

The Jesuit Exploration of the Pulangi or Río Grande de Mindanao 1888-1890



Up in the central highlands of Mindanao (which we now call the Bukidnon plateau), they call it the Pulangi. Down at the delta (in what was later the District and still later the Province of Cotabato), it was called in ancient times the Maguindanao. But the Spaniards, impressed by its size, gave it a name which has gone into the maps, the history books, and the documents of the past four hundred years. They called it *el Río Grande de Mindanao*.

The term “*rio grande*” is not itself unusually significant. The Spaniards applied the term to any river of any size that had abundant waters (*rio caudaloso*). The opposite was “*rio chico*” (little river). Thus, in northern Luzon, there is the Río Grande de Cagayan and the Río Chico de Cagayan. In central Luzon, the Río Grande and the Río Chico de Pampanga. Even the Marikina River, now almost dried up, was in Spanish maps named the Río Grande de San Mateo. But applied to the Pulangi or Maguindanao, the term is remarkably appropriate: *Rio Grande de Mindanao*; the Great River of Mindanao.

That name was first applied to it in 1572 by the anonymous writer in Legazpi’s expedition who has left us an account of what he called “The Conquest of Luzon.” Actually, other islands besides Luzon are mentioned in that account, including Mindanao which the anonymous writer described as “very large.”

Large, it certainly was, though the anonymous chronicler could not have known how large. We know today that Mindanao has an area of 36,537 square miles, which makes it larger than the whole of Portugal, and much larger than the whole of Ireland or Scotland.

This, the sixteenth century chronicler did not know. But he did know that it was “very large” and “sparsely populated” and “unhealthy” in some spots, and also “extremely rough” — meaning, presumably, that the land was broken up by mountains and rivers. It was, however,

a "rich" island — rich in gold: "The natives there obtain pure gold, for the mines are numerous and rich." He was apparently referring to the ancient mines in Surigao.

From there they sailed "eighty leagues" down the eastern or Pacific coast of the great island to the southern tip, which he called the Cape of Caahuite (but we, the Cape of San Agustin), five degrees north of the Equator, "where cinnamon was grown." Turning that cape and sailing westwards and then north, it was another "sixty leagues" to the mouth of a very large river, in fact the great river of the island, *el río grande de Mindanao*. The sailors left their ship and put out in a small boat and went "near" the river, but they did not enter the river itself: "Up to the present none of the Spaniards who were in that ship have been in that river."¹

But they or others after them must have gone into the river and made friends with the Muslim inhabitants of the delta, for only two years later, Guido de Lavezaris was writing from Manila to Philip II of Spain, informing that monarch that he had received letters (doubtless brought back by the Spanish ships) from the sultan: "The ruler and chief of the Bindanao [sic] River has informed me through letters that he wishes to be Your Majesty's friend and vassal."²

Perhaps Guido de Lavezaris was a little naive in interpreting that letter. "Friend" the sultan doubtless wanted to be; but it was doubtful whether he also wanted to be a "vassal." Subsequent events did not show any particular desire for vassalage.

Be that as it may, Lavezaris assured the Spanish King that he would try to follow the matter up. "If I have an opportunity, I shall send men there," he wrote. And he added: "If convenient, we shall make a settlement there."

That was easier said than done. Guido de Lavezaris wrote that letter in 1574. It was not until three hundred years later that that

¹The Spanish text of the narrative entitled "Conquest of Luzon" was published by Retana in *Archivo del bibliófilo filipino*, IV. An English translation is in Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, III. It is also reprinted along with other documents by the Filipiniana Book Guild in the volume entitled *The Colonization and Conquest of the Philippines by Spain*, ed. Rafael Bernal (Manila, 1965) 190-210. The reference to the "island of Basilan" in B & R's footnote is probably a mistake.

²The letter, dated Manila, 17 July 1574, is in Blair and Robertson, III, 275. (Also in the Filipiniana Book Guild volume *Conquest mentioned above*, pp. 276-282.)

desire could be fulfilled. In the intervening three centuries, the Great River of Mindanao was to be the object of many an expedition, the arena of many a battle, and the scene of many a martyrdom.

The Spanish Jesuit missionaries made two attempts to explore the Pulangi River or *Río Grande de Mindanao*. The first attempt, made in 1888, was unsuccessful. The second (successful) attempt was made in 1890. Both are described in detail in the letters written by the missionaries to their religious superiors in Manila and Barcelona and published in Volumes 8 and 9 of the Jesuit *Cartas de Filipinas*.³ The story of the first attempt (1888) can be pieced together from nine letters written in 1888 and collected in Volume 8 of the *Cartas*.⁴ The story of the second and successful attempt (1890) is contained in five letters, collected in Volume 9 of the *Cartas*, and which have been translated into English.⁵

The present article is written to retell that story and to put it into its historical context.

