

FINDING DE LOS RÍOS

Spain was the destination of my first overseas trip. That was in 1959 as a second year undergraduate at Oxford, when our group, which we called ‘the Argonauts’, rented the house of Maria Nofre Soler in Cadaqués, Catalunya, a pleasant walk over the hill from the house of Salvador Dalí in Port Lligat. That was also the first time I spoke a foreign language: Spanish. I had learnt French and Latin at high school in England and a few of us made a start on Spanish specially for the holiday.

Twenty years later I returned to Oxford from Australia, where I had migrated in 1969, and was working in the Bodleian library on a book on the history of mathematics [5]. Looking at the catalogue, which was then a huge series of volumes with pasted in entries, for a European mathematician called Barlaam,¹ I noticed the next entry: *Barlaan ni Josaphat*, a book written in Tagalog² and, much to my surprise, published very early in Manila, 1712 to be exact.³ The work caught my eye because in 1974 I had made my first visit to the Philippines and, on my second visit in 1975, had there met Sara Miranda, who became my wife. She was a Tagalog, having been born in Manila. Out of sheer curiosity, I asked to look at the book. For that I had to go to a special secure room, for the book was noted as being very rare: ‘not noted in any bibliography’.⁴ The book had been printed at the press of the University of Santo Tomas.⁵

Fast forward again, this time thirty years to 2005. I was visiting Manila again, as I had done very regularly since 1974, working with Fr Ben Nebres, SJ, and other Filipino mathematicians to develop PhD programmes. This occasion was different because Sara’s grade school friend, Regalado Trota Jose (Ricky), was now working at the University of Santo Tomas and took me in there. On

¹Barlaam (1290 - 1348) Barlaam, formerly Bernhard, was born in Seminara and became a monk in Calabria. He became Bishop of Geraci, Naples, and wrote a work on calculations in the sexagesimal system, which was used in calculating astronomical data, and about lunar eclipses. The former was published by Dasypodius in Strassbourg in 1572. Barlaam died before the 4. August 1348, on this date his successor as Bishop was nominated. Barlaamus bp. of Gerace. His book is *Barlaami monachi Logistica*, Lat. reddita, & scholijs illustr. I. Chambero. Paris : 1600.

²The local language of Manila, which has become the basis of the national language, Filipino.

³Bodleian Library, Oxford, Bookstack Arch. Bd.2.

⁴The date of that remark was 1833. This is no longer true, for the work was subsequently noted by Retana [16] in 1906 and is included in the more recent bibliography by Ricky Jose [13].

⁵Virgilio S. Almario published a new edition, in Filipino, in 2003 [1].

all the visits I had made to the Philippines, while I was working with Philippine university mathematicians, I had been to only one meeting in Santo Tomas, even though Santo Tomas was, and is, the fourth ranking university in the country. It had always seemed like a fortress, with strict security, and not welcoming to casual visitors, even though it occupies a grand site in Sampaloc, and has a huge main building, built to withstand earthquakes, in the 1920s.

This time was different. Ricky welcomed me, showed me their museum and, when I mentioned the Barlaan and Jehosaphat book, arranged for me to meet the prefect of Libraries, who rejoices in the name of Fr Angel A. Aparicio, OP. The jovial, very Spanish, priest welcomed me and, when I mentioned Barlaan and Jehosaphat, he immediately instructed an assistant to go and fetch their book about them. By the time I had told Fr Aparicio about the Oxford volume, the Santo Tomas book had appeared. It was crumbling and the first few pages were virtually unreadable. Moreover, this edition was in Spanish.⁶ Again it had been published by the press of the University of Santo Tomas, this one was from 1692, twenty years earlier.

We were as enthusiastic as small boys. Fr Aparicio then wanted to show off more of his library's treasures and I was pleased for him to do so. He explained that Santo Tomas was the only place in the Philippines with a substantial collection of rare books. The university had been fortunate that, because it had grown too big for its premises inside the walled city of Manila, Intramuros, it moved to its present site in Sampaloc, a couple of kilometres away, in the nineteen twenties. This move and the fact that it was used as an internment camp for allied personnel during the Second World War, meant that it had not been subject to the bombing and destruction that Intramuros, and in particular, the National Library, had suffered. The Santo Tomas collection of rare books numbers about 10,000 volumes, over 400 of which are from before 1600. Fr Aparicio next took me to another room in the library with a display case containing a number of rare books.⁷ He explained that some had come from other Dominican houses in Asia, and took out one book: a first edition of Nicolaus Copernicus, *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* of 1543 [4]. The book has many wormholes but is totally legible. Opening it up to the title page, I was immediately attracted by the name, just underneath the title. It was only partially decipherable but Fr Aparicio at once pointed out that the first abbreviation was for 'Licenciado', which roughly translates as MA. The full inscription reads:

Del Lic^{do} Hern^{do} delos rios coronel

which expands to 'Del Licenciado Hernando de los Ríos Coronel', or 'ex libris Hernando de los Ríos Coronel, MA'.

⁶It predated the Tagalog version, there having been a sequence of translations from Greek to Spanish to Tagalog.

