

ARAGON IN THE PHILIPPINES

José María de Jaime Lorén

Universidad CEU Cardenal Herrera. Valencia
jmjaime@uch.ceu.es

Browsing in the library of the famous University of Santo Tomas in Manila, the oldest in the Philippines Islands and possibly in the Far East, we find an interesting book whose study we will display. Its title is «Aragón en Filipinas. Homenaje a Ntra. Sra. del Pilar de Zaragoza, de aragoneses, navarros y riojanos. Manila 12 de octubre de 1896» (Aragon in the Philippines Islands. Homage to Our Lady of Pilar of Zaragoza, Aragon, Navarre and La Rioja. Manila 12th October, 1896»).

We try to achieve with two objectives this work. On one hand is announcing this publication, virtually unknown in Spain. On the other hand we attempt to emphasize the intellectual and social importance of these religious, military or Spanish government officials who lived at the end of the colonial period, when they developed an unquestionable important cultural advocacy completely forgotten today, both in Spain and the Philippines.

This is a small booklet of 14 pages in printed in one-quarter of a page, with illustrations and divided into two columns, as indicated in the catalog card by P. Aparicio. It was printed in the Type-lithograph of Chofre and Company of Manila. It has three illustrations showing Aragonese local customs done by I. Diez, P. Ramírez and Enrique T. Romero respectively.

The last name quoted is probably Enrique Romero de Torres. He was an artist and archaeologist from Cordoba and brother of the famous painter Julio Romero de Torres. Enrique Romero, during his stay in Madrid while studying law, drew for the most notable magazines and newspapers of that time as «La Ilustración Española y Americana», «La Ilustración Nacional» and «La Correspondencia de España» («The Spanish and American Illustration», «The National Illustration» and «The Correspondence of Spain») and others. Among his work in these magazines there is a beautiful Baturro engraving that is also found in the «Aragón en las Filipinas», as it corresponds to the same period.

The title page included a beautiful lithograph of the image of the Virgen del Pilar signed by the printer. After it and starting in page 3, there are 34 articles corresponding to 34 partnerships whose titles and names can be found in the Annex at the end.

The promoter of the work is undoubtedly Pablo Feded y Temprado, who in the first article expresses the reasons that motivated the issue, especially the longing for the homeland, the devotion to the Virgen del Pilar and a desire for peace before the dark clouds that hover over Spain, just a year before the great crisis of 1898 when the

Spanish Kingdom lost definitely the last overseas colonies. His words were prophetic (translate):

«Come, we said, all those of you who love and believe; all that hope and suffer. Give expression in this sheet flowers of your thought, sighs of the heart and expressions of the soul of the believer ... And may the sky be pleased by the intercession of the beloved Virgin, devoted by everyone from these regions, to light up the horizon with the peace rainbow, aura beneficial to allay the storm».

The general tone of the articles is somewhere between religious and patriotic. It is not strange whilst the authors are ecclesiastical, members of the Spanish Army and government employees. Indeed, among the 34 authors are 9 who sign as religious; and may be some more that does not add this detail.

All the articles are short in length, some just one-quarter of a page, but others are more extensive, such as the one dedicated to the aragonese character of Fr Fernando Aragon Mayandía. Most of the articles are neatly written in a simple style, without much waste of adjectives, except when are about the Virgin or patriotic aspects, in which they let the imagination run a little.

The theme of the 34 partnerships, although the difficulty in placing them in one area or another, or a single in several at once, we have distributed as follows:

- Customs: 8
- Religion: 10
- Patriot: 16

About the origin of the authors, at least five of them came certainly from Aragon. These writers are Eusebio Blasco, Pablo Feced, Fr Pascual Lagunas, Wenceslao Martínez and Manuel Sastrón. May be there are some more Aragonese that did not state that fact, such as Fr Fernando de Mayandía de la Virgen del Pilar. Analysing the articles, we realize some of them also come from Navarra, La Rioja, Catalonia, Valencia and Andalusia.

The articles gloss the figure of the Virgen del Pilar as representing the Hispanic character, the heroic virtues attributed to the Aragonese, among other related topics. Despite of it, reading between the lines, the contributors referred also to the difficult political and military situation of that era in the Philippines.

As a summarizing anthology we have extracted some parts of the articles to enlighten the dramatic political situation the Archipelago was living when the Spaniards fought openly against the independence uprising. For example this one, in which Manuel Sastrón alludes to the famous Katipunan. It was a secret society created to achieve the independence. He emphasized the importance of his recent discovery as follows:

«Advertidos los españoles del horrible y sangriento fin que contra los mismos pactaran, muchos indios ingratos, afiliados al Katipunan en los infernales antros en que se tatuaban para juramentarse, nos aprestamos todos a la defensa de la integridad de la Patria, con todo el valor».

There is also a brief sketch of the contributors to the text of which there are reports that clearly show the high intellectual level of the Spanish presence in the Philippines at the end of the colonial period.