

## LETRA DE MECA: JAWI SCRIPT IN THE TAGALOG REGION DURING THE 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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### Abstract

History of writing in the Philippines has traditionally affirmed the eventual disappearance of pre-Hispanic script in the archipelago after Christianization. This affirmation ignores the relevance of Islamization in Manila bay. Accordingly, Jawi script became the dominant writing system in the Malay world from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards affecting also Tagalog culture, as several data confirm. This paper explores the use of Jawi script for Tagalog language and the cultural changes introduced by the Spanish establishment in Manila.

**Keywords:** *Letra de Meca*, Jawi script, Tagalog, Philippine, Southeast Asia

### *Baybayin* and the Construction of Philippine Culture

The substitution of Brahmic scripts by the Roman alphabet in the Philippine archipelago has traditionally been assumed as an abrupt period which took less than a century. Furthermore, it has been described as unnatural process caused and forced by the Spanish clergy. Thus, zealot missionaries destroyed and burned Philippine vernacular manuscripts as pagan crafts forcing the indigenous people to use exclusively Latin script. The story might perhaps be different as we explained in other places (Donoso, 2009 283-328). The first book printed in the Philippines (1593) used the vernacular Brahmic script, named *Baybayin*. Missionaries always described local scripts in their works and praised the literacy of the people. Moreover, the famous Belarmino's catechism was completely written in *Baybayin* in 1621.<sup>1</sup>

Writing was an agency for local intelligentsia. When the newly literate elite in Roman script and Spanish language (the so-called *Ladinos*) were consulted for undertaking an orthographic reform in vernacular script, they refused to change "what was naturally given by God." This opinion appears in Pedro Andrés de Castro's *Tagalog Orthography*.<sup>2</sup>

[The missionaries] consulted and requested the *Ladinos* to adopt the new invention in their writings for better understanding. After giving thanks and celebrating the suggestion, they refused the use of the cross as orthographic sign saying that it was against the own and natural peculiarity given by God, destroying at once Tagalog Syntax, Prosody and Orthography. However, their intension was not to confuse the Spaniards, and they were going to obey when writing Spanish in Tagalog script.<sup>3</sup>

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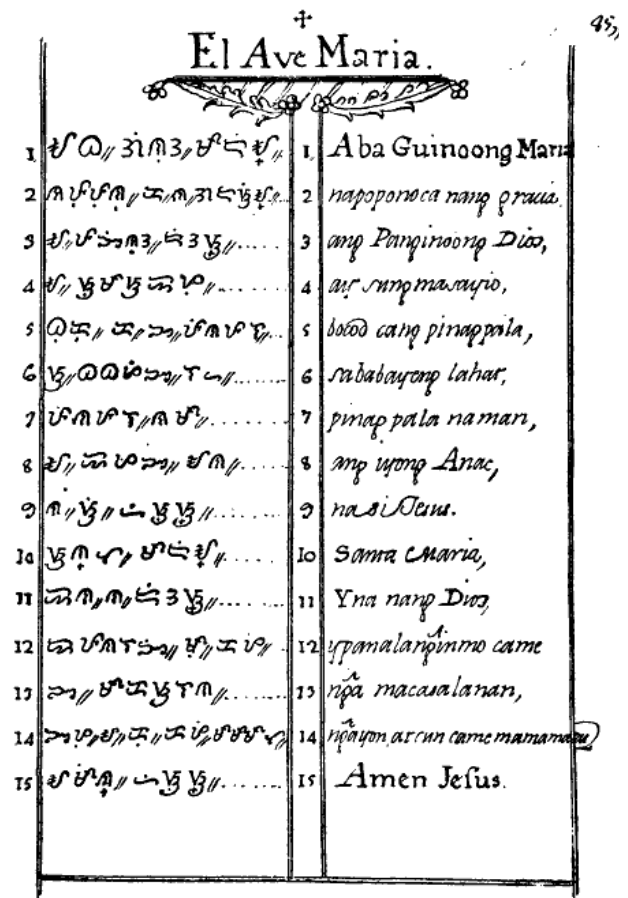
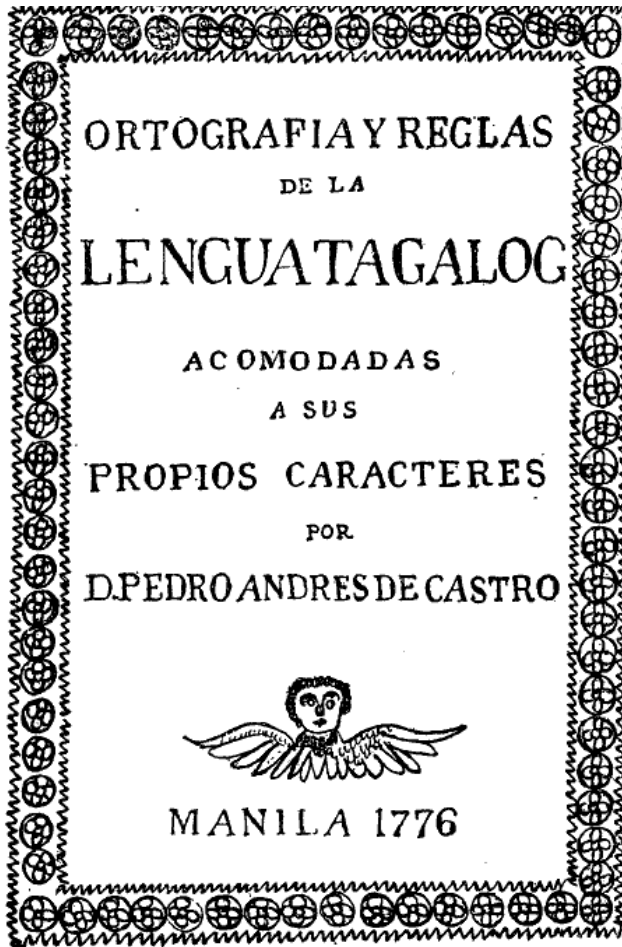
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1 *Libro a naisurátan ámin ti bagás tu Doctrina Cristiana, nga naisurát ití libro ti Cardenal a Agnagan Belarmino, Ket ináon ti P. Fr. Francisco Lopez padre á S. Agustín, ití Sinasamtóy*. Impreso en el Convento de S. Pablo de Manila, por Antonio Damba, i Miguel Saixo. Año de 1621. See Regalado Trota José (1993), *Impreso. Philippine Imprints. 1593-1811*. Manila: Fundación Santiago & Ayala Foundation, p. 32.

2 *Ortografía tagala, dedicada a la Muy Clara y Muy Expectable Señora Doña Maria Magdalena de Pazis, Solimán y Lacandola: Principala Cacique del Pueblo y Caveçera de Bulacán: Señora de la casa de Lacandola, Capitana de Dalagas*, 1776.

3 Authors own translation. Original text: "Se les consultó a los *Ladinos* esta nueva invención, suplicándoles la adoptasen por suya, y la usaran en sus escrituras, para conveniencia de todos. Pero ellos después de haber celebrado mucho la invención de la Cruz y haber dado muchas gracias por ella, resolvieron que no podía tener lugar en su escritura porque era contra su intrínseca propiedad y naturaleza que Dios le dio y que era destruir de un golpe toda la Sintaxis, Prosodia y Ortografía de su lengua tagala. Pero que no era su ánimo tampoco el despistar a los Señores Españoles, y que harían lo que les mandasen especialmente cuando escriban cosas de lengua española en sus caracteres tagalos." Pedro Andrés de Castro (2014), *Baybayin. Ortograpiya at mga tuntunin sa pagsulat sa wikang tagalog ni Pedro Andrés de Castro*, edition and translation by Elvin R. Ebreo. Manila: Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino, p. 34. See also Cipriano Marcilla y Martín (1895), *Estudio de los antiguos alfabetos filipinos*. Malabón: Tipo-litografía del asilo de huérfanos, p. 94.

