

Historias, Crónicas, Vocabularios: Some Spanish Sources for Research in Philippine Food



The researcher who seeks to explore Filipino food before or early in the era of Spanish colonization, probably starts by discovering the dearth of source material. Records of the period before Western contact are virtually nonexistent, for three reasons: first, if there were any, they were probably inscribed on bamboo, bark, or leaf, and no longer exist; second, three centuries and a half stand between them and the present researcher, a hiatus which has created not only a data void, but a psychological distance; and third, friar and government accounts, which constitute the bulk of extant records, say little about food.

The Spanish friar, the representative of Spain closest to the people's ordinary life, was no anthropologist, and in general was interested mainly in those details of Indio life which had relevance to his task of Christianization. He considered many of the native lifeways pagan and primitive, un-Spanish and un-Christian, and therefore necessary to replace with Christian equivalents. Even more importantly, the burden of his teaching — of religion, of language, of Hispanic customs — created the attitudinal set known as the “colonial mentality,” which made the native Filipino look down on traditional lifestyles, and aspire for Hispanic replacements. Thus eventually the Filipino himself was partly responsible for leaving no records, because he came to see his culture as inferior, and deserving of change.

This is the reason that there are few of the usual historical materials relating to Philippine food — no cookbooks ethnic or otherwise, no books on household matters, no market lists, no information on conservation and preservation, no menus till the nineteenth century, and those mainly of Spanish and Chinese food, the native food not

being served in restaurants, only at home, where it went largely unrecorded.

The researcher must obviously delve into nonfood records, in order to sift out the occasional mention of the food the Filipino natives were eating at the time. These ethnographic materials consist principally of reports sent to Spain by friars, government officials, and travelers — *memorias*, or memoranda to the King, his officials, or to heads of the five religious orders working in the Philippines (Augustinians, Dominicans, Recollects, Franciscans, and Jesuits); *relaciones* or relations of events in the Philippines, generally within a time frame (e.g. “Relation of Events in the Filipinas Islands from 1618 to 1619”); *crónicas*, or histories of missionary work in the islands; *cartas*, or letters to government or religious authorities, such as the yearly letters (*litterae annuae*) of Jesuits to their superiors in Spain; and other similar materials.

Pigafetta's Primo Viaggio

The earliest account is Antonio Pigafetta's relation of the first circumnavigation of the world, of which he was a participant. *Primo viaggio intomo al mondo*¹ was written ca. 1525, and starts with Pigafetta hearing in Barcelona that an expedition under Ferdinand Magellan was setting out. The ships set sail from Seville on 10 August 1519. The fleet of five small vessels was reduced to three by 16 March 1521, when the first of the Philippine islands (called by them the archipelago of St. Lazarus) was sighted.

The very first mention of Philippine food in a European account records the moment when the Spanish expedition first touched land, and the men saw their first natives — nine men in a boat, to whom they served food and gave “red caps, mirrors, combs, bells, ivory.” The natives reciprocated by presenting fish, a jar of palm wine, “figs more than one palmo long” (i.e., bananas), and others smaller and more delicate, and two coconuts.

¹Antonio Pigafetta, “Primo viaggio intomo al mondo,” 1525, in James A. Robertson and Emma Helen Blair, eds. *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898* (Mandaluyong, Rizal: Cacho Hennanos, Inc. 1973), Vol. XXXIII.

Pigafetta explains what those are:

[Coconuts] are the fruit borne by the palm trees. And just as we have bread, wine, oil and vinegar in their several kinds, these people have the aforesaid things which come only from the palm trees. And know that wine is obtained from the said palm trees in the following manner. They make an aperture into the heart of the tree at its top which is called *palmito*, from which is distilled along the tree a liquor like white must, which is sweet with a touch of greenness. Then they take canes as thick as a man's leg, by which they draw off this liquor, fastening them to the tree from the evening until next morning, and from the morning to the evening, so that the said liquor comes little by little.

