

The Spanish Shipyard on Isla de Panamao (now Biliran Island)

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ABSTRACT

From the 1580s up to the early 1600s, several of the famous early Spanish galleons that crossed the Pacific Ocean from the Philippines to New Spain (Mexico) were built on *Isla de Panamao*, the present Biliran Island (and province) north of Leyte in Eastern Visayas. The galleon “Santa Ana,” which was captured and looted by the English corsair, Thomas Cavendish, off the tip of Lower California in November 1587, is believed to have been constructed in the shipyard here. This was also the site of a bloody international encounter involving

Cavendish's men and the Spanish-led local defenders, an event that William Lytle Schurz, author of *The Manila Galleon*, had placed somewhere else. This paper presents pieces of evidence of the existence of a Spanish shipyard on the former *Isla de Panamao*, specifically in the present capital town of Naval, Biliran Province, that include Spanish-era chronicles and documents, existing place-names and landmarks related to shipbuilding activities, folklore, a death ritual cooperative, and the site of perhaps one of the oldest burial grounds or cemeteries in the country.

KEYWORDS

Spanish galleons, Biliran Island, *Isla de Panamao*, shipyard, shipbuilding, Spanish-era accounts

INTRODUCTION

The research and writing of this paper was prompted by the virtual absence of knowledge, publications, or mention in the national history literature about the Spanish shipyard on *Isla de Panamao*, the present Biliran Island north of Leyte, at the dawn of the Spanish colonization of the Philippines. After collecting and perusing primary and secondary source materials on this topic, this writer alarmingly realized that a larger chunk of galleon-making activities in Panamao had, in fact, been placed elsewhere through a series of confusing claims and erroneous misrepresentations, particularly in the Spanish sources.

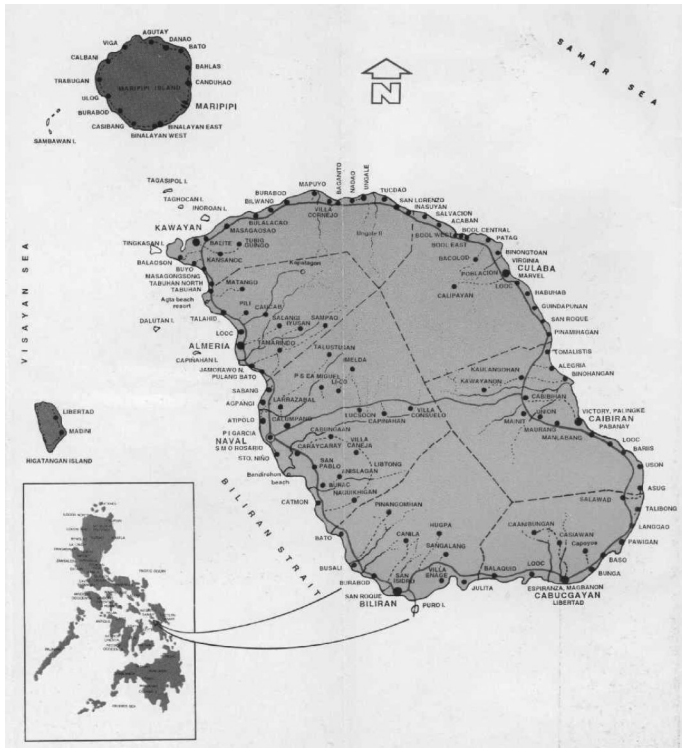
This paper hopes to straighten these inaccuracies and place the events in their proper contexts and historical locations.

THE PANAMAO SHIPYARD IN THE 1580S

The island of Biliran (see Fig. 1) was known as *Isla de Panamao* in the early Spanish chronicles and in the earliest map of the Philippines (see Fig. 2). The earliest known record that made mention of *Isla de Panamao* is the account of Thomas Cavendish's expedition around the world from 1586 to 1588. It said:

The eight and twentieth day [of January 1588], in the morning about seven on the clock, riding at an anchor betwixt two Islands, we espied a Frigate under her two Courses [lower sails], coming out between two other Islands, which (as we imagined) came from *Manilla*, sailing close aboard the shore, along the main Island of *Panama[o]*. Here we rode at anchor all that night, and perceived that certain Spaniards (which came from *Manilla* to *Ragaun* [*sic*], to fetch a new ship of the Kings, there built) had dispersed their Band into two or three parts, and kept great Watch in several steeds [horses], with Fires, and shooting off their Pieces. The Island [Panamao] had much plain Ground in it, in many places, and many fair and straight Trees do grow upon it, fit for mak[ing] excellent good Masts for all sorts of ship. There are also Mines of very fine Gold in it, which are in the custody of the Indians...¹

