

LAND ACQUISITION, OWNERSHIP AND UTILIZATION IN 19TH CENTURY ALBAY

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Abstract— This preliminary study seeks to provide a working knowledge of how agricultural land was acquired, owned, and utilized in the Province of Albay during the middle to latter parts of the nineteenth century. Using land ownership and notarial records from the National Archives of the Philippines, this paper argues that lands planted mainly to rice and abaca were being purchased and acquired by men and women from different racial and socioeconomic classes in Philippine society as early as the 1860s. A careful examination of these documents reveals, however, that the acquisition of such holdings became increasingly concentrated in the hands of the male elite who obtained these via direct purchases, debt defaults, and applications to the State. Simple quantitative and qualitative examinations of these land documents also show the variety of land measures used by Albayenos to determine the sizes of their properties, the high value of abaca lands near seaports, the increasing dimensions of farmlands that were farther from these facilities, and the use of land by Albayenos for both commercial (abaca) and subsistence (rice, coconut) purposes. It is hoped that this study would encourage further research in the ownership, acquisition, and utilization of land during the Spanish period in the Philippines using archival documents.

Keywords — Land use, land ownership, land acquisition, agricultural land

INTRODUCTION

Land is a valuable, versatile, and attractive resource that people would like acquire. Developed or otherwise, urban and rural real property could yield material or economic benefits when sold as a commodity. On the other hand, its surface is a potential platform for profit and rent-seeking activities such as factory, shopping center or housing facility (Serote, 2004). Landowners could also take advantage of the fertility of agricultural parcels as a direct input for raising crops or livestock for personal consumption or a market commodity. Natural resources like minerals or timber (Serote, 2004) extracted from the soil can be subjected to further processing and eventual consumption. In this respect, land plays a crucial role to a society's development and serves an integral part in a people's way of life.

Early Filipinos, on the other hand, did not see land in this manner. Prior to Western contact to the middle part of the 18th century when the Philippines was under Spanish rule, the lack of a market for agricultural produce (Benitez, 1916), Spanish dependence on the Manila-centered Galleon Trade (Foreman, 1905), and the disinterest of colonial rulers to pursue agricultural pursuits meant that land was initially seen as a source of daily subsistence and tribute in colonial society (Rodriguez, 1998; Cushner, 1971). It was only during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the Philippines was opened to world commerce that its agricultural cash crops for export like sugarcane and abaca became sought after in the world market (Larkin 1972; Lynch 1988; Corpuz, 1997). Following this event, which led to the institution of a monetized economy, land emerged as a valuable and sought-after commodity (Bankoff, 1996) and a means for acquiring and solidifying economic and social status (Corpuz, 1997).

Landowning native elite and mestizo

families were encouraged by Manila-based trading houses to go into the large-scale cultivation of cash crops that included tobacco, indigo, and coffee and purchase more and more land (Mallat, 1983; Corpuz, 1965; Corpuz, 1997). Some provinces soon became known for the crops its inhabitants produced. The localities of Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog and the island of Negros became the main source of sugar cane (Foreman, 1905; Larkin, 1972). Batangas, Laguna, and Cavite became known for its coffee, and Albay became a major source of abaca (Foreman, 1905).

This sudden and intense demand for agricultural land led to the titling of parcels of earth, their measurement, and valuation. Land also have become an object disposition, sale, and acquisition in different parts of the Philippine colony. Studies by Larkin (1972), Bauzon (1974), Owen (1984), Lynch (1988), Huetz de Lempis (1998), Camagay (1995), and Lagman (2020), among others, have discussed how agricultural and urban properties became the object of transactions both fair and foul in different settlements in the Philippines. Owen, in particular, deals with the growing importance of abaca lands in the Bicol Region's uplands as a source of wealth and systematic economic activity and the persistent importance of rice fields in the lowlands for alimentary purposes.

However, there has not been a study, that has sought to examine in detail the kind of agricultural land transactions, land uses, and other facts pertaining to the ownership, acquisition, disposition, and utilization of land resources among Bicolanos, particularly those in the province of Albay, during the late nineteenth century when land became so important that legal documents began to be employed to ensure an individual's possession and benefits from such assets.

This study examines land documents in the form of land titles and notarial records to shed light on the kind of demographic, spatial, resource use, and monetary

information that can be documented and analyzed in land acquisition, ownership, utilization-based sources pertaining to late nineteenth century Albay that are found at the National Archives of the Philippines. In particular, this research sought to answer the following questions:

1. Who and what were the characteristics of individuals involved in land-related transactions such as social class, race, gender, occupation?
2. In what ways were agricultural lands in Albay owned, acquired, and disposed of?
3. What were the sizes of private agricultural lands in Albay, what land measures were used to determine their metes and bounds, and what were their common market values?
4. What were the kinds of agricultural lands that were commoditized in the said province?
5. In what ways do the contents of such land transactions reflect the culture and values of Albayenos as their economy transitions to one with a more capitalistic nature?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Social historians seek to tell the stories and everyday lives of people from past societies who are rarely given importance (Zunz, 1985; Burke, 2002; Sharpe, 1991). Their specific experiences that have been influenced by wider processes like effects of international trade, colonialism (Warren 2000; Warren 2003) could demonstrate particular patterns and trends (Burke, 2002) that are worthy of mention.

