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REFORM OR LEAVE. A RE-READING OF THE
SO-CALLED SECRET REPORT BY SINIBALD
DE MAS ABOUT THE PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

Sinibald de Mas (Barcelona, 1807) was the author of the so-called Secret Report on the Philippine Islands that came out in 1843. The aim of the article is to reconstruct the circumstances and meaning of this well-known piece of colonial policy. In fact, the text is a very intriguing one because at the very end of the text the author suggested an important decision: either to reform or to leave the Spanish possession in the China Sea. Through a detailed analysis of Sinibald de Mas’s arguments and propositions, the particular nature of the Archipelago as a Spanish colony can be unveiled. In this light, we can better understand the ambiguous position of that well-informed and diligent Government’s informant.

Resumo

Sinibald de Mas (Barcelona, 1807) foi o autor do chamado Relatório Secreto sobre as Ilhas Filipinas, que saiu em 1843. O objectivo deste artigo é o de reconstruir as circunstâncias e significado desta obra bem conhecida da política colonial. Efectivamente, o texto é bastante intrigante pois, no final, o autor sugere a tomada de uma decisão importante: reformar ou abandonar a colónia espanhola no Mar da China. Através da análise exaustiva dos argumentos e propostas de Sinibald de Mas, consegue desvendar-se a natureza específica do Arquipélago como colónia espanhola, sendo assim possível compreender melhor a posição ambígua deste informador do Governo bem versado e diligente.

要約

シニバルド・デ・マス（バルセロナ、1807）は1843年に記されたフィリピン諸島に関する「シークレットレポート」と呼ばれる報告書の作者である。本稿の目的は、植民地政策についての言及でよく知られるこの作品をめぐる状況とその意義を再考することにある。そのテキストは最後
However many times you read Sinibald de Mas’s *Secret Report* on the Philippines, this continues and will continue to pose major interpretative problems.1 Some of the questions derive from the author’s very personality, from the way in which he fits into the fabric of the colonial administration. Another reason for uncertainty comes from the text’s very particular expository structure, from its curious instrumental Machiavellism. In other words, from the sensation experienced by the reader that it offers some recipes for colonial policy that the author very probably did not share or consider proper for a nation standing at the dawn of liberalism. This gap between what is said and what is thought – or what is perhaps thought – is not at all frequent in contributions of this nature, generally replete with the self-satisfaction of the winner. For this last reason, this unusual contribution to Spanish colonial policy threw Mas’s scholars and readers -of which there are plenty and already were many at the time- into a manifest perplexity. This difficulty of interpretation justifies our attention, as does the fact that the report is one of the 19th century Spanish texts best known and most cited in the archipelago, thanks to its translation into English, in an abbreviated version, by Blair and Robertson and the fact that a complete version was published by the *Historical Conservation Society* of Manila in 1963.2 One final observation:

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1 Sinibaldo de Mas, *Informe sobre el estado de las islas Filipinas*, Madrid, Imprenta Sancho, 1843.

2 *Informe secreto de Sinibaldo de Mas (Secret Report of Sinibaldo de Mas)*, introduction and notes by Juan Palazón, Manila, Historical Conservation Society, 1963. The citations from the text are from this edition since it is, for now, the most accessible one for the international reader.
the text we are looking at forms part of a much longer work, part of which analyses matters closely related with those dealt with in the so-called Secret Report. In reality, the “domestic policy” chapter is a pendant to another dedicated to “foreign policy”, which completes it and gives the intellectual enterprise unity. To summarise, until Sinibald de Mas’s publications are analysed properly as a whole, it will not be possible to pass final judgement on his contribution to the history of Spanish colonial policy. We are therefore committed to this rescue operation.

It is advisable to start at the beginning of such a particular career; in other words, to try to know more about the intriguing Catalan who, in his later years, knew Asia as well as or better than any other Spaniard. Sinibald de Mas y Sans was baptised in Barcelona Cathedral on the 7th of November 1807. He belonged to a family of sailors and soldiers, linked through his father to the city’s maritime activities and service with the Real Armada. His grandfather, Sinibald Mas, was the founder of the city’s Nautical School, a commissioned midshipman and navy pilot. His father Rafael was also a navy sailor, while his mother, Águeda Sans, born in Cartagena, was daughter of the engineer lieutenant Josep Sans. The family, therefore, had an undeniably military character. Thanks to indications from Sinibald de Mas himself, we know that his father died in prison during the Civil War as a result of his liberal convictions and that most of his five brothers continued the family’s naval tradition. In 1825, however, Mas joined the artillery corps, after working for the Barcelona trading houses of Larrard y Compañía, Castañer and Pedro Ortembach, this last one belonging to the Danish Consul in Barcelona. He remained in that branch of the army for fifteen years, after which he moved to the Foreign Office, at which point he was already

3 There is no satisfactory biography of Mas. The following materials have been consulted: by Antoni Homs i Guzmán, Sinibald de Mas, Barcelona, Gent Nostra, 1990; by Nicolás Martín Alonso, “Un diplomático olvidado”, Revista de Occidente, 178, 1975, pp. 3-19; by Alberto Gil Novales, “El orientalismo de Sinibald de Mas”, in Hirotaka Tateishi (ed.), Percepciones y representaciones del Otro: España-Magreb-Asia en los siglos XIX y XX, Tokyo, Tokyo University Foreign Studies, 2006, pp. 121-134. I have also consulted the still unpublished texts cited in footnote 28.

