Evidence, Silence, and Execution: Reassessing the *Trece Mártires de Batuan* (1900)

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ABSTRACT

The locally popular designation "Trece Mártires de Batuan" (30 September 1900) presumes martyrdom but rests on a limited documentary base. This paper returns to the *Libro de Entierro* of Bilar as the primary evidentiary source, presenting a consolidated transcription and translation of thirteen burial entries and evaluating four competing explanations: revolutionary martyrdom, counterinsurgency execution, local factional violence, and suppression of a religious-political movement. The entries consistently record a coordinated

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episode of execution by gunfire under conditions that precluded the administration of sacraments, while remaining silent on motive, identity, and perpetrators. Of the competing interpretations, the counterinsurgency hypothesis best fits the document's internal structure. However, the evidence provides no substantiation for claims of martyrdom in either theological or nationalist terms. The paper's contribution is both methodological and practical: a distinction between evidence and inference is established and proportionality is re-established. It is argued that "martyrdom" should be treated as a retrospective moral designation rather than an evidentiary conclusion. On this basis, the case for commemoration is affirmed and its conditions are specified: heritage policy and public representation should support remembrance but should explicitly distinguish documented fact from interpretive attribution, such that the limits of the archive are made visible and alternative explanations are preserved.

Keywords: *Philippine-American War; Bohol; parish archives; microhistory; martyrdom; counterinsurgency; historical method*

The Trece Mártires de Batuan (30 September 1900) are situated in local history as an episode of martyrdom. Their names are verbally reproduced by locals and in secondary accounts, and the designation "martyrs" is often treated as self-evident. However, this narrative coherence stands in tension with the limited and insufficiently examined documentary record on which it depends. For instance, in the chapter "The Boholano-American War," the historian Jes Tirol recounts the event but in that work, the term "martyrs" was not used."[1] This is a case in which the popular narrative appears to exceed what can be established from the available evidence.[2] What requires explanation, therefore, is not only the event, but the persistence of a claim that exceeds its evidentiary base.

The problem is clear: the label "martyrs" is widely accepted but not evidentially demonstrated. It is possible that the designation "Trece Mártires" was influenced by earlier usages, such as those associated with Cavite under the Spanish rule. This parallels the way José Rizal is described as "the national martyr."[3] However, the term 'martyr' carries multiple

[1] Jes Belarmino Tirol, *Bohol from Spanish Yoke to American Harness: Philippines Revolution and Resistance Against the Americans* (Tagbilaran City: University of Bohol Research Center, 1998), 110-111.

[2] Peter Seixas, "Teaching Rival Histories: In Search of Narrative Plausibility," in *International Perspectives on Teaching Rival Histories: Pedagogical Responses to Contested Narratives and the History Wars*, ed. Joanna Wojdon (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 253–268.

[3] Artemio R. Guillermo and May Kyi Win, *Historical Dictionary of the Philippines*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 9.

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meanings, and the term is not used in the primary source Jes Tirol points us to when narrating the event: "'Libro de Entierro, 1900,' San Isidro Labrador Parish, Bilar, Bohol."[4] This issue is further complicated by cases in the Visayas region in which anti-colonial movements were also predatory (looting and killing civilians), as in the case of the Pulahanes.[5] The relationship between documentary trace and historical interpretation remains underdeveloped. Martyrdom is better understood as a normative designation (assigning moral meaning to death), sustained by collective memory, oriented toward identity, and not just an empirical claim.[6] This paper addresses that gap by treating the primary document as the limit condition of interpretation. This paper is based exclusively on archival and published documentary sources and has been approved by the thesis committee of the College of Education of Bohol Island State University – Main Campus.

This paper returns to the *Libro de Entierro* of Bilar. It asks a basic but necessary question: what does the document itself allow us to claim about the deaths of the thirteen individuals recorded on 30 September 1900? The argument is deliberately limited in scope. Its claims are restricted to what can be sustained from the internal structure of a single documentary source. The entries consistently attest to a coordinated episode of violent death by gunfire under conditions that precluded the administration of sacraments. However, they do not explicitly substantiate claims of martyrdom in either theological or nationalist terms. The archive supports a narrower conclusion than the one commonly asserted. The paper proceeds in three steps: it presents the document, tests competing hypotheses, and offers a ruling grounded in the evidence.

Historiographical Context: Memory Without Method

Narratives of the Philippine-American War remain heavily centered on Luzon, privileging major political actors and large-scale military engagements. Localized violence in the Visayas is comparatively underrepresented, often appearing only in fragmentary form. For instance, historian Rolando Borrinaga argues that hidden in a "notes section," Captain Mariano A. Pacheco is shown to have embodied, civilian-backed,

[4] Tirol, *Bohol from Spanish Yoke to American Harness*, 110.

[5] George Emmanuel R. Borrinaga, "The Pulahan Movement in Leyte (1902–1907)," *The Journal of History* 54 (January–December 2008): 236. Borrinaga cites a town account that says the Pulahanes were "*more of a trouble to the people than a help*," that they "*went from house to house… brought anything they liked*," burned houses, killed people.

[6] Seixas, "Teaching Rival Histories,"253–268.

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improvisational war effort that challenges how we understand the Philippine-American War as a whole.[7] Within this landscape, cases like the Trece Mártires are primarily preserved through local memory rather than sustained archival analysis.