FIG.1. MAP OF BILIRAN PROVINCE

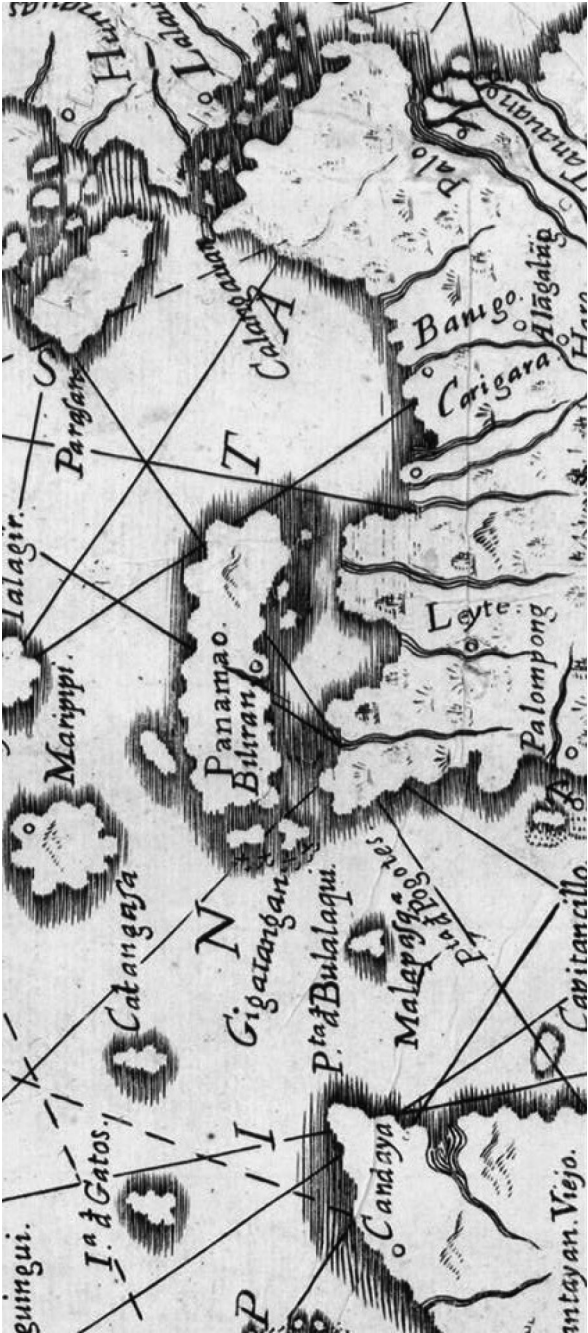


Source: Oocities.org/rolborr/official.html

Dr. Jose Rizal, in his annotations of Dr. Antonio Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, originally published in 1609, identified the island of Panamao and paraphrased this part of the Cavendish account as follows:

The following day, 24 June (1588) [*sic*, it seems the Spaniards and the British used different calendars in dating this event; June seems to be Rizal's miscopying error], they sailed toward the N.W. [*sic*, S.W.] sailing by various islands where the Spaniards, alarmed, lighted bonfires watching closely all night

FIG. 2. DETAIL OF PANAMAO ISLAND AND ITS VICINITY IN THE 1734 MURILLO MAP.



Source: <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/10089/#q=Philippines>

and shooting incessantly. They passed the island of Panama (*sic*), a level country abounding in tall trees, suitable for making topmasts, and has various gold mines owned by the *Indios*.²

The part of Panamao Island mentioned in the Cavendish account was presumably the plains of the present town of Naval, the widest in the island.

NO MENTION IN THE MANILA GALLEON LITERATURE

The Panamao shipyard is mentioned in the accounts of Fr. Pedro Chirino, S.J.,³ and Fr. Francisco Colin, S.J. (1900), which are classic sources, and in the account of the Cavendish expedition. These accounts were read and cited by Dr. Jose Rizal in his annotations of Dr. Antonio Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*.⁴ With this type of visibility in the primary source documents, it was initially expected that Panamao Island already had a secure place in the general history of the galleons in the Philippines.

However, with the acquisition in 2010 of a copy of the book *The Manila Galleon* by William Lytle Schurz (1959), it was surprising to find that the island was not mentioned there at all. In fact, Schurz replaced the word Panamao in the various accounts with Panay, and also placed the site of the Spanish shipyard there. He also transferred to Panay the dramatic confrontation between the Cavendish expedition and the Spaniards that is considered a milestone in the history of the Manila galleon. This was indicated in the following two sentences:

The only aggression which he [Cavendish] committed during his seventeen or eighteen days among the Philippines was an unsuccessful attempt to burn the galleon *Santiago*, which was nearing completion in the yards at Arevalo on the south coast of Panay. However, his landing party was beaten off by a company of Spaniards, who appeared on the shore.⁵

Schurz's erroneous claim of the Panay location of the Spanish shipyard had been handed down since then. It appeared again in the recently published history of Iloilo City.⁶

EVOLUTION OF AN ERRONEOUS CLAIM

In tracing the sources of Schurz's apparent error from extant documents, some paper trail has been established.

The first known published report of the Cavendish episode in the 1580s was made in 1609 by Dr. Antonio de Morga, a top official during the early decades of Spanish colonization. He wrote:

During the incumbency of Chief Justice and Captain General Santiago de Vera [1584–1590], the English Admiral Thomas Escander [sic, Cavendish] sailed the Straits of Magellan toward the South Seas. He had taken along the coast of New Spain, close to California, the vessel *Santa Ana* as it was coming from the Philippine Islands loaded with much gold and valuable merchandise, and from there sailed toward the Philippine Islands, and entered the provinces

of the tattooed natives (Visayas) [*sic*, the *Pintados* Islands] within view of the *Villa de Arevalo*, and the dockyard where they were building a galleon to be used in the Manila-New Spain line. The Englishmen attempted to burn the vessel, but Manuel Lorenzo de Lemos, who was helping in its construction, fought him off.⁷

De Morga established three place-names relevant to the discussion here: (1) “the provinces of the tattooed natives,” or the *Pintados* provinces, which mainly referred to the Leyte-Samar area in the 1580s; (2) *Villa de Arevalo*, attributed to have been named after the hometown in Spain of the Spanish governor-general in 1580–1583, Gonzalo Ronquillo de Peñalosa;⁸ and (3) the dockyard.

The second known published report of this episode appeared in *Conquistas de las Islas Filipinas* by Fr. Gaspar de San Agustin, originally published in 1698. He recounted:

He [Cavendish] reached the island of Capul and from there went on to Negros. Within sight of the town of Arevalo, there the ship *Santiago* was dry-docked at a place called Lacaygan, the corsair attempted to burn it, landing people ashore for this purpose. However, Captain Manuel Lorenzo de Lemus, in charge of the factory, prevented him. He managed to kill seven Englishmen, and the pirate desisted from his plan.⁹

It must be noted that in the original Spanish narrative, de Morga did not mention Panay at all, only *las provincias de Pintados*.¹⁰ Likewise, Father San Agustin did

not mention Panay. But both disclosed that the shipyard could be seen from *Villa de Arevalo*, which later historians associated with the pueblo of Arevalo in Panay.