The biographical information that follows comes from published documents as well as complementary information and, in many cases, unpublished documents from Mas’s papers deposited in the Archivo General de la Administración (AGA) in Alcalá de Henares and from the Archivo del Ministerios de Asuntos Exteriores (AMAE) in Madrid. Also used have been those from the Rare Documents section of the Philippine National Archives (PNA).

4 It is worth noting that in his early years, Sinibald used the preposition “de” in front of his second surname. Only later did he put it in front of his first. At one point, in 1833, he used it in front of both the first and second surnames. One of his grandfather’s publications makes it clear that in 1787 the specified form was not yet in use. (Sondeo de la Boca y Puerto de Barcelona ejecutado en marzo de 1787, Sinibaldo Mas and Agustín Navarrete, Barcelona, Escuela de Náutica, 1787).
travelling around Asia on a diplomatic mission. Sinibald de Mas studied languages, mathematics and drawing at the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce schools, something very common among trade employees who wanted to progress. In any case, and to conclude these details of his formative period, it would be useful to remember the weight of liberalism inherited through family tradition, a loyalty that is quite relevant if an attempt is being made to understand the distant roots and the final orientation of his text on the Philippines. Another point to bear in mind is his early knowledge of Barcelona trade, along with the concrete and mental links that it favoured and which permitted a world so impregnated in economic and political liberalism. The Catalan will maintain throughout his life that ideological orientation inherited from his family environment and the city of his birth, despite the fact his conceptions and proposals never completely identified with the dominant currents in the Spanish world. Symptomatic of the relationships between the family and politics is the fact that one of our author’s older sisters, Águeda de Mas i Sans, married José Gutiérrez Ferrer, who worked with General Joan Prim, the leader of the Catalan progressives in the same decades when Mas was working as a diplomat.5

When he was a young man, Mas already showed exceptional abilities in very different fields: drawing and painting, languages, geography and history, government and administration. The breadth of his interests bears witness to his integration in the circle of the future Bishop of Astorga, Félix Torres Amat, nephew of Félix Amat, Archbishop of Palmyra in partibus infidelis and confessor of Charles IV.6 As testimony to his gratitude to and appreciation of his enlightened mentor, he signed as one of his disciples a compilation of Spanish, French and English literature and some of his poems (even dedicating one to his honour, within the very walls of Palmyra).7 The two clergymen mentioned sided with Joseph I during the war against Napoleon, and so they had to deal with complicated political circumstances during the reign of Ferdinand VII. In fact, Torres Amat was no ordinary prelate if we consider both his open Gallicanism and his manifest sympathies for liberalism and Protestantism.8 It was Torres Amat who recommended

5 I owe knowledge of these details regarding family connections to the diligent archivist of the Gandia District Archive, Jesús E. Alonso, as well as to the helpfulness of this archive in providing me with a copy of the entire Sinibald de Mas collection in the Spanish Foreign Office.

6 There is a very complete biography of Félix Amat. Ramon Corts i Blay, L’arquebisbe Félix Amat (1750-1824) i l’última Il·lustració espanyola, Barcelona, Editorial Herder, 1992.

7 For example, when he signed a poem in this way congratulating Francisco Martínez de la Rosa on being appointed Foreign Secretary. Also, Sinibaldo de Mas, Pot-pourri literario dedicado al Exmo. E Ylmo. Sor. D. Félix Torres Amat, Madrid, Imp. Miguel Sánchez, 1845-1846, 2 vols.

8 There is a biography of the bishop by Julián Barrio Barrio, Félix Torres Amat, 1772-1847, un obispo reformador, Rome, Instituto Español de Historia Eclesiástica, 1976.
Sinibald de Mas to Minister Francisco Zea Bermúdez, although the letter from the bishop was limited to highlighting Mas’s skills in terms of languages, drawing and mathematics, without alluding to any specific post. It was the recommended party himself who would later write to the minister to offer himself as a traveller and informant regarding the Ottoman Empire and the whole of Asia, with the pretext of improving and broadening his knowledge of Asian languages. In June 1833 he was sent to the Academia de Roma as a pensioner and later on to the East, “with the aim of studying the languages and customs of those countries and to make drawings of the antiquities there.” For him, that destination was a natural goal due to his interest in that world and his knowledge of languages, as well as the desire to follow in the footsteps of that fascinating adventurer, Domingo Badía y Leblich; like Mas a native of Barcelona, he was a committed Francophile and one of the first Europeans to enter Mecca. His travel book was, for many years, a reference for the young Sinibald de Mas. It was Torres Amat who had passed on knowledge of the life and work of that tireless traveller and spy to this generation of restless barceloneses, and Torres Amat has maintained personal contact with Badía when he held the post of Governor of Segovia, forming part of Joseph Bonaparte’s administration.