For this study, archival research of notarial records pertaining to transactions dealing with land in late nineteenth century Albay required the collection of data regarding such dealings in notarial records and land titles in the National Archives of the Philippines called the *Protocolos de Albay* and the *Terrenos de Albay*, respectively.

Such documents, which were produced between the 1860s and 1890s, are all handwritten records in Spanish that were not collected annually and whose numbers vary from year to year. Save for the individuals involved and the property that was the object of a transaction, information in these documents is also not consistent and seem to change over time. Given that the study began with no idea as to the information and amount of material available for description and analysis, the following steps were undertaken in the data collection part of the research:

1. As there were different years wherein notarized records of land transactions were available, and since some years had documents that were unreadable, the researcher selected 1864, 1870, 1873, 1880, 1887, 1890, and 1895 as the years wherein information were to be gathered;
2. For consistency, all towns or pueblos that were the sites of land transactions were included in the database, even if such localities are no longer part of present-day Albay Province;
3. Notes were taken for the following information: a) the individual/s involved in the land transaction, b) the type of transaction, and c) description, location, size, land use, and value of the property;
4. All collected data were then inputted in Microsoft Excel to create a database of all transactions. A thorough analysis of the data led to the creation of additional columns that better describe the information regarding the concerned individuals and commoditized land. The additional columns include, among others, if the transactions were conducted among persons of equal status based on the titles they carried (Y/N), the conversion of land areas to hectares, another for additional remarks to account for unique cases; and

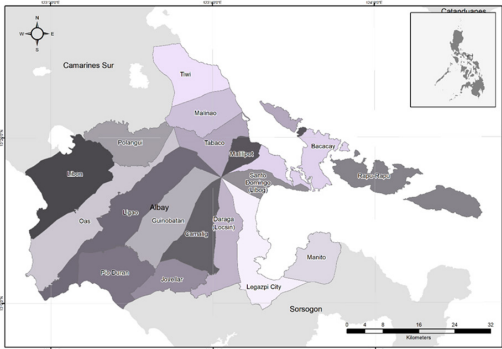


Fig. 1. Map on the Present-Day Province of the Albay.ⁱ

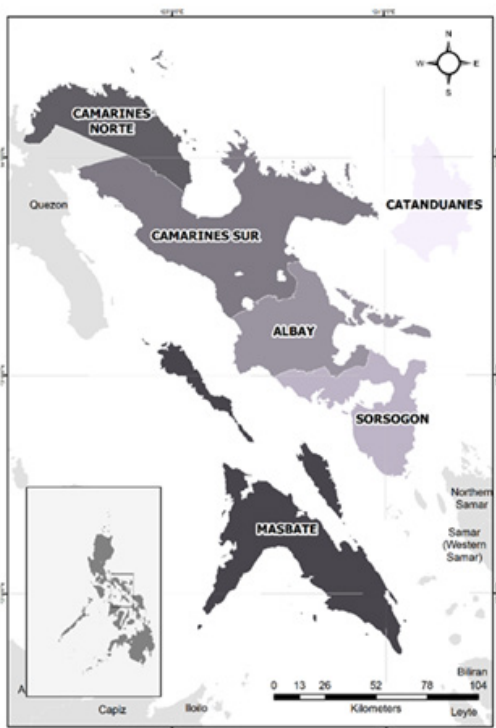


Fig. 2. Map of the present-day provinces of the Bicol Region. (Based on archival sources, Albay Province in the late 1800s included the current provinces of Catanduanes, Sorsogon, and Masbate.)

5. Once completed, the database was then utilized and managed to identify patterns such as existence of land consolidators, buyers and sellers of land who were not locals, geographic distribution of transactions, and variations in the size and measures of agricultural properties depending on the place and time period.

Table 1. A sample of the database generated based on information gathered from the Terrenos and Protocolos de Albay documents.