I. The Rio Grande

The river which the Spaniards dreamed of colonizing is one of the two largest in the Philippines, the other being the Río Grande de Cagayan in northern Luzon. This great river in Mindanao has its source in the Kimankil and Dumanlog and Sobrak mountains in the central cordillera near the northern coast of the island (above Gingoog). The river flows southward, cutting a deep gorge along the Bukidnon

³*Cartas de los PP. de la Compania de Jesus de la Mision de Filipinas*, Cuaderno 8 (Manila 1889) pp. 130-148; Cuaderno 9 (Manila 1891) pp. 94-127.

⁴The nine letters are from (a) Guillermo Bennásar, Tamontaca, 27 September 1888 (b) Juan Quintana, Tamontaca, 27 September 1888; (c) Quintana, Tamontaca, 1 October 1888; (d) Ramon Bea, Cotabato, 4 October 1888; (e) Bennásar, Tamontaca, 10 October 1888; (f) Jacinto Juanmartí, Cebu, aboard the S.S. Remus, 20 October 1888; (g) Bennásar, Tamontaca, 10 December 1888; (h) Juanmartí, Tamontaca, 12 December 1888.

⁵M. A. Bernad, "Five Letters Describing the Exploration of the Pulangi or Río Grande Mindanao, 1890," *Philippine Historical Review*, I, 2 (1966) 17-62. The letters are from (a) Jacinto Juanmartí to Pablo Pastells (Manila) from Tamontaca, 31 May 1890; (b) Juanmartí to Provincial (Barcelona) from Cotabato, 1 June 1890; (c) Eusebio Barrado to Pastells from Cotabato, 1 June 1890; (d) Barrado to Pastells, from aboard the S.S. Elcano bound for Zamboanga, 5 June 1890; (e) Juanmartí to Pastells from Tamontaca, 21 August 1891. The originals are in *Cartas*, IX (1891) 94-127.

plateau, sometimes flowing smoothly, at other times in violent rapids rampaging tumultuously through mountains and forests until it emerges into the Cotabato plains where it widens and becomes placid and flows southwestward towards the Liguasan marsh. From there it cuts a wide arc and flows westward toward the Illana Gulf. Before it reaches the sea, it forks out into two branches: the northern branch flows past the town of Cotabato where it widens out to make Cotabato a port. The southern branch, less wide, passes by Tamontaca.

The entire route of the river from source to sea is approximately 480 kilometers long — almost twice the distance from Manila to Baguio. Along the way the great river collects the waters of several large tributaries and many smaller ones. The principal tributaries in Bukidnon province are the Tigua, the Sawaga, the Manupali, the Kulaman, the Maramag and the Molita. In the Cotabato area the principal tributaries are the Maridagao, the Kabakan, and the Alah.⁶

Today, with airplanes and helicopters, we can trace the course of rivers accurately in a few hours. But in past centuries, geographical knowledge came little by little; and often enough, every bit of information had to be paid for with a heavy price in human suffering and endurance.

The Muslims

Long before the Spaniards came, there were already Muslim settlements on the banks of the Great River. They lived near the delta in villages, some of which were fortified. Gradually, they pushed their settlements farther and farther up the river; but they never got beyond the confines of what the Spaniards called the District of Cotabato (today carved up into four provinces). What lay beyond (in what is now Bukidnon province) was unknown to many: it was a mystery which very few ever dared to penetrate. For beyond its confluence with the Molita, the Great River seemed to disappear into a natural and forbidding fortress of rock and virgin forest.

⁶The Rio Grande de Mindanao is described in some detail in *El Archipielago filipino* (2 vols., Washington. 1900), I, 508-510 and is shown in the maps in the Atlas accompanying that work. That volume also contains a treatise on the geography and the governmental structure of Mindanao in the nineteenth century (I, 124-137). On the Muslims and other ethnic groups as they were known in the nineteenth century, see *ibid.*, I, 209-210; and 174 ff.

There was actually little reason why the Muslims of Maguindanao should seek to penetrate farther into the interior: for their interests lay elsewhere. They were a sea-roving race, and in their swift boats they emerged frequently and in large numbers to raid and burn the Christian towns and villages along the coasts of all the islands of the Philippine Archipelago and carry off their inhabitants into slavery. Hence the need — becoming more and more pressing as the decades went by — for the government in Manila to subdue this fierce race and to colonize the vast and fertile territory watered by this Great River.