⁷The University of Santo Tomas has subsequently moved its rare books into a new air-conditioned part of the library dedicated to its surprisingly large collection of rare books: the Heritage Library.

Naturally, I asked who he was, and Fr Aparicio began to tell me. Ríos⁸ had gone to the Philippines in 1588 as a soldier and became a highly respected administrator who was then sent to Spain as Procurador General to represent the interests of the Philippines at the Spanish court. Fr Aparicio told me that while Ríos was in Spain he was ordained priest. After returning from Spain, he was later sent a second time to Spain as Procurador General. Fr Aparicio recounted that Ríos wrote a long, oft quoted, memorial to King Philip III in 1621 and then nothing more was heard of him.

Before leaving the library I was introduced to the Librarian of the Benavides Library, Ms Estrella S. Majuelo, who was then working on a Master's thesis that was to become a part of the newly initiated catalogue of the rare books in Santo Tomas [2]. Fr Aparicio kindly gave me a copy of volume I, part 1, which he had just published and which covered books published in or before 1600, including one incunabulum: Josephus, *The Jewish Wars* [11]. I took the large catalogue volume away and looked at it. What was particularly interesting to me was the mathematical aspect and, having seen one mathematical book, I wondered if there were others, though I was not very hopeful. There was indeed Euclid's *Geometry*, in an edition of perhaps 1557[10], and although there was nothing else that was strictly mathematical, there were one or two books that were scientific. One of these was Scaliger's work on the emendation of the calendar [17] and another was Rao di Alessano [15], apparently on the weather.

I arranged to return to the library to look in the collection and the very helpful staff started bringing books out of the stacks for me. It did not take long to find other books bearing the signature of Ríos. Both the Scaliger and the Rao bore his name. By the end of the day, I had found nine books of his. Returning the second day, and now joined for part of the time by Ricky, we had found seventeen books by the end of that day (see [6]).

After I had returned to Australia, I asked the rare book librarians Jenneth Gomez and Ginalyn Matias Santiago, who were aided by Rey Cula, to go through all the 400 or so books from no later than 1600—the extent of the catalogue volume I had. They turned up another half dozen that indicated they belonged to de los Ríos and I was keen to get back to Manila to see them. I did so, a few months afterwards. There was still the possibility of finding more. The next part of volume 1 of the catalogue had subsequently appeared. In it there were another 150 books or so that had appeared before Ríos had left the Philippines for the last time in 1618 and these were now listed in the volume that Estrella S. Majuelo had prepared. I therefore systematically went through all of those. The net result was the identification of 31 books which had belonged to Ríos, and another six that possibly had belonged to him. I have now written this all up [8]. By my calculations the librarians had moved about two tonnes of books for me!

⁸As is usual in Spanish, the very last name is his mother's name.

So much for the books of Ríos, what about the man? Ricky Jose had worked hard to establish as much as he could about Ríos [14] but this was relatively little. Back in Australia I had been searching the web, and also using the remarkable resources of the State Library of Victoria, principally assisted by Des Cowley, and made a little progress. Then, from Ricky's comments and from searching the web, all roads led to the AGI, the Archivo General de Indias, in Seville, where all the records from the Spanish colonies were sent, or supposed to be sent, each year. The Spanish government's portal, PARES,⁹ gave précis of their documents and I quickly found nearly 200 mentioning Ríos. A picture of the man, at least from 1594, when he was 35 years old, began to emerge.

The Argonauts, who featured at the beginning of this piece, were having a reunion at St John's College, Oxford, in April 2008. I was determined not to miss that, but it also afforded the opportunity to go to Spain en route. While in Spain I spent the best part of a week in Seville. I found my way to the AGI, which sits in the shadow of the Alcazar, with the Casa de Contratación, which features large in the history of the Spanish colonies, between it and the cathedral. Security was tight and even after having gone through a metal detector, not only did I have to leave my bag and valuables in a locker, no books were allowed and no piece of paper larger than A5.

Once in the AGI, the whole of the staff could not have been more helpful, despite my halting Spanish. I worked assiduously there from shortly after their rather odd opening hour of 8 am until they closed at the even odder hour of 3 pm. There was no break; any siesta would have to come after that. On only one occasion did I handle original documents, so much is already scanned and, while not yet available on the Internet, thousands of documents are visible on their local computers.

Some hopes were dashed: one précis referred to Ríos writing for permission to take the books 'de su estudio' (from his study) back to Spain in 1610. I had hoped to find a list of books, but the document had few other words in it. On the other hand I did find lots of other helpful detail and the experience of reading his, and others', handwriting was by no means as fearsome as I had expected, except on one group of documents.

The days passed quickly and towards the end I looked at *Espasa* [9], the famous Spanish encyclopaedia, and its entry on Ríos. The copy of the volume I consulted looked almost new and I thought how nice it would be to contact the author. It was only then that I discovered that the encyclopaedia had been published in 1934.