TOWN	TRANSACTION TYPE	EQUALS	SELLER	M/F	ELITE	RACE
CAGSAWA	FORMALIZATION	NA				
BACACAY	PACTO DE RETROVENTA	YES	BRULLIA BASALLA	F	N	
LIGAO	PACTO DE RETROVENTA	NO	MANUELA DE LOS SANTOS	F	N	
	SALE	YES	JUAN LUCERO	M	N	
BACACAY	FORMALIZATION	NA				
TABACO	PACTO DE RETROVENTA	YES	MARIANO BUENAFE	M	Y	
BACACAY	PACTO DE RETROVENTA	YES	JUAN BERCES	M	N	
	SALE	NO	FRANCISCA FELICIANO	F	N	
	FORMALIZATION	NA				
BACACAY	SALE	YES	RAYMUNDO BARQUIN	M	N	
	SALE	YES	JUAN DE LA PENNA	M	Y	
TABACO	PACTO DE RETROVENTA	NO	ACORDIA BORLAGDAN	F	N	
	SALE	YES	MARIANO CONSOL	M	N	
GUINOBATAN	FORMALIZATION	NA				
LIGAO	SALE	YES	CLEMENTE QUIRA	M	N	INDIO
	SALE	YES	MARZARIA DURAN	F	N	INDIO
LIGAO	SALE	YES	JUAN TICAGAN	M	N	INDIO
CAMALIG	SALE	NO	MATEO MARQUES	M	N	INDIO
	SALE	NO	MARIA MARCELLA	F	N	INDIO
PANDAN	PACTO DE RETROVENTA	NO	AGATON DE LA ROSA AND VICENTE ANGELES	MM	N	INDIO
PANDAN	PACTO DE RETROVENTA	NO	CASIMIRO YLANAN	M	N	INDIO
PANDAN	PACTO DE RETROVENTA	NO	SANCHES AND MAXIMO RIVERA	MM	N	INDIO
OAS	SALE	N	FERNANDO REFRACSON	M	N	
CAGSAWA	SALE	YES	MANUEL DINO	M	Y	
OAS	SALE	YES	MANUEL REALISTA	M	Y	
LIGAO	SALE	YES	DAMASO QUINTERIO	M	N	INDIO
MALINAO	SALE	NO	JUANA CONS	F	N	
MALINAO	SALE	NO	ANACLETO CARULLO	M	N	
MALINAO	SALE	NO	MATIAS BRAUS	M	N	
MALINAO	SALE	NO	LUCIO AND FELICIANO CERRANO	MM	N	
MALINAO	SALE	NO	CIRIACO CELESTIAL	M	N	INDIO
MALINAO	SALE	YES	MARIANO CASALLA	M	Y	
CAMALIG	SALE	NO	PEDRO GUIRIBA	M	N	INDIO
GUINOBATAN	SALE	YES	ANTONIO SANCHES	M	Y	ESPAÑOL
LIGAO	SALE	NO	PEDRO FEDERICO	M	N	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Transactors' Social Class

Ninety-eight of 113 cases had sellers whose social class was identified. Thirty-seven (39%) of those individuals who sold their properties were members of the elite as signified by their honorific title of "Don" or "Doña" preceding their names, while 61% of those cases had individuals who had no titles and, thus, were common people.

Ninety-six percent of all recorded land transactions indicated the owner or buyer of the concerned property. There were 77 cases wherein the purchasers or owners of agricultural lands were members of the elite; this translates to roughly seven out of every ten dealings (71%). Only 29% of recorded buyers or possessors of agricultural lands, such as Manuel Gallegos (Terrenos de Albay, 266-70) and Apolinario Bruncano (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21302) were untitled individuals.

The data, while not conclusive, show a trend purchasers and possessors of farmlands were likely to be upper class individuals and those who put up their parcels for sale tended to be people from the lower classes. For the years 1864 and 1870, 6 out of every 10 landholders were titled individuals. By the years 1880, 1890, and 1895, 82% of all owners of agricultural properties that were notarized were upper class individuals. When a common person sold his properties, in only one out of every three dealings (32%) would it involve a buyer without a title. Conversely, 2/3 (68%) of the time, such a transaction would involve a purchaser of property from the upper class.

How about the proportion of acquirers of land coming from the upper class? In 1864, five of 13 land-related notarial records (38%) were persons who carried honorific titles. By 1870, this increases to 76% or more than three out of every four land contracts. In the 13 gathered records from 1890 and 1895,

11 or 85% of the buyers or individuals who formalized their ownership of farmlands were all Dons. This included Don Benito Onandia (Protocolos de Albay Bundle 1032-A, and Don Mariano Mape (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21416). The data, while not conclusive, proffers a trend wherein the rich are slowly consolidating ownership of agricultural lands. Thus, the data, however crude, reveals a possible manifestation of elite capture of a particular resource.

Gender

Of 89 land sales, in only 12 of those cases (14%) were the seller of the property a woman. These include Francisca Feliciano in 1864 (Terrenos de Albay 1864), an india named Marzaria Duran in 1870 (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21194), and Doña Maria Quinal in 1887 (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21302). A female, however, tended to be less likely to buy land as only Basilia Borjal (Terrenos de Albay 1864), Milatra Imperial and Martina Canco (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21302) were recorded as acquirers of land (3% of all land sales). The data demonstrates that women were three times more likely to be a seller than a buyer of land. Moreover, a woman was rarely an owner of agricultural land as females were involved in only 16% of all agricultural property contracts.

Occupation and Race

It is unfortunate that the land transactions that were examined did not yield much information regarding the occupations and races of the individuals involved. Out of the 113 documents that wherein notes were taken, we only have information on the livelihoods of only six sellers and three buyers. Of the six persons who sold their land parcels, five were farmers. Juan Rico and Tomas Lindio were growers based in Ligao who sold their abaca lands to a fellow agriculturalist named Don Mariano Mape in 1890 (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21416). Five years later, a 70-year-

old farmer named Don Juan Vegerano may have been too old to manage his more than 70-hectare abaca land (abacales) when he decided to sell the said property to another fellow cultivator named Don Jaime Serra (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21416). The only exception among the sellers was a woman named Arcadia Garcia of Libog (present-day Sto. Domingo) who sold three and a half hectares of abaca land to a businessman (negociante) named Don Martin Contabitarte in 1895. Ms. Garcia's occupation was listed as property-owner [propietario] (Protocolos de Albay Bundle 1032-A).

