

Philippine Collection

This essay, written by John Leddy Phelan, was originally published in [The Newberry Library Bulletin](#) volume 3, number 8 (1955), under the title “The Philippine Collection in the Newberry Library.”

To the vision and imagination of Edward E. Ayer is due, in large measure, the Library’s remarkable collection of Philippiniana. Mr. Ayer’s original “grand design” was to assemble all the books he could upon the history of North American Indians, and subsequently he expanded his collection to include the impact of Spanish civilization on the Indians of the western hemisphere. Happening to be in Italy in the spring of 1898 when word came of Admiral Dewey’s victory at Manila Bay, he sensed at once a possible new role for the United States in the Far East. He wired from Rome to his book agents, principally in Madrid, Barcelona and Paris, to gather lists of available Philippine materials, to have them ready for him when he returned to Chicago, and from such lists he bought wisely and extensively, at a time when items in the field were plentiful and the demand scant. He concentrated on two types of material: rare editions of the 17th and 18th centuries, and manuscripts.

The bulk of the early printed sources of Philippine history were written by ecclesiastics. The priests of the great missionary Orders assumed the burden of attracting, and sometimes compelling, the natives into the orbit of Western Christian civilization from which they have never departed. The Spanish colonists themselves scarcely roamed beyond the vicinity of Manila. For Spain the Philippines was essentially a missionary enterprise, and the colony’s annual deficit provoked repeated suggestions from economy-minded bureaucrats in Madrid that the Philippines ought to be abandoned. In all such crises the representatives of the missionary Orders at the Spanish Court succeeded in persuading the sovereigns that their promise to convert the natives and to preserve the Faith in the islands was a solemn commitment that could not be easily liquidated. Withdrawal from the archipelago, the missionary spokesmen argued, would result in either the return of the natives to paganism or the conquest of the island by one of the Protestant rivals of Spain—the Netherlands in the 17th or England in the 18th century.

In order to create a climate of opinion favorable to their pretensions, the superior prelates of the missionary Orders commissioned from time to time chronicles which depicted the spiritual exploits of their Orders in the Orient. Many of these sources have never been published in modern editions. Mr. Ayer accumulated a substantial selection of these first editions, which today command handsome prices in the book market. Philippine items have become increasingly scarce to locate at any price.

Among the Augustinian sources is [Juan González de Mendoza’s history of China](#). Published in Rome in 1585, this famous account is significant as a Spanish missionary’s first impression of Chinese civilization, but has also useful information about Augustinian missions in the Philippines. [Juan de Grijalva’s chronicle of the Mexican Augustinian province](#), whose only edition was published in Mexico City in 1624, remains the most circumstantial account we have of the early contacts between Spanish Christianity and the native world, for the first missionaries in the Philippines were

Augustinian friars from Mexico. [Gaspar de San Agustín's history](#), published in Madrid in 1698, is noteworthy not only for its contents but also for the very fine engravings symbolizing the “spiritual conquest” of the Augustinians and the temporal conquest by Philip II's soldiers. [A continuation of this work, written by Casimiro Díaz](#), was not published until 1890. [Juan de Medina's history](#), completed in 1630, and Pedro del Vivar's account, covering events up to 1763, appeared first in 1893. Although modern editions, these chronicles are now scarce.

Franciscan sources, likewise represented in Mr. Ayer's purchases, were published in various countries. [Bartholomé de Letona's biography of Sister Gerónima de la Asunción](#), the indomitable founder of the first convent of nuns in Manila, whose portrait Velázquez painted, appeared in 1662 in Puebla, Mexico. Both [Miguel de San Bernardo's book](#) and [Juan Francisco de San Antonio's monumental chronicle](#) were published in Manila, the one in 1736, the second two years later. [Marcos de Santa Rosa ó Alcalá's chronicle](#), indispensable for understanding the Spanish background of the Philippine Franciscans, bears a Madrid imprint of 1738, and [Domingo Martínez's survey](#) of the whole scope of Franciscan activity in the Orient was likewise published in Madrid in 1756. Another [chronicle](#), written in the 17th century by Francisco de Santa Inés, did not appear in print until 1892. Recently the Library bought the rare edition of [Marcello de Ribadeneira's history](#), invaluable for the early years of Franciscan activity in the Philippines (Barcelona, 1601).

The Dominicans published in Manila a series of chronicles, all of which Mr. Ayer purchased. The first [history of that Order](#), by Bishop Diego Aduarte, came out in 1640, and was [reprinted](#) in Zaragoza in 1693, at the time when Baltasar de Santa Cruz published a [continuation of Aduarte](#). Later histories of the Dominican missions were by [Vicente de Salazar](#), 1742, and by [Domingo Collantes](#), 1783.

