**Spain in the Marianas**

Missionary arrival in June 1668

Missionaries did not plant the first cross in Marianas or declare the islands a Spanish possession; this was done in 1565 by Miguel de Legazpi–who went on to establish Spanish rule in the Philippines.

- That was the formal act of possession, but occupation was something else again. Confusion in the books (and minds) on this point.

- Spanish claim to the islands went back 300 years before the end of the empire, but Spanish rule only extended some 230 years–from 1668 to 1899.

Legazpi planted his cross in 1565 and promptly departed, but it was only a matter of time before Spanish returned. When they did, a century later, they came with 6 Jesuits and 32 soldiers,

- established a foothold in Agana area under protection of local chieftain

- came reluctantly, let it be said, at the command of the Queen Mother, Mariana of Austria, who gave her name to the islands.

- purpose was to christianize population–not that Spain would have been averse to claiming gold or spices (this was written into instructions)–but there were none.

- events took a disastrous turn, however, but not in the way or for the reasons generally portrayed in the older histories.

Missionary advance north from Guam

It didn’t take long for Jesuits to make their way north to islands now part of CNMI.

- priest (Fr. Morales) was sent to Tinian within two months but found people at war; he was speared in the leg and two of his military escort killed in outbreak of violence. When Fr. Morales returned, he was treated much better and began the first parish.

- trouble in Anatahan a year later when a catechist was killed (although Sanvitores was unharmed)

- Sanvitores–one of the mildest of men and a pacificist at heart–adopted stronger measures. He preached a crusade on Guam and returned to Tinian with a small army–composed of Guam converts and some Filipino troops. He managed to stop the fighting for a while.

- When a Jesuit (Fr. Luis de Medina) returned to Saipan in early 1670, he was killed, becoming the first of 12 Jesuits to die in Marianas.

- Soon outbreaks of violence began in Guam--and the guerrilla warfare that came to be known as “Spanish-Chamorro war” ensued, off and on, for the next 15 years.

Explanation of the hostilities

Choco, Chinese beachcomber, often blamed for inciting islanders, but more to it than this.

- Chamorros were, by the early European accounts, a gentle and hospitable people, extremely tolerant of foreigners and able to assimilate them easily, as witnessed by the presence of several castaways.

- Yet, the islands were divided, it seems, into autonomous districts--and warfare was endemic in the Marianas at time of arrival of Spaniards.

- Missionaries, whether they realized it or not, were associated with the people of the Agana area and their chiefs. In a confusing network of alliances, they were an easy target for the enemies of their allies in Agana. By the 1680s the Spanish recognized the existence of two distinct camps among the local population--those with pro-Spanish and Christian sympathies and the “rebels” form outlying areas and in the north. Might not this division have followed traditional socio-political lines?

- Attempts to change customs a reason for uprising and killings? Not likely, from what we know of Pacific history. They would have been laughed at and ignored, but not killed.

- More personal insults and offense was a greater possibility–a public scolding, an accusation of cheating, execution of a chief, harsh remonstrance. These seem to have been the immediate cause of the killing of 4 Jesuits on Guam between 1674 and 1676. Revenge for an affront–usually public–suffered by an islander. This is the stuff of which Pacific wars are made.

- Troops, who were to defend the missionaries, were often impulsive and heavy-handed in dealing with people. Soldiers have been known to rape and steal at times, and sometimes were a little too quick with their musket or sword.

- Gradual escalation of hostilities with each act of violence–a process of tit for tat that served to harden feelings on both sides. Jesuit abandonment of pacificist stance in favor of stronger garrison--even Sanvitores was asking for 200 more troops two years before he fell.

Consequences of this early period

1) Of precontract population of some 40,000, less than 4,000 survived in 1710. Hence, population fell to less than one-tenth of its original size. Many historians attribute this to the force of Spanish arms, but there is compelling evidence against this interpretation.

- population decline continued at some rate after 1700, when all fighting had ended (we know from church records of baptisms and deaths).

- Spanish records (mostly mission sources) give detailed accounts of loss of life in battle during the year; it seldom reached double digits.