LETTERS TO KING FELIPE II

The earliest known attribution to Panay as the site of the contested shipyard in the 1580s is the letter of Governor-General Santiago de Vera to King Felipe II, dated 26 June 1588. This letter described the capture, sacking, and burning of the galleon “Santa Ana” near California by ships from England.¹¹ About the presence of an English ship in the Pintados Islands (i.e., Leyte-Samar), the governor-general reported:

... [T]he English learned that a galleon of your Majesty was being built in the shipyard of Caigoan on the island of Panay (*sic*). An attempt was made to land troops for the purpose, as is supposed, of burning it; but it was defended by some carpenters and ca[u]lkers who were working thereon.¹²

A letter to the King from Juan Bautista Roman, dated 2 July 1588, provided more detailed descriptions of the “Santa Ana” incident contained in the preceding letter of the governor-general.¹³ On the reported English threat to the shipyard in the Pintados Islands, he narrated:

... [T]hey set sail [from Capul Island] and went to another island called Panae (*sic*), more distant from this settlement of Manila, and toward the south. There is a small city in that island called Arevalo

of which Captain Don Juan Ronquillo is alcalde-mayor. A large ship was being built nearby at the expense of the royal treasury. The Englishmen arrived between the hamlet and the shipyard where the ship was building on the seventh of February, where he captured by means of his ship's boat a sailor who was coasting along in a boat quite inapprehensive of any such danger. All the information that could be desired was learned from that sailor. Next day the Englishman landed the sailor with a letter for one Manuel Lorenço, who had the construction of the ship in charge. The letter contained some threats and arguments of little moment and was signed Tomas Candish [*sic*, Cavendish] of Trimbley, as your Majesty will see by the original in the papers sent by the president [Santiago de Vera].¹⁴

In his letter to the King dated 13 July 1589, Governor-General de Vera stated that a new galleon had just been finished and would make the voyage to New Spain (Mexico) in the reported year (1588). Of the four ships available for the Manila-New Spain route that year, one was sold to make the voyage to Macau, where it was wrecked and burned by the Chinese. Another was in the port of Manila ready to make the voyage to New Spain, but it was wrecked by a hurricane along with many other Spanish and Chinese ships. Only two remained, of which one could not be used for being so old.¹⁵ He added a note of hope for 1589 as follows:

Understanding the great need there was for ships, I had a large galleon of six hundred *toneladas*, which

had been built in the Pintados Islands, placed in the shipyards of your Majesty, for the above-mentioned route. God willing, it may sail in the year ninety-one. I have given orders for private persons to make two other ships of less tonnage. One is already finished, and both will be able to sail next year.¹⁶

The galleon that sailed to New Spain in June 1588 was the “Santiago” and the one estimated to sail in 1591 was probably the “San Felipe.”¹⁷ Both galleons served the fledgling colony until the mid-1590s, but in 1596 the “San Felipe” was confiscated in Japan while seeking shelter from storms and was consequently damaged.¹⁸ The galleon that was wrecked by the Chinese was the “San Martin,” which was built and completed in Sorsogon in 1581.¹⁹

In the same letter, Governor-General de Vera reported that Master Miguel de Palacio, chief shipbuilder and superintendent of work at the shipyard of these islands, had died. His replacement, Master Marco, a good builder of all kinds of ships, had also died.²⁰ Both apparently died within months after each other, and since their unnamed replacement was already old and could not attend to all the work in the shipyard, the governor-general sought the King’s help in this regard.²¹

PANAMAO, NOT PANAY

After itemizing the published official literature pointing to Panay as the site of the Spanish shipyard that was threatened by the English corsair Thomas Cavendish in early 1588, the following counter-arguments are presented

to support the claim that this shipyard was, in fact, located on *Isla de Panamao*, the present Biliran Island.

As cited earlier, Dr. Jose Rizal was keen enough to notice, after reading the Cavendish account in the British Museum, that the Spanish shipyard was located on the “island of Panamao.”²² Rizal contradicted all the published sources within his access at the time, which placed this shipyard in Panay. He inferred “Panamao” from the word “Panama” written in the eyewitness account of the Cavendish expedition.²³

Some details of location and distances in the Cavendish account asserted that the expedition had never been near Panay. It stated:

The nine and twentieth day of January, about six of the clock in the morning we set sail, sending our Boat before, until it was two of the clock in the afternoon, passing all this time as it were through a Strait, betwixt the said two Islands of *Panama* [*sic*, Panamao] and the Island of *Negros*; and about sixteen Leagues off, we espied a fair opening, tending South-west and by South... Thence the expedition passed through the Moluccas.²⁴

At sixteen leagues away from Panamao, the expedition would have been in the strait between Bantayan Island and northern Cebu (measured using Google Earth Map software at 3 nautical miles: 1 league). Here, they took the small boat that had led them from Panamao Island and released the sailor they had captured near the shipyard. The

village on Bantayan Island at that time must have been already a focal point of marine travel in the Visayas. The Cavendish expedition apparently sailed down Tañon Strait between Negros and Cebu on its way to the Moluccas.

The refutation of Panay (in favor of Panamao) as the site of the shipyard threatened by the Cavendish expedition leaves one detail to be settled: *Villa de Arevalo*, a key landmark identified by several authors. The answer came quite serendipitously after translating from Spanish to English the 1886 parish profile of Leyte pueblo (on Leyte Island), which then covered the northwestern area facing Biliran Island. The name Arevalo was referred to as a *visita* (a settlement with a church but no resident priest).²⁵ By using the 1899 Map of Leyte published by the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, the village of Arevalo was located to be facing a bay south of San Isidro *poblacion* in western Leyte. At present, Arevalo has been reduced into a *sitio* (hamlet) of Barangay (village) Tabing in Tabango town, at the boundary with San Isidro town on the north. But the name Arevalo Bay has been retained.²⁶

The *Villa de Arevalo* in the area might have been settled by Captain Juan Ronquillo and company when he was *alcalde-mayor* of the island that would later be called Leyte. The village apparently started to lose its importance after Ronquillo was pulled out of the Visayas to help subdue the Muslims in Mindanao starting around 1596.²⁷

It is also possible that the Manila-based officials in the 1580s deliberately tried to keep the location of the Panamao shipyard as a secret, and placed it as a security

measure near the better-protected Arevalo in Panay. The latter could be easily defended in case of future attacks premised on the unlikely event that the reports to the King would fall on the wrong hands. If so, in retrospect, these officials might have only deceived themselves.