Existing references to the Trece Mártires follow a consistent pattern: names are consolidated and repeated, but the underlying documents are not systematically examined. Works such as those by Tirol are important for preserving the list, yet they do not reproduce the parish entries in full nor subject them to detailed source criticism. The result is a historiographical condition in which narrative stability is achieved through repetition rather than verification. Under such conditions, citation functions as a substitute for evidence rather than a trace back to it.

This case is therefore not unique. It reflects a broader methodological issue: historical claims harden into accepted truth not because they are repeatedly tested against evidence, but because they are repeatedly cited. The *Trece Mártires* offer a clear instance where memory has outpaced method.

Archives, Silence, and Interpretation

The document is housed in the Bilar Church because, at the time, "[i]t was yet a barrio of the interior town of Bilar, Bohol, but it already had a separate church."[8] Parish registers are not narrative documents; thus their priority is to classify deaths according to ecclesiastical requirements. They are administrative and sacramental records structured by formula, and not by explanation. Their purpose is to record death and sacramental status, and not to describe events or assign meaning.

This yields two implications. First, the archive constrains interpretation. What is recorded—name, status, cause of death, sacramental condition—sets the limits of what can be directly known. Second, the archive is structured by omission. The absence of political identity, motive, or perpetrator reflects the priorities of the institution that produced the record.

Analytically, this requires a strict distinction between evidence and inference. The document attests to certain facts; interpretation must remain proportional to those attestations. Silence is meaningful in that it limits claims, but it does not authorize speculative expansion. Any interpretation

[7] Rolando O. Borrinaga, "Captain Mariano A. Pacheco: The Most Accomplished Revolutionary Leader in Leyte during the Philippine-American War," *The Journal of History* 51, nos. 1–4 (2005): 400-417.

[8] Tirol, *Bohol from Spanish Yoke to American Harness*, 110.

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that supplies what the document omits must therefore be marked explicitly as inference rather than evidence.

However, the distinction between "evidence" and "silence" may itself be historically produced rather than methodologically given.[9] From this view, the parish register's omissions, particularly of motive, agency, and political identity, do not merely delimit interpretation but also reflect the classificatory logic of colonial ecclesiastical documentation, where certain forms of political life are rendered unintelligible by design. The "silence" of the archive, therefore, may function as an active structuring of what can appear as historical fact.

The tension between documentary minimalism and narrative elaboration is central. Oral traditions and local histories supply coherence and moral meaning, but they operate under different evidentiary conditions. This paper prioritizes the constraints imposed by the document.

Historical Context: Bohol in 1900

The events of 30 September 1900 occurred within a period of unstable transition. Toward the end of November 1898, Spanish forces began withdrawing from the island, gradually abandoning their posts and preparing to leave for neighboring territories. By Christmas, their evacuation was complete. Jagna became their final point of departure on the way to Camiguin, and the transition passed with "almost no bloodshed attending their departure."[10] For the people of Bohol, this peaceful exit did not mean the end of struggle; rather, it marked the beginning of a new and uncertain chapter. With the colonial government gone, authority vanished almost overnight, and the island was suddenly left to govern itself.

The immediate problem was order. When the Spanish authority had withdrawn from Bohol, it left behind not a stable transition but a vacuum. Without officials, soldiers, or administrative structures, law enforcement weakened and uncertainty spread quickly across the island. Reports of banditry circulated, roads became unsafe, and trade faltered. Communities faced the real possibility of disorder. In this context, the local elite—landowners, professionals, and municipal leaders—moved to stabilize the

[9] Rommel A. Curaming, "Postcolonial Studies and Pantayong Pananaw in Philippine Historiography: A Critical Engagement," *Kritika Kultura* 27 (2016): 63–91, accessed at Ateneo de Manila University.

[10] Marianito Jose Luspo, "Bohol Through the Centuries," in *TUBQD: The Heart of Bohol*, ed. Ramon N. Villegas (Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2003), 35.

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situation. Their intervention was not ideological but practical: order was necessary to protect property, commerce, and social hierarchy. As one account observes, "there were reports of banditry and other forms of lawlessness in the island," and because "the upper class had the most to lose… the ilustrados took the initiative securing a mandate from the Malolos government."[11] By doing so, they tied Bohol to the emergent Philippine Republic under Emilio Aguinaldo, extending the authority of the revolutionary state into the province.

Out of this moment emerged the Gobierno de Cantón, or Junta Provincial—a local government that sought to impose order while claiming legitimacy within the revolutionary framework. Bernabé Reyes of Dauis was elected president, and the administration adopted the features of a functioning state. It issued directives, exercised authority, and even adopted an official seal, described as "an ellipse bearing a sun rising behind three mountain peaks and with three stars above… surrounded by the legend 'Gobierno Republicano de Bohol.'"[12] The symbolism was deliberate. It projected the image of a polity not adrift but self-consciously aligned with a national project of independence. From April 1899 to March 1900, this government attempted to hold the island together, confronting external threats and maintaining internal stability. For a brief interval, Bohol appeared capable of governing itself, moving, as one account puts it, "on the path to peace."[13]

That moment ended abruptly on 17 March 1900. American forces arrived by sea, landing at Nagtubo (now Mayacabac) in Dauis after departing from Cebu. Their advance was swift and largely uncontested: Mount Banat-i was secured, and troops proceeded toward Tagbilaran without resistance. To outside observers, the transition might have appeared uneventful. Indeed, "on the surface, the Boholanos seemed to have reconciled with living under a new foreign master."[14] Yet this apparent calm masked a different reality. Beneath it, local leaders and patriots were already meeting in secret, weighing the possibility of armed resistance.