This palm tree bears a fruit, named *cocho* [coco, coconut], which is as large as the head or thereabouts, and its first husk is green and two fingers thick, in which are found certain fibres of which those people make the ropes by which they bind their boats. Under this husk is another, very hard and thicker than that of a nut. This second husk they burn and make of it a powder that is useful to them. And under the said husk there is a white marrow of a finger's thickness. Which they eat fresh with meat and fish, as we do bread, and it has the flavour of an almond, and if it were dried it would make bread. From the center of this marrow there flows a water which is clear and sweet and very refreshing, and when it stands and settles it congeals and becomes like an apple. And when they wish to make oil they take this fruit called *cocho* and put it in the sun and let the said marrow putrefy and ferment in the water, then they boil it and it becomes oil like butter. When they wish to make vinegar, they let the water of the said *cocho* ferment and put it in the sun, which turns it into vinegar like white wine. From the said fruit milk can also be made, as we proved by experience. For we scraped that marrow, then mixed it with its own water, and being passed through a cloth it became like goat's milk. This kind of palm tree is like the palm that bears dates, but not so knotty. And two of these trees will sustain a family of ten persons. But they do not draw the aforesaid wine always from one tree, but take it for a week from one, and so with the other, for otherwise the trees would dry up. And in this way they last one hundred years.²

²Antonio Pigafetta, *Magellan's Voyage* [1525], translated and edited by R.A. Skelton from the MS in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University (London: The Folio Society, 1975), pp. 62-63.

Aside from this rare and strange food, the natives later brought sweet oranges, a jar of palm-wine, and a cock “in order to show us that there were fowls in that district.” During their stay on that island Magellan went ashore daily to visit the sick, and “every morning gave them coconut water from his own hand, which comforted them greatly.”

The next encounter was with a native king, who reciprocated the presents given him with a basketful of ginger and a large bar of gold, which the captain did not accept. He requested that food be brought to the ships, and back came “three porcelain jars covered with leaves and full of raw rice, two very large *orade* [dorado fish], and other things.”

Eventually they sat down to eat together — a plate of pork and a large jar filled with wine. “At every mouthful,” Pigafetta writes,

we drank a cup of wine. The wine that was left ‘in the cup’ at any time, although that happened but rarely, was put into a jar by itself. The king’s cup was always kept covered and no one else drank from it but he and I. Before the king took the cup to drink, he raised his clasped hands toward the sky, and then toward me; and when he was about to drink, he extended the fist of his left hand toward me (at first I thought he was going to strike me) and then drank. I did the same toward the king. They all make those signs one toward another when they drink. We ate with such ceremonies and with other signs of friendship.³

Those were just appetizers, because later the supper hour was announced, and “Two large porcelain dishes were brought in, one full of rice and the other of pork with its gravy After a half-hour a platter of roast fish cut in pieces was brought in, and ginger freshly gathered, and wine ... Then two platters were brought in (one with fish and its sauce, and the other with rice) ...” All the dishes of that king, Pigafetta writes, were of gold.⁴

“There ... [were] dogs, cats, swine, fowls, goats, rice, ginger, cocoanuts, figs [bananas], oranges, lemons, millet, panicum, sorgo, wax, and a quantity of gold” in that island. Magellan and his men also saw “bats as large as eagles,” and in need killed and ate one of them.

³Pigafetta, “Primo viaggio intorno al mondo,” pp. 107-19 *passim*.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 119-23 *passim*.

Pigafetta says it “resembled chicken in taste.” In the same island, Gatigan, they also noticed black birds as large as domestic chickens, with a long tail, that laid eggs as large as goose eggs, and buried them in the sand, to hatch in the heat. “Those eggs are good to eat,” he writes.

After the explorers moved on to Cebu, there was more sharing of porcelain platters of meat and jars of wine, and then a meeting with the king, whom they found sitting in his palace, on a mat on the ground, eating turtle eggs from two porcelain dishes, and drinking from four jars of “palm wine covered with sweet-smelling herbs and arranged with four small reeds in each jar by means of which he drank.” They were then entertained by dances “by three quite naked girls.”⁵

Pigafetta, who seems more interested in details of food and lifestyle than almost any Spaniard who came later, also notes that the people ate large sea snails called *laghan*, which are “beautiful to the sight,” and kill whales. “For the whale swallows them alive, and when they are in the whale’s body, they come out of their shells and eat the whale’s heart. These people afterward find them alive near the dead whale’s heart. Those creatures have black teeth and skin and a white shell, and the flesh is good to eat.”⁶