Figures 1 and 2. Cover and sample of Pedro Andrés de Castro, *Ortografía tagala*, 1776, from the original manuscript, López Library and Museum, Manila



*Tagalog Orthography* is a precious document proving the persistence of *Baybayin* script in the 18<sup>th</sup> century since it was in fact a handbook for learners. The book provides insights about the relevance of the vernacular script and the agency of Filipinos in their cultural transformation. Unlike an idea of cultural imposition, this sample helps us to understand the cultural negotiation between the local and the alien.

In other hand, missionaries undertook from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards a huge endeavour to study, analyse and compile grammars and vocabularies of the major Philippine languages (Sueiro, 2003). Eventually this task consolidated a tradition that helped the development of Comparative Linguistics and the work of Lorenzo Hervás: *Idea dell'Universo*, Cesena, 1778-1792, 21 vols. (Fuentes, 2013). The cover of the first issue of *Panitik Silangan* (a weekly magazine published during the 1960s using the old Philippine alphabet) reflects this task depicting names of Spanish missionaries and their works:<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> This magazine proves that the transitional period between scripts is not yet finished. There has been always an interest and revival on Philippine old scripts, with recent publications like Michael Raymon Pangilinan, *An introduction to Kulitan, the indigenous Kapampangan script*. Angeles: Center for Kapampangan Studies. Pangilinan, 2012. Similarly, we have to remember that in some areas of the Philippines the vernacular script subsists within remote communities, like the Tagbanua of Palawan and the Mangyan of Mindoro. See the historical references: Fletcher Gardner & Ildefonso Maliwang (1939), *Indic writing of the Mindoro-Palawan axis*. San Antonio: Witte Memorial Museum, and the more recent: Griselda Yabes (1999), *Letters from Pala'wan*. Makati: Bookmark; and Antoon Postma (2005), *Mangyan Treasures: The Ambahan: A Poetic Expression of the Mangyans of Southern Mindoro, Philippines*. Calapan: Mangyan Heritage Center.

Figure 3. Cover of *Panitik Silangan*, year I, num. 1, September 1963



What is important to us is the relevant activity during these centuries to study, write and even print in *Baybayin*. And this task is not strange in other regions of the Spanish Empire. In fact indigenous documents placed a significant role in the judicial and legal life of the colonies.<sup>5</sup> Documents in other language than Spanish were legally considered, and Pedro de Castro says that “I have seen in the archives of Lipa and Batangas many documents with these characters”.<sup>6</sup> Nowadays we can find *Baybayin* documents in some repositories, including the oldest library in the country, the University of Santo Tomás (Sánchez, 1928, 181-184). In consequence there is no doubt that during the 17<sup>th</sup> century Brahmic scripts were still part of the cultural scenario of the archipelago for legal purposes and literary activity.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, it is feasible to speak about an incipient pre-Hispanic literary tradition in the Philippine archipelago, although certainly this was mainly an oral literature in a proto-historic period.<sup>8</sup>

5 James Lockhart (1991), *Nahuas and Spaniards. Postconquest Central Mexican History and Philology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

6 Original text: “Yo he visto en los archivos de Lipa y Batangas muchas escrituras en estos caracteres.” Castro (2014), p. 36.

7 Virgilio Almarino compiled in 1996 the old Tagalog Poetics: *Poetikang Tagalog: mga unang pagsusuri sa sining ng pagtulang Tagalog*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines.

8 It is needed to remember here the new researches in the field for the Malay world: “With the Tanjung Tanah manuscript, the assumption of a pre-Jawi script literary tradition (beyond occasional Old Malay stone inscriptions) now ceases to be a mere hypothesis, as it provides direct insight at least into remnants from the closing phase of that period. The principal message it has for us is thus, in my opinion, that there must indeed have been a Malay literary tradition before the transition to Islam and Jawi script,” Waruno Mahdi (2015), “Script and Language of the Tanjung Tanah Manuscript,” in Uli Kozok, et al., *A 14th Century Malay Code of Laws: The Nitisārasamuccaya*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, p. 218.

Having this in mind the main objective of this research is to write a different narrative of the history of writing in the Philippines. Firstly, we affirm that the transition from Brahmic script and Hindu-Buddhist culture to Christianity and Roman alphabet in the archipelago was longer than assumed. Secondly, if *Baybayin* was not deleted but promoted and we know that Manila was becoming an important Islamic *entrepôt*, it is feasible to think that *Baybayin* was in a mutable phase in Manila area at the Spanish advent. This is to say, like in other areas of the Malay world, Jawi script and Islam were replacing *Baybayin* and Hindu-Buddhist culture.<sup>9</sup> Namely Spaniards might have promoted *Baybayin* as a way to stop Islamization since the Tagalog language was moving from *Baybayin* to Jawi script.

However, there is a major problem in order to prove this thesis, to the knowledge of the researchers, there is not a single document of a Tagalog text in Jawi script. Consequently, we will use secondary sources to find data proving the thesis, this is to say, during the last part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Tagalog culture was in a process to change *Baybayin* for Jawi script, a phase aborted with the Spanish intervention which stopped Jawi and changed *Baybayin* for Roman alphabet and Islamization for Christianization.<sup>10</sup>

### **Islamization of Manila**

Southeast Asia was involved in a process of Islamization that transformed the region from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Sulu and Mindanao in Southern Philippines developed political sultanates. In parallel Brunei expanded a thalassocracy and the settlement of Manila became a commercial *entrepôt*. People from the Philippine archipelago participated in the activity of the region strengthening Islamic political and commercial networks.

When the Portuguese arrived at the city of Malacca inhabitants of the island of Luzon (*luções*) were involved in its commercial and military life as mentioned:

The people of Luzon are ten days of navigation beyond Brunei. They are practically all pagans. They do not have a king, being governed by the eldest of their tribes. They are primitive people of insignificant value. They do not have boats in Malacca. Two or three boats ship the goods to Brunei and they move forward to Malacca.<sup>11</sup>