By 1 September 1900, that possibility had become an action. Boholano forces withdrew into the interior and began a guerrilla campaign against American troops. From the mountains and forests, they ambushed patrols, disrupted supply lines, and made governance increasingly difficult. The conflict shifted from occupation to insurgency. For fifteen months, control of

[11] Luspo, 36.
[12] Luspo, 36.
[13] Luspo, 36.
[14] Luspo, 36.

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the island remained contested, and what had initially appeared to be a stable transfer of power became a prolonged struggle.

The American response was both systematic and severe. Unable to decisively defeat the guerrillas, colonial forces turned to a strategy designed to break resistance by destroying its support base. Towns were burned, crops destroyed, and civilians subjected to coercion and violence. As one account records, "the Americans burned 20 of the 35 towns of Bohol, killing innocent civilians and destroying livestock and agricultural produce."[15] The objective extended beyond military victory; it aimed at dismantling the material and social conditions that sustained insurgency. Yet resistance persisted under the leadership of Pedro Samson, whose forces continued to operate despite diminishing resources.[16]

The conflict intensified further in late September 1901 with the arrival of reinforcements under Robert P. Hughes. Their campaign accelerated the collapse of organized resistance and was later described as responsible for "much of the horrible atrocities committed by the Americans in Bohol."[17] Within months, the insurgency could no longer be sustained. On 21 December 1901, Samson was located in Canhayupon, Dimiao and presented with an ultimatum: surrender or face the complete destruction of the island. Confronted with this threat, he capitulated, bringing the armed resistance to an end.[18]

Spanish rule dissolved with little violence, giving way to a brief experiment in local republican governance. American forces then arrived, initially encountering little resistance but soon facing a determined insurgency. The conflict escalated into a destructive counterinsurgency campaign that reshaped the island's social and economic landscape before ending in forced surrender. Bohol's incorporation into American colonial rule was therefore neither smooth nor inevitable. It was produced through conflict, negotiation, and coercion. This trajectory provides the necessary context for interpreting the Trece Mártires de Batuan. Their deaths occurred within a setting defined by surveillance, violence, and suspicion, where executions of alleged insurgents or sympathizers formed part of a broader logic of control.

A contemporaneous glimpse of this process appears in the 16 October 1900 issue of *El Progreso*, a Manila-based Spanish-language newspaper. In the

[15] Luspo, 36-37.
[16] Luspo, 37.
[17] Luspo, 37.
[18] Luspo, 37.

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article "Proyektos de ley," the paper reproduced measures issued by the American colonial government, offering insight into how authority was being institutionalized. The formula "Por autorización del Presidente de los Estados Unidos…" makes the chain of command explicit: sovereignty flowed from the U.S. President to the Philippine Commission and into provincial governance.[19] For readers at the time, this was a clear signal that a new political order had replaced the Spanish rule. By presenting these decrees in Spanish, the newspaper rendered American authority legible within an existing legal and linguistic framework.

Among the measures was the establishment of a Court of First Instance in Tagbilaran: "Por la presente se establece… un tribunal de primera instancia… para la provincia de Bohol."[20] This court was integrated into a wider judicial system, linked to the colonial Supreme Court in Manila. Yet its authority was not purely civilian. Officials took their oaths under "la orden general No. 20… expedida por la oficina del Gobernador Militar," and the presiding judge's oath was administered by a U.S. commanding officer.[21] The institution thus embodied the hybrid character of governance in 1900: civilian in form, military in foundation.

Administrative control extended beyond the courts. The article specified that "todos los nombramientos y destituciones… se dará cuenta á la Comisión por el Gobernador Militar,"[22] establishing a chain of accountability that tied local officials directly to the colonial center. Governance became a matter of procedure—appointments, reporting, and oversight—through which imperial authority was translated into everyday administration.

Yet even as these structures were being established, signs of instability persisted. A brief notice in the same issue reported: "Corre el rumor de que en Bohol, veinte individuos de la Policía han pasado a las filas revolucionarias que acaudilla el Sr. Pedro Samson. No garantizamos la veracidad de esta noticia" ⁅"There is a rumor that in Bohol twenty members of the police have joined the revolutionary forces led by Mr. Pedro Samson. We do not guarantee the truth of this news"⁆.[23] Whether verified or not, the report is revealing. It suggests that colonial authority remained uncertain and that loyalty was not assured even among those tasked with enforcing order. The police themselves could defect. The cautious phrasing of the report

[19] *El Progreso* (Manila), "Proyektos de ley," October 16, 1900, Southeast Asian Newspapers, Global Press Archive (East View), 3, https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=prgs19001016-01.

[20] *El Progreso*, "Proyektos de ley," October 16, 1900, 3.

[21] *El Progreso*, "Proyektos de ley," October 16, 1900, 3.

[22] *El Progreso*, "Proyektos de ley," October 16, 1900, 3.

[23] *El Progreso*, "Lo del día," October 16, 1900, 2.

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underscores the limits of information in a contested environment, where rumor and fact circulated together.

Taken together, these accounts capture the contradiction of Bohol in 1900. On paper, the province was being systematically integrated into a colonial state through courts, bureaucratic procedures, and administrative oversight. On the ground, authority remained fragile, challenged by insurgency and shifting allegiances. It is within this tension—between consolidation and resistance—that the Trece Mártires de Batuan must be understood. Their deaths did not occur in a stable or pacified province, but in a landscape marked by uncertainty, coercion, and the uneven imposition of colonial power.