He further records what he calls a “ceremony used to consecrate swine,” which we at hindsight realize was probably a ritual, surely of welcome, that involved the sacrifice of a black pig, still the favored sacrifice in *babaylan* (native high priest) rituals even to this day. This first account of native Philippine rituals shows what ceremonial food was among those Filipinos: “three large dishes ... two with roses and with cakes of rice and millet, baked and wrapped in leaves, and roast fish,” cups of wine. After the ceremony, the food was eaten by the priestesses and the women.⁷

Filipino hospitality, it seems, was the same then as it is now:

“Whenever any of our men went ashore,” writes Pigafetta, “both by day and by night, every one invited him to eat and to drink. Their viands are half cooked and very salty. They drink frequently and

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 133; 149-51.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 167-71.

copiously from the jars through those small reeds, and one of their meals lasts for five or six hours.”⁸

Much can be learned from Pigafetta, especially in the light of surviving customs among Filipinos today. Food still has a very important ceremonial aspect, even if sacrifice is no longer practised, and rituals have changed. It is still the first element of ceremonies, of the welcoming of guests, of gestures of friendship. The basic food is still fish and some meat, often flavored with ginger and other aromatic roots. The food is found by non-Filipinos to be “very salty,” perhaps too salty, because it is meant to be eaten with an accompaniment of rice, which is a balancing, bland background for it. The food is in general freshly gathered from the environment — it does not travel a long distance — and thus prepared with very little cooking (half-cooked, Pigafetta thought), the natural thing to do with fish fresh out of the waters around seven thousand islands, the flesh of animals raised or from the hunt, and greens gathered from the fields and forests. What seem like exotica to the foreigner — whale-killing snails, unfamiliar fowl, turtle eggs — are simply the products of an environment familiar, abundant, and well-explored.

Would that other foreign visitors who followed Pigafetta had been as observant, as careful about documentation, as curious about details. Unfortunately, most of the other chroniclers were more interested in other aspects of life.

Loarca, Lavezaris et al

Miguel de Loarca, in his “Relacion de las Yslas Filipinas” (1582), limits himself to observing that all the natives “are provided with fowls, swine, a few goats, beans, and a kind of root resembling the potatoes of Sancto Domingo, called by the natives *camotes* — which puts to rest speculations that the camote, or sweet potato, was brought in by the Mexicans.⁹ He adds that “after rice, fish is the main article of maintenance in this and other islands, for it abounds in all of them, and is

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁹Miguel de Loarca, “Relacion de las Yslas Filipinas,” 1582, Blair and Robertson, Vol. V, p. 45.

of excellent quality in this island of Cebu.” Deer, he said, are available on other islands but not in Cebu.

Guido de Lavezaris,¹⁰ replying to Fray Martin de Rada, says it is untrue that the natives have very little food, and “live on roots part of the year ... potatoes, sago bread, and other vegetables,” for “they eat all sorts of food” like borona, millet, beans, fish, swine, fowl, many kinds of wine. These “great quantities of provisions” they get from irrigated lands.

Both Loarca and Lavezaris register some surprise at the variety and quantity of food the “pagan natives” produced, or gathered from the surrounding fields, forests, and waters. They also register some disdain for the “roots” eaten, which must have seemed to them inferior or hardship food. It remained for another person some centuries later, the Jesuit Juan L. Delgado, to record the great variety of root crops that the Filipinos had discovered to be edible and useful and — even now — good eating.

Most of the stray sentences — a line or two — in the other accounts simply confirm the above basic information about the native diet. We note that little is said about the native cuisine, the cooking processes, the names of dishes.

Much of the information focuses on rice, which is obviously the central, staple food — highly valued, highly symbolical. It is not only used in ceremonies like weddings (in some of which the couple exchange balls of rice) and welcome rites, but was the matter of tribute (two *fanegas* of unwinnowed rice a year)¹¹ and the medium of support for the religious demanded of the natives — payment, one might say, for the grace of Christianization:

When vouchers are issued for the stipends and the support of the religious ministers, the reckoning is by fanegas, at the rate of two cabans of twenty-four gantas each, of the said palay rice uncleaned. And because his Majesty chooses that they give it to us very clean, it is now ruled in the royal accountancy that the forty-eight gantas of the fanega of palay is equivalent to a basket of twenty gantas of

¹⁰Guido de Lavezaris, et al, “Reply to Fray Rada’s ‘Opinion,’” 1574, Blair and Robertson, Vol. III, p. 268.