In the summer of 1833, now a pensioner at the Roman academy, Mas asked to be sent to Asia, a destination that had been granted to him by royal order on 12 February 1833. He would finally receive confidential instructions to this effect on 10 April 1834 from Francisco Martínez de la Rosa, then Foreign Secretary, specifying the goals of his mission in each of the countries he intended to visit. In the coming years Sinibald de Mas would follow

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9 The letter that Torres Amat sent to the minister survives. Félix Torres Amat to Salvador Zea Bermúdez, Barcelona, 3 April 1833. In the following months, Sinibald presented different recommendations. For example, that of the Real Academia de San Fernando, of 24 April 1833.

10 Sinibaldo de Mas to different addresses, 15 January 1833.

11 Extracted from his personal dossier from 1851. Conserved in AGA. Hacienda, box 18114. (I owe knowledge of this to my friend and colleague Luis Ángel Sánchez).


13 This can be appreciated from the references in the *Memorias para ayudar a formar un diccionario crítico de los escritores catalanes*, Barcelona, Imprenta J. Verduguer, 1836, pp. 71-80, which Félix Torres Amat prepared in those years. See, by Joan Mercader Riba, ”Ali-Bey’, intendente afrancesado de Segovia”, *Estudios Segovianos*, XI, 1959, pp. 20-21.

14 Idem, 397.

15 Royal orders of 12 February and 5 March 1834, making official the appointment, rank and uniform; Francisco Martínez de la Rosa to Sinibaldo de Mas: ”Instrucciones reservadas”, 10 April 1834.
this route: Greece, Istanbul, Syria, Egypt and to India via Suez. After a year
and a half’s enforced stay in Kolkata due to illness, he left the Bengali
port en route for the Philippines, with ports of call in Penang, Malacca and
Singapore. The Spanish diplomat put into port in Manila on 20 September
1840. Luís Lardizábal Montoya was, at that time, Captain General of the
Philippines. Once there, and after registering with the authorities, the diplo-
mat’s personal and economic situation did not improve significantly. Ill and
without money, he found himself in the sad position of having to rely on help
from the Hospital of San Juan de Dios, although his stay there would have
further consequences. In fact, we know from his own testimony that it was
during the five months spent at the hospital when he personally dealt with
Apolinario de la Cruz, a key figure in the dramatic events that occurred in
the colony in 1841.16 Driven by economic need, Sinibald de Mas managed to
make some money thanks his abilities as a portraitist. Despite the fact that
the Captain General wrote to the Spanish Governor in his favour, the island’s
Treasury authorities claimed never to have received any orders to provide
him with funds.17 Thanks to those requests and his continuous demands,
always backed by the Foreign Office he was depending on, the Treasury
Ministry finally gave the order, on 20 April 1841, to pay the pertinent
arrears.18

During the summer of that year, the government decided to send
Sinibald de Mas as Spanish diplomatic representative to the Celestial Empire.
In order to do this, he was to replace navy captain José Maria Halcón, who
had left for Macau to manage Spanish demands regarding the burning of
the Spanish merchantman the “Bilbaíno”.19 Things were not to go smoothly
in this regard, given the unfortunate coincidence that Halcón was a cousin
of Captain General Lardizábal, who was in charge of making the demands.20