The amount of recorded data with respect to the race of the persons involved in notarized land-related documents, while better than occupations, was also quite scant. Of the 17 people who sold or pawned their agricultural assets, 14 were indios or natives of the colony, two were Spaniards (Español), and one was of Chinese descent (Chino). On the other hand, out of 22 transactions that were notarized wherein the racial profile of the buyer or owner of the land concerned was noted, nine were Chinese, only five were indios, and two were Spaniards.

The documents that were examined indicate that sellers of land were likely to be natives of the Philippines, while their buyers belonged to groups that had more money such as the Chinese and the Spaniards. It should be noted that the significant number of Chinese doing business in a particular place served as a proxy indicator of the quality of the economy of a particular area (Casiño, 1976), and Albay province in the late 1800s was considered a prosperous first-class province. It was also noted by John Foreman, a British national who spent much time in the Philippines during the last decades of Spanish rule, that the Chinese were known to be active buyers of abaca lands (Foreman, 1905). The latter contention is reflected in purchases of abacales made by men such as Uy Toco, Tan Quico, and

Martin Garcia in 1887 (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21302). Similar to Garcia, acquirers of agricultural land such as Sebastain Ynchausti (Terrenos de Manila 1864) and Eugenio Gonzales (Protocolos de Manila SDS-21302) were Christianized Chinese who already carried Hispanic names. This practice of using Christian names among the Chinese was likely an attempt by such migrants to adapt and integrate with their new lives in a new place.

The categorization of inhabitants of the Philippines based on race (i.e., Español, mestizo, Chino, Indio) is grounded on the legal code, jurisprudence, and methods of governance of the Spaniards in the Philippines (Larkin, 1972; Bankoff, 1996). Simply put, one's race determined one's rights and privileges in society (Madrid, 2021). Clearly, those of pure Spanish ancestry had more benefits, yet those Spaniards born in Spain were called Español peninsular and were considered of a higher class than those only born in the Philippines [Español Filipino or Insular] (Madrid, 2021). It is for this reason that Don Juan Marcella (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21416) and Juan Azada (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21515) were classified as Español, while it had to be made clear that Joaquin de Roco was merely an Español Filipino (Protocolos de Albay Bundle 963).

Notarized Land Transactions Types of Land Dealings

The simplest and most direct land matter involved the legitimization of a person's ownership of a real property. This is undertaken when an individual notarizes several papers to stake his claim to a piece of land that is signed by a notary public. While such a document is not in any way a land title, a notarized record is one of the means by which an owner makes formal his hold over the said physical asset. There are five such documents that were uncovered, all of which were undertaken by men. In

1864, all such transactions involved the ownership of lands whose use was not clearly defined. Sebastian Ynchausti had a document stating that he had possession of two undefined plots of land, one of which was in the town of Cagsawa (Terrenos de Manila 1864), while Basilio and Eustaquio Barrameda made it known that they owned farmland in the pueblo of Bacacay (Terrenos de Manila 1864). Over time, such claims of landownership involved valuable abaca plots. In 1870, Guinobatan resident Juan Pasibio was the owner of 400 topones of abaca land that was valued at ₱1000 (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21194). Eladio Ognaga and Fermin Abuites also claimed possession of similar abaca fields in the towns of Malinao and Ligao, respectively, in 1895 (Protocolos de Albay Bundle 1032-A).

Another straightforward transaction was sale of agricultural land that involves a willing seller and an interested buyer. Such sales accounted for nearly four out

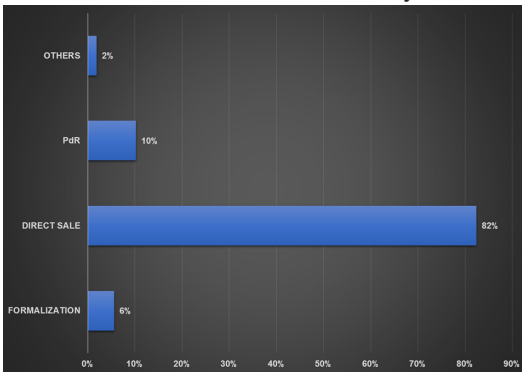


Fig. 3. Percentage share of methods of land ownership by type.

of every five (79%) dealings. For instance, in 1864, Raymundo Barquin agreed to give up his 1.4 hectares of abaca crop land to Calixto Bejarano for ₱27. There must have been some haggling involved as Bejarano also paid Barquin an unspecified amount of rice (Protocolos de Albay 1864). Sixteen years later, Don Tiburcio Lajata sold his abacal that was located in Sorsogon to Don Marcelino Jornaluz (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21302). Moreover, in 1890, Ciriaco

Grajo sold his rice land that was situated in present-day Magallanes, Sorsogon to Don Aniceto Judit for ₱44.40.