¹¹Lavezaris, p. 268; Juan L. Delgado, S.J., “Historia General,” 1751-54, Blair and Robertson, Vol. XXVIII, p. 181.

bigas, which is the name for cleaned rice. Hence the king in his charity, in order to give us our sustenance in the rice without waste, gives valuation to the measure at his own pleasure, for the rice with husk, so that the quantity may be doubled. The estimation of the king on this is not the same as looking into the hollow measure in its strict capacity, as has been already explained.¹²

Rice is thus not only a medium of exchange, but “coin of the realm” and of colonization — more than tribute, since it is not only token of subservience but direct, immediate support. The onerousness of colonization is clearly and symbolically seen in the fact that in the conversion from palay to husked rice, the natives, who, to use current terminology, constitute the forces of production, are taken advantage of by the unequal valuation given by the king.

Rice is even used to express grief, the Spaniards found: “As a sign of mourning, they ate no cleaned rice for a whole year, but only herbs and vegetables,”¹³ — proof not only of the ceremonial use of rice, but of its centrality to Philippine life. As other mourners give up colored clothing, or social activity, the Filipino gives up rice.

How was the rice cooked? One friar, interested in “native races and their customs,” notes that it was well hulled and cleaned, and boiled only with water. Cooked, it was called “morisqueta” by the Spaniards, “as if to call it ‘food of the Moors’” — pagan food, impliedly inferior. The rice is flavored with the broth of small fishes “lacking in no part” (i.e. with heads, tails, stomachs), boiled in water. At banquets, however, they add “venison, pork or beef, which they like best when it has begun to spoil, and to smell bad” — probably the dried meat we call *tapa*, or forms of fermented food (fermentation being one way of preservation), such as *buho*. He too notes a predilection for salty and acid foods — used to flavor rice, as we have already noted.

It is Fr. San Antonio, a Franciscan, who notes the system of measuring rice. The smallest standard measure, *chupa*, is “the ration of cleaned rice sufficient for each meal of a man” — a logical way to measure something that every man eats. The other measures have

¹²Juan Francisco de San Antonio, “The Native Peoples and Their Customs,” 1738-44. Blair and Robertson, Vol. XL, p. 363.

¹³“Relation of the Philipinas Islands,” (1586?), Blair and Robertson, Vol. XXXIV, p.378.

been, he notes, adjusted to Spanish measures, and thus: one *caban* is “one fanega of the standard of Toledo,” and contains twenty-four *gantas*; one *ganta* (*gabang, salop*) is one-half of a Toledo *almud*; one-half *ganta* is called a *quartillo*; and a *chupa* is one-eighth of a *half-almud*.¹⁴

Perhaps it is logical that the friars, being often drinking men, devoted much more attention to wine and liquor than they did to “comestibles” or food. Colin writes that the common wine is made from palms (coconuts, *nipa*) or from sugarcane. Cane wine is made from the “sap of canes, boiled “so that it becomes like red wine, although it does not taste so good.” Palm wine is made from

the sap or liquor from which the fruit was to be formed. For as soon as the palm begins to send out the shoot from the end of the twig, and before the flower is unfolded, that flower-stock is cut, and a bit of bamboo is fastened to it and is tied to the stalk or shoot. Since the sap naturally flows to that part, as in the pruned vine, all the sap that was to be converted into fruit, flows into that bamboo and passes through it to vessels where, somewhat sour and steeped with the bark of certain trees which give it color, heat, and bite, they use it as a common drink and call it *tuba*. But the real and proper palm wine is made from the same liquor before it turns sour, by distilling it in an alembic in ovens that they have prepared for it. They give it a greater or less strength as they please; and they get a brandy as clear as water, although it is not so hot [as our brandy]. It is of a dry quality and, when used with moderation, it is considered even outside Filipinas as healthful and medicinal for the stomach and a preventive of watery humours and colds.¹⁵

Fr. Pastells notes that *nipa* wine was called *Tanduay*, and that a famous Chinese mestizo called Anacleto del Rosario had found a way to remove the “disagreeable taste” and make it equal to Spanish brandy in color, smell, taste and strength.¹⁶

¹⁴ San Antonio, pp. 362-363.

¹⁵Francisco Colin, “Native Races and Their Customs,” 1663, Blair and Robertson, Vol. XL, pp. 65-66.