16 De Mas stayed in the hospital from September 1840 to January 1841. Mas’s version of the
Tayabas events of 1841 and the personality of the brotherhood’s founder, Apolinario de la Cruz,
can be found in the Informe sobre el estado de las Islas Filipinas en 1842, Madrid, Imprenta
17 The economic demands of the envoy in Asia are so numerous that we have preferred to
set this matter aside. Some arose due to jurisdiction conflicts among different ministries and
between these and the Treasury; other simply from the administration’s idleness or failure to
fulfil its responsibilities.
18 Although part of the conflict resulted from the fact that the Home Office was initially supposed
to provide him with 12,000 reals.
19 This seaman had had his moment of glory when the acting Captain General Salazar gave him
the responsibility of signing a trade agreement with the Sultanate of Jolo. He did not manage
to stop the pirate attacks launched from that place, a fact that Mas attributes to the Captain
General’s poor understanding of the nature of this so-called piratería mora (“Moorish piracy”).
20 Perhaps for this reason, Lardizábal is dealt with in a rather disdainful manner in the book
on the Philippines. The following passage cannot be interpreted in any other way: “he was
For this reason or because of his own abilities, the naval officer was kept in the position until August 1841, and so he continued to receive payment regularly from the Philippine coffers. As a result of this and of the confused information regarding his appointment, Mas could not take up the anxiously-awaited diplomatic post to which he had been appointed, nor could he receive his salary.\textsuperscript{21} Pressed by so many problems, the diplomat returned to Spain in February 1842.\textsuperscript{22} He reached Barcelona on the following 2 November and spent the following months in the Catalán capital arranging his affairs (including publishing matters) and awaiting his definitive appointment as diplomatic envoy in China. In April 1843, when Espartero’s Regency was on the point of expiring, he finally received his appointment as diplomatic and trade envoy in that destination. His first proper consular dispatches, sent from Macau, are dated early 1844. He stayed there until September 1845, when he returned to the Philippines to recover his depleted health, as the Captain General of the Philippines, Narciso Clavería y Zaldúa, told the government. Once this goal had been achieved, the diplomat went on to spend the next two years in China. From there, shortly after arriving, he communicated the fact that he had travelled to Shanghai with the aim of being able to give the Spanish Government reliable information about the country’s state after the end of the First Opium War and the 1842 Treaty of Nanking. Everything seems to indicate that Mas stayed in China in 1844-1845 and 1868, with periods in the Philippines, Europe and Spain. It should be noted that there is a gap of twelve intriguing years between 1851 and 1863, during which there was no Spanish legation in the Chinese Empire; however, we have knowledge of his doings at this time thanks to a detailed note of his movements and contacts.\textsuperscript{23} In 1856 he refused to head the State Office for Overseas Affairs (a forerunner of the ministry of the same name created a few years later), since he believed that Cuba should be sold to the Americans. This possibility had been the core of Pierre Soulé’s proposition when he was ambassador in Madrid, before the threat to take the island by force that was expressed in the

\textsuperscript{21} On 13 September he was empowered as secretary of the Spanish diplomatic legation in China. On the 15\textsuperscript{th} of that month, Mas demanded clarification of this from the Secretary of the State Office. He was fully justified in doing so since, despite being called for three times, Halcón remained in the Canton legation. In September 1841, Mas contacted the Foreign Office insinuating in his letter that Captain General Oráa’s behaviour had been less than transparent.

\textsuperscript{22} On 15 January 1842 he had warned the ministry on which he depended of a return that circumstances made unavoidable.

\textsuperscript{23} MAE, \textit{Itinerario de los Viajes de D. Sinibaldo de Mas}. 1867, 32 pp.
1854 Ostend Manifesto once negotiations had failed. The restless figure of Sinibald de Mas spent those years, when he had no diplomatic destination, in close contact with the Portuguese of Macau, an opportunity that would give rise to his well-known Iberist publication *La Iberia. Memoria sobre la conveniencia de la unión pacífica entre España y Portugal* (1854), translated into Portuguese three years later. He travelled through France and England a number of times, during which trips he arranged for the publication in Paris of his main works on China and Asia, *L'Angleterre, l'Inde et la Chine* (1858) and *La Chine et les puissances chrétiennes* (1861). In 1863 he was once again named plenipotentiary to the Emperor of China and the King of Siam. He resigned his post in mid-December 1867 and handed over the legation in April 1868. The matter must be looked into in greater detail, but everything seems to suggest that the reason he gave up his position was due to the problems resulting from the denigrating traffic in Chinese coolies. Important Cuban-Spanish interests had been involved in these problems for fifteen years. He died in Madrid some months later, almost totally forgotten, according to one of his biographers. The long duration of his stay in Asia, his linguistic skills and his insatiable curiosity had given him an outstanding knowledge of the Chinese world during a very turbulent period, between the two opium wars and around the time of that massive protest against imperial power, the Taiping Rebellion. This extremely interesting part of Sinibald de Mas’s career—which recently occupied the attention of some young scholars of relationships between Spain and China—is not the subject of this research.

The fact that Mas did not take up the post of Spanish diplomatic representative in China and stayed longer than planned in the Philippines

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25 Both Spanish and Portuguese Iberist media were very openly Masonic. However, there is no record of this affiliation in Mas’s case. In this regard, by José Antonio Rocamora Rocamora, "Masonería e iberismo", in José Ferrer Benimeli (ed.), *La Masonería española entre España y América*, Zaragoza, Gobierno de Aragón, 1995, vol. I, p. 69. Regarding Iberism as a political current, by José Antonio Rocamora, *El nacionalismo ibérico, 1792-1936*, Valladolid, Universidad de Valladolid, 1994.