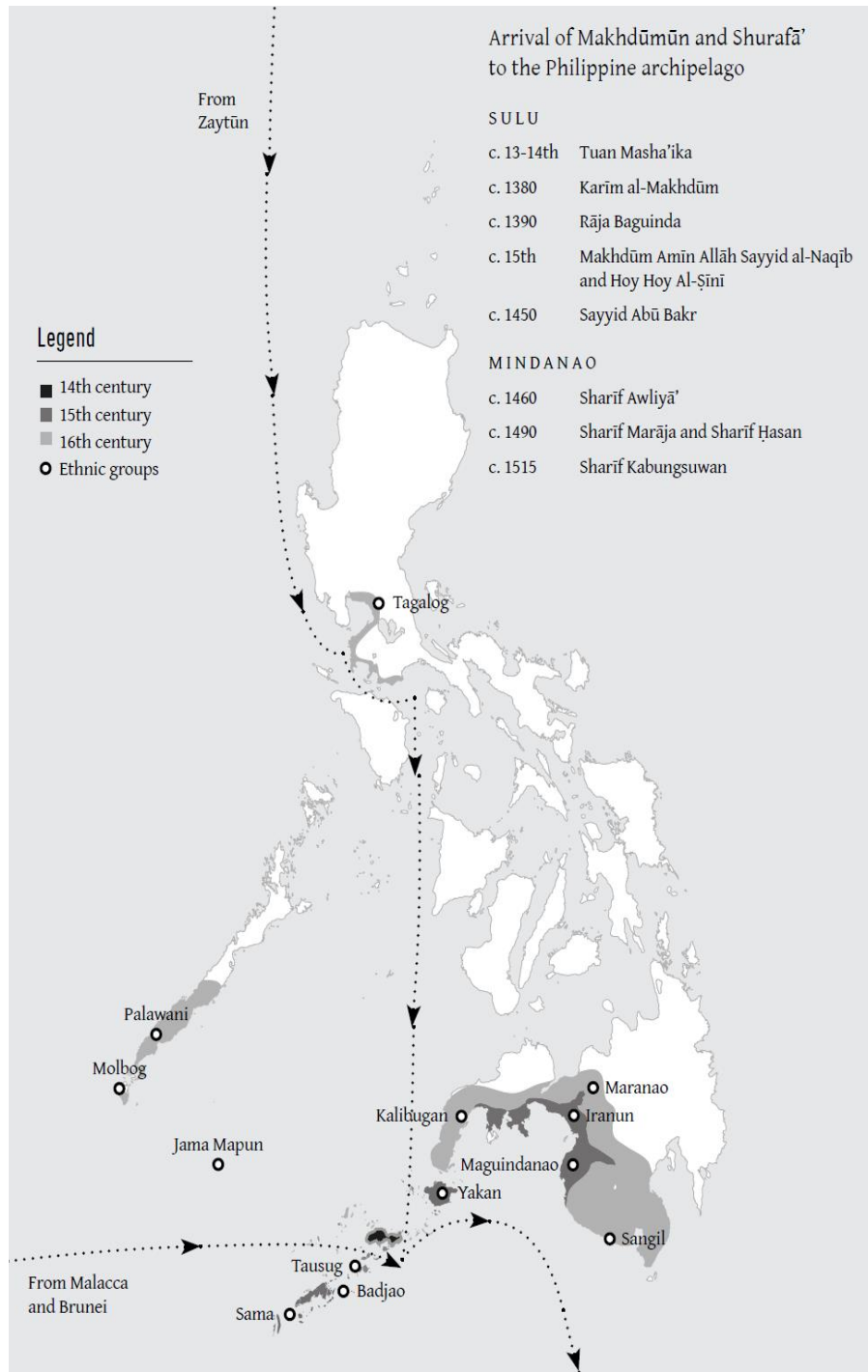
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9 Annabel Teh Gallop (ed.) (2015), "A Jawi Sourcebook for the Study of Malay Palaeography and Orthography," in *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 43, issue 125.

10 Cultural process that is comparatively similar to the abortion of English for Spanish as national language during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. See Donoso (ed.), *Historia cultural de la lengua española en Filipinas: ayer y hoy*. Madrid: Verbum, 2012.

11 Original text: "Os luções são além de Burney obra de dez dias de navegação. São quase todos gentios; não têm rei, somente regem-se polos mais velhos em cabilas; é gente robusta de pouca valia. Em Malaca não têm juncos. Até dous, três trazem as mercadorias a Burney e dali vêm a Malaca." See also Garcia, 2003. Armando Cortesão (ed.) (1978), *A Suma Oriental de Tomé Pires e o livro de Francisco Rodrigues*. Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, pp. 376-377

**Figure 4. Islamization of the Philippine Archipelago**



Source: Donoso (2013), 157

People from Luzon participated in the activities of the region from Malacca to Brunei but also consolidated a local aristocracy in the *entrepôt* of Manila. As consequence of this international trade Tagalog society suffered a major cultural transformation during the last part of the 15<sup>th</sup> century:

Manila was a bilingual community at the time of the Spanish advent, its bourgeoisie speaking Malay as a second language even as their descendents were later to speak Spanish and English [...] Malay was the *lingua franca* of Southeast Asia commerce at the time and had been for many years [...] Indeed, it was probably the language which Sulu royalty spoke with a community of Chinese Muslims in a trading station on the Grand Canal in Shantung province in 1417 [...] and it is significant that the majority of them [foreign words] were already Malay borrowings from civilizations farther to the west at the time of their introduction into Tagalog.<sup>12</sup>

12 William Henry Scott (1984), *Prehispanic Sources Materials for the Study of the Philippine History*. Quezon City: New Day, pp. 42-43.

Indeed, it can be affirmed that a transitional process from vernacular culture (with Hindu-Buddhist influences) towards Islamization started. This process must have affected all cultural aspects, including writing. At the moment of the arrival of the Spaniards the sources talk about a people able to read the Arabic Qur'an:

It is true that some people that have been in Brunei understand somehow Islam and they are capable to read some words of the Qur'an, but these are very few. They consider between themselves that if a person has not been in Brunei can freely eat pork. I heart this from many of them.<sup>13</sup>

As other *entrepôts* in Southeast Asia, Manila started to embrace the Islamized Malay culture coming from the west. The Tagalog society from Manila joined the mercantile world and embraced Islamic culture. Some of them were able to read Arabic, and reasonably the ability to write it. Islam was in this context the culture of a commercial and aristocratic elite. This transitional period towards Islamization might affect the writing as well, as supported by Corpuz:

The link between Islam and writing [...] is repeatedly documented [...] The chiefs of Manila were in written communication with the Sultan of Borneo. Writing, presumably, in the Arabic script, was linked to Islamic conversion in Manila and Batangas [...] The native scripts were superseded by the Castilian alphabet in colonized Filipinas. In the Tagalog area, the Arabic script, which might have displaced the native script at least among the chiefs, was also superseded by the Castilian.<sup>14</sup>

The route of the *Luções* has been described by Portuguese sources, from Brunei to Malacca, and going back to Luzon. In other words, were travelling regularly in the 15<sup>th</sup> century from Manila to Malacca via Brunei. Economy is one of the keys of cultural transformation and it is understandable that the vibrant Islamized Malay culture of these *entrepôts* was been imported (together with goods) into Manila. In terms of languages, Arabic words were adopted into Malay. From this linguistic *koine*, a kind of *lingua franca* for commercial purposes, Tagalog merchants adopted also Arabic words.<sup>15</sup>

In parallel with the acculturation coming from the commercial ties, Muslim preachers may have taught in Manila bay and other areas or the archipelago altering the literacy of the people. In this sense writing was not anymore an earthy activity for personal purposes, but a way to connect the believer with God through the written word, the Qur'an.<sup>16</sup> Hence the link between writing and Islam was strong even to the point to consider afterwards literacy in terms of Islamicity:

In Alcina's day [17<sup>th</sup> century], it was assumed that Philippine literacy was ultimately derived from non-Filipino Muslims because the first literate Filipinos the Spaniards encountered were the Muslim rulers of Manila. Thus, the Visayans referred to the Philippine script as «Moro writing».<sup>17</sup>

Several documents and reports describing the Spanish conquest of Manila can be found. These sources are useful to understand the level of Islamization of the area around 1571. Specifically, the treaty of peace signed in May 18, 1571 between Miguel López de Legazpi and Rajá el Viejo (Matanda), Rajá Solimano (راجة سليمان / Rāja Sulaymān) and Lacandola was conducted by the interpreter Juan Mahomat, so-called *yndio cristiano intérprete* ("native Christian interpreter"). This Juan Mahomat (with an undeniable Islamic name, Muḥammad) was a key figure in the conquest of Manila.<sup>18</sup> This is how the agreement starts:

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13 Authors own translation from the original text: "Verdad es que algunos que han estado en Burney, entienden alguna cosa, y saben leer algunas palabras del Alcorán; empero estos son muy pocos y tienen entre ellos opinión que el que no hubiere estado en Burney puede comer puerco, y esto yo se lo he oído decir a muchos dellos." Wenceslao E. Retana (1898), *Archivo del Bibliófilo Filipino. Recopilación de documentos históricos, científicos, literarios y políticos y Estudios Bibliográficos*. Madrid: Librería General de Victoriano Suárez, Vol. IV, p. 29.