These land sales underscore how agricultural parcels have become valuable commodities in the market. Their value as wealth-generating assets is further emphasized by an increasing number of individuals who bought multiple parcels as well as those who consolidated their ownership of land in a particular area. An example of an individual who actively acquired agricultural land was an indio named Don Eulalio Brotamonte. While he was a resident of Tabaco, in 1870 he purchased farmlands found in the nearby town of Malinao from Juana Cons, Anacleto Carullo, Matias Braus, as well as Lucio and Feliciano Cerrano (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21194). Ten years later, Mr. Brotamonte again acquired land in Malinao from Florencio Teocson, who was an absentee landowner as he was based in the province of Camarines Sur (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21302). Malinao seemed to have been a preferred area for the purchase of agricultural lands as Don Gaspar Palomar also bought developed farmlands from Ciriaco Celestial and Mariano Casalla (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21194).

Another example of a person who acquired so much land in a short time was Don Antonio Muñoz. In 1887, Muñoz was able to purchase 10 parcels from both upper class and untitled individuals. These properties were composed mainly of abaca lands as well as a few plots that were planted to rice and coconuts (Protocolos de Albay Bundle 1000-A).

Interested individuals in the 1800s had another way to acquire agricultural land. This was to loan money at exorbitant rates to individuals who used their agricultural lands as collateral. The term used for this means of acquisition is *deuda con hipoteca* or “debt with mortgage” (Bauzon, 1974). Also called *pacto de retroventa*, this practice

emerged in prosperous agricultural towns in the middle 1700s, wherein failure of the mortgaged to buy back the collateralized property mean the money lender got to formally own the land in question (Corpuz, 1997; Larkin, 1972).

Nearly one out of every 10 notarized land dealings (9.2%) involved an individual mortgaging his or her property in exchange for money. Mortgaged properties included rice lands, a house and lot, an abaca late, and coconut lands. There were agreements involved a “guarantor” and an individual who “entrusts” his properties to the guarantor, who was commonly a person of means. Interestingly, in some cases, no amount of money loaned was stated, and there was no stipulation for the recovery of these properties.

On the 9th of January 1873, in Legaspi, Don Marcelo Aguilar became the guarantor of an abaca land, a rice field, a house made of nipa, and a small plot of land planted with sugarcane and coconut. These properties were once owned by Don Juan Calleja (Protocolos de Albay Bundle 932-A). In that same month, Leon Cariñaga of Ligao “entrusted” his small reed house and a plot planted with abaca to Don Isidro Requilme (Protocolos de Albay Bundle 932-A).

Other pacto de retroventa transactions dispensed with such “niceties” and were simply straightforward transactions wherein one pawned his assets to a money lender for a specific amount, with the former having the option to buy back what he has mortgaged over a specific time frame. Bacacay resident Braulia Basalla pawned 2 pisosones (2.8 has) of land planted to abaca and coconuts to Fabian Barrameda for ₱32 in 1864. Ms. Basalla had two years to repay her debt after which she forfeits her farmland. That same year, Don Mariano Lazaro loaned ₱35 to Manuela de los Santos. In exchange, Mariano got hold of the title of Manuela’s agricultural parcel in Ligao; she had four years to buy back her

land (Protocolos de Albay, Bundle 932-A).

A woman named Doña Eulalia Vicentura, in fact, acquired more than one piece of cultivated property by giving out loans. A daughter of the province’s inspector of roads, Ms. Vicentura acquire the plots of Don Mariano Buenafe and Acordia Borlagdan in Tabaco for a combined amount of ₱110 (Protocolos de Albay, 932-A).

Pacto de retroventa transactions reveal what Albayenos would consider to be items of economic or monetary value in their society. In the Memorias de Manila, an 1892 document that served as a de facto socioeconomic profile of the towns of Manila Province, livestock were considered as valuable agricultural assets that were of significant economic value. Water buffaloes or carabaos in Manila was valued anywhere between ₱20-40 (Memorias de Manila 1892). It is, thus, not surprising that in 1870 in Pandan, Catanduanes, there were three instances wherein carabaos and different types of cows were used as collateral along with cultivated lands. Agaton de la Rosa, Vicente Angeles, Casimiro Ylanan, Maximo Rivero, and an individual who was only known by his surname Sanches mortgaged a combined 26.6 hectares of land along with 4 cows, 16 carabaos, 3 calves, and a 2 turnera or cows that are ideal for fattening (Protocolos de Albay 1870 SDS-21194).

There was even a case wherein two men used their lands as collateral in Guinobatan in order to pay for storage fees. Ignacio Ofiando and Don Maximo Lodia decided to mortgage three of their abaca lands to a Spaniard named Joaquin de Roco to pay for the right to store abaca in the space provided for by the latter (Protocolos de Albay Bundle 963). It can be assumed that the two men were confident enough that once they were able to sell their abaca hemp, they could easily pay the unspecified amount that they owed Don Joaquin. In addition, the fact that the two men mortgaged their properties under the assumption that they could earn

more money after all their transactions are done and over with reflects a group of people's deep understanding of how land capital can be used in various ways to produce even more money.