The temporal clustering of deaths within a short interval aligns with broader patterns of intensified suppression during this period. This concentration suggests a discrete episode of violence rather than ordinary mortality, pointing to a moment of compression consistent with counterinsurgency conditions.

In September 1900, episodes of violence and resistance across the Visayas illustrate the fragmented and localized character of the conflict. In Cebu, forces under Hilario Alifio ambushed an American unit in the barrio of Bugas, forcing its retreat despite limited weaponry.[24] In the same month, American troops under Lt. Cromwell Stacey entered the town of Sogod in pursuit of insurgents associated with Arcadio Maxilom, killing at least one civilian and finding the settlement largely abandoned.[25] Meanwhile, political resistance took organized form in Danao, where local officials including Presidente Victorino Buot and justice delegate Felix Batucan resisted the imposition of American authority, while leaders such as Maxilom and Juan Climaco mobilized broader opposition through petitions and coordinated refusal of colonial governance. [26]

Those episodes in the nearby island of Cebu are indicative of a wider pattern: violence during this period operated through dispersed, locally specific encounters involving both armed confrontation and coercive governance. Crucially, such events are unevenly documented. While some, like those in Cebu, survive in narrative and military accounts with identifiable actors, others—such as the deaths recorded in the Bilar parish

[24] Resil B. Mojares, *The War against the Americans: Resistance and Collaboration in Cebu, 1899–1906* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999), 62.

[25] Mojares, *The War against the Americans*, 68.

[26] Mojares, *The War against the Americans*, 121.

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register—persist only as minimal administrative traces. The Trece Mártires case must be situated within this landscape of asymmetrical documentation, where the density of historical narrative reflects the survival of sources rather than the scale or significance of the event itself.

The sporadic appearance of the *Trece Mártires* in local histories reflects this structural tendency to subordinate dispersed coercive encounters to narratives organized around major campaigns. Recent scholarship on colonial pacification emphasizes that violence often operated through decentralized practices affecting municipal populations rather than exclusively through battlefield confrontation. Microhistorical approaches, therefore provide methodological access to forms of coercion that remain obscured within macro-political narration. Examination of parish registers enables reconstruction of localized disturbances that reveal how colonial transition was experienced at the level of kinship networks, communal relations, and everyday vulnerability.

Source Presentation: The *Libro de Entierro* Entries

The primary source is a set of burial entries recorded in the parish register of Bilar. The entries correspond to individuals buried on 30 September 1900 in the cemetery of Batuan.

The records were transcribed by social studies students and translated with attention to orthographic fidelity and consistent rendering of key terms. The entries are highly formulaic, repeating specific phrases across individuals.

Three elements recur with striking consistency:

- "muerte violenta" — violent death
- "fusilado" — executed by gunfire
- "sin haber recibido los sacramentos" — without receiving the sacraments

The entries also consistently identify the individuals as residents of Bilar, primarily farmers, with no mention of political affiliation, military role, or religious designation.

The document establishes a clear evidentiary baseline: thirteen individuals died violently, by gunfire, on the same date, and were buried without sacramental preparation. The following are the authors' translations of the death records as identified by Tirol. The final three entries are fragmentary in the register and preserve only minimal identifying information.

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1. INOCENCIO PACATANG

Spanish: *En treinta de Setiembre y ano de mil nuevecientos fue seputiado en el Cementerio de Batuan perteneciente* a' *Bilar, el cadaver de Inocencio Pacatang, indio casado con Teodoria Malig-on, indio hijo de Leonardo y de Inocencia Ason, indios naturales y vecinos de Bilar de oficio labradores. Abuelos paternos noce conocen. Abuelos maternos Ydeno. Fallecio de muerte violenta, desgraciadamente por haber sido fusilado, sin haber recibidos los sacramentos, siendo testigos de la estencion de esta partida Mariano Domaas, escribiente de esta parroquia y Angel Dolotina, sacristan mayor de esta Iglesia, ambos indios naturales y vecinos de este pueblo. Y por verdad lo firmo.*

English: On the 30th of September in the year 1900, the body of Inocencio Pacatang was buried in the cemetery of Batuan, belonging to Bilar. He was a native man married to Teodoria Malig-on, and the son of Leonardo and Inocencia Ason, natives of and residents of Bilar, whose profession was farming. Paternal grandparents are unknown. Maternal grandparents are also unknown. He died a violent death, having been executed by gunfire, without having received the sacraments. Witnesses to the preparation of this record were Mariano Domaas, a clerk of this parish, and Angel Dolotina, the senior sacristan of this church, both natives of and residents of this town. This is signed as a truthful account.

2. VALENTIN GUMAPAC

Spanish: *En treinta de Setiembre y año de mil nuevecientos, fue seputiado en el Cementerio de Batuan perteneciente a' Bilar, el cadaver de Valentin Gumapac, indio casado con Felisitas Butalid, indio hijo de Simeon y de Anacleta Ajoc, indios naturales y vecinos de Bilar de oficio labradores. Abuelos paternos Apolinario y Felipa Jumawid, indios naturales y vecinos de Bilar de oficio labradores. Abuelos maternos Leon y Maria Francisca indios naturales y vecinos de Bilar de oficio labradores. Fallecio de muerte violenta desgraciadamente por haber sido fusilado, sin haber recibidos los sacramentos, siendo testigos de la estencion de esta partida Mariano Domaas, escribiente de esta parroquia y Angel Dolotina, sacristan mayor de esta Iglesia, ambos indios naturales y vecinos de este pueblo. Y por verdad lo firmo.*

English: On the 30th of September in the year 1900, the body of Valentin Gumapac was buried in the cemetery of Batuan, belonging to Bilar. He was a native man married to Felisitas Butalid, and the son of Simeon and Anacleta Ajoc, natives and residents of Bilar whose occupation was farming. His paternal grandparents were Apolinario and Felipa Jumawid, also natives and

residents of Bilar who worked as farmers. His maternal grandparents were Leon and Maria Francisca, natives and residents of Bilar, likewise engaged in farming. He died a violent death, executed by gunfire, without having received the sacraments. Witnesses to the preparation of this record were Mariano Domaas, a clerk of this parish, and Angel Dolotina, the senior sacristan of this church, both natives and residents of this town. This is signed as a truthful account.