On the very last day, I finished a little early, round about one thirty, rather than 3 pm. Just before leaving I asked a librarian if they had ecclesiastical records, for I was anxious to find when Ríos was ordained as conversations with Ricky had suggested it was even before Ríos went to Spain in 1605. The librarian regretted that, not only did they not have records, he did not know if there were

⁹<http://pares.mcu.es>

any in other agencies in Seville. However, he suggested that I go across the square, past the cathedral, to the Archbishop's palace.

I did so, and the brusque guard was not very helpful. It did not help that I misunderstood his instructions. I made a second attempt to get in and was ushered through security at least as strict as that at the AGI. Finding the Archives I saw that they were to close even earlier than the AGI: at two o'clock. It was now twenty minutes to. I explained to the attendant at the desk what I was after, but he regarded that as too hard and went off to find a librarian. A very helpful lady emerged. She apologized that their records only went back to 1610—the latest year in which Ríos could have been ordained. Ever hopeful I said I would be happy to look at what they had. Again she was apologetic, saying that they only had a book of records and I took this to mean a bare printed list. I pressed on, and then, having deposited my belongings as at the AGI, I sat with my pencil and small piece of paper and waited. It was 1.45 pm. Within a couple of minutes, the librarian reappeared with a thick volume in a box. This was no printed book; this was the original records, marked on the box as 1610–1620. Opening it, I saw that there were some records from 1609. That was encouraging. I started leafing through the pages. With the exception of just a couple, they were written in the legible style of handwriting. I reached folio 28 recto and there in the second column was the name I had been hoping for, or rather, slightly more than I had expected: Hernando Fernando de los Ríos. He was listed under 'Religiosos', while previously I had understood that he was a secular priest. He was not a friar, for it said: Comp^a de IHS. I could not believe my eyes, so I checked with the friendly librarian; 'Compañía de Jesús', she said, 'Jesuita'. To crown it all, on the opposite page was the date and place where he was ordained: the church of San Pedro, Seville, on Holy Saturday, 10 April 1610.

In the evening I went to the church, which people at my hotel told me was on the corner of Calle Doña María Coronel. Was she from his family, I asked myself? The priest at San Pedro referred me to the convent a hundred metres down the street. This was an enclosed order and mass was about to start. I sat through the mass in the elaborately gilded church and afterwards managed to speak, through the grille, to the nuns. I was so excited my Spanish was worse than ever. Nevertheless they were kind and helpful and gave me a pamphlet recounting the hideous beginnings of their convent. Their founder Doña María, had been courted by King Pedro I, but she resisted his advances, even to the extent of disfiguring her face with boiling oil. After that, she started the convent. The following morning I left Spain.

There were other documents I knew of, but had not seen. The most well known was the printed memorial of 1621. Efforts to get a copy of the one in the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid proved unsuccessful: they sent the shorter version, which has subsequently proved to be fascinating and gripping to read. The other documents were two *Derroteros*, sea logs, or rutters, included in the Blair and Robertson *Bibliography* in volume 53, p. 279, and mentioned by Retana [16] who

regretted, in 1906, that the *Derroteros* had not been published.

At the beginning of June, my dear friend Constant Mews pointed out that, quite near to his house was the Yarra Theological Library of the Franciscans, which housed the Celsus Kelly library. Fr Celsus Kelly, OFM, had worked on the voyage of the *Espíritu Santo* to the north of Australia in 1605 and had been allowed to bring all his books and documents back from Europe to Australia. I went to have a look. The librarians there, in particular, Miranda Welch, were very helpful and opened up the Celsus Kelly collection and left me to explore. There were useful books and a filing cabinet with a couple of drawers of microfilms. One of those films was from the Biblioteca Nacional of Madrid and on the box it indicated there was the Memorial of Ríos. The microfilm readers at the library were ancient but a magnifying glass revealed there were images of the work. I was allowed to take the microfilm back to my own university and there I examined it in detail. Disappointingly, there were just a few pages from the memorial. However, I then requested a copy of the full memorial from the British Library, which I discovered had two copies. On the other hand, the microfilm had also listed a *Derrotero*. I looked at that and found to my delight that it was the *Derrotero* of Ríos. In fact, it was not just one but four, and all the pages were there. Retana [16] and Gil [12] had only mentioned two, but here was one from Manila to Acapulco in 1605, the continuation from Veracruz on the east coast of Mexico to Spain in 1606, one rather different one sailing round the Philippine Islands (undated) and one from Acapulco to the Philippines in 1611. In addition, there was half a page of notes on a lunar eclipse of 1584, visible in Mexico and Europe. This has led to another paper [7].

Within a few weeks of the discovery of this microfilm, the scan of the 1621 Memorial arrived from the British Library. and this book contains the first English translation of the whole work. Long ago, in 1897, Retana [3], p. cxxvij wrote about a map drawn by Ríos in 1597: *Conocemos bien este Mapa, que quizá algún día publiquemos, si nos decidimos á dar á la imprenta Vida y escritos de Ríos Coronel, que es curiosísima.*¹⁰ Retana did not publish such a work, but this book is my version of *The life and writings of Ríos Coronel*.

¹⁰‘We know this map well, which someday we may publish, if we decide to give to the press *The life and writings of Ríos Coronel*, which is most fascinating.’ The map was made in 1597 by de los Ríos.

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