CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE BRITISH EXPEDITION TO MANILA

Nicholas Tracy

It is impossible to disagree with the comment written by Captain Horne of the Honourable East India Company army:

So much for the Manilla expedition, which ... has been Attended with numberless fatall Consequences without being attended with any One good ... Except the Adm[ira]l and Gen[eral] and a few Cap[tai]ns of men of war, I don't know a person but what are Considerable Sufferers, indeed chiefly owing to the misconduct of our chiefs (who if they have their deserts all deserve the gallows).2

British interest in the Philippines was a result of the frustrations associated with the development of trade with China. The East India Company was only permitted to deal with the Hong merchants at Canton, and was only permitted to pay for China goods with silver obtained from Spain, or from the Spanish colony at Manila, which received an annual subsidy in silver from New Spain to support its role as the centre of Christian missionary effort in Asia. The Spanish law of the Indies did not permit British merchants to deal directly with Manila, so an indirect trade had grown up using Indian middlemen, who sold Indian commodities to the Chinese colony outside Manila. Spanish dependence on the Chinese colony, which they feared and despised, restricted the potential of their trade to such an extent that it amounted to the cargo carried onboard a single annual galleon to Acapulco. Nonetheless, despite its moribund nature, Manila was an important part of the British trading system in Asia. To the British it was a matter of concern that the Spaniards were able to cream off a significant part of the profits. The British Navy already had some experience of

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1 This chapter is extracted from my Manila Ransomed: The British Expedition to the Philippines in the Seven Years’ War (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1995). I am grateful for the assistance of Dr. José Barco Ortega for reading this chapter. His own doctoral thesis, “El Gobierno de Manuel Antonio Rojo Filipinas, 1761–1764”, was presented at the University of Navarra in 2002.

the Philippines and the Manila trade because in 1742 Captain George Anson had captured one of the galleons on his voyage around the world.

In 1759 Alexander Dalrymple had undertaken to improve the profits of the East India Company by establishing commercial relations with the Sultanate of Sulu in the Borneo archipelago, sandwiched between the Spaniards in the Philippines and the Dutch who claimed control of Malaya and the Indonesian islands. In the seventeenth century there had been several English posts in Indonesia, but the Dutch had forced the English from them all, except for a small station at Bencoolen on the south side of Sumatra where it was ill placed to participate in a trade with China. Dalrymple hoped to establish an entrepôt in Sulu where northern Chinese merchants could bring their silks and chinaware, thereby circumventing the restrictions on foreign trade at Canton, and replacing Spanish silver with English manufactures as the means of financing the trade. A colony of Chinese would also be planted to produce Suluan goods for the English market.

In January 1761 Dalrymple had actually succeeded in concluding a provisional treaty with the Sultan of Sulu. He had then visited Manila where the treaty was countersigned by the old Sultan, Alimud Din I, who was a prisoner of the Spaniards. He also made a survey of Manila Bay which persuaded some Spaniards, too late, that he had been on a covert operation preparing the way for the invasion. It was Dalrymple’s practice, however, to make surveys wherever he went. In later years he was to become Britain’s first official hydrographer.

Dalrymple was not directly involved in the planning of the British expedition to Manila. With the help of his patron George Pigot, who was governor of the East India Company’s Fort St. George at Madras, he had obtained the approval of the Council there for taking a cargo to Sulu, and had actually sailed on 10 June 1762 to set in train the commercial venture before news of war with Spain had been received in India. All the same, Dalrymple’s ideas had played their part in setting the Manila expedition into motion.

When leaving Madras on his 1759 reconnaissance expedition Dalrymple had travelled as far as the Dutch post at Malacca onboard the East India Company ship Winchelsea, on which was also traveling on sick leave Colonel William Draper. Draper was a career soldier who had fought at the

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