***The Early Spanish Period in the Marianas, 1668-1698:***

 ***Eight Theses***

After reviewing the early sources once again, I have just completed a monograph offering a reinterpretation of the period. This will be submitted to the Northern Marianas HPO for publication as a companion piece for my booklet, *From Conquest to Colonization*, published in 1989 and republished in 2000.

The 30-year period described in the booklet cannot be understood unless we see the dynamics involved through this period. History is by definition dynamic and changing. In my publication I hope to capture some of these dynamics–how things changed and why–even during this short period of time.

Since I cannot hope to offer a complete presentation of this new piece, let me simply present a few thoughts in the form of theses.

*1) San Vitores brought no military troops with him in 1668, only mission helpers.*

San Vitores believed that the presence of a military guard would compromise his message of peace. For this reason, he resisted demands to bring a military guard. Instead he chose 31 mission helpers, including 19 Filipinos and 12 Mexicans, for their good lives and the skills that could be used for community development.

The Filipinos included two survivors from the *Concepcion*, a galleon wrecked off Saipan years earlier, who were to serve as interpreters for the mission party. The Filipinos ranged in age from a 60-year old farmer to a 12-year old boy who was a singer. They included a stone mason, a carpenter, and persons who could serve as teachers in the schools he hoped to open.

The group were to give witness through their Christian lives and to teach skills to the people. Only secondarily was this group to serve as a militia if necessary. Initially, they were equipped with only three or four muskets. Some of the others had bows and arrows.

*2) The cause of initial conflict may have been Choco’s stories about baptismal water and the missionaries’ resistance to the ancestral worship, but conflict soon centered on personal insults that was fueled by village rivalries.*

The tale that the waters of baptism were killing children was widespread during the early years, according to the mission accounts. Children who were baptized did, in fact, die at a high rate because they would have been in danger of death for the missionaries to baptize them. Choco’s tales about the poison waters of baptism may have had a little more impact in the northern islands, but they really didn’t have much staying power, except perhaps among people who had no real contact with the missionaries. After the first year or two, the stories are seldom mentioned in missionary letters.

The missionary campaign aimed at smashing the skulls of ancestors and destroying the shrines to the *aniti*, or spirits, created more serious problems for the missionaries. This was a crucial point of conflict between the Jesuits and the local people because the destruction of these shrines: 1) seemed to oppose the respect paid to ancestors; 2) attacked deeply held religious beliefs in the efficacy of the ancestors in providing assistance to the living in time of need; 3) threatened the social status of the *makanas*, who often spoke for the ancestors (as they did in other Micronesian cultures). The *makanas*, or sorcerers, would have been strong forces in resisting Christianity. It’s worth noting that the trouble which broke out on Guam in 1671 was attributed by Garcia to the destruction of the shrines to *aniti* rather than to poison water stories.

Most of the hostility was generated by personal offense, as was true everywhere in the Pacific. This could include personal insults, but could also include revenge for relatives killed by the Spanish or for property destroyed by the troops. Other people with kin or other ties to those with grievances against the Spanish were drawn into the conflict. [On Guam in 1671, the arrest of key figures in Agana for the murder of the Mexican boy escalated the reaction of local people.]

In later years, as the composition of the militia changed, reasons for conflict would have included abuses by the soldiers, perhaps extorting food or material possessions from them or making sexual advances toward the women.

All this would be compounded by the inter-village rivalries in the islands: “The enemy of my friend is my enemy”, and vice versa.

*3) The policy of Spanish retaliation escalated through the 1670s, only easing up in 1680 and afterwards.*

During the first years of the mission, San Vitores tried to carry out his work without military protection. After the early outbreaks of violence, however, he had members of his “militia” accompany priests to the villages. He believed that the mere presence of the troops would serve to deter attacks on the missionaries. San Vitores seemed ready to pardon the wrongdoers rather than exact justice. No attempt was made to retaliate for the deaths of mission personnel.

By 1674, with the arrival of a new commander, the Spanish take the position that matters will only get worse unless they seek out the wrongdoers and punish them. At first, the Spanish retaliate whenever one of their number is killed, lest the local people think that they can kill with impunity. Then, the retaliation occurs whenever there is an outbreak of violence in a village, regardless whether lives are lost. Soon, the Spanish begin marching on villages that are thought to be resisting Spanish claims to authority, especially those harboring criminals. As this retaliatory policy was carried out, Chamorro resistance seems to have broken down.