3. ALEJO MORALA

Spanish: *En treinta de Setiembre y ano de mil nuevecientos, fue seputiado en el cementerio de Batuan, perteneciente a' Bilar, el cadaver de Alejo Morala indio casado con Baselisa Tomanda, india hijo de Juan y de Victoriana Panganoron, indios naturales y vecinos de Bilar, de oficio labradores. Abuelos paternos noce conocen. Abuelos maternos ydeno. Falleció de muerte violenta desgraciadamente por haber sido fusilado, sin haber recibidos los sacramentos. siendo testigos de la estencion de esta partida Mariano Domaas, escribiente de esta parroquia y Angel Dolotina, sacristan mayor de esta Iglesia. Y por verdad lo firmo.*

English: On the 30th of September in the year 1900, the body of Alejo Morala was buried in the cemetery of Batuan, belonging to Bilar. He was a native man married to Baselisa Tomanda, and the son of Juan and Victoriana Panganoron, natives and residents of Bilar whose occupation was farming. His paternal grandparents are unknown. His maternal grandparents are also unknown. He died a violent death, executed by gunfire, without having received the sacraments. Witnesses to the preparation of this record were Mariano Domaas, a clerk of this parish, and Angel Dolotina, the senior sacristan of this church. This is signed as a truthful account.

4. GUILLERMO GUMAPAC

Spanish: En treinta de setiembre y año de mil nuevecientos, fué seputiado en el Cementerio de Batuan, el cadáver de Guillermo Gumapac, indio casado con Atanasia Morala india hijo de Nicolás y de Francisca Ancog indios, naturales y vecinos de Bilar de oficio labradores. Abuelos paternos Joaquín y María Ajoc, indios naturales y vecinos de Bilar, de oficio labradores. Abuelos maternos Gabriel y Petrona Dilig, indios naturales y vecinos de Bilar de oficio labradores. Falleció de muerte violenta desgraciadamente por haber sido fusilado, sin haber recibidos los sacramentos, siendo testigos de la estención de esta partida Mariano Domaas, escribiente de esta parroquia y Angel Dolotina sacristan mayor de esta iglesia. Y por verdad lo firmo.

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English: On the 30th of September in the year 1900, the body of Guillermo Gumapac was buried in the cemetery of Batuan. He was a native man married to Atanasia Morala, and the son of Nicolás and Francisca Ancog, natives and residents of Bilar, whose occupation was farming. His paternal grandparents were Joaquín and María Ajoc, natives and residents of Bilar, also farmers. His maternal grandparents were Gabriel and Petrona Dilig, natives and residents of Bilar, engaged in farming as well. He died a violent death, executed by gunfire, without having received the sacraments. Witnesses to the preparation of this record were Mariano Domaas, a clerk of this parish, and Angel Dolotina, the senior sacristan of this church. This is signed as a truthful account.

5. GREOGORIO GUMAPAC

Spanish: En treinta de setiembre y año de mil nuevecientos, fué seputiado en el Cementerio de Batuan perteneciente a'Bilar el cadáver de Gregorio Gumapac, indio casado con Feliciana Dalagan, indio hijo de Antonio y de Roperta Polinar, indios naturales y vecinos de Bilar de oficio labradores. Abuelos paternos noce conocen. Abuelos maternos ydeno. Falleció de muerte violenta desgraciadamente por haber sido fusilado sin haber recibidos los sacramentos siendo testigos de la estención de esta partida Mariano Domaas, escribiente de esta parroquia y Ángel Dolotina sacristán mayor de esta Iglesia. Y por verdad lo firmo.

English: On the 30th of September in the year 1900, the body of Gregorio Gumapac was buried in the cemetery of Batuan, belonging to Bilar. He was a native man married to Feliciana Dalagan and the son of Antonio and Roperta Polinar, natives and residents of Bilar, whose occupation was farming. His paternal grandparents are unknown. His maternal grandparents are also unknown. He died a violent death, executed by gunfire, without having received the sacraments. Witnesses to the preparation of this record were Mariano Domaas, a clerk of this parish, and Ángel Dolotina, the senior sacristan of this church. This is signed as a truthful account.

6. JUAN CUBAO

Spanish: *En treinta de setiembre y año de mil nuevecientos, fue seputiado en el Cementerio de Batuan perteneciente a Bilar el cadáver de Juan Cubao, indio casado con Genoveva Lanzang, indio hijo de Francisco y de Florentina Todtod, indios*

naturales y vecinos de Bilar de oficio labradores. Abuelos paternos noce conocen. Abuelos maternos ydem. Falleció de muerte violenta desgraciadamente por haber sido fusilado sin haber recibidos los sacramentos siendo testigos de la estención de esta partida Mariano Domaas, escribiente de esta parroquia y Ángel Dolotina, Sacristán Mayor de esta Iglesia. Y por verdad lo firmo.