The Figueroa Expedition

One of the earlier attempts to conquer and colonize the territory of the Great River was made in 1596 by Captain Esteban Rodríguez de Figueroa. This man was cut of the same cloth as the great conquistadors of Spain and Portugal. He was a soldier who gloried in arms. He was also a gentleman who loved the arts of peace. He had for instance endowed the Jesuit College of Manila, and had also provided an endowment to maintain scholars at the College of San Jose — an endowment that continues to be used for scholarships to the present day. He was also a shrewd businessman. Or perhaps “shrewd” is not the word: he was rather a businessman who had great vision and was willing to take huge risks.

One of those huge risks was his expedition to the Río Grande de Mindanao. He had gotten to know the people of the Great River by bitter experience at first hand. Coming back from his expedition to Borneo, Governor Francisco de Sande had sent Esteban Rodríguez de Figueroa to free the Christian captives in Jolo; then, if possible, to establish trade relations with the people of Maguindanao. De Sande’s instructions read:

And having finished affairs in Jolo, if time permits, you shall, God willing, go to the island of Mindanao. There you shall try, by the most convenient methods and with friendliness, to reduce the chief of the river of Bindanao and other chiefs of that island and of those nearby to the obedience of his Majesty, giving him to understand

what they will gain in becoming his Majesty's vassals and our allies, and in having trade with us.⁷

But the Muslims of the Great River misunderstood the Spaniards' intentions. One boat containing three or four men was attacked by 3,000 natives. They killed the *maestre de campo* of the fleet. Clearly, there was no question of trade or settlements without first conquering the territory.

The following year (1579) Governor de Sande dispatched another expedition under Captain Gabriel de Rivera "to pacify the river of Mindanao." Rivera stayed a month near the mouth of the river, but accomplished little. "The king who ruled there fled; but as our people carried orders not to do any harm there, peace was made and some of the natives returned."

"If we plant a colony there," Governor de Sande added — somewhat optimistically — "that king will also submit: which cannot be effected in any other way because of our distance from there."

So the hope of a colony remained alive; but there seemed little chance of its being realized unless a determined effort were made, not by government but by private enterprise. This was precisely what Esteban Rodríguez de Figueroa proposed to do. Accordingly, he made a proposal with regard to what was later called the District of Cotabato, similar to that which three centuries later José de Oyanguren was to make with regard to Davao: namely, to colonize the territory with his own forces and at his own expense, in exchange for the governorship of the territory and a monopoly of its trade for a certain number of years. In the case of Oyanguren, this was for ten years; in the case of Rodríguez de Figueroa, "for two lives" — i.e. during his own lifetime and that of his son or heir. Figueroa's proposal had been made to Governor Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas, but it was not accepted by the King of Spain until after Dasmariñas' death. Doctor Antonio de Morga describes the Figueroa expedition both in a letter to Philip II written from Manila in July 1596, and also in his ample work, *Sucesos de Filipinas*, published in Mexico in 1609.⁸

⁷Sande's expeditions and instructions make up a considerable portion of Blair and Robertson, Vol. IV.

⁸The Figueroa expedition is described by Morga, *Sucesos*, Chapter V. Also in Morga's letter to Philip II, 6 July 1596 (in B & R, IX). There is an account of Rodríguez

The Figueroa expedition set out bravely from Manila in April of 1596. It was a large fleet consisting of fifty ships, large and small. The ships carried a fair complement of men, including 1,500 native Filipino soldiers and 214 Spaniards. It was an army large enough to conquer and to colonize any region in Mindanao. The fleet had apparently good sailing, for within a week they were anchored at the mouth of the Great River itself. They found the delta “thickly populated” but they learned from the natives that the Muslim king and his people had retired some twenty-five leagues up river to a village called Buayan, and there they had built fortifications. They also learned that the people of the delta — in particular those of Tancapan and Lumaguan — were hostile to the “king” of Buayan (or Bohayan, as the Spaniards spelled it).⁹

Figueroa decided to sail upriver and attack Buayan. The Muslim natives of the delta rallied to his standard. Figueroa’s invading army now swelled to some 6,000 men.

Opposite Buayan, the fleet dropped anchor and a large portion of the army disembarked. The Muslims of Buayan came out to meet them, and the battle was joined. It was hand-to-hand fighting in swampy terrain, and Figueroa, watching from the deck of his flagship, became impatient at his army’s lack of success. “Not able to endure the confusion of his men, he seized his weapons and hastened ashore with three or four companions and a servant who carried his helmet in order that he might be less impeded in his movements.” That was a tragic decision. Thus armed but bareheaded, Esteban Rodriguez de Figueroa entered into the swampy thicket. One of the enemy stepped out unseen from the side and dealt him a blow on the head with his *kampilan*. Esteban fell to the ground, badly wounded. He died the next day. Rizal, in his edition of Morga, makes an interesting footnote to this account of Figueroa’s death. The man who killed Figueroa (says Rizal, quoting Argensola) was named Ubal, and he had held a

Figueroa’s expedition and of his benefactions in Father H. de la Costa’s *The Jesuits in the Philippines* (Harvard, 1961) Chapter XII, pp. 279-301. On Oyanguren’s conquest of the Davao territory, see José Montero y Vidal, *Historia general de Filipinas* (3 vols., Madrid, 1895). III. 108-122.