26 It is worth noting that Mas had already toyed with the idea of publishing his work on the Philippines in Paris or London much earlier. Evidence of this is a letter from him to the Foreign Office, 19 March 1843.


was due to Captain General Lardizábal’s obstruction. As a result, the able
government agent undertook the task, from the spring of 1841, of analysing
in depth the situation in the remotest of the Spanish possessions.\textsuperscript{29} Considering
this factor, the first question to ask ourselves regarding his book on the
Spanish colony is the following: were his work on the Philippines and his
controversial domestic policy report – as it should properly be called – the
result of his personal initiative, or were they commissioned by the Govern-
ment? The instructions received from Francisco Martínez de la Rosa allow a
first and tentative answer.\textsuperscript{30} In fact, in them, the Foreign Secretary instructs
him in the matters on which the diplomat was to focus his attention in the
different countries, with specific indications in each case. In this regard, the
trip’s political nature is much clearer if we recall his anger when a ministry
error revealed the fact that the trip did not have only cultural or informational
aims. Significantly, Mas brought up the sad fate of the already-mentioned
Domingo Badía y Leblich, supposedly poisoned by the British, although he
loyally omitted the fact that, at that time, the courageous traveller had been
working for the French.\textsuperscript{31} Returning to the confidential instructions received
by Mas, it should be remembered that these included specific and precise
goals with regard to Spain’s only Asian colony. The first consisted of clari-
fying whether, after the abolition and end of the Real Compañía de Filipinas,
the colony still represented a useful trading platform for Spain.\textsuperscript{32} Even more
important: he was asked to elucidate those aspects of its internal administra-
tion that the Spanish government should know about, despite that colony’s
“learned authorities”. In short, Sinibald de Mas was a man with a mission
and, as we shall see, he was willing to accomplish it. Furthermore, the docu-
ment known as the \textit{Secret Report} was precisely the result of the commission
entrusted to him, although it is unlikely that the government expected such a
broad-based and substantial work.

The diplomatic correspondence between the Catalan traveller and the
Foreign Secretary allows the circumstances in which this text was written
and published to be established. On 15 September 1841 he gives informa-
tion about his project for the first time.\textsuperscript{33} On this occasion, he referred to the

\textsuperscript{29} A letter from Mas to the Foreign Office, of 30 May 1841, tells us that he had started his travels
around inland Luzon.
\textsuperscript{30} Confidential instructions from Francisco Martínez de la Rosa to Sinibaldo de Mas, 10 April
1834.
\textsuperscript{31} Sinibaldo de Mas to the Foreign Office, Kolkata, 15 February 1840. The dark episode of
\textsuperscript{32} This matter had already been mentioned in Martínez de la Rosa’s instructions of 10 April
1834, but he will later be reminded of this, more than once.
\textsuperscript{33} Sinibaldo de Mas to the Foreign Office, 15 September 1841.
700 to 1000 pages he said he had available for a work providing a complete overview of the island’s situation. This was a work much like those published at the time in Spain and Europe in general: compendiums of information on the natural world, demography, political organisation, economy and social structure. However, as the work took the reformist viewpoint opened up by Espartero’s Regency, which included the promise to formalise a new legal framework for the overseas colonies (something that did not happen, either at that time or in the following decades), Sinibald de Mas decided to include a domestic policy appendix at the end of the work. In this text he describes the unsatisfactory state of the Spanish administration in the Philippines, while setting out different measures that should guide a thorough reform. In that first letter, Sinibald de Mas explained that his literary project used not only information from the colonial administration’s papers but also that he had collected in-situ information and opinions. He stated that he had visited seven provinces, gone into the mountains inhabited by the Igorots, and that he had held conversations with administrative representatives in very different places. The route given fully confirms this. As we will see later on, the use of first-hand information is one of the factors that give the report its great reliability. In April 1843 he received authorisation from the Regent to publish the book, but with the express condition that the last chapter, “domestic policy”, should be reserved for the government’s exclusive use. However, for unknown reasons, the Informe secreto sobre el estado de las Islas Filipinas en 1842. Política interior was published, like the rest of the book, in 1843, but in a separate edition of only a few copies, that is to say, with very limited circulation conditions. Less limited, of course, than those previously imposed by the government, on whom, at the end of the day, its author depended.

Sinibald de Mas’s report is not, for these reasons and because of its content, a text that is in any way disconnected from the circumstances of the period. On the contrary, from the first page to the last, it attempted to answer the questions that impinged on the very continuity of the Spanish presence in the archipelago. Two questions refer to circumstances unconnected with Philippine life as such, although with important consequences for it. The first of these questions featured explicitly in the confidential instructions that Francisco Martínez de la Rosa delivered to Sinibald de Mas in 1834. What

34 Mas reflects that promise of 17 November in his plan for the work. Regarding this detail, see Josep M. Fradera, Colonias para después de un imperio, Barcelona, Edicions Bellaterra, 2005, pp. 585-588.
35 Mas insists on this again and again. For example, in his presentation of the material written in Madrid, 10 November 1842.
could be expected of a colony like the Philippines, once the Spanish liberal government of 1820 had undertaken the process of bringing the Real Compañía de Filipinas to an end? As is well-known, the activities of the Compañía were the only economic link between Spain and its distant possession in the China Sea after the collapse of the relationship with the Viceroyalty of New Spain. That the time of the great chartered company had passed was completely clear in 1834, after the death of Ferdinand VII and with liberalism’s return to power on the horizon. Consequently, the Foreign Secretary’s indication betrayed the uncertainty and lack of a defined state policy with regard to a world that was so poorly known on the peninsula. The second factor referred to the need to completely redirect Spanish policy towards the Philippines after the radical change in international relations in Asia that resulted from the First Opium War of 1839-1842. In fact, the opening of the Chinese market was the loadstone towards which international trade in the South and China Seas and Southeast Asia in general, would gravitate in the following decades. The Spanish colony in Asia, which had been the Chinese Empire’s most important trading partner for three hundred years, found itself faced with the need to seek a new position in the context opened up by the Treaty of Nanking. Furthermore, the Chinese famines of the thirties had fostered a major recovery in the exports of Philippine rice to the large market that the Chinese world represented. This was certainly a very advantageous trade position for the Spanish possession that both the metropolitan government and the captain generalship of the Philippines wanted to maintain.