14 Onofre D. Corpuz (2005), *The Roots of the Filipino Nation*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines, Vol. 1, pp. 39-42.

15 Jean-Paul Potet (2013), *Arabic and Persian Loanwords in Tagalog*. Raleigh: Lulu.

16 "What I am arguing for island Southeast Asia is that although the writing system must originally have been introduced from India in the first Christian millennium to serve a sacred literature, it spread to many parts of Sumatra, South Sulawesi, and the Philippines for quite different, everyday purposes. Prior to the sixteenth-century expansion of Islam and Christianity, writing was being adopted by largely animist cultures where women were more commercially and socially active than in other parts of the world [...] On this basis we can accept levels of literacy in sixteenth-century Indonesia and the Philippines that were very high by any contemporary standards, and as high as any in the world for women", in Anthony Reid (1990), *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680: The lands below the winds*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 221-222.

17 William Henry Scott (1992), *Looking for the Prehispanic Filipino and Other Essays in Philippine History*. Quezon City: New Day, p. 105.

18 T. Valentino Sitoy, Jr. (1985), *A History of Christianity in the Philippines. The Initial Encounter*. Quezon City: New Day, p. 208.

In the river and town of Manila, in the island of Luzon, in the Philippine Islands of the West, domains of our King, May 18, 1571, in front of the very distinguished Miguel López de Legazpi, General Captain and Governor of our King and his people and army in the discovery of the West, in front of myself, Fernando Riquel, notary [...] and in front of some natives, Benito Díaz Bustos and Juan Mahomat, native Christian interpreter, declare us that the rulers were Raja Ache the old and Raja Solimano the young, lords of the town of Manila, and Sibanao Lacandula, lord of the town of Tondo.<sup>19</sup>

The names of these individuals (Sulaymān and Muḥammad) prove already an incipient Islamization with a political system based in the Hindu Raja. Within this context of cultural and political transformation towards Islamization, several members of the Islamized Manila could see in the Spanish intervention the opportunity for social change. Perhaps this was an opportunity to escape slavery in a very hierarchical society.<sup>20</sup> Mahomat (Muḥammad) became Christian with the name ‘Juan’ and collaborated with the Spaniards in the negotiation.<sup>21</sup> This local action had an important impact for the future of international affairs. Namely the Islamic world was encapsulated from Granada to Manila. In other words, the process of Islamization was confronted in both al-Andalus and Southeast Asia.

On another front, Brunei was successful in controlling important areas of the Tagalog region. Muslims from Brunei dominated not only the Pasig River in Manila bay but also coastal areas in southern Luzon: Balayan (now called Batangas), Bonbón (now called Taal) and Mindoro. Regional rulers foresaw the inevitable conflict with Christian nations after the fall of Malacca in 1511 and the Spanish explorations in Brunei in 1521. Political expansion was mainly based on economy. In the new order religion has utmost importance. This is why during the whole 16<sup>th</sup> century Muslims missionaries and preachers travelled from Brunei to the Philippine shores:

The inhabitants [of Manila] are Moros, instructed in the Islamic faith by people from Brunei [...] The Moros only live in this district of Manila bay along fifteen coastal leagues, being the most fertile land of the island.<sup>22</sup>

Brunei ruled important commercial parts of the Philippine archipelago at the Magellan advent. The Spanish threat caused a rapid activity from 1521 to 1571 to control a region menaced by the new actors. After the Spanish conquest of Manila, the sources clearly state the discontent of an important part of the elite. In fact, the merchant elite had still crucial links with Brunei and Muslim preachers travelled continuously to the Philippines.<sup>23</sup> Within this context Governor Francisco de Sande (1575-1580) meditated a plan to invade the core of Brunei Sultanate. In order to legally justify the invasion, he commanded to interrogate Tagalog and Bruneian Muslims around Manila to create a *Casus Belli*, a reason to start the war. This was found in the confession of a Moro from Balayan who referred Muslims activities in the Philippines with the following words:

When he was inquired about where he learnt the religion of Muhammad and who his master was, he answered that he became a Muslim in his town of Balayan through the teachings of missionaries from Brunei whose ancestors were from Mecca. Hence, the people from Balayan, Bombon, Manila and Mindoro have learnt that religion from the Bruneians because they were not Muslims before. And consequently, they are all Muslims now since their ancestors learnt the religion from Bruneians. Thus, the script and language that they listen and talk are from

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19 Original text: “*En el río y pueblo de Manilla, de la yslla de Luzón, de las Filipinas del Poniente, de su Magestad, a diez y ocho días del mes de mayo de 1571 años, antel muy llustre señor Miguel López de Legazpi, gobernador y capitán general por su Magestad de la gente y armada del descubrimiento del Poniente, por presencia de mí, Fernando Riquel, escribano mayor y de gobernaçión [...] pareçieron presentes çiertos indios, que mediante Benito Díaz Bustos y Juan Mahomat, yndio cristiano intérprete, declararon llamarse Rajá Ache el viejo y Rajá Solimano el moço, señores y prinçipales del pueblo de Manilla, y sibanao Lacandola, prinçipal del pueblo de Tondo.*” Patricio Hidalgo Nuchera (1995), *Los primeros de Filipinas. Crónicas de la Conquista del Archipiélago de San Lázaro*. Madrid: Miraguano & Polifemo, p. 284.

20 “The Islamic conquest had ended in the south of the archipelago, but was in a transition period in the islands owns today. Therefore, the election of the locals was not doubtful, since we were in the position to be liberators rather than conquerors,” in Victor Concas y Palau (1884), “La Sultania de Joló”, *Boletín de la Sociedad Geográfica*, Vol. IX, no. 3, p. 157. See also W. H. Scott (1997), *Slavery in the Spanish Philippines*. Manila: De la Salle University Press, pp. 11-17.

21 “That day we decided to negotiate peace and friendship with Raja Solimán, lord of Manila, sending for that purpose Mahomete’s brother, the Muslim who became Christian, and the Muslim prisoner, together with a Spanish-speaking Black for spying the settlement of the town and the river,” in *Relación circunstanciada del subceso del viage y jornada que hizo el Maese de Campo Martín de Goyti*, Nuchera, p. 273. Original text: “*Allí se acordó aquel día de imbiar a requerir con la paz y amistad al Rajá Solimán, señor de Manila, y que para el efecto fuese el hermano de Mahomete, el moro que se tornó christiano, y el moro prisionero, y un cafre ladino que fuese a espíar al pueblo y viesse el asiento de él y sondase la boca del río.*”

22 Miguel de Loarca (1903-1919), *Relación de las Yslas Filipinas* (1582), translated in Emma Helen Blair & James Alexander Robertson (eds.) (1903-1919), *The Philippine Islands. 1493-1898*. Cleveland: A. H. Clark, Vol. 5, pp. 82-85. Original text: “[*Manila*] está poblada de moros yndustriados de los de burney [...] de suerte que los moros poseen la tierra más fértil de esta yslla pero no tienen sino esta ensenada de manilla y quince leguas de costa.”