⁹The spelling “Buayan” is used by Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Magindanao 1860-1868: the career of Datu Uto of Buayan* (Data Papers no. 82, Southeast Asia Studies Program, Cornell 1971).

feast two days previously at which he had vowed to kill the Spanish commander.

With the death of Figueroa, the great expedition at first decided to stay, then hesitated and withdrew to the coast. The natives of the delta returned to their pursuits; the rest returned to Manila. The great venture had failed.

Had Figueroa's dream materialized, Cotabato might have become, from the beginning of the seventeenth century, a province in which Muslims and Christians lived together in peace, and at peace with the other provinces of the Philippines. Instead, for two centuries and a half (until it was conquered in 1861) it remained a separate territory consisting of many sultanates or "kingdoms" ruled by warlike men like "Corralat" (Kudarat) and feared by all Christian Filipinos who lived in the coastal towns of Luzon, the Visayas, and northern and eastern Mindanao. For two centuries and a half these coastal towns were subject to Muslim raids, and their population was carried away by the thousands to supply the slave markets of Cotabato and Jolo and the Dutch East Indies.

In the intervening centuries, Jesuit missionaries would go to the sultans of Cotabato as envoys of the Manila Government. Some of them would succeed in establishing a short-lived peace. Others would fail and be killed.¹⁰

And when the envoys of peace failed to bring back peace, governors like Hurtado de Corcuera (in 1637) would lead mighty expeditions to the Great River of Mindanao. They would win battles which would be acclaimed in Manila with fireworks and triumphal parades and the ringing of bells.¹¹ And no sooner were the bells hushed than the wars would begin again, and Christian Filipinos from Samar or Leyte or Negros or Cebu or Panay or the Bicol Peninsula would be captured by the hundreds and sold as slaves. For war or peace meant nothing to the people who lived on the banks of the Great River — or on the

¹⁰One of the Jesuit missionaries who was at first successful in negotiating a peace treaty with the Muslims under Sultan Kudarat was Father Alejandro López. He was eventually killed by the muslims in 1655. (See H. de la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines*, pp. 442-451.)

¹¹The Corcuera expedition is described by H. de la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines*, chapter 16 "The Last Conquistador."

banks of Lake Lanao, or in the islands of Sulu — as long as a lucrative market existed for slaves.¹²

Dampier's Visit

The Spaniards were not the only ones to visit the delta of the Great River. Among the other visitors were a shipload of English buccaneers in 1686. They had come not to trade with the Muslims or to conquer their land, but merely to obtain provisions and also to indulge in some diversion. One of the Englishmen was Dampier who has left an account of their journey.

William Dampier had been working in the West Indies but had left his work to join a party of buccaneers. They sailed down the coast of South America, sacking and pillaging as they went. Then they sailed northwards to Mexico and Lower California where they broke up into groups. One group decided to cross the Pacific, Dampier with them. Commanded by a captain named Swan, their ship set sail in March 1686, touched at Guam, and eventually reached the Philippines. But the months spent on the ocean must have been horrible. At one point their provisions had gone so low that the men were thinking of rising in mutiny. Their intention was cannibalistic: they wanted to take the “portly and fleshy” captain and eat him up. Saved from that horrible fate, Swan brought his ship to the Philippines and sailed about the islands in what has been described as “six months of debauchery.” It was in July of 1686 that they anchored off the Mindanao River. This is Dampier’s account of that event:

The 18th of July we arrived before the River of Mindanao, the mouth of which lies in latitude 6d. 22m. N and is laid in 231 d. and 12 m. Longitude West from the Lizard in England. We anchored right

¹²On the Dutch complicity in the Muslim slave-trade, see V. Barrantes, *Guerras piraticas de Filipinas* (Madrid, 1878), 43-45. On Muslim piracy, besides Barrantes, see José Montero y Vidal, *Historia de la piratería malayo-mahometana* (2 vols., Madrid, 1888). The details of the raids are in Zuñiga, *Historia de las Islas Philipinas* (Sampaloc, 1803) and in the last three volumes of Juan de la Concepción, *Historia general de Philipinas* (14 vols., Sampaloc, 1792V A recently published book deals with the question of slavery: James F. Warren, *The Sulu Zone 1768-1898: the dynamics of external trade, slavery and ethnicity in the transformation of a Southeast Asian maritime state* (Singapore University Press 1982).