The other two factors with an important presence in the report were connected to the domestic situation. The first of these was what occurred in Tayabas province in 1841. I am referring here to a key event in 19th century Philippine history: the tragic events that centred on the San José Brother-

36 Some indications of the kind of problems resulting from the end of the Real Compañía de Filipinas in “Opio y negocio, o las desventuras de un español en China”, in Josep M. Fradera, Gobernar colonias, Barcelona, Ediciones Península, 1999, pp. 129-152.
37 The literature covering this period is vast. For an overview, by Peter Ward Fay, The Opium War, 1840-1842. Barbarians in the Celestial Empire in the Early Part of the Nineteenth Century and the War by Which They Forced Her Gates Ajar, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1997 (the first edition is from 1975).
38 One should still consult the massive work by Hosea Ballou Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire: The Period of Conflict, 1834-1860, New York, Paragon, 1964 (the first edition is from 1910).
This had been founded in 1832 by Apolinario de la Cruz – known as Father Pule – whom some, to the outrage of the Spaniards, called the “King of the Tagalogs” after he was crowned in front of his followers in a ceremony whose meaning is unclear.41 We know from his own testimony that Sinibald de Mas witnessed at first hand the massacre perpetrated by the Spanish army during that dramatic October of 1841, on the orders of Captain General Marcelino Oráa. It is no exaggeration to state that Mas’s entire report is conditioned by the author’s keen perception that the Tayabas events signalled an epochal change in the archipelago.42 The loyalty of the Filipinos, whether rich and educated or poor and illiterate, could no longer be taken for granted.

The second domestic factor that bears on the government agent’s opinions is less well-known than the one just given, and has less dramatic overtones than the brutal crushing of a religious community of peasants. If I am referring to the discovery by the Manila authorities of large-scale embezzlement in the Cagayan Valley, the production centre that ensured the viability of the tobacco monopoly on the island of Luzon.43 (The author himself emphasised the tobacco monopoly’s importance in a report on Philippine income published in 1853.)44 The fact that the colony’s finances rested on tax monopolies, particularly the one covering tobacco, cannot be ignored; this was the condition that allowed the Spanish presence in a possession where metropolitan exploitation was in doubt unless fairly radical changes were introduced.45 For these reasons, the tobacco monopoly’s crisis was not by any means a trivial matter. What had happened demonstrated not only the persistent venality of the administration, but also the very weakness of the mechanisms for controlling it. This administration was very


41 I am currently working on the reconstruction of the Spanish view of the event, as well as on the behaviour of the institutions in this regard.


43 I referred to this matter in Filipinas, la colonia más peculiar. La hacienda pública en la determinación de la política colonial, 1762-1868, Madrid, CSIC, 1999, pp. 227-230.

44 Sinibaldo de Mas, Artículo sobre las rentas de Filipinas copiado del Boletín del Ministerio de Hacienda n. 174, de 28 de abril de 1853, Madrid, Imprenta de M. Rivadeneyra, 1853.

punctilious about duties and rank, but far less so when it came to preventing rackets involving large sums of money, which is what had just happened in the tobacco monopoly’s offices.

However, it is the matter of Philippine society’s loyalty towards its long-standing metropolis that structures the central part of the report. The diagnosis is very clear and not at all complaisant: there was no high-profile social group in the Philippines that the Spanish could trust. Under those conditions, perpetuating the colonial order was an uncertain enterprise. In other words: Spanish control could only be assured by exploiting the internal contradictions of Philippine society. Therefore, the prescription Mas proposes is clear: Only thanks to a particular balance of forces among the various groups, encouraging internal divisions and suspicions, could the continuity of the connection with the metropolis be guaranteed. It is not advisable to be too shocked by the Spanish agent’s Machiavellian position. A colonial power that was weak in political, military and economic terms, a liberal state with structural problems in a country that had just experienced a bloody civil war, was not in any condition to unilaterally impose undisputed control. In the Spanish Antilles, in Cuba and Puerto Rico, it had been the extraordinary development of slavery which had allowed the establishment of what the authorities called the *equilibrio de razas* (“racial balance”), a skilful exploitation of the racial borders, ruled over by those true autocrats, the captain generals.46 The social and political balances in the Philippines could not be the same, although the idea could be productively developed if local society was properly understood. Working in this direction was what gave sense to the analytical part of the report and what the perceptive government agent’s advice pointed at.