- the “disease of the ships” is well chronicled during later years, claiming 100 or 200 lives after departure. No immunity to flus, smallpox, and other illnesses. Jesuit Brother Chavarri spent 50 years in Marianas.

2) Forced relocation of population. By 1700 the remaining population was settled on 3 islands: Guam, Rota and Saipan. Saipan was allowed to remain a settlement due to cooperation of its people in the great roundup of northern islanders–but by 1730 the last of the Jesuit pastors was withdrawn as its population dwindled to nothing.

- purpose was not punishment, but policy of “reduction” was intended to create Christian settlements where people could be easily catechized and brought to sacraments. This was in keeping with standard Spanish colonial policy.

- effect was to create town-dwellers (pueblo-dwellers) out of people who had always roamed to farm and gather food. Double system of house in town and ranch in the boonies soon developed.

3) Christianization of population–and hispanization. The Spanish brought their faith together with many of its forms–we think of processions, fiestas, fandangos, belas, novenas and many more. This was a religious legacy, but one enwrapped in particular Spanish forms taken over into culture. (eg, just think of the aras, or coins, given by the groom to the bride in a wedding ceremony).

4) Intermixture of Filipino genes–they formed not only the first militia, but subsequent ones as well. Many stayed and married local women, after becoming alcaldes of the villages. They formed an essential part of the gene pool thereafter, as the garrison was sustained by arrival of new troops long after the fighting ended. (Note: The earliest alcaldes were mostly Filipinos who married locally. They became the tax collectors and enforcers of government policy, obligated to the governor and often in personal debt to him; but they were also pressured by their wife’s family to assist them.)

18th century

Political position

- Marianas remained a lonely outpost in Western Pacific–the gateway to Philippines. It offered Spain little other than strategic denial. Spanish retention discouraged English and Dutch from interfering in Spanish shipping lanes and claiming larger share of China trade. Marianas stood guard over galleon route.

- Occasional attempts to upgrade military capabilities of island, especially after embarrassment of encounters with English privateers. More muskets sent, new fort built at Apra to overlook dock–but these were sporadic efforts and effect was not long lasting.

Economic development–efforts to move islands to modern economy

- importing 100 Filipino families to develop agriculture potential, but ship sank in 1748 and all were lost. (desperation to stimulate more intense cultivation)

- early discouragement: one governor (in 1725) recommended radical downsizing of administration to 25 troops and 3 priest, while reducing annual subsidy from 20,000 to 3,000 pesos. Another proposed an even more drastic plan–ship all the people to Philippines, where they could be governed more economically.

- through the years several attempts made to develop economy

- Manuel Tobias (1771) - encouraged production of cotton, sugarcane and other introduced plants, imported donkeys from Mexico and deer from PI; brought in hand looms to make cloth; and made salt.

- Villalobos (1828) - proposed increasing exports: sale of wine, sugar and other commodities

- Felipe de la Corte (1855) - brought in Japanese rice farmers to stimulate production, but the experiment failed.

- people in Marianas, as in so many other parts of the world, resisted change. They remained occasional farmers–growing a little tobacco for their own use and for barter, raising pigs and fowl for food, and remaining stubbornly self-subsistent, to the chagrin of Spanish reform-minded administrators.

As de la Corte writes in 1853:

“There is not a single shop in the Marianas, not one carpenter, not a blacksmith, no tailor, cobbler, domestic servant....They are all everything and nobody is anything... Each sows what he needs to eat, brings what he wants from the field, makes his house and clothes, rears his animals or hunts or fishes them, and nobody does anything as a trade... Thus, the Marianas are in a state which could be called a true mercantile and social vacuum, for if we analyze the inhabitants, we might say that they do not form a real society, but a heterogeneous unit of men who work by themselves and for themselves.”

Sunset Years

By early 19th century, the sun was setting on Spanish Empire

- American colonies were breaking away from Spain

- galleons, the life-line of Asian-Spanish trade, were discontinued in 1810 after nearly 2 ½ centuries.