against the River in 15 fathom Water, clear hard Sand; about 2 miles from the shore, and 3 or 4 miles from a small Island that lay without us to the Southward. We fired 7 or 9 guns, I remember not well which, and were answered again with 3 from the shore; for which we gave one again. Immediately after our coming to an Anchor, Raja Laut and one of the Sultan's Sons came off in a canoa, being rowed with 10 oars, and demanded in Spanish what we were? and from whence we came? Mr. Smith (he who was taken prisoner at Leon in Mexico) answered in the same Language that we were English and that we had been a great while out of England. They told us that we were welcome, and asked a great many questions about England, and especially concerning our East India Merchants; and whether we were sent by them to settle a Factory here? Mr. Smith told them that we came hither only to buy Provision. They seemed a little disconcerted when they understood that we were not come to settle among them: for they had heard of our arrival in the East side of the Island a great while before, and entertained hopes that we were sent purposely out of England hither to settle and Trade with them; which it would seem they are very desirous of. For Captain Goodlud had been here not long before to treat with them about it; and when he went away told them (as they said) that in a short time they might expect an Ambassador from England to make a full bargain with them.¹³

The English buccaneers stayed some time in Mindanao and almost came to grief there. Dampier however managed to get out to the East Indies and thence (after some years) back to London where he published the celebrated account of his travels.

The Río Grande Conquered

It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the Great River and the entire territory was brought under the control of the colonial government. In 1851 Governor Urbiztondo led an expedition to Jolo comprising over 4,000 men (900 of whom were volunteers — mostly from Zamboanga). After a fierce battle, Jolo was taken. Urbiztondo thought that this was the psychological

¹³*Dampier's Voyages*, ed. John Masefield (2 vols., London 1906). The section quoted here is from chapter 13, which also is in Blair and Robertson, vol. XXXIX.

moment to establish at least one foot upon the territory of Maguindanao. Accordingly, government troops were sent to Pollok, a harbor north of the mouth of the Rio Grande, and there they built a fort.

Ten years later, in May 1861, government troops occupied the site of the present city of Cotabato in the delta, at that time a relatively populous village and the chief residence of the sultan of Tumbao.

But Tumbao itself, at the apex of the delta, where the river forks out into two branches, remained un taken. The sultan and most of his soldiers held what seemed the impregnable fortress of Pagalungan. This the government troops had to take if they wished to control the delta. Accordingly, in November of that same year (1861) the government forces, led by Colonel José Ferrater and by frigate captain Casto Méndez Núñez, advanced by water up river upon Pagalungan. After many unsuccessful attempts to approach the fort by land, Méndez Núñez finally ran one of his ships aground against the fort and thus was able to get into the fort with his men. The Muslims at first put up a stiff resistance but finally fled, leaving behind 117 corpses. The casualties on the government side were 30 killed and 50 wounded.

With the capture of Tumbao, the entire delta was in government hands. There remained only one hostile Muslim leader, the Datu Uto of Buayan. He was not conquered until twenty-four years later, in 1885. With the capture of Buayan (or Bohayan, as Father Juanmartí consistently spelled it in the Jesuit Letters) the entire valley of the Rio Grande was conquered. Uto's forts were demolished and the government troops established their principal fortifications nearby at Bakat, which they renamed Reina Regente in honor of the Queen who was then ruling Spain as Regent. By 1898 the government had a total of 10,374 troops in southern Mindanao. The fort of Bakat (or Reina Regente) had two officers and 112 men. That at Tumbao had 66 soldiers and one officer.¹⁴

¹⁴On the Spanish occupation of the Cotabato delta, see José Montero y Vidal, *Historia de la piratería*, II, ch. 33. On the battle of Tumbao and subsequent dealings with Datu Uto, see Pablo Pastells SJ, *Misión de la Compañía de Jesús de Filipinas en el*

II. The Jesuits in Mindanao

When the Jesuits returned to the Philippines in 1859 after an absence of 91 years, they did not return to their old missions in the Visayas or Luzon. Nor was there any question of their doing so. Those old missions had become fully established Christian communities and no longer needed the pioneering work of missionaries. The town of Antipolo in Luzon, for instance, had become a place of pilgrimage. The towns in the Marikina Valley (like Marikina and San Mateo) or those on the ridge overlooking the Laguna de Bae (like Cainta and Taytay) or those in Cavite (like Silang or Maragondon or Naic or Indang or Cavite Viejo) or those in the western coast of Batangas (like Nasugbu) were mission stations no longer. They were full-fledged Christian parishes.