The description made by the author of Philippine society is very intelligent and shrewd. In his opinion, there were three groups that constituted the Philippine social landscape, excluding the small Spanish administration as such.47 Two of them make up its minority elites: the “Philippine Spaniards” or those of mixed Spanish and Philippine race; and the mixed-race Chinese or *mestizos de sangley*, who later on would call themselves “Filipinos” and which he discerningly saw as the group with the greatest social and economic weight in the immediate future. Below these were the large majority of the inappropriately-named Indians, with their many internal divisions. In the Catalan traveller’s opinion, doubtless influenced by the still recent events of the secession in the Americas, the descendents of Spaniards (known as

46 I looked into this matter thoroughly in *Colonias para después de un imperio*, pp. 299-322.
47 This attempt to set out the colony’s social geography is found in the *Informe secreto de Sinibaldo de Mas*/*Secret Report of Sinibaldo de Mas*, pp. 17-22.
“Creoles” on that continent) were the natural adversary of the colonial power in the Philippines. Furthermore, reasons for dissatisfaction seriously undermined their loyalty towards the metropolis. Among these reasons was the metropolitan government’s preference for appointing people who had been born in Spain to positions and jobs in the Philippine administration. In other words: what was known at that time as *empleomanía* (competition for official positions), was “the torch of discord”. It was therefore important to reduce the “Creole” social group both demographically and culturally; in any case, inducing it to take up agriculture, to contribute to the effective colonisation of the country’s interior, although this would entail the removal of the obstacles limiting available manpower. At any rate, it would be better if there were fewer of them and if these were as marginal as possible in Philippine social life, particularly that of the capital. In Mas’s opinion, the Tayabas revolt had shown that the “Spanish Filipinos were as alarmed as the Europeans, if not more” by the popular uprising. It would be ideal if they were to continue in that state of anxiety. Without considering at this time the wisdom of this interpretation, which must be analysed in a complete reassessment of that decisive event, Mas’s position showed how it could be possible to interpret—and make political use of—the internal divisions of the complex world of Luzon, the only part of the Philippines considered in the text.

Aside from the leading groups, it was necessary to take decisions about the large majority of the country’s population, the so-called, and very inappropriately so, “Indians”. The first and most important is that set out by the author in all its crudeness: the less educated and more socially marginalised, the better. In Mas’s categorical words: “in a colony, liberal and insurgent are synonymous.” Once again we see the undisguised echoes of the American experience, as well as the recollection, explicitly mentioned, of the Philippine political troubles between 1819 and 1830, when a series of popular uprisings or conspiracies within the army seriously threatened the continuity of the Spanish presence in the islands. The dart was now aimed with priority at the native clergy, the beginnings of a native Creole world, to the extent that Mas senses their probable radicalisation in the terms of what would occur in Cavite in 1872. The new liberal spirit that was spreading in Spain should pervade the government’s action, although this should be tempered by the massive presence of regular friars from the peninsula, a true *deus *

48 Idem, p. 20.
50 Idem, p. 23.
52 19th century Philippine political history is set out on pp. 17-19 of the Report, but more detail on this is given in the second volume of the work cited in note 16.
ex machina (“power” in Mas’s expression) of government action. In the medium term, only the balance of forces between the place’s population and the two pre-eminent social groups, distinguishable by their non-native origin, would allow such a remote possession to be maintained. In the author’s words: “the government’s strategy must consist of keeping them [the three social groups mentioned] separate and in conflict at all times, so that they never come together or form a common public spirit, but rather on the contrary, one acts as an instrument to subdue the other.”53 Greater political realism would be impossible. These considerations are the core of the domestic policy report.

The last section of practical recommendations aimed at the Spanish administration is as politically incorrect as the rest. Mas’s central idea is that a united command was lacking, both in the Philippines and in the metropolitan government with regard to overseas possessions.54 The administration inherited from the old colonial regime by the liberal state conceded “pretensions of authority” to the different sections of the government or the provincial administration, and so it was almost impossible to centralise decision-making and impose a consistent political line.55 To justify this assertion, the author provides details of jurisdiction conflicts to support his position. These details consist of examples based on his own personal experience in inland Luzon or received thanks to the information passed on to the author by a number of high-level bureaucrats, including, once again, some of his “companiots”, that is to say, representatives of the very limited Catalan presence on the islands. That is the case, for example, of the Governor of Ilocos Norte, José Abdón de Rich, about whom we know nothing.56 Without this approach to the reality there, that is, the use of privileged information obtained thanks to personal contact, the report would not have the research value it does.