¹⁶Pablo Pastells, S.J., note to Colin; Blair and Robertson, Vol. XL, p. 66.

The Visayans, another “Relation” records, make a rice wine called *pangasi*, an “add-water-only” almost-instant wine:

The method of making it is to place in the bottom of a jar of ordinary size (... generally of two or three arrobas ...) a quantity of yeast made from rice flour and a certain plant. Atop of that they put clean rice until the jar is half full. Then water is added to it, and after it has stood for a few days, it is fermented by the force of the yeast, and is converted into the strongest kind of wine, which is not liquid, but thick like *gachas*. In order to drink it they pour water into the jar. It is a cause for surprise that even though water be poured again and again, the liquor is pure and liquid wine, until the strength vanishes and is lost, and then they leave it for the children. The method of drinking it is with a tube, which they insert clear to the bottom where the yeast is. They use three or four of those tubes, according to the number of persons who can find room in the vessel. They suck up as much as they wish, and then give place to others.¹⁷

Drunkenness, the friars note, is common, for at feasts the natives would “drink constantly for two or three days.” One observes, however, that even when drunk, the Filipinos did not “entirely lose their senses,” never falling down drunk, and this he attributes to the fact that the wine, although powerful at the beginning, soon loses strength — as Colin above observes — at which point it can be left for the children.

A contrary note comes from Fr. Alcina, who says that the Visayans have more “drinks that cause drunkenness than any other people of the universe.” He names five: *alac* (arrack; now the generic term of alcoholic liquor of any kind); *tuba* from coconut; *cavaravan* from the honey of bees; *pangasi* which he says is from liquid honey and other mixtures, cured in the sun or over fire; and *intus*, which is from the sap of sweet cane.¹⁸

It is also Alcina who notes that the Filipinos — he was speaking of residents of Samar and Leyte — could go whole days without eating, and still stay well. When sailing or travelling, he says, they just “tighten[ed] more firmly the *bahaque* or loincloth. When food was available, they would “eat copiously,” but when it was not, they withstood hunger without losing their cheerfulness, or interrupting

¹⁷ Colin, pp. 66-67.

¹⁸Francisco Ignacio Alcina, “The Muñoz Text of Alcina’s History of the Bisayan Islands (1668),” Part I, Book 2. pp. 350-356.

their work. In contrast, he notes how he and his companions suffered when food was scarce and not regular. On hindsight, we marvel at the powers of adaptation of people attuned to rhythms of nature, to cycles of scarcity and plenty, to time and climate, and to the seasons of fishing, hunting and planting.

Delgado: Trees, Plants, and Vines

It is a unique track that is traveled by Fr. Juan J. Delgado of the Society of Jesus, in his *Historia general sacro-profana*, which his *Dedicatoria* dates at 1751.¹⁹ What concerns us is the fourth book, with its eighty small chapters on trees that grow in plains and valleys; forty-six chapters on fruit trees; twenty-three chapters on trees that grow in the mountains; sixteen chapters on trees grown by the sea; five chapters on “arbolillos”; twenty-eight chapters on palms; twelve chapters on plants and flowers; seventeen chapters on vines (which seem to include creepers and rootcrops). The fifth book has a total of fifty-three chapters on birds, animals, reptiles and fishes. Obviously, Fr. Delgado was interested in writing natural history, and in the process supplies some data on edible plants and animals, either native to the Philippines, or brought in from India, Mexico, Spain, or elsewhere.

Rice, which we have seen to be a matter of interest and curiosity to the Spaniards, and a food of symbolic as well as central value to the Filipinos, merits one of Fr. Delgado’s longer chapters (six pages). Entitled “Del arroz y otras especies de alimento,” it begins with wheat, which he says deserves first place because of its “nobility and utility.” However, he says that although Christ said that man cannot live by bread alone, the *Indios* can live by rice alone, and feel that even if that is all they have, they have to fast as the Church commands, but if they do not have it, then they are free of the obligation (not eating rice is not eating at all).