The same was true in the islands of the Visayas where the Jesuits had worked for almost two centuries before their expulsion. At the time of their departure in 1768, Samar (with 15 Christian towns) and Leyte (with 17) and Bohol (with 10) were already Christian islands, as much a part of Christendom as were the countries of Europe.

But Mindanao was a different matter. That large island was in great part unexplored, and, except for a few parishes and mission stations along the coast, not yet Christianized.

Early in the Spanish era, that island had been divided into two missionary districts: the Recoletos to the east, the Jesuits to the west. Mission stations had been established along the northern and the eastern coasts by the Recoletos, and along the northwestern, western and southwestern coasts by the Jesuits. But the south and the vast interior regions were virgin territory for the Gospel.

This entire island of Mindanao, and the smaller adjacent islands, and the entire Sulu Archipelago were entrusted to the Jesuits as their missionary territory upon their return in 1859.¹⁵

siglo XIX (3 vols., Barcelona 1916) I, ch. 4. For the military details see Benito Francia y Ponce de Leon and Julian Gonzalez Parrado, *Mindanao* (Havana, 1898). On Datu Uto himself, see Reynaldo Iletto, *op. cit.*

¹⁵Mindanao was entrusted to the spiritual ministry of the Jesuits by articles 13 and 14 of the royal decree of 30 June 1860 and in subsequent documents. But the actual implementation was done gradually. See Pastells, *Misión de la Compañía de Jesús de Filipinas*, I, chapter 3 ff.

Geographical Pioneering

In such a vast territory, with so many tribes living in places difficult of access, missionary work involved a good deal of geographical exploration. The distant tribes had to be visited, and therefore the hills and valleys had to be traversed and the rivers explored. Even the mountains (though this was not strictly necessary) were climbed. A Jesuit priest, Father Mateo Gisbert of Davao, was in the first successful expedition to climb Mount Apo in 1880.¹⁶

One motive that impelled the missionaries to go on their difficult and risky journeys of exploration was the need for communication. The Jesuits in the north (in what is now Misamis Oriental or in the Bukidnon highlands) could not communicate with those in the south at the mouth of the Rio Grande except through a long and roundabout sea route. The letter or messenger from Cotabato would first go by sea to Zamboanga, thence northwards to Cebu, then back again southwards to Cagayan de Misamis, and finally overland, up the valley of the Tagoloan River to the Bukidnon plateau. The reply must go back by the same roundabout way. Similarly, the missionaries in Surigao or Agusan in the north could not communicate with those in Davao except by sea, along the eastern coast of Mindanao where the "Pacific" Ocean often belied its name.

It was this need for communication between the missionaries of the north and those of the south that impelled the Jesuits to explore the Río Grande. And it was the same need for communication that impelled Father Barrado to cross the mountains in 1892 in search of an overland route between Cotabato and Davao.

There was also a scientific motive in all these explorations. The Jesuit missionaries of Mindanao belonged to the same Order and served under the same superiors and had gone through substantially the same type of training as the Jesuit scientists in the Manila Observatory, or as the Jesuit teachers in the Ateneo and the Normal School for Teachers in Manila. In those days, the work of the scientist, the teacher and the missionary was better coordinated than it is now. Often enough there was an interchange of posts: Father Juan Heras, rector of the Ateneo and superior of the Philippine Jesuits, became a

¹⁶M.a. Bernad, "The Ascent of Mount Apo 1859-1958," *Philippine Studies* VII (1959) 5-67.

missionary in northern Mindanao. On the other hand, Father Pablo Pastells, a missionary in Mindanao, became superior of the Mission in Manila and afterwards a research historian in Barcelona and Seville. Father Francisco de Paula Sánchez, whom Blumentritt honored for his ethnological studies, had been a teacher at the Ateneo before becoming a missionary in Tagana-an and in Tandag in the Surigao District.

Because of this collaboration, the scientist and the teacher often obtained his ethnic or geographic or other scientific data from his missionary colleagues. The encyclopedic work on The Philippine Archipelago, compiled by the Jesuits of the Manila Observatory and published by the United States Government in Washington in 1900, would have been impossible without this close collaboration between scientist and missionary. The famous Museum of the Ateneo de Manila (destroyed in the fire of 1932) had been the fruit of this same collaboration.