GALLEONS BUILT IN THE PANAMAO SHIPYARD IN THE 1580s

It may now be deduced that the shipyard on Panamao Island was established after the completion of the galleon *San Martin* in Sorsogon in 1581.²⁸ From the route of the Cavendish expedition in the Pintados Islands here, it can be inferred that the *Santa Ana* they captured and looted near California was built in Panamao, to where they proceeded after their arrival and restocking of food and provisions in Capul Island near the mouth of San Bernardino Strait in Northern Samar. The Spanish official documents interpreted it differently, but the failed English landing near the shipyard might have been an attempt to seize the *Santiago* as a replacement of their boat *Desire* for the return home. And although the *San Felipe* started to sail only in 1591, its construction was started as early as 1589.

The three galleons—*Santa Ana*, *Santiago*, and *San Felipe*—each with an illustrious history, can be ascertained to have been constructed in the Panamao shipyard in the 1580s, along with two other ships of less tonnage that were not named by the governor-general.

Several other galleons would be built in Panamao during the next decade and into the early years of 1600.

THE PANAMAO SHIPYARD IN THE JESUIT ACCOUNTS

The Jesuit mission in Panamao Island was featured in Chapter 76 of *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas* by Fr. Pedro Chirino, S.J.²⁹ Published in Rome in 1604, this is the earliest book written about the work of the Jesuits in the Philippines.³⁰

Father Chirino described Panamao Island as “almost a continuation of [Leyte], since the area is separated only by a strait so narrow that a ship can scarcely pass through it.”³¹ He mentioned about the shipbuilding activities therein involving Spanish, native, and other workers, and which were visited by Jesuit missionaries based in Carigara starting in 1601.³²

In his account about Panamao, Father Chirino highlighted a crime of passion that stirred the religiosity of the entire shipbuilding community. A Spanish-speaking Negro in the service of the shipyard captain caught his wife one night in an adulterous situation with a young and likeable Spaniard. Driven by jealousy, “he killed the adulterer with a lance and wounded the woman, leaving her for dead.”³³ This incident moved and influenced the entire community to make confessions and do penance for their own sins in the presence of the visiting priest, Jesuit Fr. Francisco Vicente. Before the priest departed after a week-long visit, he had a wooden church built almost overnight by his hosts; had effected the reconciliation between the murderer-husband and the adulteress-wife who embraced

and pardoned each other; and left a little hospital for the sick and poor in the shipyard.

The second Jesuit account which expanded Father Chirino's shorter report was *Labor Evangelica* by Fr. Francisco Colin, S.J., first published in 1663 and re-issued with annotations by Fr. Pablo Pastells, S.J., in 1900. Father Colin depicted the destruction of a galleon at its construction site on Panamao in 1601, which translates into English as follows:

Due to the typhoon, so much water from the mountains overflowed the riverbank in seemingly scandalous and rapturous way. As the floodwaters forced their way to the sea through the same river course and mouth, they also inundated the shipyard grounds, eroded the soil at the base of the scaffoldings that propped up the galleon that was being built, and tossed the boat into the water, resulting in its destruction.³⁴

Attached as Annex is this writer's English translation of the Colin-Pastells narrative about the events in Panamao. Unlike the Chirino account which already has several English versions (a quoted letter has been copied for a Pastells footnote in the annex), there is no such translation yet in the published historical literature.

A significant item pertaining to the galleons was the *Santa Cruz de Mayo* (1 May) incident in 1601. Not just one but two (!) Spanish galleons were destroyed due to a

strong typhoon that day. The first was the galleon that was finished the month before and was ready for blessing and launching when it was toppled from its scaffoldings and destroyed by the flood at the Panamao shipyard. The second was the *Santo Tomas*, which was sunk off Catanduanes on its return trip from Mexico.

A historian of Leyte, Manuel Artigas y Cuerva, claimed that the *Santo Tomas* was also built in Panamao.³⁵ It was apparently completed and launched in 1599, when it first departed for Mexico.³⁶ About another galleon, he recorded:

When in April [*sic*, December] 1601 the works ended and finished the galleon *San Antonio*, Father [Mateo] Sanchez blessed her at the Shipyard in Panamaw. On this ship rode Father Pedro Chirino, when he left for Rome [via Mexico, in July 1602], where he made his celebrated *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas*.³⁷

The *San Antonio* was apparently the last galleon built on Panamao Island, but in a different place, in Pauican, now a barangay in the present town of Cabucgayan. Thereafter, the shipyard was transferred to Cavite, and the reason given was the “bad luck” that befell the ships built in Panamao.³⁸ But the more likely reason was the onset of the Moro raids on Leyte in the first decade of 1600.³⁹

In his narrative that mentioned the sinking of the *Santo Tomas*, Artigas claimed that six more boats of the galleon class were built in the Panamao shipyard.⁴⁰ He did

not provide the names of the other boats. It is also not known if he included in his count the boats built in the 1580s, which were assigned to a shipyard in Panay and contested in this paper. Whatever the eventual number may be, at least one-in-twenty (a 1:20 ratio, which could improve to as much as 1:10 ratio) of the total 110 Manila galleons ever made, according to Wikipedia, were built on *Isla de Panamao*. They also happened to be the bigger boats that dominated the Manila-Acapulco sea lanes for at least 20 years from the 1580s to the early 1600s.

Another prominent galleon that was presumably built in Panamao was the *San Diego*, which engaged the Dutch armada under the command of Admiral Oliver van Noort but was sunk near Fortune Island in Nasugbu, Batangas on 14 December 1600.⁴¹ It first surfaced in the galleon rosters in 1597 as having sailed to Acapulco, Mexico.⁴² Although the caption for the glass-encased miniature of this galleon displayed at the National Museum states that this was made in Cebu in 1590, it is possible that the construction of the “San Diego” was only funded by Cebu-based Spaniards, but the galleon was built in Panamao.

TRACING THE ANCIENT SHIPYARD IN PLACE-NAMES, LANDMARKS, FOLKLORE, ETC.

The subsequent sections describe existing place-names and landmarks, a folklore, a death ritual cooperative, and the site of perhaps one of the oldest ground burial grounds in the country, and their apparent connection to the galleon-making activities in *Isla de Panamao* centuries ago.