English: On the 30th of September in the year 1900, the body of Juan Cubao was buried in the cemetery of Batuan, belonging to Bilar. He was a native man married to Genoveva Lanzang and the son of Francisco and Florentina Todtod, natives and residents of Bilar, whose occupation was farming. His paternal grandparents are unknown. His maternal grandparents are also unknown. He died a violent death, executed by gunfire, without having received the sacraments. Witnesses to the preparation of this record were Mariano Domaas, a clerk of this parish, and Ángel Dolotina, the senior sacristan of this church. This is signed as a truthful account.

7. FRANCISCO QUEZA

Spanish: *En treinta de Setiembre y ano de mil nuevecientos fue seputiado en el Cementerio de Batuan perteneciente a' Bilar, el cadáver de Francisco Queza, indio casado con Isidora Cubao, indios naturales y vecinos de Bilar de oficio labradores. Abuelos paternos noce conocen. Abuelos maternos ydeno. Falleció de muerte violenta desgraciadamente por haber sido fusilado sin haber recibidos los sacramentos siendo testigos de la estención de esta partida Mariano Domar escribiente de esta parroquia y Angel Dolotina sacristan mayor de esta iglesia, ambos indios naturales y vecinos de este pueblo. Y por verdad lo firmo.*

English: On the 30th of September in the year 1900, the body of Francisco Queza was buried in the cemetery of Batuan, belonging to Bilar. He was a native man married to Isidora Cubao, both natives and residents of Bilar whose occupation was farming. His paternal grandparents are unknown. His maternal grandparents are also unknown. He died a violent death, executed by gunfire, without having received the sacraments. Witnesses to the preparation of this record were Mariano Domar, a clerk of this parish, and Angel Dolotina, the senior sacristan of this church, both natives and residents of this town. This is signed as a truthful account.

8. MANSUETO CABERTE

Spanish: *En treinta de Setiembre y año de mil nuevecientos, fue seputiado en el Cementerio de Batuan perteneciente a Bilar, el cadáver de Mansueto Caberte indio sacristan, hijo de Juan y de Eleoteria Dano, indios naturales y vecinos de Bilar de oficio labradores. Abuelos paternos, Gabriel y Juliana Palapar, indios naturales y*

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vecinos de Bilar de oficio labradores. Abuelos maternos Jose y Lucia Dano, indios naturales y vecinos de Bilar de oficio labradores. Falleció de muerte violenta desgraciadamente por haber sido fusilado sin haber recibido los sacramentos siendo testigos de la estención de esta partida Mariano Domaas escribiente de esta parroquia y Angel Dolotina sacristan mayor de esta iglesia. Y por verdad lo firmo.

English: On the 30th of September in the year 1900, the body of Mansueto Caberte was buried in the cemetery of Batuan, belonging to Bilar. He was a native man and sacristan, the son of Juan and Eleoteria Dano, natives and residents of Bilar whose occupation was farming. His paternal grandparents, Gabriel and Juliana Palapar, were also natives and residents of Bilar, working as farmers. His maternal grandparents, Jose and Lucia Dano, were likewise natives and residents of Bilar, engaged in farming. He died a violent death, executed by gunfire, without having received the sacraments. Witnesses to the preparation of this record were Mariano Domaas, a clerk of this parish, and Angel Dolotina, the senior sacristan of this church. This is signed as a truthful account.

9. MARTIN HINGPIT

Spanish: *En treinta de Setiembre y año de mil nuevecientos fue seputiado en el Cementerio de Batuan perteneciente a' Bilar el cadáver de Martin Hingpit indio viudo de Dionisia Macabudbud india hijo de Francisco y de Leona Corip, indios naturales y vecinos de Bilar de oficio labradores. Abuelos paternos noce conocen. Abuelos maternos ydeno. Fallecio de muerte violenta desgraciadamente por habor sido fusilado sin haber recibidos los sacramentos siendo testigos de la estencion de esta partida Mariano Domaas escribiente de esta parroquia y Angel Dolotina sacristan mayor de esta yglesia. Y por verdad lo firmo.*

English: On the 30th of September in the year 1900, the body of Martin Hingpit was buried in the cemetery of Batuan, belonging to Bilar. He was a widower of Dionisia Macabudbud and the son of Francisco and Leona Corip, natives and residents of Bilar whose occupation was farming. His paternal grandparents are unknown. His maternal grandparents are also unknown. He died a violent death, having been executed by gunfire, without having received the sacraments. Witnesses to the preparation of this record were Mariano Domaas, a clerk of this parish, and Angel Dolotina, the senior sacristan of this church. This is signed as a truthful account.

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10. CARPIA TAGUBAR

Spanish: En treinta de Setiembre y ano de mil nuevesientos; fue seputiado en el Cementerio de Batuan perteneciente a' Bilar, el cadaver de Carpia Tagubar india viuda de Alejandro Caberte indio hijo de padres desconocidos. Abuelos paternos noce conocen. Abuelos maternos ydeno. Fallecio' de muerte violenta desgraciadamente por haber sido fusilado, sin haber recibidos los sacramentos, siendo testigos de la estencion de esta partida Mariano Domaas escrebiente de esta parroquia y Angel Dolotina sacristan mayor de esta yglecia ambos indios naturales y vecinos de este pueblo. Ypor verdad lo firmo.