23 Julkipli M.Wadi (2008), “Rajah Sulayman, Spain, and the Transformation of Islamic Manila.” in I. Donoso (ed.), *More Hispanic than We Admit. Insights into Philippine Cultural History*. Quezon City: Vibal Foundation, pp. 37-51.

Mecca. People from Siam and Patani have also Qur'āns of the Mohammedan sect. He has seen and heard preaching with the use of this book in which Christians are enemies of the Muslims. Other books used by the *catip*, their best preacher, say that Christians are bad and Muslims are good. During the last year 1574 the king of Brunei tried to come to Manila in order to combat the Spaniards. He prepared a navy of one hundred galleys and one hundred small boats with fifty and thirty persons respectively in each one [...] He knows, since it is public and notorious, that the king of Brunei had sent many Muslims to preach Islam to Mindanao, Manila, Bombon, Balayan, Mindoro and other places.<sup>24</sup>

This confession was a right reason under Sande's eyes to declare open war against Brunei. Besides sending Muslim preachers, Brunei encouraged Manila's rulers to revolt against the Spaniards. Importantly this information was confessed by a Moro from Balayan, a Muslim from Southern Luzon whose ancestors were Islamized by people from Brunei. Furthermore, the southern Tagalog Muslim declares that his writing and language (*letra y lengua*) is from Mecca and they have also the Qur'ān. In other words, the Tagalog Muslim from Balayan represents at least the second or third generation of Muslims in Southern Luzon since he clearly says that "his ancestors were Islamized by Bruneians" (*al presente son moros por haber sus antepasados deprendido la dixa secta de los borneyes*).

In consequence it can be presumed that the first Islamization took place short time before the Magellan expedition. It is here where the introduction of *Letra de Meca* ("Meccan script", the use of Arabic script by Tagalog people as the Muslim from Balayan confessed) can be located. And this is a feasible claim: in some moment of time Tagalog language started using Jawi script within specific coastal Islamized communities.

### **The Use of Jawi Script to Write Tagalog Language**

It is assumed that Spanish preachers targeted and destroyed local culture in the Philippine archipelago as pagan crafts. However, the first books printed in the Philippines used 'local culture.' Perhaps the acculturation program has more to do with the Islamic culture rooted in the islands. This might be a reason to explain the Spanish interest in *Baybayin* script after 1571. Unfortunately, a sample of Tagalog language in Jawi script will hardly emerge. In order to prove the existence of Tagalog letters in Jawi script it is needed to recall secondary sources speaking about this type of documents. And we do have some testimonies. Namely in the same account on the conquest of Brunei in 1578, it is possible to read that Francisco de Sande sent a mission led by two Muslims: Magat and Magachina (precisely our Tagalog Muslim from Balayan). The goal of the mission was to deliver two letters that they themselves composed as interpreters of the Spanish Governor as below:

He sent two Muslims from Balayan, vassals of his Majesty, from the island of Luzon, with two letters, the one written in the language of Borneo and the other in the language of Manila, in order to reach the navy and deliver the two letters informing about the reasons of their presence.<sup>25</sup>

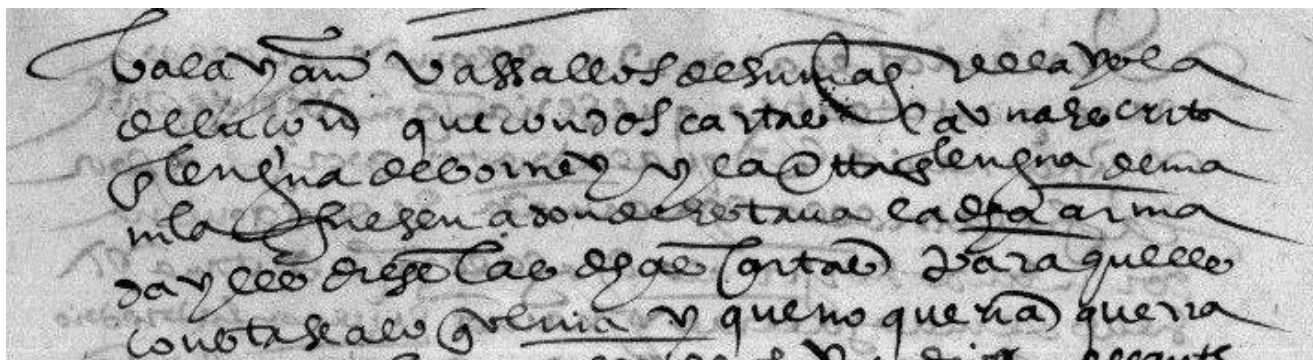
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24 *Jornadas a Borneo, Joló, Mindanao, en Filipinas* (1578), in Archivo General de Indias (Seville): [PATRONATO, 24, R.48], pp. 3v-4v. Original text: "[...] preguntado dónde deprendió este testigo la secta de Mahoma y quién se la mostró dixo que en su pueblo de Balayán se la mostraron borneyes y también viniéndole a contratar borneyes la deprendió que es porque los antepasados de los borneyes eran naturales de Meca a lo que este testigo supo y así los de Balayán, Bonbón y Manila y Mindoro han deprendido la dixa secta de los borneyes porque ellos no la sabían y así todos ellos y este testigo son al presente moros por haber sus antepasados deprendido la dixa secta de los borneyes y así la letra y lengua que oyen y hablan es de Meca y los naturales de Siam y Patan tiene asimismo sus alcoranes que es la ley y secta de Mahoma y que el libro que tienen escrito del alcorán que éste ha visto y oído predicar oyen que son enemigos de los cristianos y también lo delatan en otros libros en que leen por su catip que es su mejor predicador y estos con semejantes con los cuales creen la dixa secta de Mahoma para que la guarden y en ella declaran ser la fe de los cristianos mala y la suya buena y que cosa notoria es que el año pasado de setenta y cuatro el Rey de Borney quiso venir sobre Manila y conquistar los españoles que en ella residen y para ello tuvo una armada de cien galeras y cien navios pequeños [...] y que sabe por público y notorio que el Rey de Borney había mandado muchos moros a Mindanao, Manila, Bonbón y Balayán, Mindoro y otros lugares a que prediquen la secta."

25 *Ibid.*, p. 10v. Original text: "Mandó a dos moros de Balayan, vasallos de su Majestad, de la isla de Luzón, que con dos cartas, la una escrita en lengua de Borney y la otra en lengua de Manila, fuesen a donde estaba la dixa armada y les diesen las dexas cartas para que le contase a lo que venía."



Figure 5. Detail transcribed from *Jornadas a Borneo, Joló, Mindanao, en Filipinas*, [Archivo General de Indias (Seville): PATRONATO, 24, R.48. p. 10]



The manuscript from «Archivo de Indias» says that the embassy secured two letters: “one written in the language of Borneo and the other in the language of Manila” (*con dos cartas la una escrita en lengua de Borney y la otra en lengua de Manila*). It is clear that the letter in the language of Borneo was written in Jawi script but, what about the letter in the language of Manila?