PLACE-NAMES AND LANDMARKS

The name *Panamao*, the old name of Biliran Island, refers to a heavy-duty fishing net centuries ago, which was used to catch large species of fish. Jesuit Fr. Francisco Alcina in his 1668 manuscripts⁴³ described that these nets were set in place in the sea; they were likewise used on land to catch wild hogs and other animals. At sea, they ordinarily caught *duyungs* (sea cows) and various species of manta ray.⁴⁴

Father Colin's account provides hints of the vicinity in the present Naval town in Biliran Province where the shipyard was located. This was along the Caraycaray River based on local myth and folklore (Caraycaray River being believed as the path of "ghost ships" from Panamao—the mountain, not the island).⁴⁵ This river was the usual path of large floods caused by *buhawi* (cloudbursts) dropped in the mountains (in 25-year cycles until 1986).

The current theorized workshop area of the shipyard is roughly a 110 meters long and 50 meters wide river island called *Panaliwad-on* (from *taliwa*, middle or center), about 250 meters south of the Caraycaray Bridge. The name suggests that this abandoned ground was once a center of activity in the area.

The Cavendish account specified *Ragaun* as the place on Panamao where a new ship was being built.⁴⁶ This name was presumably given by the people of Capul Island in Samar. However, there is no trace of this name in Biliran, and its item and meaning are not found in the old Bisayan-

Spanish dictionaries. The shipyard site was called *Caigoan* by Governor-General de Vera; its root word, *igo*, means “to be sufficient, to have enough of something.”⁴⁷

Apparently, the Spanish shipyard was established on Panamao Island not only because of the abundant supply of straight trees that were excellent for making ships, but also because of the bountiful food supply from the local seas and forests. Unfortunately, the rich supply of wood and food did not last long, and the shipbuilding activities from the 1580s to the early 1600s left an indelible mark on the local ecology and culture until the present. It seems the *duyungs* (*Halicore indica*, the sea cows), caught with *panamao* nets were among the first to disappear, most probably due to the over-consumption of this easy-to-catch sea mammal.

The Cavendish account also mentioned the plentiful plain ground in Panamao, where many fair and straight trees grew, whose wood was ideal for making excellent masts for ships. The geography that fits this description northeast of Naval is called Barangay Talustusan. The word for the official name as defined in a Spanish dictionary translates into English as follows: “*Talostosan*—rope, a thick and long rattan, etc., that is tied to a heavy object to slacken it or lower it from a high spot and slope; the same place where the object is taken down or lowered.” The verb form is *talostos*, “to slacken the rope, etc., to unload or lower some object from a high spot down a mountain, coast, etc.”⁴⁸ The name of the barangay describes as well the method of transporting the timber cut from this area towards the shipyard centuries ago.

The upland behind Caraycaray was labeled as *C[olina]*. *Caanibo[n]gan* (Caanibongan Hills) in the 1899 map of Leyte. It seems this area was grown with anibong palms, a source of *bahi*, the strips of hard palm wood that might have been used for some interior structures of the galleons.

BUGKUT, DISAPPEARANCE WITHOUT A TRACE

A popular folklore heard during the writer's childhood was about people who were allegedly befriended or bewitched by fair-skinned *enkantos* (fairies) and were supposedly brought to Mt. Panamao in Biliran Island. The phenomenon is represented by the word *bugkut*, commonly understood to mean "disappearance without a trace through abduction by the *enkantos* (fairies)." The counter-measure ritual to recover the disappeared person (called *gibugkut*) involved a group of people who had to conduct a noise barrage in front of some *dakit* tree (*Ficus* sp., Tag., *balete*) locally known to be haunted by spirits.⁴⁹ An old *dakit* tree before which such ritual might have been performed still exists in Barangay Caraycaray.

However, stripped of its folkloric meaning and superstition, *bugkut* is pure and simple abduction or kidnapping.⁵⁰ Its historical context appears to be the forced conscription by the Spanish authorities of able-bodied males from the surrounding Visayan Islands to work in the Panamao shipyard from the 1580s to the early 1600s. Some of the abductees were probably just taken forcibly from their fields or fishing bancas and, even without informing their families, brought to Panamao. Many probably died in the workplace and could not return to their homes and

villages, and their mysterious disappearances later became the grist of myth and legend.⁵¹

Fr. Jose V. Braganza, SVD, a priest-historian of Leyte, had written the undocumented comment that “native forced labor must have been tremendously difficult because a Jesuit blamed the Operation Panamao as one of the causes of the decimation of Leyte population around this time.”⁵²

TAMPO, A DEATH RITUAL COOPERATIVE

Another possible remnant of the shipbuilding years in Panamao is the *tampo* (lit., grouping), a death ritual cooperative still existing in Barangay Caraycaray of Naval. This might have started with the deaths and burials of conscripted shipyard workers who had died away from their home villages and families centuries ago. The fellow workers, bound by a pact of cooperation, presumably contributed rice and *tuba* (coconut wine) for the different death rituals including the burial of their dead comrades. Only Barangay Caraycaray has this tradition in the entire Biliran Island.

ANCIENT CEMETERY SITE

Although there are many deaths associated with the shipbuilding activities in Panamao as recorded in Spanish-era documents and suggested by the *bugkut* folklore and the death ritual cooperative, the location of the ancient cemetery in the area of Barangay Caraycaray could not be pinpointed for many years. Then a breakthrough came in 2009.

This writer's high school science teacher and classroom adviser, Mr. Crispin de la Cruz, retired from government service around 2008 and became the caretaker of a large meadow land with tall coconut trees and adjacent to *nipa* swamps in Sitio Ilawod of Barangay Caraycaray. The first thing he did was to plant a small cross made of cement near a row of grown mango trees on the boundary of the property.

Visiting the site on 2 November 2009, this writer asked him about his purpose for planting the concrete cross. Mr. de la Cruz said the area was reputed to be haunted by spirits, as indicated by the more than occasional sightings here of the *santelmo* (St. Elmo's fire) phenomenon at night. Upon further probing, it was learned that during his youth in the early 1950s, he had witnessed an excavation activity here that unearthed a large wooden box and about three sacks of longer-than-ordinary human bones which the excavators quickly took away with them. The wooden box was interpreted by this writer as a log coffin used by the ancient natives, and the unusual bones as belonging to foreigners who were buried on this site.