Land can also be disposed of and acquired by people through inheritance. Last wills and testaments were used by individuals, especially women, as a means of ensuring that their loved ones are well-provided for once they are gone. In such documents real property was a resource that was considered very important forms of inheritance (Lagman, 2020). In her will that was notarized in 1890, one of the assets that Doña Marcia Rita left behind to an unknown individual was a plot of abaca in the town of Cagsawa that was roughly a hectare in size (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21416).

Aspects Pertaining to Land Measures and Sizes

Modern states, by their very nature, strive to control, monitor, and make legible their territories, resources, and subjects. Its officials and institutions attain this by making uniform and standardized how different important elements and aspects of people's lives are weighed, measured, registered, and organized (Scott, 1998). It is for this reason why lands that were owned, acquired, used, and disposed of in Albay during the last decades of Spanish rule were subject to measures. Unfortunately, however, the systems of weights as well as liquid and linear measures in the Philippine provinces during the Spanish period were made up of a variety of local measures that were of native, Asian, and Spanish origin. While some could be converted to linear measures, this was not possible for some (Census, 1905).

The land measures used for agricultural lands in Albay initially employed both local and Spanish measures that mirrors the disorganized nature of Spanish rule that can also be observed in the different types

of currency that they allowed to circulate and facilitate economic transactions in the Philippines (Bankoff, 1996). Such gauges included the pison, topon, and the braza de circunferencia.

The pison, which is equivalent to 1.4 hectares (Census of the Philippine Islands), was a land measure reflective of the changing outlook of the Albayenos towards land and their reaction to certain peculiarities in their landscape's physical geography. This measure took its name from the Mexican peso, the main means of exchanging goods at that time. Like the peso, which was equivalent to eight reales (Barrows, 1905), a pison of land could be subdivided into eight equal parts called the real. This reveals that by the nineteenth century land was an economic resource that had monetary value in Albay.

Just as important, the pison was closely associated to Albay province's main export – the abaca. Foreman (1905) noted that the pison was a local land measure of Albay usually associated with abaca plantations. A land area of this size could fit 2,500 abaca plants. Mallat (1983) adds that this measure was rather irregular due to the upland terrain where abaca was cultivated. This explains why most land contracts that used pison as a measure qualifies the size of the land with the phrase "more or less".

Ten notarized documents that were examined involved individuals who agreed to purchase several reales or pisonones of land, mostly abacales. Don Laurente de la Peña acquired 4 pisonones or 5.6 hectares of farmland from Francisca Raymundo that was located in an undetermined part of Albay (Terrenos de Albay 1864). Acordia Borlagdan mortgaged 8 pisonones (11.2 hectares) in the uplands of Tabaco to Eulalia Vicentura in exchange for a debt worth P75 (Terrenos de Albay 1864), while 4 reales or 7,000 square meters of farmland was sold to Eulalio Brotamonte for ₱34 in 1870

(Protocolos de Albay SDS-21194).

From notarized records from 1864 and 1870, there were nine agricultural lots with areas that were measured in topones, a local measure of which one unit in Albay was equal to 43 square meters (Census, 1905). Real properties whose extents were calculated through such measures were not very extensive, a feature of land parcels that were observed by the historian Norman Owen (1984) in the documents that he reviewed for Spanish era Bicol. With the exception of Don Tomas Gallego's 5,780 topones (24.85 hectares) of land planted to abaca and coconuts (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21194), lands whose extents were determined through such measures did not exceed 5 hectares. The 100 topones of land acquired by Mariano Lazaro through pacto de retroventa was only 4300 square meters or .43 hectare, while three abacales owned by Juan Pasibio, Pascual Tagalog, and Antonio Perete all had an area of 400 topones or a mere 1.72 hectares (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21194).

Local measures used in determining the areal extent of lands in Albay could be converted to the metric system (hectares). Unfortunately, one form of land measure, the braza de circunferencia (BdC), seems to not have a clear conversion. There were six land sales from 1864 to 1880 that computed the size of lands sold in terms of BdC, and their purchase price ranged from ₱40 to P121. The smallest of these was an uncultivated land parcel in Oas measuring 200 BdC that was owned by Fernando Refraceson and sold to Don Gaspar Ricafuente in 1870. The biggest was a 575 BdC of land planted to 157 coconuts in Malinao bought by Gaspar Palomar from Mariano Casalla on that same year (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21194). The most expensive land purchase using the said measure was bought in 1864 by a woman named Doña Basilia Borjal. The land that she acquired in an undetermined place in the province had an area of 436 BdC and was clearly located in the steep uplands as

the parcel was said to be located in some sort of cavity. Ms. Borjal spent ₱121 for the said property (Terrenos de Albay).

By the 1890s the Spanish government enacted policies that would standardize the measurement of lands. One of these was the Royal Decree of 13 August 1898. This ruling stated that the market value of land prices should be based on the average value of all lands sold per hectare in each province during the last five years. Land sales should also be conducted in cash (Ahern and Basa, 1901).