The method of cooking rice — husking, polishing, boiling in water — is noted, and also the rice cakes made from the sticky rice (*pilit*). One of these is *bibinca*, which is taken with chocolate and for breakfast; another is *poto* (“tortas grandes y amasadas, muy esponjadas y blancas,

¹⁹ Juan J. Delgado, S.J., *Historia General Sacro-profana, Politico y Natural de las Islas del Poniente Llamadas Filipinas* [1751] (Manila: Imp. de El Eco de Filipinas de D.Juan Atayde, 1892.).

y ... a propósito para el chocolate”); and the third is *suman* (good to eat with meat). He notes that sometimes this is cooked with coconut milk and sugar, but considers the best type the one cooked in bamboo, which turns out “gustoso, con color y sabor, y excita el apetito,” as well as being convenient to carry around in the mountains, where no cooking vessels are available.

The little cookies and pastries (*golosinas*) made from rice he calls by Spanish names — *broas*, *marquesotes*, *rosquetas*, and judges them so excellent that Spaniards no longer miss cakes made from wheat flour, and value them as gifts. Rice gruel he calls *cinogao* (*nilugaw*); it is fed to the sick when they cannot eat any other strengthening food. Rice in broth he considers suitable for both the sick and the healthy; rice with carabao milk is appreciated even in Spain, where the rice is inferior to the local varieties. Of these he names ninety-three types (*bulac-naga*, *cadayhag*, *daragangan*, *magsanaya*, etc.), while admitting that on other islands there are undoubtedly many others.

Delgado feels that rice must be very similar to the manna which God sent the Israelites in the desert, since the small white morsels of food would be very much like the whitest rice congealed in dew, and also because in it alone they found all the flavors that they desired. “Sustento suave, blanquísimo, oloroso y muy connatural,” the natural bread of all India and Asia, he calls rice — so fine and delicate that even Europeans no longer desire the whitest and most valued breads made from wheat.

The lowly *camote* or sweet potato, reliable stand-by in the peasant diet, and for difficult times, Delgado calls “not noble like the other foods written about.” He names twenty-nine kinds of this most ordinary of food, the peasants’ literal “daily bread,” responsible for keeping them healthy and robust.

Fr. Delgado’s little chapters on fruit are useful in that they identify which are native to Philippine soil (mango, *nungka*), which were brought over from Mexico, then called *Nueva España* (guava, cacao), and occasionally the ways in which they are cooked (*pajomangga* or *paho* is pickled in brine and called [*a*]chara, which is an aid to digestion). Of bananas he names fifty-seven varieties, the greatest number of any country of the Indies, he says, where it is a native fruit.²⁰

²⁰Delgado, pp. 633-943, *passim*.

Fr. Manuel Blanco's famous *Flora de Filiplnas* (1877) with its giant engravings of Philippine plants, is botanical in interest, and thus the mango is classified under botanical names: *Mangifera indica* or *manga de indias* is what is locally called *kalabaw*, the largest of the mangoes; and the smaller *piko* is called *mangifera rostrata*. There is barely any data on food customs or values, only notes like: the *manga indica* is believed to cause sleepiness as well as a light skin eruption that can be removed by bathing (popular belief says that mangoes cause prickly heat); and there is a mango that smells of anise, but about which Fr. Blanco seems doubtful. The best usage of Fr. Blanco's work would seem to be in conjunction with Fr. Delgado's, so that the historical/anthropological may illumine the botanical data.²¹

Vocabularios, etc.

If the stray facts from the ethnographic accounts, and the lists of Fr. Delgado and Fr. Blanco open the door only slightly on the secrets of Philippine food before and during the Spanish colonial period, a more direct avenue is opened by *vocabularios*, *diccionarios*, and *artes de la lengua* — works generally examined by literature and linguistics scholars rather than by food researchers.

The *Vocabulario de la lengua tagala* by Juan de Noceda and Pedro de Sanlucar, published in 1754, is an example. It was begun in the seventeenth century by the Jesuit Clain, and is believed to contain orally transmitted folk material dating to "the period of the first relations between the native and Spanish cultures (1570-1699)."²² This would mean that the food words included in it date to the time of the first contact with Spain, and would thus suggest the food then available (cultivated, hunted), the ways in which they were processed and cooked, and something of what they meant to the Filipino population of Cavite (where the words were gathered) in early Spanish times.

First of all, of 713 food-related words listed by Noceda and Sanlucar, 160 pertain to rice — varieties, planting and harvesting, and cooking; 144 pertain to fish — varieties, fishnets, baskets, cooking;

²¹Manuel Blanco, *Flora de Filipinas* (Manila: Establecimiento Tipografico de Plana y Ca.. 1877). pp. 229-231.