Hence, the approximate location of perhaps the largest ancient international cemetery in the Visayas has been found. It had probably served as burial ground of the dead Englishmen left behind by the Cavendish expedition as well as of the Spaniards (possibly including the unnamed personalities mentioned in the Colin-Pastells account and the two master shipbuilders mentioned by Governor-General de Vega), Chinese laborers, and numerous native

conscripts who died during the shipbuilding years in *Isla de Panamao*.

CONCLUSION

This paper presented evidence and analyses of the existence of a Spanish shipyard on the former *Isla de Panamao* based on Spanish-era chronicles and primary sources. From these, it can be concluded that the famous Spanish galleons were indeed built in the shipyard on *Isla de Panamao*, now Biliran Island, and that this island deserves a significant niche in the history of the Manila galleon, which was denied in Schurz's book.

The paper also traced the ethnographic evidence of the existence of this shipyard from extant place-names and landmarks, folklore, a death ritual cooperative, and the located site of perhaps one of the oldest ground burial cemeteries in the country.

With the help of this contextual paper, the vicinity of the Panamao shipyard could be a focus of future archaeological studies by interested researchers and scholars, including those from the National Museum of the Philippines.

ANNEX "A"

COLIN-PASTELLS ACCOUNT ON PANAMAO

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248. Shipyard in Panamao

The precise need that these Islands have of *naos* [ships, galleons] for the difficult and long journey to New Spain [Mexico], from where they bring in the subsidies of silver and the people who keep them, obliged [the authorities] to search places on purpose for shipyards, and workshops (*fabricas*) where wood are at hand, the *Indios* must drag them close, the [river] fords (*botaderos*) are clean, and sheltered from the winds. Of all this, there was sufficient parallel in the Island of Leyte, and its surroundings. And so were there ordinary workshops. [These were] delivered starting the year 1600, when they equipped the shipyard on the Island of Panamao, [which is] almost contiguous to that of Leyte (2), because a bulky ship can hardly pass through the [narrow] strait that separates [both islands]. It is not populated by people, but by many deer and wild boars that those [people] from Leyte are accustomed to hunt there. It is an elevated ground with very rough mountains, and thick forests. With the little experience of the workers (*fabricadores*), forsaking to take the aforementioned comforts, [they] chose [the] place, without noticing that they would have to pass through a ravine that descends from the high mountains. They put [their] hands to the work and performed so good a skill that, by the month of April 1601, they had already finished the ship. They

requested the Superior of those *Doctrinas* [Jesuit missions] (3), that he would come to bless [the ship]. During the day of the *Santa Cruz de Mayo* of that year, at the same time, a furious hurricane, which caused the loss of the Galleon “Santo Tomas” [in Catanduanes] that we had just told about in the preceding chapter, dropped so much water from those mountains, and the ravine rose in such manner that it seemed [like] a mighty, and rapturous river. And as its exit to the sea was through the same [river] mouth, it rampaged through the equipped shipyard, inundated everything, eroded the soil [at the base] of the scaffoldings, or props, that steadied the *nao* [galleon], [and caused these] to crumble to the water and fall with the boat on the ground (4). And as if God had not sought another thing, the galleon was overturned, the damage complete, [and] burned (*abonanço*) in time. The Father arrived to bless her, and felt fully obliged to console the grief-stricken workers, and to persuade them to convert the sorrow from the lost storm to that of their sins, and to agree with the divine will. And so they did. And striking fire to the lost boat to take out the iron [materials], they gave the order to start a second construction in another place of the same Island, much safer (5), and not less suitable. By means of which, and their good diligence, the galleon was finished in December of 1601. And launched with prosperity, fitted with masts (*arbolada*), and commissioned (*enxarciada*), it sailed to Cabite, where it took cargo for New Spain. It left that port in July (6) of 1602, and took the trip to Acapulco, with much happiness that another two [galleons] departed that typical year, and they arrived such that bad agreements were resolved at once.

- (1) Brother Robles died on 26 January 1602.
- (2) The island of Panamao is located between Masbate and Leite.
- (3) Fr. Mateo Sanchez, residing in Carigara.
- (4) “They gave in [fell] to the sides with her, and without fail smashed [the boat] to pieces.” Chir.
- (5) It was called Pauican, or place of Turtles.
- (6) Day 7 [i.e., 7 July 1602]. The *nao* (galleon) was called *San Antonio* and in her embarked Father Chirino for Acapulco. This galleon was lost in the high seas, during the second trip it made from Manila to Acapulco, in the year 1604.

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249. Mission to this Shipyard

While [the activities] lasted in these workshops, we were of much service, and glory of Our Lord for the spiritual fruit of what was done there by our Fathers (1), for lack of Chaplain, and own Minister that they never had. We went there during Lent, and Easter, to hear confessions from them, to preach to them, to say Mass to them, and to administer the other Sacraments. And because the people who joined in similar workshops (*fabricas*) were many, [-] Spaniards, *Indios*, Negroes, and Chinese [-], they well needed the charity, and the patience of the Ministers, particularly for the *desagrauios* [*sic*, *desagravios*, people seeking penance], and temporary (*temporal*) assistance for the *Indios*, and other poor people, and the destitute. Among

those who had worked in some of these occasions, we speak of Father Francisco Vicente (person of Religion, and *prendas* [of the cloth]), who has already been mentioned, and more will be said on purpose ahead in this *Historia*, because he had said so (2):

- (1) Father Francisco Gonzales went to Panamao twice with this occasion: the first, at the beginning of Lent of 1602, to attend to one of the gentlemen on the Island; and in passing he gave the ash to all and heard the confessions of many Castilians who attended the work on the galleon at the Shipyard; the second, at halfway through Lent of this year. Of these last ministries he gave to Father Sanchez the following account:

“For the *Domingo de lazaro* [Palm Sunday?] Father Francisco Gonzales returned another time to the shipyard in the company of Brother Pedro Diaz, where they remained until *Sauado de ramos* [Black Saturday?] very well occupied, the Father in hearing the confessions of Spaniards and *Indios*; the Brother in gathering them and teaching them. And to the glory of Our Lord, there confessed and received the Holiest Sacrament almost all the Spaniards, who were more than thirty: and the Christian *Indios* all confessed, and some of them received Communion. This was a work of much service to God: because they have

much need of these remedies for the many disorders they have there. All the Spaniards went to mass during these days; and on the third day to the lecture. And the *Indios* heard mass on three days of the week, reciting the doctrine and listening to the lecture on catechism, and the way of confession. We found many sick persons; and to one Gentile (*gentil*), quite to the end. Our Lord desired that everything be arranged, and he received the Holy Baptism. And on the following night his reason (*juicio*) left him, and in his madness he repeated the words that had been said by the Father during catechism; he especially repeated a lot the Holiest Name of JESUS. He finally died on another day with very good displays and signs of salvation. To the other sick ones, we reached out to those Gentlemen who came from their lands (*tierras*) and were thus obliged; and if alone he went to Father Francisco Gonzales, who was very well employed: for having had great charity, and to be the only means for their health; and even to love us and be thankful. Every day they sang the *Salve* [praise] after they had lifted from work, and all the Spaniards went, and many of the *Indios*, and on Saturday they sang at mass for Our Lady, to whom many people received Communion with much edification from all. And it was a matter of praising to Our Lord to see those

days that the Father was there, the care with which those Spaniards went to the officious Saint who was no little help to disengage the *Indios* from their errors: that these things that entered through the eyes, they were more beneficial, and powerful, [and] that many lectures and exhortations had made them.”

- (2) The letter of Father Vicente, directed to Fr. Mateo Sanchez, is as follows: [*Note:* The full English translation of this cited letter in the Colin-Pastells footnote is taken from Chapter 76 of the Chirino Account in *B&R* (Vol. 13, pp. 179–181).]

“I reached Panamao, on Saturday before the last Sunday of Advent, and we were welcomed by the captain with much affection and kindness. It is a large population which has been gathered there, of both Indians and Spaniards, and among them God our Lord gave us a goodly harvest of souls. On arriving there I sought to speak to them and show them my affection. At the outset, I undertook to have a church built; and this was done so that we said mass on the following day. I also preached to them on matters relating to sin, explaining to them its hideous and injurious nature—especially by recalling to their minds that recent example or sermon which our Lord had preached

to them a short time before. They were all deeply moved, and resolved to ask me for confession and the cure for their souls. In order that so rich a prize should not be lost, I labored assiduously, preaching now to the Spaniards, now to the Indians. On that Sunday I preached three sermons, and tried, moreover, by special discourses to attract the headmen and chiefs, explaining to them how they ought to make confession. When they understood that I must go immediately after the first day of Easter, they entreated me to remain, if only until the third day, in order that they might make their confessions as they should. I consented to this; and from that hour, all the people, Spaniards as well as Indians, began to consecrate themselves with such devotion as to make me ashamed. I did not lose this opportunity—now encouraging and consoling them, now removing their difficulties, now instructing them; and striving most heartily to assist them. The confessions began before dawn, about four o'clock in the morning; and the people came with general confessions for a whole life or for many years, uttering these with tears and sobs. Indeed, it was necessary to loosen the reins and encourage them, for it was not necessary to seek, as is usually done, incentives to contrition and grief. During this mission some of the Spaniards were obliged to go to another islet; some of

them, in order not to lose this opportunity, hastened to confess, making up for the shortness of the time allowed them by their great devotion; others, who were deprived of even this satisfaction, deferred their confessions until my return, to their own great sorrow and with holy envy for those who remained. In truth, God knows best what went on in those souls: what I can say is, that I have never seen such tears, or conversions to sincere. There were persons who spent entire nights in weeping, with the crucifix in their hands. During the Easter season they were so withdrawn from worldly concerns that it seemed to be Holy Friday; and they did not leave their houses except to go to mass or to confess with me about the welfare of their souls. In their silence and downcast looks, and the grief which they felt within, they gave evidence of the mercies which our Lord had showed them, and the light which He was bestowing upon them, as they went from and to their houses. I experienced a thousand scruples in regard to calming and satisfying their consciences; but I gave a thousand thanks to God our Lord for having brought me to that place for the greater good of so many souls. Certain persons assured me that they had never before seen the like. We continued to hear the confessions, so that they might be

better prepared for Easter. Certainly, had I to purchase by dint of toil those moments of consolation, when I was administering to each one the sacrament of communion and seemed to read his very heart, a thousand journeys from España were little to give for that. I was to go on the fourth day of Easter, but that was impossible, for with earnest solicitations they entreated me to remain—and some, moreover, had not finished their confessions; it was therefore necessary to wait until Sunday. On that day we effected a reconciliation between the murderer and the adulteress, who embraced and pardoned each other and made their confession with much devotion. On Monday morning I was obliged, on account of my departure, to say mass shortly after two o'clock; and yet the service was not so secret as to prevent them from attending it, all being present, and manifesting great devotion. With tears and words they expressed their great regret at my departure, and made me promise that I would soon return to console them; and with this I came away, glorifying the Lord. I left, in process of erection, a little hospital for the sick and poor, which all aided with charitable offerings and personal attendance. Glory be to our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom proceed all things.”

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We arrived at Panamao on Saturday before the last Sunday of Advent (1). We were received by the Captain with much love, and hospitality. It is a large pueblo, one that there had been joined the *Indios*, and the Spaniards; and in all it gave us Our Lord a good harvest of souls. Upon arriving, we tried to speak to them, and to caress them. The following day we said Mass, and we preached to them matters regarding sins, declaring to them their ugliness, and damages. And especially we brought to them the memory a fresh example, or Sermon, that Our Lord had preached to them not long before. It was the case of a Negro mestizo (*ladino*), servant of the Captain, married, who caught his woman with a well-known Spaniard, and esteemed by all. And yet, furious with the passion of jealousy, he killed [the Spaniard] in a brazen manner, and left her for dead. The ending was so messy (*desastrado*) for a Christian man without confession, and in such occasion at the hands of a Negro, who felt all notably hurt; and even remorseful, and many fear that God will not punish with similar death. I, so as not to lose such good occasion, was preparing the material, and disposing the spirits. Thus, I made three Sermons that Sunday, and with private talks had moved all, and I prepared for their confessions, which started the following day at four o'clock in the morning. There were some full of life, and others of many years, and all with tears and sobs that before had to be reined to find reasons to move them to contrition, and sorrow. I can affirm that I have not seen such conversions, and tears. There were persons who went through entire nights crying with a Crucifix in the hands. The days had been