By the late 1670s, villages had begun freely handing over “criminals” to the Spanish, sometimes killing these men themselves before handing over their heads to the Spanish. The villages on Guam were politically divided, as always, and their conflict with one another could be legitimized under the new Spanish law making it a crime to harbor a criminal wanted by the Spanish.

*4) By 1680, after only twelve years of Spanish presence, the reduction of the Guam population into seven towns was achieved. This was as much due to the cultural attraction of town life as it was to Spanish force.*

The Spanish certainly encouraged the people from small hamlets to move into the larger villages, if only to be closer to the church. The Spanish exercised a certain push, as they rounded up people and moved them into town.

But there was also a pull for local people. The attractions included titled positions of authority bestowed on Chamorro leaders, and land in town as well as the right to continue farming their land outside. Once islanders were assured they would not lose their land, they were more easily persuaded to move to town. New crops (especially corn) were introduced and livestock and farm animals as well. Cotton was woven to make clothes and tobacco was grown to be smoked and used as currency.

*5) The composition of the military changed for the worse even as their poverty increased, leading to morale problems and abuses on the local population.*

The militia of San Vitores might be described as mission helpers more than soldiers. But the composition of the garrison soon changed. As the number of troops grew from the mid-1670s on, many of the new troops were recruited on shipboard. Some were convicts assigned to prison in the Philippines. They were adventurer types, many from Mexico, trying to make a future for themselves in the Spanish colonies abroad.

As the number of troops increased, so did their poverty–they were paid a fraction of the salary due them as the force outstripped the number of paid positions (plazas) and as governors chose to pay them off in inflated material rather than in cash. The troops, for their part, began preying on the islanders, even as they chased island women. Their behavior became more of a problem from the mid-70s on, worsened in the 80s (at least if we are to believe Quiroga), and continued to be something of a problem throughout the pacification of the islands. “The scum of the earth” is what one missionary called them.

*6) The local population was divided from the beginning over support for the Spanish missionaries, but by the late 1670s, as the Spanish troops went on the offensive, the majority of those on Guam swung to the side of the Spanish.*

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The attractive features of the new settlements and the conversion of many to the faith also helped tilt the balance on Guam. The same thing would happen on Rota, and eventually on Saipan as well.

By the mid-1680s, the size of the Chamorro militia under the four Chamorro officers who sided with the Spanish was greater than the size of the colony’s Spanish garrison.

*7) The loss of Chamorro life in hostilities throughout the course of the “Chamorro-Spanish Wars” was less than the loss suffered in a single epidemic.*

The number of Chamorro deaths in battle reported in the Spanish accounts is 57, but there are probably about 110-120 Chamorro lives lost in hostilities over a 30-year period. This would average out to 4 a year throughout the entire period 1668-1699.

The Spanish would have lost 12 Jesuits and 26 mission helpers, in addition to some soldiers throughout the same period. The death count for the Spanish party averaged out to about two a year.

By comparison, a single epidemic in 1689, with colds, stomach aches, fever and diarrhea, claimed more than 166 lives before the end of the year. This is more than the number of Chamorro lives claimed during the hostilities with the Spanish throughout the entire 30-year period.

It is clear that the depopulation of the Marianas during this period was due far more to epidemics spread by European ships than to the muskets and swords of the Spanish.

*8) The worst indignities suffered by Chamorros may have occurred after warfare ended as the governor gained control of the economy and turned it to his personal benefit.*

The real sins of the Spanish during their early mission initiative in the Marianas were not the spectacular sort that have so often been attributed to them–massive bloodletting, Inquisition-like torments for forcing islanders to accept the faith, and cruel punishments for refusal to submit to the Spanish yoke. The most serious damage occurred as the governors began to gain a choke-hold on the economy and turn the subsidy intended to support the colony into a personal investment fund.

As violence subsided after 1684, Spanish officials began to exercise an authority that often reduced local villagers and Spanish troops alike to the status of household servants. This had a debilitating effect on the colony and its people for years.

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