The Jesuits played a decisive role in Christianizing the Filipinos, and the importance of their missionary achievement is reflected in the literature they published. The first account is [Pedro Chirino's](#) (Rome, 1604). This very rare first edition, which has been republished, is an outstanding example of the high level of Jesuit scholarship in this period. Francisco Colín's [continuation of Chirino](#) (Madrid, 1663) also ranks as one of the most informative accounts written about the missionary enterprise in the Philippines. The Colín edition contains a very fine specimen of Philippine cartography. The stubborn resistance of the Mohammedans of the southern Philippines to Spanish penetration is recounted in Francisco Combés' [history of Mindanao](#) (Madrid, 1667). Juan Jose Delgado's [encyclopedic synthesis](#), completed in 1752 but not published until 1892, is an indication of how the spirit of the Age of the Enlightenment had penetrated as far as the Jesuit community in the Philippines.

Although the Augustinian Recollects were the least important of the great missionary orders in the islands, Juan de la Concepción's history in fourteen volumes is one of the classic works of Philippine historiography (Sampaloc, 1788-1792). [Andrés de San Nicolas' chronicle](#) (Madrid, 1664) is a circumstantial source for the history of the early Recollect missions in the archipelago.

Though the Franciscans founded and staffed the first hospitals in the Philippines, by the middle of the 17th century the brothers of the Order of St. John were providing nurses and physicians. A

major source for the [history of the Order of St. John](#) is by Juan Manuel Maldonado (Manila, 1742). The vast scope of the charitable activities of the lay brotherhood of the Santa Misericordia is [told by Juan Bautista de Uriarte](#) (Manila, 1728).

More general in character are two 17th century surveys of conditions in the island. Antonio de Morga, whose [book](#), published in Mexico City in 1609, is an elegant example of Mexico printing, spared neither his fellow-bureaucrats, the Spanish colonists, nor the missionary orders in his trenchant critique. Less incisive than Morga's, but equally informative, is the [memorial of Juan Grau y Monfalcón](#), ambassador of the Philippine colony at the court of Philip IV (Madrid, 1637).

Two choice items bought by Mr. Ayer concern the fabled Manila galleon, which, plying between Manila and Acapulco, Mexico, made it possible for Spanish and Chinese merchants to exchange in Manila Mexican silver for Chinese silks, and so became the economic lifeline of the Philippine colony. One is the [codification of the regulations governing the Manila-Acapulco trade](#) promulgated by the Council of the Indies (Madrid, 1736); the other is a [series of regulations for the operation of the galleons](#) (Manila, 1757).

It is safe to say, in summary of this first part of the description of Mr. Ayer's interests, that the Newberry has today but one rival in 17th and 18th century Philippianiana. That is the Graiño Collection in Spain, known to all Filipinistas, with 856 rare Philippine imprints, some of them the only copies in existence, that make it the most complete collection of its kind in existence. J. T. Medina reports that between 1593 and 1810 565 books were published in the islands, printed on presses operated by the religious congregations. The bulk of 17th century imprints—to a lesser extent the 18th century—reflect the practical exigencies of a missionary outpost on the rim of Christendom. Catechisms, devotional works, linguistic studies, and little else, came from Philippine presses. The printing was inferior to that of Spanish America, and the use of fragile rice paper helps account for the present scarcity of the volumes. The major 17th century chronicles were published, not in Manila, but in Spain, and most of those are in the Newberry. The 18th century Chronicles more often bore a Manila imprint; those Mr. Ayer bought. The scholarly importance of these ecclesiastical chronicles derives from their penetrating descriptions of the acculturation process by which the Filipinos were gradually, if only partially, westernized. If the Spaniards went to the Far East as missionaries, the Filipinos, for their part, gave to Spanish Christianity a decidedly oriental stamp. Historians and anthropologists will continue to dispute the degree to which the Spaniards remade Philippine culture, but what remains beyond dispute is that the islands today, as a direct consequence of their long Spanish past and half-century of American rule, constitute the only Christian-Oriental community in the Far East. They form a bastion of Western influence in an Asia in the throes of revolutionary nationalism.