[like] Christmas (*Pascua de Navidad*), Holy Week. Nobody left house except for the Church, or to stop at my lodging to try to [find a] remedy for their souls; showing well the interior compunction in the silence, and modesty in the face, not ceasing to come to me once, and many times, just to have the satisfaction from their confessions. I saw what happened, blessed a thousand times by God for having placed in the hands such an occasion, that to buy a weight of work seemed to me like a thousand comings from Spain were not enough. We remained there until the following Sunday, when we publicly made the friendships of [i.e., reconciled] the killer, and of the adulteress, and they confessed to my satisfaction. We procured to introduce other things, accommodated a house for a Hospital, and there showed up the sick persons, and the poor with charity, as it was made so. Many people [also] went there to serve and to help [the sick] with their charities. On Monday morning, we wanted to leave without being noticed, and thus said the Mass before daybreak. With all that rush of the voice that I was leaving, many came to say goodbye, moved with their tears, and requested me with much truth to return promptly to console them. The glory is to Our Lord, Jesus Christ, from whom all things proceed.

- (1) Year 1601. Before this Fr. Mateo Sanchez was there, with time (*ocasion*) for a sick person, and “for them warned with talks to all that they should be ready to confess by Christmas time, which came about because they were told he would act according to their pleasure.” Chir. 1, 5, c. 29.

NOTES

- 1 Blair, Emma Helen and James Alexander Robertson, *The Philippine Islands, 1493–1898*, 55 vols. (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1903-1909), 15:297.
- 2 Jose Rizal, annot. *Historical Events of the Philippine Islands*. (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1990), 23.
- 3 Blair and Robertson, vols. 12 & 13.
- 4 Rizal, 1990, 23; Blair and Robertson, 15:297; Antonio De Morga, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* [1609] (*Nueva Edition por W. E. Retana*) (Madrid: Libreria General de Victoriano Suarez, 1909).
- 5 William Schurz, *The Manila Galleon* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc. 1959), 310.
- 6 Policarpio Hernandez, O.S.A., *Iloilo, the Most Noble City: History and Development, 1566–1898* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 2008), 37-38.
- 7 Rizal, 23.
- 8 Rizal, 18.
- 9 Gaspar de San Agustin, O.S.A., *Conquistas de las Islas Filipinas: Conquest of the Philippine Islands, 1565–1615* (Manila: San Agustin Museum, 1998), 943. The original book in Spanish was published in 1698.
- 10 De Morga, 26.
- 11 Blair and Robertson, 7:52-55.
- 12 Ibid., 52.
- 13 Blair and Robertson, 34:392–394.
- 14 Ibid., 393–394.

- 15 Blair and Robertson, 7:86–87.
- 16 Ibid.,87.
- 17 Summary Information of Voyages and Ships, 6.
- 18 Ibid.,8.
- 19 Ibid., 4.
- 20 Blair and Robertson, 7:93.
- 21 Ibid., 93–94.
- 22 Rizal, 23.
- 23 Blair and Robertson, 15:297.
- 24 Ibid.,297–298.
- 25 Pbro. D. Felipe Redondo, *Breve Reseña de lo que fue y de lo que es la Diócesis de Cebu en las Islas Filipinas* (Manila: Colegio de Sto. Tomas, 1886), 195.
- 26 Francisco S. Tantuico, Jr. S. *Leyte Towns: Histories/ Legends* (Tacloban City: FSTantuico, Jr., 1980), 102.
- 27 Rizal, 55–60.
- 28 Summary Information of Voyages and Ships, 4.
- 29 Blair and Robertson, 13:178–181.
- 30 Horacio De la Costa, S.J., *The Jesuits in the Philippines, 1571–1768* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 620.
- 31 Blair and Robertson, 13:178.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Francisco Colin, S.J., *Labor evangelica de los obreros de la Compañía de Jesus in las Islas Filipinas* [1663] (*Nueva edicion ilustrada con*

copia de notas y documentos para la crítica de la historia general de la soberanía de España en Filipinas por el P. Pablo Pastells, S.J. (Barcelona: Imprenta y Litografía de Henrich y Compania. 1663), 3:326. Commonly cited as Colin-Pastells. Digitized by Google.

35 Manuel Artigas y Cuerva, *Reseña de la Provincia de Leyte* (Manila: Imprenta “Cultura Filipina,” 1914), 252.

36 Summary Information of Voyages and Ships, 9.

37 Artigas, 286.

38 Menardo L. Lumapak, “A Historical Research on Biliran.” (Unpublished manuscript at the Leyte-Samar Museum Library, Divine Word University, Tacloban City, 1957), 27.

39 Artigas, 273.

40 Ibid., 252.

41 Rizal, 143-165; Angara and Madrid, 226.

42 Summary Information of Voyages and Ships..., 9.

43 Ch. 16, Bk. 2, Part I.

44 Ibid.

45 Rolando O. Borrinaga, *Leyte-Samar Shadows: Essays on the History of Eastern Visayas* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 2008), 171.

46 Blair and Robertson, 15:297.

47 Antonio Sanchez de la Rosa, O.F.M., and Antonio Alcazar, O.F.M., *Diccionario Español-Bisaya para las Provincias de Samar y Leyte* (Manila: Imp. y Lit. de Santos y Bernal, 1914), 166.

48 Sanchez de la Rosa and Alcazar, 337.

49 Rolando O. Borrinaga, “The Use of Etymology in Retracing the Local History of Biliran Province” (Paper presented at the National Historical Institute Seminar-Workshop on Oral and

Local History in the Visayas, Silliman University, Dumaguete City, November 5–6, 2007) 8.

50 George Dewey Tramp, Jr., *Waray-English Dictionary* (Kensington, MD: Dunwoody Press, 1995).

51 Ibid.

52 Jose V. Braganza, S.V.D., “Leyte: The First Hundred Years 1521–1622 (The Story of Leyte)” (Unpublished manuscript, ca. 1960), 19.

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