- reduction of annual subsidy from 20,000 to 8,000 pesos in 1817, signaling Spanish intentions to leave islands to their own devices.

- liberalization of Spanish policy: Royal Estates divided among people (collectivization was ending); population allowed to trade freely (with whaleships and other vessels coming to anchor); foreigners were allowed to reside in the archipelago.

Repopulation of northern Marianas (linked to policy changes at beginning of century)

- Carolinians admitted to Saipan in 1817

- leper colony established on Tinian in 1836

- further Carolinian migrations to Saipan in mid-century, and trade with Guam

- Johnston venture to Tinian in 1860s: 265 Chuukese to Pagan, 604 more to Saipan.

- resettlement by Chamorros in latter part of century–in 1860s and later.

Troubled last years (events determined by Spain’s troubles at home and abroad).

- Marianas became a penal colony for political activists from Philippines from 1870 on, as independence movement grew in force.

- first deportados (11 persons) were from Spain, in 1870

- 22 political prisoners following Cavite Mutiny in 1872.

- for next several years, political prisoners came from Spain and Philippines as Spain mounted last effort to control its dwindling empire and its own nation.

- insurrection of Filipino deportees in 1896, with 80 killed

- arrival of 700 Pampango troops (known as Macabebes) to strengthen Spain’s militia in 1899–sent to Saipan.

- By 1898, with outbreak of Spanish-American War, Spanish rule was effectively ended. It was formally concluded the following year when Spain was forced to yield Guam to America and sell the northern Marianas and the Carolines to Germany.

Spanish Legacy in Marianas

* Spain is land of high-minded nobility--El Cid & Cervantes. “Laws of Indies” governing overseas rule were much more humane than counterparts in northern Europe. But they were not followed for lack of effective enforcement machinery. (That’s the Anglo-Saxon genius). Hence, contrast between noble aims and rather squalid reality–in Marianas and so many other parts of its empire.
* Many of evils suffered by Marianas in late 17th century were typical of what other islands endured a century or two later at first intensive contact with West. Marianas was first island group to be colonized.

- depopulation was terrible, but no worse than Kosrae or Yap, or other islands in Pacific ravaged by disease.

- “reduction” into population centers–may have taken a greater toll on people than the so-called “wars” due to unfamiliar pattern of life, work requirements, and disease.

- cultural enervation: loss of will, fatigue on part of local population in the face of a dominant culture–like “culture shock” on the ethnic level.

* Likewise, the benefits offered by Spanish were similar

- peace to islands torn by sporadic war making (but only after 30 years of even more intense guerilla warfare)

- protection and guidance of a European power through the wild years of early contact, and protection from the predations of other European powers–like befriending the school bully to get protection from other bigger kids. (All Pacific islands except Tonga were colonized anyway).

- religious faith, encrusted with the cultural forms of expressing this faith–all of which was integrated into cultural fabric of islands and forms a strong base for identity even today.

* “Black Legend”–country that brought us Torquemada and Spanish Inquisition brings us genocide and oppression on massive scale in Marianas. This is a historical bias that is slow in being erased.

- Its program, like most other colonial programs elsewhere was a failure but not a disaster. Its administration in early years was corrupt and its development program in later years, after administrative apparatus was reformed, never took hold.

- Overall, Spain’s rule may not have been much worse than colonial rule anywhere else.

* But Spain did make a significant impact on Marianas

- Most Spanish cultural influence mediated by Mexican or Filipino colonies–places at either end of shipping lines.

- Hence, what we think of most readily as Spanish influence have Mexican or Filipino flavor–cockfights, fiestas and religious ceremonies, burial and wedding customs, food (atole and tortillas), clothing , respect forms (mangingi or mano).

- But the most lasting contributions may have been:

- family organization–patrilineality replacing matriline, creation of godparents (with compadre and commadre relationship). But family generational depth continued.

- civil administration–alcaldes majores (later known as simply mayors), other officials as part of a community system that endured for decades even after Spanish ended.

- religious system–which has always borne special imprint of Spanish Catholicism–and always will.

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