English: On the 30th of September in the year 1900, the body of Carpia Tagubar was buried in the cemetery of Batuan, belonging to Bilar. She was a native woman, the widow of Alejandro Caberte, and the daughter of unknown parents. Her paternal grandparents are unknown. Her maternal grandparents are also unknown. She died a violent death, executed by gunfire, without having received the sacraments. Witnesses to the preparation of this record were Mariano Domaas, a clerk of this parish, and Angel Dolotina, the senior sacristan of this church, both natives and residents of this town. This is signed as a truthful account.

11. JUAN BALISA

Spanish: *En treinta de Setiembre y ano de mil nuevesientos; fue seputiado en El Cementerio de Batuan perteneciente a' Bilar, el cadaver de Juan Balisa indio.*

English: On the 30th of September in the year 1900, the body of Juan Balisa, a native man, was buried in the cemetery of Batuan, belonging to Bilar.

12. FAUSTINO GUMAPAC

Spanish: En treinta de Setiembre y ano de mil nuevesientos; fue seputiado en el Cementerio de Batuan perteneciente a' Bilar el cadaver de Faustino Gumapac indio sacristan hijo de.

English: On the 30th of September in the year 1900, the body of Faustino Gumapac, a native man and sacristan, was buried in the cemetery of Batuan, belonging to Bilar.

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13. MARIA POLINAR

Spanish: En treinta de Setiembre of uno desmil nuevesientos; fue seputiado en ol Cementerio de Batuan perteneciente a' Bilar, el cadaver de Maria Polinar indio.

English: On the 30th of September in the year 1900; the corpse of Maria Polinar, a native woman, was buried in the Batuan Cemetery belonging to Bilar.

Competing Explanations

The designation "Trece Mártires" imposes narrative clarity on what is, in the archive itself, a remarkably spare record. The parish entries do not narrate an event; they register deaths. Their language is formulaic, repetitive, and administrative. Precisely for that reason, they demand a method that resists premature coherence. The procedure adopted is eliminative: interpretations are retained or discarded based on their fit with the document's most consistent features.

Across the entries, one encounters a recurring formulation:

"falleció de muerte violenta desgraciadamente por haber sido fusilado, sin haber recibido los sacramentos"

("he died a violent death, having been executed by gunfire, without having received the sacraments")

This repetition is the document's most important feature as it appears to be a structural pattern. The historian's task, therefore, is not to move quickly beyond it, but to remain within it—to ask what such repetition permits, and what it refuses.

What follows is not a search for the correct narrative, but a controlled testing of plausible explanations against the document's internal evidence. Each hypothesis is treated not as a story to be affirmed, but as a claim to be measured against what the entries actually say—and do not say.

I. Revolutionary Martyrdom

The most widely accepted interpretation reads the thirteen as victims of colonial repression, and therefore as martyrs of the Philippine-American

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War. Chronologically, this is plausible: 30 September 1900 falls within a period of active insurgency in Bohol. The manner of death—*"fusilado"* ("executed by gunfire")—appears, at first glance, to support the idea of punitive killing rather than battlefield death.

Yet the evidentiary difficulty lies not in what is present, but in what is absent. The entries identify the dead with striking consistency as:

> *"indios naturales y vecinos de Bilar de oficio labradores"*
> ("natives and residents of Bilar, whose occupation was farming")

It is the only social identity the document provides, and it is repeated across cases. The individuals are situated within kinship and occupation, not within political or military categories. No entry identifies a victim as *insurrecto* (insurgent), *soldado* (soldier), or even *sospechoso* (suspect).

This absence matters. It does not disprove the possibility that they were insurgents. But it constrains the claim. Any assertion of revolutionary identity is, at this point, an inference external to the document. The claim may be true, but it is not demonstrated by this source. The parish register neither encodes nor signals such a status.

Equally significant is the tonal register of the entries. The language is administrative, not commemorative. There is no moral elevation, no indication that the deaths are to be remembered as exemplary. This silence is consistent with the genre of the document, but it also means that martyrdom—as a category of meaning—is not present in the source itself.

The interpretation of revolutionary martyrdom is therefore possible but not decisively evidenced. It rests on contextual plausibility rather than documentary attestation. To sustain it, one must explicitly move beyond the parish record.

II. Counterinsurgency Execution

A second hypothesis reads the entries within the logic of colonial counterinsurgency. This interpretation does not depend on the victims being confirmed insurgents; it requires only that they were treated as such—or as potential collaborators—within a regime of coercive control.

Here, the document's internal structure aligns more closely with the hypothesis. Four features are decisive.

First, uniformity of cause of death. Each detailed entry repeats:

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"por haber sido fusilado"
("for having been executed by gunfire")

The phrasing is not descriptive but categorical. It identifies a mode of killing associated with organized force. This is language, not of accidental death or dispersed violence, but of execution. The term does not identify the agent, but it does delimit the form of violence.

Second, simultaneity. All entries are dated to the same burial day:

"En treinta de Setiembre… fue sepultado…"
("On the 30th of September… was buried…")

While burial does not necessarily coincide with death, the clustering of thirteen individuals under identical phrasing strongly suggests a single episode. The inference of a single episode rests on convergence, not explicit narration. The interpretation that this reflects a coordinated event is therefore an inference, but a defensible one grounded in the document's temporal compression.

Third, the denial of sacraments.

"sin haber recibido los sacramentos"
("without having received the sacraments")

Within Catholic record-keeping, this notation marks a death that occurred without the normal pastoral sequence of confession, absolution, and last rites. The entries do not explain why the sacraments were not administered, but their repeated absence suggests conditions in which ritual preparation was either impossible or prevented.