²²Bienvenido Lumbea, *Tagalog Poetry 1570-1898* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1986), pp. 1-2.

and the rest are divided between the names of fruits, of vegetables, of tubers, of shellfish and other sea creatures, and of meats (domesticated and game), the latter being definitely in the minority. From the physical count alone, we know that the contemporary Filipino peasant diet of rice and fish is the traditional one, almost surely the pre-Spanish food pattern — logical because of the agriculture-based economy, and the preponderance of water sources for food.

We also know that meat was a late-comer to the diet (a friar has noted that in the beginning the *Indios* did not eat beef, and their dogs did not disturb the calves; “but now the Indians eat beef, and the fields are full of unruly dogs”²³ and that of these meats chicken was the more common item. The chicken was almost surely bred for cockfights as well as for food, because many names identify particular kinds and colors of cocks (e.g. *alimboyquin* is a red cock with black-spotted wings and dark feet). Then *copcop*, the word for a hen’s act of sheltering chicks under her wings, is also the word for taking in and cherishing — sure proof of domestication. Few words relate to pigs and cows.

The words relating to fish reveal the contours of native fishery. The names of fishes (*banac*, *biya*, *bangos*, *candoli*, *loualo*, *lumahan*, *lumbalumba*, *malacapas*, *malanay*, *mamali*, *taniqui*, *talilong*, *qilongqilong*, *pingolpingol*, *pantat*, etc.) are all of native origin, showing that this was a native, pre-Spanish territory of activity. Also from this lexicon we learn the kinds of nets used in fishing, the kinds of baskets used for carrying fish, cooking processes, and that fishes were so familiar that they were used as referents in poetic imagery:

Isda acong gaga sapsap,
gagataliptip calapad,
caya naquiquipagpusag,
ang calagoyo, i, apahap.²⁴

(I’m a fish the size of a *sapsap* no wider than a barnacle; but I’m creating quite a stir because I’m swimming around with a big *apahap*.)

²³Fray Juan de Medina, “Historia de la orden de S. Agustin de estas Islas Filipinas,” [written 1630] 1893, Blair and Robertson, Vol. XXIII, p. 160.

²⁴Juan de Noceda and Pedro de Sanlucar, *Vocabulario de la lengua Tagala* [1754], Reimpreso en Manila: Impresa de Ramirez y Giraudier, 1860, p. 74. Translation in Lumbera, *Tagalog Poetry*, p. 16.

The *sapsap* is a small, flat, thin fish — humble food — while the *apahap* is one of the more highly-prized fishes. The image compares “small fry” to a small fish like the *sapsap*, about as little as an oyster, that keeps company with “a biggie,” an *apahap*. This means, the authors intone, that being in the shadow and having the aid of someone powerful, small fry can aspire to big things. It is a capsule comment on social networking through the *compadrazgo* or godfather system.

The 160 words relating to rice add up to a whole world, and justify its place in ritual and ceremony. There are words, first of all, not only for the different stages (*palay* has the husk on; *bigas* has been unhusked and milled; *canin* is cooked rice), but also for every step of the growth of rice, and they paint the whole picture, giving the technology and the lore of growing rice. *Baslay* is the term for when the rice starts to sprout; *dapog* is to transplant the seedlings; *maymota* is rice in blossom; *apao* is to ear, the grains growing as the stalk grows tall: *bayoquin* is rice that does not fruit well; *carato* is three-month old rice, *dumali* is four-month old rice; *cogo* is rice half-dead from drought; *catoro* are rice [stalks] when they are the size of the index finger; *cotlo* is to cut the rice stalk with one’s finger nail; *dali* is early rice; *habhab* is rice incompletely milled; *baloyot* is a rice basket; *calahan* is dirty, half-rotten rice; *dayami* is rice straw: *amabong* and *baysa* are granaries; *bayo* is to pound rice with a pestle and mortar; *asoc* are the blows given in the *bayo* process: *losong* is a mortar; *ipa* are empty rice husks; *darac* is left after the rice is polished; *caslang* is to help mill rice; *cabay* is a basket for measuring rice; *gilib* are the fine fragments generated in the milling, which cause itches (that can be removed by bathing — in rain water, goes the popular belief); *pamago* is new rice; *hilapas* is rice badly milled; *dayami* is also the term for falling ill because of having eaten rice; *dacot* is a handful of rice, *dacotan* is to scoop up handfuls of rice for someone; and *balangauan* is rice that is blackish because it has been wet.

