiz, is only 9 miles from Caluya. So I am of the opinion that we should return Caluya to Jaro, or better give it to Jaro, as it has never really belonged to it. For the S.V.D. it will be a problem hard to solve to provide these people²⁰.

I hope your health is now fully restored and you will be able to return soon to Manila.

The Fathers that accompany me are well and send regards.

Yours fraternally in Chr.to.

(SGD) † W. M Finnemann

²⁰ On March 25, 1953, the islands of Caluya, Semirara, and Sibay, etc., were transferred to the Diocese of Jaro.

Follow next some pertinent data about Sibale, excerpted from various reports about the Status of Ecclesiastical Mindoro:

Brief overview of the Apostolic Prefecture, prepared for the Directory of the Philippines for 1950.

Concepcion 1,754²¹ souls; Catholics 1,700

Patron: Immaculada Concepcion, December 8

Priest: Fr. Benito Rixner, SVD

(From Pinamalayan)

Report of Fr. Rixner, SVD about Maestre de Campo, June 1951:

“...There is an old small chapel there. The people donated a lot to the Catholic Church, but no funds are at hand to build a good church...”

From a July 1957 report of Bishop William Duschak SVD, Vicar Apostolic of Calapan, Mindoro.

“...Maestre de Campo, or Sibale, is an island-parish, 30 km away from the coast of Mindoro, with hills fully planted with coconuts, and settled down by Bisayans. It belongs to Romblon Province, is totally and solidly Catholic, with up to 3,000 souls. With a smaller number of souls they never had a resident priest. There is a big, beautiful, as well as sturdy Chapel there, but no Convento yet. The first missionary to Sibale, an American, when he returns from his home-leave next year, will be fully equipped landing on the Island with his own motor boat...”

Indeed, during June of 1958, Fr. Dennis Mckillip SVD took possession of the Parish of Sibale as its first parish priest, where he stayed until the end of May of 1993, when he was succeeded in June, 1993 by Fr. German Mehler SVD., who is still in charge as of this writing.

From a report of Bishop Duschak of July, 1959:

“...Concepcion, on the island of Maestre de Campo, or Sibale, had its church building enlarged lengthwise with 24 meters. Its Convento has been constructed. A great expense has gone into the buying of a lot for the Rectory-site...”

For lack of additional data, these “Notes on the History of Sibale”, etc. are hereby concluded.

Antoon POSTMA

Oct. 29, 2001

²¹ These are still the old population figures taken from the 1939 National Census. In 1948 Census this number had increased to 2,197, or 24.6% and the 1960 Census gave 2,998 or an increase of 37%. The latest Census Data were not mentioned by the “Socio-Economic Profile of the Municipality of Concepcion”, compiled during the incumbency of Prospero Fabregas as Municipal Mayor (1988-1990?).

APPENDIX**Recollect Priests of Banton, Sibale, etc. (1746 – 1898)****Abbreviations:**

A = Assistant Priest;

P = Parish Priest;

Pos = Position;

1. = age of start in B.;

2. = age of death;

(…) = 2nd assignment;*cursive* = A/P from Romblon;

_____ = a gap in succession;

age+ = older the indicated;

? = lacking further data.

Period	Missionary	Pos	1.	2.	Where/how?
1746-1749	Jesús del Rosario	P	36	39	Romblon
1749-1751	Miguel del Rosario	P	39	41	Romblon
1751-1769	Ignacio de Jesús	A/P	36	54	Banton
1770-1771	Jerónimo de Jesús	P	35	42	Calapan
1771-1773	Miguel de San José	P	26	56	Manila
1773-1776	(Jerónimo de Jesús)	P	38	42	Calapan
1779-1782	Lorenzo de San José	A	33	57	Manila
1789-1791	Narciso de Guia	P	43	61	Manila
1791-1793	Marcelino de las Mercedes	A	26	56	Tagbilaran
1794-1797	(Miguel de San José)	P	70	80	Manila
1797-1807	Francisco de Sta. Teresa	P	27	47	Manila
1808	Alonso de San José	P	32	32	Sea/Moro victim
1808-1809	(Francisco de Sta. Teresa)	P	28	47	Manila
1809-1810	Manuel de la Consolación	P	44	45	Banton
1815-1816	Pedro del Carmen	P	39	40	Banton
1821-1825	Lorenzo de la Fe	P	49	67	Manila
1827-1828	Alejandro del Pilar	P	34	35	Banton
1829-1843	José Aznar	P	23	50	Cebu
1843-1858	Pedro Guillermo	P	29	48	Odiongan
1858-1859	Pablo Bienzobas	P	34	52	Banton
1859-1861	Manuel Alonso	P	28	68	Cebu
1861-1862	Eustaquio Ruiz	P	25	64	Spain
1862-1867	Ignacio Noguerras	P	25	30	Odiongan
1868-1870	Mateo Bernad	P	26	47	Amblan (Negros)
1870-1875	(Pablo Bienzobas)	A/P	23	62+	Manila?
1874-1877	Juan López	P	39	55+	Brasil?
1877-1885	Vicente Angós	P	39	68+	Spain?
1885-1887	Blas Martínez	P	34	65+	Spain
1887-1888	León Inchausti	P	28	63+	Spain
1888-1891	Sandalio Majuelo	P			Brasil
1892-1897	(León Inchausti)	P			Spain
1897-1898	Julián Ortiz	P	24	33+	Negros?