In the same account this two Tagalog Muslims (Magachina and Magat) confessed that during their youth they were forced to remain for several years in Brunei. It is strange that afterwards they addressed the almighty Muslim Sultan with a letter in Baybayin. It is likely that this second letter also employed the Jawi script.<sup>26</sup>

On another front, we know that Fr. Martín de Rada was aboard the Spanish navy and revised the original Spanish letter written by Sande. And providentially he explained the details of this embassy in a personal letter sent to Fr. Alonso de la Veracruz and dated Brunei, April 25, 1578:

From there the Governor sent two principal locals from Balayan as messengers, with six Indian pullers in a boat. They brought a letter to the King [of Brunei], written in his language [Malay] and two translations: the one in Arabic script, and the other in the script of Luzon, since they both know and understand.<sup>27</sup>

Martín de Rada clarifies unmistakably the versions of the letter: “one for the Sultan in his language”, this is to say, Malay (*una carta para el Rey, escrita en su lengua*), and “two translations” (*e dos trasladados*) in Tagalog, “one with Arabic script” (*vno, en letra aráuiga*) and “the other in the script of Luzon” (*y otro en letra de lussón*). Hence, we do have two letters, but three versions: one letter in Malay language and Jawi script, and other letter in Tagalog language and two versions, one in Jawi and the other in *Baybayin*.<sup>28</sup>

The story follows until the diplomatic mission was seized when approaching the capital. The chief Salalila read the letter, imprisoned Magat and killed Magachina. After the conquest of Brunei, the Spaniards rescued Magat and inquired about the fortune of the mission as argued below:

When Salalila and other Bruneians saw the letters, they seized them grumbling what kind of sorcery was that. This informant [Magat] answered that the letters came from the Spaniards to the King of Brunei. Salalila understood that observing the letter written in the language of Manila. After reading it, he said “this letter is from the Portuguese” and petulantly destroyed it. The other one, written in the language of Brunei, was sent altogether with this informant in a boat with some Muslims to the King of Brunei.<sup>29</sup>

26 Donoso (2014), “Manila y la empresa imperial del Sultanato de Brunéi en el siglo XVI,” *Revista Filipina*, Vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 14-24.

27 Original text: “Desde allí enbió el governador dos indios prinçipales, naturales de balayan por mensajeros con seys indios remeros en un batel con una carta para el Rey, escrita en su lengua e dos trasladados: vno, en letra aráuiga, y otro en letra de lussón, que entrambas las saben y entienden.” Isacio Rodríguez Rodríguez, OSA (1978), *Historia de la Provincia Agustiniense del Santísimo Nombre de Jesús de Filipinas*. Manila: Convento de San Agustín, Vol. XIV, p. 503.

28 “This is reflected in a letter of 1578, written in Spanish with accompanying translations in the Arabic and Tagalog scripts and presented by Magat Sina and another Balayan noble named Magat, in which Governor Sande told to the Brunei sultan”, in T. Valentino Sityo, Jr. (1985), *A History of Christianity in the Philippines. The Initial Encounter*, Quezon City: New Day, p. 220.

29 *Jornadas a Borneo, Joló, Mindanao, en Filipinas* (1578), in Archivo General de Indias (Seville): [PATRONATO, 24, R.48], pp. 13v-13r. Original text: “Y después que el dixo Salalila y los demás borneyes que con él estaban le vieron las dexas cartas, se las tomaron, diciendo qué bellaquería era esta que traía aquí, era alguna hechicería para pelear con nosotros. Y este declarante respondió que no era sino unas cartas para dar al rey de Borney, que eran de los españoles. Y el dixo Salalila lo cual vio por la carta que iba escrita en lengua de Manila. Y después de leyda le dixo, esta carta es de

At first sight Salalila thought that the letter might be some kind of amulet yelling that “it was a trick or sorcery to fight against them” (*qué bellaquería era esta que traía aquí, era alguna hechicería para pelear con nosotros*). This reaction has to refer to the letter written in *Baybayin*. Bruneians were clearly not familiar with the Philippine indigenous script. He observed once more the letter in the Manila tongue and read it; we have to assume now that it was the Jawi version. After all, Salalila says that the letter is from the Portuguese and destroys it. The second letter in the language of Brunei was forwarded to the King. The episode shows Salalila’s disregard towards Tagalog language and script.<sup>30</sup>

The sample substantiates the existence of Tagalog writings in Jawi script. Yet the majority of Luzon’s Moros must have been illiterate in writing Jawi and reading Arabic. Nevertheless, the Islamic acculturation transformed not only the writing system but also the social practice of writing.<sup>31</sup> Writing was a quotidian female practice in pre-Islamic Philippine society. Islamization changed the role towards a religious and male activity. Foreign Muslims and members of the religious and political elite were now the keepers of the treasure. Accordingly, the Boxer Codex mentions:

When their ancestors had news of this god which that have as their highest, it was through some male prophets whose names they no longer know, because as they have neither writings nor those to teach them, they have forgotten the very names of these prophets, aside from what they know of them who in their tongue are called *tagapagbasa*, *nansulatana dios*—which means readers of the writings of god—from whom they have learned about this god.<sup>32</sup>

As the codex will mention later the Tagalog Moros have “certain characters that serve them as an alphabet with which they write what they want. They look very different from the ones that we are familiar with” (*Tienen ciertos caracteres que les sirven de letras, con los cuales escriben lo que quieren. Son de muy diferente hechura de los demás que sabemos*).<sup>33</sup> Although in matters concerning religion “they do not have a text to read” (*porque como no tienen escritura que se lo enseñe*), but some “readers of the writings of god,” *tagapagbasa nansulatana dios*, or in Spanish *declaradores de los escritos de dios*. This notion appears revealing since states that religious preachers (*makhdūmūn* and *shurafā’*, or other names used in the sources namely *catip*, *gazi*, *pandita*, and the like) read, taught and spread the Qur’ānic message to the mass. We have to remember again what Magachina said: “they have the Qur’ān and other books which they read through their *catip*, their best preacher” (*tienen escrito del alcorán [...] y también lo delatan en otros libros en que leen por su catip que es su mejor predicador*). The reader of the Qur’ān was the *khaṭīb* / خطيب, the preacher able to read and write in Arabic.

As a matter of fact, Jawi script was still in its beginnings within Tagalog culture during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Yet it was already transforming social, political and religious practices. The contact with Brunei was altering coastal Tagalog society and in Manila bay and surroundings the local lore was changing towards a more international Islamized culture controlled by men.

### Scriptural Scenario in Spanish Manila

Europeans entered Asia with a feverish activity already tested in America. The goal was to spread a religious message and communication was a must. They learnt Asian languages and wrote *Artes* and *Vocabularios*, grammars and vocabularies, in many cases the first grammars of many languages. They printed books about the history, culture and geography of new regions and projected Asia towards a cultural activity similar to the Renaissance. This cultural revolution was promoted under a Christian religious spirit, the spirit of conversion and proselytism. Going back to Spain, Granada was an Islamic intellectual center in old times. However, the

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*portugueses, haciendo burla, y la hizo pedaços. Y la otra que estaba escrita en lengua de Borney el dixo Salalila la ynvió juntamente con este declarante a una banca con ciertos moros borneyes al rey de Borney.”*

30 James T. Collins (1998), *Malay, World language: A Short History*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, p. 23.

31 “Because both Islam and Christianity introduced a new script along with the new faith, their established patterns of a more restricted, school-based male literacy in most places drove out the old script, which became associated with the pagan past. In the Philippines knowledge of the Indonesian scripts had gone within a century of Christianization [...] A similar fate may have overtaken pre-Islamic scripts in Malaya and parts of Sumatra and coastal Borneo,” in Reid, 1990, p. 223.