There was a third motive for geographical exploration: it was the need to protect the pagan tribes from the domination of the Muslims. Because Mindanao was largely unexplored, it had become a "mysterious" island; and because for three centuries the Christianized portions of the Islands had suffered so heavily from the depredations of Muslim pirates, the idea had become accepted in government and military circles that the Muslim datus were all-powerful in Mindanao. And in fact their influence was felt in many places, and the ignorant and often timid tribes of the interior were in terror of the Muslims who took advantage of their helplessness. An instance is mentioned in the Jesuit letters, where the Manobo tribesmen were given one shawl as payment for a boat.

Because of this intimidation, the missionaries were anxious to have the government in Manila realize how superficial in fact was the power of the Muslims. Beyond a certain point of the Río Grande, there were no Muslims at all: a mission station and a military post at that point would protect all the tribesmen living upstream from Muslim incursions.

Linguistic Pioneering

The missionaries in Mindanao had to do pioneering work in another direction. They had to learn the language of the various tribes, and they had to learn them without books or teachers. They also had to write the grammars, dictionaries and catechisms from which succeeding missionaries would have to learn the language. This was of course not a new situation. The Jesuit missionaries in Mindanao in the 1880s had to do the same kind of linguistic spadework that the older missionaries of various religious orders in Luzon and the Visayas had to do since their coming in the sixteenth century.

The earliest of the Mindanao missionary publications of the Jesuits was a 56-page booklet by Father Jacinto Juanmartí, entitled *Cartilla moro-castellana para los Maguindanaos* (printed in Binondo in 1887 by the printing press of M. Perez, Jr.)

This was followed a year later by an 83-page catechism, also by Father Juanmartí. The odd-numbered pages were in Spanish, the even-numbered in the Maguindanao language in Arabic characters. Because there was no movable type in Manila for Arabic characters, the booklet had to be printed from lithographic plates in the laborious and expensive manner then in use.

Father Juanmartí's next book was a 148-page "Compendium of World History from the Creation to the Birth of Christ" (we should today call it the History of Salvation). This also was written in two alphabets: Roman and Arabic. No printer in Manila could handle the job and Father Juanmartí went to Singapore in 1888 to get it printed there by the Koh Yew Hean Press.

He next published a dictionary of the Maguindanao tongue, a quarto volume of almost 300 pages, printed in 1892 in Intramuros by the printing press "Amigos del Pais." The preface of that book gives an idea of what it must have entailed to prepare such a dictionary: "The lack of a dictionary," he says, "has been the cause why so few outsiders have been able to learn the Moro-Maguindanao tongue. Heretofore, there has been no dictionary whatsoever of that language. To prepare the present dictionary, I have had to rely on the oral speech of the natives and my own dealings with them in this tongue."

In the same year as his dictionary, Father Juanmartí also published a grammar of the Maguindanao language, also printed in Intramuros. This was later translated into English by an American officer in the

early years of the American Occupation, for the use of American soldiers and government officials in the Cotabato region.¹⁷

While Juanmartí was turning most of his attention to the Maguindanao Muslims, Father Guillermo Bennásar, also working in the Río Grande delta, devoted most of his efforts to the Tiruray tribe. He learned their language and published several books in their tongue. First, a small catechism printed by Pérez in Binondo in 1888. Next, a grammar of the Tiruray tongue, published in 1892. Then a dictionary which was published in two parts: the first (Tiruray-Spanish) in 1892, the second (Spanish-Tiruray) a year later.

Father Mateo Gisbert, twelve years after he had climbed Mount Apo, published a dictionary of the Bagobo language. This also was printed in Manila in two parts and a by two different printers: the Spanish-Bagobo Dictionary by the printing press of J. Marty on Carriedo Street, Santa Cruz; the Bagobo-Spanish by the Ramírez Press on Magallanes Street. Both were published in 1892.

Meanwhile, in the Bukidnon plateau, a small 64-page catechism in the "*binukid*" tongue (*Doctrina Cristiana en lengua montés*) was prepared by Father Francisco Chorro and other Fathers. It was printed in 1895 at the Consolación Orphanage in Malabon, near Manila.¹⁸

All this linguistic scholarship was undertaken in the midst of a very active missionary life, and it is not surprising that Father Juanmartí — who had written some of the books — was also the one who conceived the project of exploring the entire course of the Río Grande de Mindanao.

Jesuit Mission on the Río Grande

The Jesuits came to the Río Grande in 1861 after the occupation of Cotabato and shortly before the capture of Tumbao. In September of that year, two Jesuit priests and two lay brothers left Manila aboard a

¹⁷A *Grammar of the Maguindanao Tongue according to the manner of speaking it in the interior and on the south coast of the Island of Mindanao*. Translated from the Spanish of Rev. J. Juanmartí, Order of Jesuits, by C. C. Smith (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1906).