This explains why the notarial records of the Protocolos Albay for as early as 1890 had land measures in hectares and its corresponding subdivision of ares and centiares, which are equal to 100 and 1 square meter, respectively (Department of Agriculture Region 5 undated). In 1890, Don Jose Sarte became the new owner of an abaca land that had a land area of 71 hectareas, 81 areas and 25 centiares or 7.8125 hectares that was sited in Ligao. On that same year, 3 pisosones of land planted to abaca and coconuts or a land area of 4 hectareas, 19 areas, and 23 centiares (4.19 hectares) was mortgaged by a farmer named Saturnino Nones for ₱100 (Protocolos de Albay SDS-21515). Five years later, an abacales owned by Benito Onandia was accurately measured as having a definite land area of 2.09 hectares. It sold for ₱70. (Protocolos de Albay 1032-A).

The standardization of land measurements and the approximation of land sizes from hectares up to one square meter not only indicate exactness of measures. It also implies that land became so valuable that accuracy was now required in measuring properties. This increasing prudence in measures was also reflected in the practice in agricultural towns like San Ildefonso, Bulacan in the late 1990s where farmlands were being purchased by the square meter instead of in hectares.

Moreover, increasing accuracy in measuring land also implied that the Spanish colonial bureaucracy of the late nineteenth century now had enough personnel, like surveyors, notaries, and registrars of lands, to do such tasks (Owen, 1984).

Landowners in Albay eventually adhered to metric measures. For some Albayenos, however, the pisonon remained as the preferred land measure even after the implementation of the 1895 provision. In fact, majority of the landholdings confiscated by revolutionary forces in Albay in 1899 had land measures that were still in units of pisonon (Philippine Insurgent Records Albay).

Land Sizes

The historian Norman Owen noted that landholdings in the Bicol settlements were not as extensive compared to their cash crop growing counterparts in other provinces in the Philippines (Owen, 1984). While the data collected for this research is by no means complete, the crude calculations that were generated from such information seems to support Owen’s assertion. Almost of six out of every 10 transactions (57%) where the land area of the property being sold or possessed is provided have farmlands whose size do not exceed two hectares. In fact, almost three out of every 10 land dealings concern real properties that do not even reach a hectare in area. Only 9% of these purchased, owned, or mortgaged assets are between two to five hectares, while only 14% of transactions deal with cultivated or farmable land that is between 5 to 10 hectares. There were four parcels who areas were within the 11-to-25-hectare range (9%), while there were only three properties (9%) that were more than or equal to 56 hectares.

The sizes of land being sold, irrespective of land use, seems to reflect an increasing trend over time. For the year 1864, lands in notarized documents had an average size of

2.59 hectares. This increases to an average of 4.72 hectares by the years 1870 and 1873. By 1880, 1890, and 1895, however, the average size of agricultural properties whose documents were notarized shoots up to 22 hectares. However, it should be noted that the samples used are too small, and three properties that had land areas of 23.85, 73.3, and 101.78 hectares, respectively, clearly skewed the average

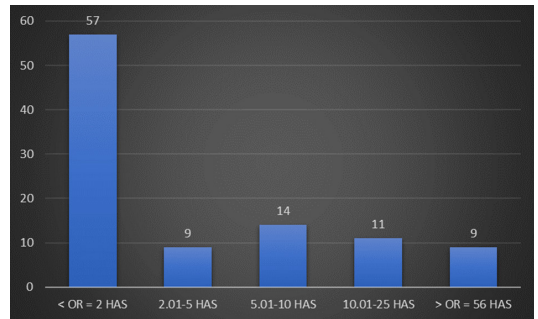


Fig. 4. Percentage of land sizes by range.

size of parcels sold or owned for those years. Without those three properties, the average hectareage would go down to 8.72 hectares. If the biggest land sizes for 1864 and 1870-1873 were also removed, the average land sizes would also be reduced to 1.52 hectares and 2.24 hectares, respectively. Yet even when such agricultural properties with unusually large land sizes were not included, land parcels over the years clearly reflect an upward trend in average area.

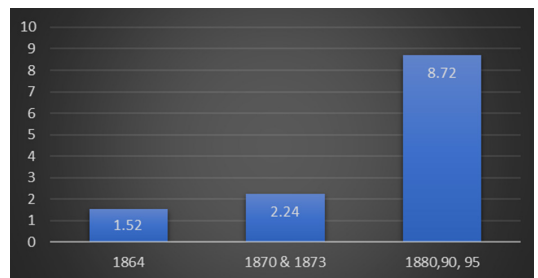


Fig. 5. Average land size in hectares of cultivable lands in selected years.

Land Values

The usual price of agricultural land by hectare also demonstrates an upward trend. In 1864, the average value of a hectare of cultivated/cultivable parcel had an average price of ₱15.25. This nearly triples in value to ₱45.5 per hectare by the years 1870 and 1873. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, a hectare of agricultural property could be had for an average of ₱70. The comparison of these land values upholds the common notion that land becomes more expensive over time and rarely decreases in value. Increases in land prices also show that land had become an item of speculation. For this reason, the Spanish colonial administration eventually enacted provisions that places a standard market price for land per province based on the average price of all the land sales made in a particular province within a time span of five years (Ahern and Basa 1901).