THE PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION IN MINDANAO*

Rufus B. RODRIGUEZ

Introduction

When I was the Senior Board Member then Vice Governor of Misamis Oriental from 1980-1986, I started researching on the history of Misamis Oriental and Cagayan de Oro City.

My initial research interestingly showed me a rich local history of nationalism of the Cagayanons and Misamisnons in their revolutionary struggle against the imposition of American rule towards the end of the 19th century and the advent of the 20th century. I also discovered that it was the elder brother of my maternal grandfather, Filomeno M. Bautista who wrote the Manuscript on the Philippine Revolution in Misamis Province in 1900 to 1901.

I then embarked on an ambitious project of writing the history of Misamis Oriental and Cagayan de Oro. This project has been a challenge to me because as I recall, when I was in high school and college, I was taught Oriental History (mainly on China), United States History and Western Civilization (Greek and Roman) and Philippine History (mainly the story of the Metro Manila and Tagalog regions) but have never learned about my own local history.

With the Philippine Centennial Celebration (1898-1998) of 100 years of Philippine Independence, I also became very interested in researching and writing on the participation of the people of Mindanao in the fight for Philippine Independence.

I have undertaken this research with the firm belief that the centennial celebration will not be complete if the participation of the different regions of the country is not recognized and included in the celebration.

* Paper presented during the International Conference on the Centennial of the 1896 Philippine Revolution held on August 21-23, 1996 at the Manila Hotel sponsored by the Philippine Centennial Commission and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. (The author is the Dean of San Sebastian College of Law. He finished his AB-Economics (Summa Cum Laude) at De La Salle University, MA-Economics (High Distinction) at Xavier University, LL.B. (Purple Feather Honor Society) at U.P. College of Law, and LL.M (Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar) at Columbia Law School in New York.

A. *Philippine History Books have no substantial Account of the Philippine Revolution in Mindanao*

The Philippine centennial celebration of our independence in 1898 can not be complete without recognizing the heroic participation of the people of Mindanao.

It is a fact that in all books written on Philippine History there is very scant account, if at all, of the revolutionary heroes of Mindanao in the revolution against Spain and the subsequent war against the Americans.

In Teodoro Agoncillo's Philippine history¹, the only account of Mindanao's participation in the revolution was contained in one paragraph which stated that although the people in Mindanao was opposed to American sovereignty, the leaders particularly in Zamboanga quarreled among themselves such that when the Americans attacked Zamboanga, the town fell without much resistance from the quarrelling Filipino leaders².

In his later book entitled *History of the Filipino People*³ there was even no mention of any revolutionary activity in Mindanao from 1896 to 1901. What was cited instead was the Bates Treaty between the Americans and the Sultanate of Sulu of August 20, 1899.

In Gregorio Zaide's *The Pageant of Philippine History*⁴ there were only three pages devoted to Mindanao's participation in the Philippine Revolution which mentioned that during the closing days of 1898, the people of Palawan rose in arms, liberated Puerto Princesa and other towns; that in January 1899 the Christian inhabitants in Misamis, Cotabato, and Surigao in Mindanao also rose in arms and drove away the Spanish garrisons, which fled to Zamboanga; and that on May 13, 1899, the Christian revolutionists under the command of General Alvarez attacked the Spanish army in Zamboanga and later the Spaniards had to leave Zamboanga⁵.

Zaide also mentioned that when the first U.S. troops under Captain Pratt landed in Jolo on May 19, 1899, the Taosugs did not resist and on August 20, 1899 the so called Bates Treaty was concluded. He continued by stating that on November 16, 1899, the American troops arrived in Zamboanga and made it a base to launch an intensive military offensive in Mindanao. He then briefly recounted the Battle of Agusan Hill and the assault of Macahambus Cave both in Cagayan de Oro by the Americans.

¹ Inang Wika Publishing Co., Manila, 1970.

² Teodoro A. AGONCILLO, *Philippine History*, p. 243.

³ Garotech Publishing, Quezon City, 1990.

⁴ Philippine Education Law, Manila, 1979.

⁵ Gregorio F. ZAIDE, *The Pageant of Philippine History*, Vol. II, p. 282.