¹⁸Most of the books mentioned here are listed by Retana in Volume III of his *Aparato bibliográfico de la historia general de Filipinas* (3 vols., Madrid 1906). See also the *Checklist of Philippine Linguistics in the Newberry Library*, compiled by Doris V. Welsh (Chicago 1950).

frigate towed by a steamship. One of the priests was Father Juan Bautista Vidal, of whom we know little today. The other is better known, thanks to his letters and to his later acquaintance with Jose Rizal. This was Father José Ignacio Guerrico, whose features lived on, long after his death, in the bust that Rizal had made of him.¹⁹

Arrived at the delta, these two priests first stayed at Pollok and were on hand later to offer Mass for those who had died in the battle of Tumbao. On the site of the ruined Muslim fort of Pagalungan, they planted a cross. Then they looked about for the most suitable place in the delta where they could establish their mission.

They chose a site in Tamontaca, on the southern arm of the Rio Grande, because it was accessible both to the Muslims of the delta and to the Tiruray tribes in the hills. There, many months later (in 1863) they had their first converts: a Tiruray family of six (father, mother, and four children) who settled in Tamontaca and received baptism. This family became the nucleus of what was to become a large Christian community in Cotabato.

The first ten years at Tamontaca were trying years because the work was slow and required much patience. Then in 1872 something happened to hasten the work. A terrible epidemic of smallpox had swept the valley of the Rio Grande. The rice fields could not be cultivated, and a great famine ensued. The wealthier Muslims who owned slaves offered them for sale at a low price. Even babies and children were for sale.

Ten years previously, when the Tamontaca mission was established, the Jesuits had conceived the idea of ransoming as many slaves as possible from their Muslim masters. The plan was to give them their freedom along with a house and a piece of land; instructed in the Christian Faith, these small landowners would become a growing Christian community living among the Muslim. But because at that

¹⁹The letters of Father José Ignacio Guerrico from Tamontaca have been edited, translated and annotated by Father José S. Arcilla SJ, in two articles in KINAADMAN: "A Letter from Tamontaca 1862*" K III (1981) 137-152; "Four More Letters Pleading for Just and Sympathetic Treatment of the Maguindanao Muslims, 1862*" K IV (1982) 203-257. — A photograph of the bust of Father Guerrico by Rizal is in Volume 8 of the 10-volume encyclopedic work *Filipino Heritage: The Making of a Nation*, ed. Alfredo Roces (Makati 1977) reproduced from Retana, *Vida y escritos del Dr. Rizal* (Madrid 1907).

time this would have entailed a large sum of money which the Jesuits could not raise, the plan had to be shelved for a decade. But in the famine of 1872, slaves and children were being sold cheap. The Jesuits raised funds in Manila and ransomed as many as they could. Many of the children were bought from Chinese middlemen who had purchased them from the Muslims with the intention of reselling them. The ransomed children were between the ages of three and thirteen. By 1885 there were 60 boys and 30 girls in the Tamontaca orphanage. The boys were taught farming and other crafts, the girls, sewing and household skills. As they grew up and got married, each couple was presented with a house and a parcel of land. Thus a Christian community began to grow, with the church and the school as the center of community life: a stable community of modest land-owners who had received at least elementary education.

Such was the mission of Tamontaca. It was at Tamontaca that Father Guillermo Bennásar wrote his books on the Tiruray tongue, and Father Jacinto Juanmartí his books on the language of the Maguindanao Muslims (as we have noted above). It was also at Tamontaca that the project of exploring the Río Grande was conceived by Fathers Juanmartí and Bennásar. The young men who ascended the river with Father Juanmartí in 1890 and who walked for nine days to contact the Jesuit missionaries in Bukidnon, were young married freedmen from Tamontaca.²⁰ ~

²⁰A comprehensive history of the Tamontaca mission has not yet been written. But an authoritative article by Nicholas P. Cushner on "The Abandonment of the Tamontaca Reduction, 1898-1899" appeared in *Philippine Studies* XII (1964) 288-296. In an appendix to that article Cushner lists the material on Tamontaca in the Jesuit archives at San Cugat del Valles, near Barcelona. This material includes the mission diary, as well as a complete list of the freedmen that were admitted to the orphanage and hospice from 1872 to 1893. On the origins and history of the Tamontaca mission, see Pastells, *Misión de la Compañía de Jesus*. See also two articles by Francis Madigan and Nicholas P. Cushner, namely: (a) "Tamontaca: A Sociological Experiment," *The Catholic American Sociological Review*, XIX (Dec. 1958) 322-336; and (b) "Tamontaca Reduction: A Community Approach to Mission Work," *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionwissenschaft*, XVII (1961) 81-94.