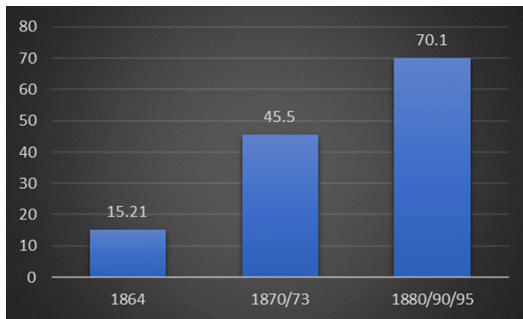


Fig. 6. Land values in Pesos/Hectare over the decades in nineteenth century Albay.

Agricultural Land Utilization

The use of agricultural land in Albay in the 19th century could be divided into three categories – for export, local consumption, and mixed-use. Abaca lands make up the export category, while lands planted rice, coconut, and bamboo were landholdings that produced commodities for domestic purposes. Mixed-use plots were a combination of export and local consumption.

Of the three classes, abaca lands, whose harvested hemp was used as ropes in navies and merchant shipping companies all over the world (Owen, 1984), was the most widely traded land type as it provided the most profit. At some point, the cultivation of abaca became so profitable that owning a plantation in the “declivities of the mountains” and “volcanic soil” (Gironiere, 1962) could yield an annual return of investment around 25-30% (Atkinson, 1905.). Incidentally, in the first three months of the year 1887, 20 land transactions involved abaca lands and another five had a mixed land use that had abaca as one of the indicated crops. This number was based on the 33 recorded land transactions that contained a particular land use. Purchased abaca lands include those acquired by Don Antonio Muñoz from Estevan Nieves, Marcelo Pelayo, Clara Arnife, and Victoria Nieves, while a Chinese native who used the Hispanized name Martin Garcia purchased three out of the five lands planted to both abaca and coconut that were the subject of notarized documents from January to March of 1887 (Protocolos de Albay Bundle 1000-A).

Among the croplands utilized for local consumption, rice lands were the most dominant form of use in this category. What is very important to note with rice lands was that most of its owners and buyers were members of the elite. Such plots offered not only potential food security but political influence in society as well. Unlike abaca lands, plots planted to rice, required more personnel and constant contact between landlord and tenant. This kind of relationship easily becomes a source of political patronage and social capital in the community (Owen, 1984). On the other hand, coconut lands were rarely identified in the course of the study.

Most farms that were mixed-use contained abaca plants and coconut trees. There are probably two reasons why these two crops were planted together. One is that abaca plants require shade which

coconuts could easily provide (Owen, 1984). Another possible explanation for this kind of combined land use is that while the owner earns a significant amount of money from abaca, coconut tress provided for the everyday needs of the Bicolano like coconut milk, oil, and toddy.

CONCLUSIONS

During the late 1700s, Bicolandia was so poor that its inhabitants could barely but tobacco from the monopoly stores. A native elite was even quoted to have said that the money families saved for generations were squandered to buy tobacco. Such contention reflected the reality that the region's inhabitants lacked revenues that could earn them income to sustain their needs (De Jesus, 1980).

This gloomy description of Albay soon changed when abaca became a prime export item in the world market. The province, reportedly the best place to cultivate abaca (Marche, 1970), benefitted from its export earnings and eventually developed a monetized economy. Such an economy in Albay is reflected in documents that reveal the increasing acquisition and ownership of agricultural lands, the money spent to pay for them, the different means by which such wealth-producing parcels were purchased, the increasing values of farm properties over the years, and even by how lands were measured (pisoson = 8 reales = Peso). Sadly, the records of those who owned, bought, and sold lands reflect a sad reality in Albay society wherein upper-class males increasingly consolidated land resources at the expense of those from humbler backgrounds. From these records, the people who were part of centuries old records cease to become mere statistics and their stories relate to present realities in Philippine society.

The documents also reveal aspects and patterns in the culture and way of life of the people of Albay. These land

transactions illustrate the growing legalism of these people (i.e., existence and recognition of land contracts), as well as their ability to respond to peculiar features of their environment (i.e., the pisoson as a unique land measure). The measuring of agricultural parcels using a variety of local and Hispanic gauges highlights the localized nature of land transactions and the lack of uniformity, accuracy, and central government control in determining the metes and bounds of properties, which only began to be addressed in the last years of Spanish rule. Land-related legal documents in Albay from 1864 to 1895 also corroborate the assertion that real properties in the said province were not as extensive as those in other provinces, and how Albayenos used, acquired, and cultivated lands to produce more wealth like abaca or mainly address their subsistence needs such as coconuts and rice.

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- 1 The maps in this paper were produced by Mr. Neil Eneri Tingin.
- 2 Interview. Cecilia Illecas. Resident and Real Estate Agent. San Idefonso, Bulacan