These chronicles also are of primary value to the cultural anthropologists who attempt to reconstruct the character of native society before the Spaniards came. They describe, moreover, an unfruitful meeting of East and West. In the 16th century the Spaniards were dazzled by the grandiose dream of the "spiritual conquest" of China and Japan. The Philippine chronicles contain a vast store of information about Chinese and Japanese civilizations and the abortive Christian

missions in those lands. In recent years The Newberry Library's holdings in this field have been enormously enriched by the William E. Greenlee Collection. The Portuguese colony of Macao on the Chinese coast was, in reality, more important than the Philippines as a base of operations from which the Iberian powers dreamed of planting the Cross in China and Japan.

The second foundation upon which Mr. Ayer built his collection, that of manuscripts, originated in his purchase of part of the manuscript collection of the Compañía General de Tabacos de Filipinas. Of the more than two hundred items, some are single manuscripts, and others contain as many as fifty documents. Many are originals; some are copies or transcripts of originals that have been lost. The collection is particularly rich in 18th century items, less comprehensive for the 17th century, and poor for the 16th.

One notable item consists of a series of largely unpublished documents which throw light on the commercial activities of the Jesuit Order prior to their expulsion from the Spanish dominions in 1767. These documents have been complemented by a recent acquisition of microfilm from the Archivo Nacional Historico in Madrid. Another bundle provides some penetrating insights into the repeated efforts of the Spanish authorities to promote economic reforms during the 18th century. There is also an unpublished historical chronicle, written, internal evidence strongly suggests, by the well-known Jesuit scholar, Juan José Delgado. The research value of the Newberry's Philippine manuscripts has been noticeably augmented by the recent purchase of a collection in Spain. This acquisition, containing some 586 items, strengthens the Newberry's holdings in the 19th century, and in the field of regional history. It is to be hoped that Dr. Paul Lietz's calendar of the Newberry's Philippines manuscript collection, soon to be published, will make it better known and more accessible to research. This collection of Philippine manuscripts is a modest assortment compared to the almost inexhaustible materials available in the archives of Spain. In the United States, however, it is a collection which has no superior. The widespread destruction sustained by the archives and libraries in Manila during the last war has unfortunately increased many-fold the research value of these documents.

Of all the Philippine manuscripts in the Newberry Library, the [five volumes of the Ventura del Arco](#) transcripts stand out in bold relief. Señor Ventura del Arco in the 1890's copied from the Jesuit papers in the Real Academia de Historia in Madrid a series of documents spanning the whole Spanish colonial period. Every Filipinista knows that few phases of the history of the Philippines can be written without utilizing these transcripts.

The basic collection of sources for the history of the Philippines is the [fifty odd volumes edited by Emma Blair and J.A. Robertson](#) at the beginning of this century. Much of the preparation of these volumes was done in the Newberry Library. The collection spans the entire Spanish period from Magellan's discovery to the end of the Spanish regime. Substantial portions of the ecclesiastical chronicles and prolific selections of documents from the Spanish archives, notably the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, were translated from Spanish into English. The defect of this pioneer and laborious work is not the publishing of the documents in translation, although scholars would feel more at ease in the original language. It is rather that the translations are usually awkward and

oftentimes ambiguous. The Newberry Library has the original Spanish transcripts of the Blair and Robertson series, not abridged as the Blair and Robertson translations sometimes are.

One of the salient characteristics of Philippine development is the linguistic diversity, which three hundred years of Spanish rule did little to alter. There are six major languages in the area—Bisayan, Tagalog, Iloko, Bikol, Pampangan and Pangasinan—as well as many other minor languages and a multitude of dialects. The Spanish missionaries did not teach the natives Castilian, but, rather, learned the native tongues. At the end of Spanish regime not more than ten percent of the population spoke Spanish. The missionary Orders were in the forefront of linguistic research. Friars composed vocabularies and grammars. They translated catechisms and other devotional works into virtually all the tongues that the Filipinos spoke. The Newberry Library has an extensive ethnographic collection including many linguistic items, printed works and manuscripts [note 1].

In the history of the Philippine collection in the Newberry Library, Mr. Ayer stands out as the imaginative pioneer. Over the course of the years secondary works, collection of sources, new editions, monographic literature, scholarly journals, and bibliographical tools have been patiently accumulated. The result of these efforts is that today The Newberry Library stands unequalled as a working research collection in Philippine studies of the Spanish period. In the field of manuscripts, the Archivo General de Indias will always remain unexcelled. Research libraries cannot hope to duplicate archives. Filipinistas will always have to journey to Seville to examine the treasures in the Archivo. If they are fortunate, however, they will also return to The Newberry Library where they will probably find under one roof more of the books they need than they will in any other one place in the world.

Notes

1. See Doris Varner Welsh, [*Checklist of Philippine Linguistics in the Newberry Library*](#), Chicago, 1950.

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