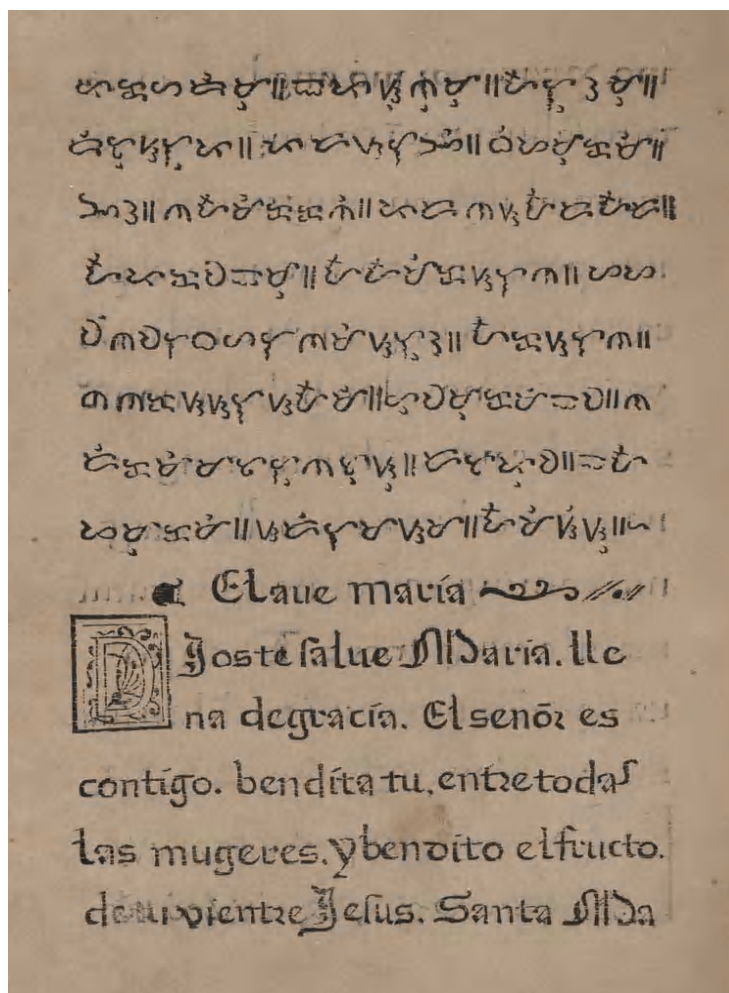
32 Original text: “*Y dicen más, que cuando sus antepasados tuvieron noticia de este dios, que es el que ellos tienen por el más principal, que fue por unos hombres profetas cuyos nombres no saben decir, porque como no tienen escritura que se lo enseñe, se han olvidado de los nombres propios de estos profetas. Más lo que de ellos saben es que en su lengua les llaman tagapagbasa, nansulatana dios, que quiere decir “declaradores de los escritos de dios”, por los cuales supieron de este su dios, diciéndoles lo que hemos dicho de la creación del mundo y de los hombres y de lo demás.*” Isaac Donoso (ed.) (2016), *Boxer Codex: A Modern Spanish Transcription and English Translation of 16th-Century Exploration Accounts of East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific*, transcribed and edited by Isaac Donoso, translated and annotated by María Luisa García, Carlos Quirino and Mauro García. Quezon City: Vibal Foundation, p. 65.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

city of the Alhambra became a center of Christian doctrine and exported, for instances, the new writings of the famous Luis de Sarria. Accordingly, he was a poor orphan born in Granada in 1504 and soon became the most influential Dominican writer, known as Fray Luis de Granada and author of the Catholic best-seller *Introducción al Símbolo de la Fe* (1583). The book was adapted to Japanese in 1592 and to Chinese the following year, being the well-known *Shih Lu* printed in post-Islamic Manila.<sup>34</sup> The two major metropolises in the Islamic borders (Granada and Manila) experienced a process of ‘de-Islamization’ during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This is a crucial fact that has been ignored. Granada and Manila were removed from the *Dār al-Islām* to be part of the Christendom. Moreover, they played a very important role in the expansion of the Christian faith. Since they were in the borders of the Islamic world, in doing so, Islam was encapsulated.

It is within this context that the first books were printed in the Philippines as a Dominican project developed in the Chinese *Parián* (Manila’s *Alcaicería* or market) using Roman, *Baybayin* and Chinese characters to write in Spanish, Tagalog and Chinese languages. If Jawi might have been an option in Manila, now it was rejected. Indeed, it is likely that the extensive use of *Baybayin* by the Spanish priests was an attempt to regain the pre-Islamic tradition.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, the first books printed in Philippine languages led the Brahmic script even to the press.<sup>36</sup>

**Figure 6. *Doctrina Cristiana, en lengua española y tagala* (1593)  
Christian Doctrine in Spanish and Tagalog**



34 José Eugenio Borao (2012), “La «Escuela de traductores de Manila»: Traducciones y traductores en la frontera cultural del Mar de China (Siglos XVI y XVII)”, in Isaac Donoso (ed.), *Historia cultural de la lengua española en Filipinas: ayer y hoy*. Madrid: Verbum, pp. 23-52.

35 Parallel processes can be seen in modern Southeast Asia. See Kevin W. Fogg (2015), “The standardisation of the Indonesian language and its consequences for Islamic communities,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 86-110.

36 These are the references of the three first Philippine *incunabula* dated 1593: 1) *Doctrina Cristiana, en lengua española y tagala, corregida por los Religiosos de las ordenes. Impresa con licencia, en S. gabriel, de la orden de S. Domingo* En Manila, 1593 (Edwin Wolf, 1947). 2) *Doctrina Christiana en letra y lengua china, compuesta por los padres ministros de los sangleyes, de la Orden de Sancto Domingo. Con licencia, por Keng yong, china, en el parian de Manila* (Gayo Aragón, 1951). 3) Hsin-k'o seng shih Kao-mu Hsien chuan Wu-chi t'ien-chu Cheng-chiao chen chuan shih-lu, in Spanish *Apología de la verdadera religión*, 1593. See Fidel Villarroel O.P. (1986). *Pien cheng-chiao chen-ch'uan Shih-lu. Apología de la verdadera religión por Juan Cobo O.P., Manila, 1593 ¿Primer libro impreso en Filipinas? Reproducción facsímil del original chino impreso en Manila en 1593, hecha sobre el único ejemplar conocido, existente en la Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid, con introducción de Alberto Santamaría O.P., Antonio Domínguez O.P. y Fidel Villarroel O.P.*, Manila: Universidad de Santo Tomás.

Eventually, Manila's elite became involved in the transformation of Tagalog culture. Regardless of the extension of Islamic civilization, it was confronted with the new process of Christianization. However, lords and principals (the so-called *principalía*) were still strongly connected with Brunei at least until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The point of no return was certainly the 1587 incident known as 'Tondo Conspiracy:'

The Brunei response was a last effort by the old Brunei aristocracy in Manila and Tondo to overthrow the Spanish with assistance from Brunei, Jolo, and Sulu, and also from Japan. This latter development was the work of De Legazpi, the Tagalog Christian nephew of Raja Lakan Dulu and son-in-law of Pengiran Seri Lela of Brunei.<sup>37</sup>

Agustín Lacandula de Legazpi and the Bruneian aristocracy in Manila had still strong links with the Sultanate of Brunei. The efforts to regain the leadership of the region, now in the hands of outsiders, will prove disastrous. Some of the most notorious members of this aristocracy will be punished due to the uprising, and the remaining rebels will have to adjust willingly or unwillingly to the new order. Interestingly, the number of documents dealing with this adjustment is not small. We can find in the Philippine National Archives and in Archivo de Indias at Seville quite a lot of manuscripts about the exception of taxes and privileges for the descendants of Lakandula and Soliman.<sup>38</sup>

There was a necessary collaboration with the new establishment after 1587. The old *rajas* and *datus* became the new *principalía*, and the traces of the initial Islamization were eventually forgotten with the new acculturation. Brunei was still a key protagonist in the development of Spanish Manila and the diplomatic relation will produce more samples of Jawi script. When the Sultan of Brunei sent a letter in 1599 to the Governor, the Spanish administrators (in this case the major of Tondo, Esteban de Marquina) requested the assistance of two translators. One of them was Constantino Xuárez, most probably a Tagalog capable to understand Malay. The other was Miguel Yaat "from Brunei" (*natural de Burney*) who fascinatingly signed the letter in Jawi:

The contents of this letter, written this year, one thousand five hundred and ninety-nine, by the king of Burney to his Highness Don Francisco Tello, knight of the Order of Santiago, governor and captain-general of the Philipinas Islands for the king our sovereign, and president of the royal Audiencia and Chancilleria resident therein, and translated by a good and exact interpreter, are as follows.

