

## SOCIAL SCIENCE SECTION

### AN OLD FORT IN LANAO

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*Ruins of Fort Almonte  
Courtesy of Mr. J. Scott McCormick.*

HISTORY tells us that Magellan, sailing under a commission from the king of Spain, discovered the Philippines in 1521. Then for more than three hundred years Spain tried to establish in this country a government which would make the people peaceful and law-abiding citizens.

Some historians say that the cross and the sword which Magellan planted were significant: the cross was the symbol of the triumph of Christianity and the sword signified power and strength.

Simultaneously with the spread of the teachings of the Catholic church in the Islands, forts were built in many places, especially in those places where peace and order were most needed. Many forts were built in Mindanao. One of these was Fort Almonte, erected during the latter part of the 19th century.

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As there are no written records of Fort Almonte to be obtained in the province of Lanao, the writer interviewed personally several old natives of the province. These were Moro Barandia of Causuagan, Datu Ande of Liangan, and Martin Gagara of Iligan. The two Maranaos actually witnessed the building of Fort Almonte, as well as other activities of the Spanish

soldiers.

If you will look at the map of Lanao, you will find Liangan, a barrio of the Municipality of Kolambugan, 36 kilometers west of Iligan. Seventy years ago Liangan was almost inaccessible to Christian people. Maranaos controlled all the territory from Iligan to Kolambugan and beyond. Liangan was very much like a hidden place in the heart of the unexplored jungle. A Christian who would attempt to live in this place would surely encounter hunger and sickness, and perhaps death.

There were no roads like those which we have at present, and of course no automobiles, no buses, and no *calesas*. Wild pigs wandered in the forest, monkeys jumped from tree to tree, and a host of Maranao outlaws roamed from place to place. Water transportation was the only means of travel from Iligan to various towns and barrios along the shores.

Then Fort Almonte was built. What caused the Spaniards to build Fort Almonte? According to Martin Gagara of Iligan, Maranaos along the seashore were then engaged in salt making. But this industry was not the principal motive of the Maranaos for settling along the seashore. The principal motive was to capture the Christians who came sailing in *vintas* close to the shores. When these Maranaos sighted a *vinta* moving along close to the shore, they would sail out, seize the Christian *vinta*, and take it to the shore. Often the messengers of the government who carried messages and letters from Misamis Occidental to Iligan and return were captured by these Maranaos. Because of such annoyances, the building of Fort Almonte was undertaken.

As soon as it was decided to build a fort, the government lost no time in blazing a trail to Liangan. Then the Spanish soldiers came. Officers and soldiers left behind them their families and the comforts enjoyed in the civilized world. They came in *vintas* to Liangan.

First they built a wooden fort on the south bank of the Liangan river. The

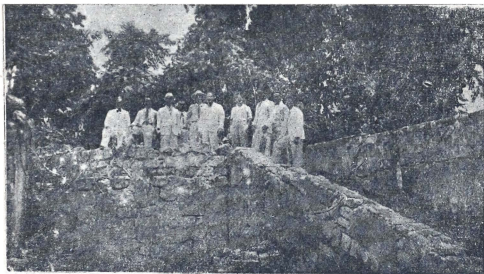
concrete well for supplying drinking water may still be seen there. Few in number, they suffered from lack of food and from skirmishes with the Maranaos. This fact is attested by Datu Ande of Liangan. The Maranaos ambushed and robbed the soldiers at night. Sometimes in broad daylight they attacked their fort. They committed many atrocities in order to discourage the Spaniards.

Finally the soldiers decided to move to the north bank of the Liangan river to the site where the ruins of historical Fort Almonte now stand. The reason for transferring the fort from the south bank of the river to the north was because on the north bank there was a more desirable position which would be difficult for the Maranaos to reach, since they would have to cross the river to do so.

At present Liangan is a small barrio of less than one hundred houses. It would be hard for a visitor to believe that once it was a very lively place where soldiers and officers and their *señoras* and children lived and enjoyed life. But this was true according to Datu Ande and Moro Barandia.

After years of fighting, the Maranaos and the Christians became friends. Amay Buaya, Amay Pago, and Datu Sangcayo were the peaceful Maranaos who in many instances "broke bread" with the soldiers.

The fort was abandoned by the Spaniards immediately after the downfall of the Spanish government in the Islands. According to  
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Photograph by Courtesy of Mr. J. Scott McCormick.  
A Group of Provincial Officials of Lanao at the  
Ruins of Forth Almonte

## THE BEGGAR'S STORY

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eye. It amused me very much to steal behind his back and slap him with anything I had at hand. Many times he tried to catch me, but how could he get hold of me when I had fast, strong legs, and he was already tottering with old age? Besides, his one good eye was becoming dim. Once, I made him so angry that, for the first time, he shouted, "O boy, you will pay for your unkindness—some day."

"I only laughed in return and gave him another slap on his thin underpants. And then I ran away and joined my friends who were exchanging stories under a *sampaloc* tree. "Boys," I suggested, "let's climb the *sampaloc* tree and see which of us can climb the highest."

Perhaps tired of telling and listening to uninteresting stories, the boys thought my suggestion was a good idea. And so climb the tree we did, each one trying to outdo the other. Pretty soon, by climbing on the back of one boy and stepping on the shoulder of another, I found myself ahead of the boys. And a few minutes later I was on the topmost branch, shouting triumphantly to my companions.

"Just then, one-eyed Apiong was passing by. I hurriedly clambered down from my high perch to be in time to tease Apiong again. In my hurry, I stepped on a dead branch and down I fell to the ground with a frightful thud. My spinal column and three ribs were broken, and my eyes striking something became useless from then on. You can read the story of my life on how I look now," the old man concluded with a pathetic gesture of his thin, dirty hands.

The children were silent as they looked at the ungainly figure of the old

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Moro Barandia, the Spaniards loaded all the cannons on a scow, took them out to sea, and sank them there. Then they left the fort and sailed for Iligan, presumably to surrender to the Americans.

The ruin of Fort Almonte, as it is today, is not especially attractive, as you see in the photographs. It is just another ruin in a forgotten place. But when one stands before it in meditation, or goes about and examines the moat about the stone fort, looks at the cells where Maranao prisoners were kept, sees the concrete oven where the soldiers baked bread, walks over the parade ground where the soldiers drilled, or climbs to the top of the small hill where the soldiers and the *señoras* looked at the landscape, then one will be intensely interested in this once important but now forgotten fortification. Fort Almonte is now only a ruin, but this historic ruin still brings to mind the Spanish attempt to bring about peace and order in the Philippines.

beggar. Carmen trembled with fear and misgiving, for she could see a clear picture of herself: an old, dirty, wrinkled woman, bent double, groping herself with a crooked stick because her eyes were useless, begging from house to house under the sun's heat and in the rain, dogs barking at her—and being teased and laughed at and molested by a young pretty girl . . .

## SOME QUESTIONS

1. What kind of girl was Carmen?
2. What was good in her? bad in her?
3. Did she listen to and obey her mother's advice?