The alternative mode of government proposed at the end of the second part, as was to be expected, aims to correct the current administrative programme’s defects, but in a different line from that which would be imposed during these years from the metropolitan government.57 Instead of dedicating the greatest of efforts to the construction of a centralised command, hypertrophying the Captain General-Governor’s authorities while depressing

53 Idem, p. 57.
54 Idem, pp. 64-65 and 66-67.
55 Idem, p. 66.
56 The itinerary given in footnote 23 tells us that they met in Vigan between 12 and 21 August 1841. In it, Sinibald de Mas gives a detailed account of the names of the Spaniards he came into contact with and whose information gave the report its tone of a reliable in-situ inquiry.
57 J. M. Fradera, “Quiebra imperial y reorganización del poder colonial en las Antillas españolas y Filipinas”, Goberrar Colónias, pp. 95-125; and also the second and fifth chapters of Colónias para después de un imperio.
and subordinating the other government agencies, Mas proposes a reform vaguely inspired by the British Empire’s system at that time; in particular, that of the East India Company’s Governor-General in Council on the Indian subcontinent. Specifically, he proposes a regency of three members, one of whom would act as president, a consultative and deliberative Council of State with the authority to appoint the regents, as well as a military administration and a judicial administration. With regard to the administration of justice, Mas explicitly cites the British system in Kolkata, which he knew at first hand from his stay there. As has been mentioned, he spent many months in what was then the true capital of British India. Below the highest institution, the idea was to form a professional and centralised civil administration, preferably with a legal education. This lack of public employees from the peninsula, in whose hands the administrative, judicial and military authorities in the provinces were to be concentrated, concerned the highest strata of colonial administration, both in Manila and in Madrid. Along with centralisation in the Philippines and in the other Spanish possessions, there was to be a parallel centralisation of colonial authorities in Spain. In short, it was necessary to form a ministry for the colonies, a Ministerio de Ultramar (“Overseas Ministry”), as it would finally be called when it was founded in 1860. As can be seen, the intention was to rationalise and demilitarise the colonial administration as much as possible; not at all to impose a genuinely liberal organisation in the style of what was then appearing on metropolitan soil. With this sensible combination of reformist spirit, with a liberal tone, and exceptionality in its adaptation to colonial soil, the Spanish case in the Philippines was not very different from what the other European colonial countries were doing.

It remains to comment on the disconcerting conclusions of the report by the diligent government agent for Asia. In the first few pages, Mas raised three possibilities with regard to the Philippines: reform, remain the same or leave the archipelago. In reality, these amounted to only two: reform or leave, because a purely stationary state was neither thinkable nor possible. The author very emphatically concludes in this way, with this implacable dichotomy. If the desired outcome was to stay in the archipelago, reforms

59 Informe secreto de Sinibaldo de Mas/Secret Report of Sinibaldo de Mas, pp. 77-78.
60 Idem, p. 81.
61 Idem, p. 81.
62 Idem, p. 84.
63 Idem, p. 84 ff.
and a new spirit of government, in line with the central part of the report’s recommendations, would have to be introduced. There remained another possibility, the genuinely liberal one. It consisted of preparing the colony, as soon as possible, for agreed decolonisation. Mas’s preference, in his condition of “person of the Spanish nation”, in his own words, whose finally triumphant liberalism had to free itself from a gloriously imperial past that had reduced the nation to a third-rate country, was clear. This assertion, tout en passant, takes up back through the whole of the author’s life, to his roots in the Barcelona of his youth, so strongly permeated with genuine political liberalism.

Spain was in no condition to impose exploitation in the Philippines by means of a relentless tax system like the Dutch in Java. Nor could it convert the islands into the place to channel a flow of convicts, forced to work, as the British did in Australia and New Zealand. Thirdly, it was not in any state to make the Philippines into a market for the metropolis’s manufactured products, as happened with the British in India, or formerly in its thirteen North American colonies. The lack of contact between Barcelona, the only industrial centre on the peninsula, and the Philippines demonstrated this last point. Lastly, to insist on retaining the islands in order to preserve Christianity there, to fulfil a missionary goal, was not something that could be justified, in our author’s liberal viewpoint.

Given these considerations, only one reasonable conclusion remained. In a few words, although extraordinarily discerning ones: “... if we keep the islands for love of the islanders, we waste our time and lose the merit; because gratitude, although sometimes found in individuals, should never be expected from peoples. And if we keep the islands for our own sakes, we fall into an anomaly, because, after all, how is it possible to combine what we wish for ourselves, liberty, and wanting to impose the law on remote peoples at the same time? Why deny others the benefit we desire for our native land? Because of these universal principles of morality and justice, and because I am sure that given the circumstances in which Spain finds itself, the state of that colony will be neglected; it is my conviction that none of the measures I propose in order to retain it will be adopted; and it will free itself violently, with the loss of much property and the lives of both European and Philippine Spaniards, I believe it would be infinitely easier, more useful and more glorious for us to acquire the task’s merit, being generous ahead of time.”

64 Idem, pp. 85-86.
65 Idem, p. 86.
66 Idem, pp. 86-87.
67 Idem, pp. 88-89.