[...]

The above translation was made by Constantino Xuarez and Miguel Yaat, a native of Brunei. They declared it to have been thoroughly and exactly made, without any change of sense. They signed the same before me, Estevan de Marquina, alcalde-mayor of Tondo and its district, for the King our sovereign. July twenty-seven of the said year, one thousand five hundred and ninety-nine.

Estevan de Marquina      مېكل جهت [Mikel Jahat] Constantino Xuárez<sup>39</sup>

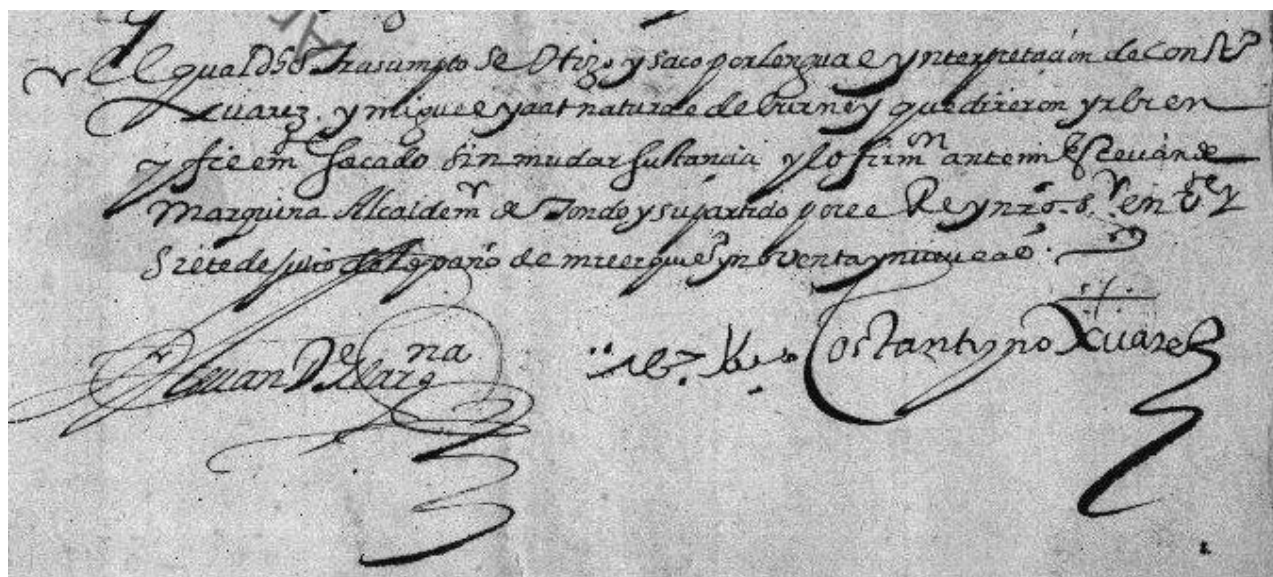
37 Graham Saunders (2002), *A History of Brunei*. London: Routledge, p. 59.

38 Luciano P. Santiago (1990), "The Houses of Lakandula, Matanda, and Soliman (1571-1898): Genealogy and Group Identity," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture & Society*, Vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 39-73. The National Archives of the Philippines has a specific section holding the documents of rajas' privileges. The following are the most important documents related with this topic in Archivo General de Indias: "*Carta de José Joaquín Merino sobre exenciones a descendientes de rajás*": *Carta de José Joaquín Merino de Ribera, fiscal de la Audiencia de Manila, dando cuenta de haber presentado en la Audiencia el despacho de 30 de agosto de 1751 sobre que se declare la extensión de las reservas de los régulos rajá Solimán y Lacandola y sus descendientes, notificandolos las diligencias practicadas y las pendientes. Manila, 20 de junio de 1754* [FILIPINAS,183,N.41]; "*Orden sobre reservas de los régulos Lacandola y Rajasolimán*": *Real Cédula al presidente y oidores de la Audiencia de Manila, ordenándoles que previa citación de los descendientes del régulo Lacandola del pueblo de Tondo y del régulo rajá Solimán, y tras la presentación de sus privilegios e instrumentos justificativos, les oigan en justicia y declaren a cuanto se deben extender las reservas de tributos y servicios personales que les están concedidas y si éstas son comunicables a los maridos de las mujeres descendientes de los mismos, como también si siendo una misma la causa, se deberá guardar una propia regla con dichos descendientes, asuntos sobre los que deben dar cuenta con testimonios* [FILIPINAS,335,L.16,F.176R-178V].

39 Original text: "*Carta original del Rey de Burney escrita a Don Francisco Tello Gobernador de las Filipinas traducida de lengua burney en castellana. Lo que contiene esta carta del Rey de Burney escrita este año de mil y quinientos y noventa y nueve al Ilustrísimo Señor Don Francisco Tello caballero de la orden de Santiago Gobernador y Capitán General de las Islas Filipinas por el Rey nuestro y presidente de la audiencia y cancillería real que en ella reside es lo siguiente traducida por lengua fiel y verdadera [...] El cual trasunto se hizo y sacó por lengua e interpretación de Constantino Xuárez y Miguel Yaat, natural de Burney, que dijeron y juran, y fielmente sacado sin mudar sustancia y lo firman ante mí Esteban de Marquina Alcalde mayor de Tondo y su partido por el Rey Nuestro Señor y siete de julio del año de mil quinientos noventa y nueve: Esteban de Marquina [Mikel Yahat] Constantino Xuárez,*" in Archivo General de Indias (Seville): [FILIPINAS,18B,R.9,N.132]. See Blair & Robertson (eds.) (1903-1919), *The Philippine Islands. 1493-1898*, pp. 120-122.

Figure 7. Detalle de la traducción de Miguel Yaat y Constantino Xuárez de la “Carta del rey de Borneo a Tello escrita en árabe (1599)”

Detail of the Sultan of Brunei letter (1599) translated by Miguel Yaat and Constantino Xuárez



In sum, Spaniards were compelled to be habituated with Jawi script in Manila bay. In a setting surrounded by Muslim traders, an Islamized Tagalog elite and the Sultanate of Brunei as regional power, Islam and Jawi were without any doubt still part of the Manila cultural landscape during the last part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## Conclusion

In the study of Early Modern History, it is a must to develop understanding of the new connections that emerged as consequence of the Western geographic expansion. But it is even more important to do not miss other disconnections and sources that were gone in the process. We have put the lens in a phenomenon that has not even considered or thought, as the scope of the Islamization around Manila bay to the point of adopting Jawi script to write Tagalog language. We have also considered the possible implications of this process, as the attention exerted by the first Christian missionaries to promote *Baybayin*, perhaps to erase the incipient penetration of Jawi script in Manila. These two theses have been supported using Spanish documents though. Most probably a Tagalog document in Jawi script will never be found. Nevertheless, the story of Magat and Magachina is reasonable enough to prove that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Tagalog was written (at least in one document) in the Islamized script coming from Brunei.

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