The cooking is almost as detailed. *Alimpuyoc* is to burn the rice, at which time the smell is called *angi*. *Balantogui* is cooked rice that has been dried in the sun and then re-fried. *Qilao* is to cook rice in water slowly. The boiled rice prepared for every meal is called *sinaing*. To “toast” or fry rice is *sangag* or *busa*, unless it is green (young) rice, which is *tanac*. The toasted rice is called *binolaclac*, or *bosa* if the grains burst — also *bulaclac* [flower], because the burst grains look like

flowers. Sometimes, in cooking the rice in a dry pan, some grains do not open, and are called *bato*. If the cooked rice is hard, it is called *bascalanan*. *Panghal* is to leave rice to cool in the cooking vessel. *Qisa* is to mix corn or shredded *camote* with rice before steaming it — a method of extending. *Botohan* is cooked rice — plain, without seasoning. Green rice makes a special delicacy called *pilipig* or *pipig*. When rice is cooked soft and wet, as a gruel, it is called *logao*.

Grinding rice into flour produces *galapong*, and from this comes a whole array of rice cakes — *bibingca*, *suman*, *palarosdos*, *palitao*, *palotan*. This galaxy of cakes of different sizes and colors — eaten with sugar, with grated coconut, with sugar mixed with toasted coconut, etc. — marks most of the festive days of the native calendar. The generic name for them is *cacanin*, obviously derived from *canin*, the generic name for cooked rice.

We find other uses for rice: *cosisap* are rice crumbs used for baiting fish; *pais* is to toast a rice cake. The Filipinos were particular about their rice (Delgado named ninety-three varieties, and Noceda has names for sticky, dark, tiny, large-grained, fragrant, etc., rice), and even for cooked badly-milled rice: *sinili*. The rice wine earlier mentioned, *pangasi*, is made from pastilles of cooked rice called *tapay*.

Rice was meant to accompany every meal, serving as background for the viands — the word *olam* (viand) meaning “to be eaten with rice.” Rice shapes the tastes of viands. Food that was not rice or fish (which must have been the usual) but greens, had a special name — *auoy*. Eating one’s rice with soup poured on it is called *bahoc*; to eat raw or toasted rice is to *diim*.

All these rice-related words are of native origin, and were obviously in use before Hispanization. All the names of rice strains are local, except for two names in the appendix (a later addition) that have Spanish origins: *quinastila* (“like the Spanish”) and *San Pablo*. Aside from what the words say, there is the fact that the existence of terminology for every step, every nuance, every variation, for success or failure, for smells and colors, indicates how central rice was to the language, and therefore to the culture. We create words for what we need to talk about, and what is not in our vocabulary is not in our lives. Rice is therefore very much in the lives of Filipinos — as a physical, economic, symbolic, perhaps mythic entity — and the dictionary tells us so.

We might check, too, related word lists, like Pigafetta's — the first Western recording of Philippine language. Rice is *bughax* (*bugas*, the Visayan word for rice): and "certain Rice cakes" are *tinapai*, the word now used for bread. A study of Chinese loan words shows that among the different categories — vegetables; food preparation; soy bean products; instruments; pork, beef, fish and other sea food; fried or soupy food; flour and rice products; fowl — the rice products have the fewest loan words from Hokkien (from which most Chinese borrowings come).²⁵ Significantly, there are considerably more Chinese loan words for vegetables and pork; Spanish loan words cluster around beef cuts.

The rice-related loan words do not signify varieties, processes, or cooking methods, but rice *products* of obvious Chinese origin — *bihon* (noodles), and *bilobilo* (small steamed rice cakes). It does seem that the rice technology is native, Philippine, and pre-Hispanic.

It seems, therefore, that in Philippine food research, it is especially the language that holds the secrets of the past. The stray notes in ethnographic records are in general quite vague, and lacking in details. The words can flesh them out, especially when they are searched out of the *diccionarios* and *vocabularios* of the more than eighty Philippine languages, and compared with contemporary and surviving food practices. The language will then unlock the secrets hidden in it through history. ↪

²⁵Gloria Chan-Yap, "Hokkien Chinese Influence on Tagalog Cookery," *Philippine Studies* XXIV:3, pp. 288-302.