That this indicates coercion or sudden execution seems to be an interpretive inference. It is defensible because the pattern recurs across multiple entries and deviates from ordinary expectations of pastoral care.

Fourth, the social composition of the victims. The inclusion of individuals such as:

"Carpia Tagubar india viuda…"
("Carpia Tagubar, a native woman, widow…")
and

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"Mansueto Caberte indio sacristan"
("Mansueto Caberte, a native man and sacristan")

complicates any strictly military reading. The presence of a woman and a church functionary suggests that those executed were not a uniform body of combatants.

This detail does not, by itself, identify the event as counterinsurgency. But it aligns with known patterns in which suspicion extended beyond armed actors to include civilians, kin, and local functionaries. This is again an interpretive move, justified not by direct statement but by the combination of execution, simultaneity, and civilian identification.

Taken together, these features make the counterinsurgency hypothesis the one most closely fitted to the document's internal evidence. It does not claim more than the source allows. It explains both what is present (execution, clustering, absence of sacraments) and what is absent (clear political identification).

III. Local Factional Violence

A third explanation situates the event within local social conflict—kinship rivalries, elite competition, or intra-community disputes.

There are elements in the document that invite this line of inquiry. Repeated surnames—most notably Gumapac—suggest kinship clustering. The victims are consistently identified as:

"vecinos de Bilar"
("residents of Bilar")

This concentration within a single locality could reflect targeted violence within a community rather than externally imposed force.

Yet the method of killing remains the central difficulty for this hypothesis. The repeated term *"fusilado"* indicates execution by gunfire. This form of killing implies access to firearms and, more importantly, a procedure associated with organized authority.

This does not make local involvement impossible. It indicates, however, that such involvement would have operated within a structure of violence not reducible to interpersonal conflict. Local actors could have participated in or informed the selection of victims. But the scale—thirteen individuals

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executed in a coordinated manner—and the uniformity of phrasing exceed what is typically implied by factional violence alone.

The interpretation that local tensions played a role is therefore plausible as a contributing factor, but insufficient as a primary explanation. The document points to a form of violence that is structured rather than spontaneous.

IV. Suppression of a Religious-Political Movement

A final hypothesis situates the event within the suppression of religiously inflected movements, such as those that would later be identified with *Dios-Dios* or *Pulahan* formations.

Two elements in the entries make this reading conceivable. The identification of a victim as:

"indio sacristan"
("native sacristan")
and the repeated notation:
"sin haber recibido los sacramentos"
("without having received the sacraments")

could be read as indicating tension not only between state and insurgents, but within the religious field itself.

However, the document does not describe belief, doctrine, or affiliation. There is no mention of sectarian identity, charismatic leadership, or heterodox practice. The entries remain entirely within the vocabulary of parish administration.

To interpret the deaths as suppression of a religious movement therefore requires a significant extension beyond the text. It is an interpretive hypothesis grounded in regional analogy, not in direct documentary evidence.

Appraisal

When the hypotheses are placed side by side, a pattern emerges. The parish register is not silent in a general sense; it is selective. It speaks clearly about mode of death, temporal clustering, and sacramental absence. It is silent about motive, perpetrator, and political identity.

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The task of interpretation is to align claims with this distribution of evidence. Explanations are therefore evaluated by proximity to the text, not by narrative completeness. The martyrdom hypothesis exceeds the document by assigning political meaning not present in the entries. The factional and religious hypotheses introduce plausible contexts, but lack direct textual grounding. The counterinsurgency hypothesis remains closest to the document because it relies primarily on what is repeatedly attested: execution, simultaneity, and conditions inconsistent with ordinary death. This makes it the most proportionate reading available.

The entries record a coordinated episode of violent death, in which multiple individuals were executed by gunfire and buried without sacramental preparation.

The interpretation that this reflects a form of counterinsurgency execution is not explicitly stated in the text. It is an inference. It is defensible because it accounts for the convergence of the document's key features without requiring additional assumptions not supported by the source.

Beyond this, the archive does not allow certainty. It does not identify who ordered the executions, why the individuals were targeted, or how they understood their own deaths.

The designation "martyrs" therefore belongs not to the document, but to the history of its reception. It is a meaning imposed after the fact—coherent, powerful, and socially significant—but only partially anchored in the surviving record.

Implications: Memory, Martyrdom, and Method

A proper historical perspective demands revisiting the very interpretive horizons through which death is rendered meaningful as martyrdom, execution, or counterinsurgency violence.[27] One can perhaps begin by noting that the designation of "martyrs" reflects a process of retrospective interpretation. It belongs to the history of the narrative, not to the event as documented. It organizes memory by assigning moral meaning to violent death. However, when such designations are not grounded in documentary evidence, they risk obscuring the limits of what can be known.

[27] Mark Steven A. Pandan, "The Memory-Method-Perspective Model: Three Dimensions to Thinking Historically," *Journal of Contemporary Philosophical and Anthropological Studies (JCPAS)* 2, no. 4 (2024): 38–52.

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The dynamics in the Balangiga attack in Samar further clarify how designations such as "martyrdom" emerge. The attack was rooted in specific local grievances, yet was subsequently reframed by revolutionary leaders such as Vicente Lukban as an exemplary act of nationalist resistance.[28] This sequence of local violence followed by retrospective moral and political elevation illustrates how meaning is constructed beyond the immediate evidentiary base of the event. The *Trece Mártires* case presents a more constrained variant of this process: while a similar moral designation persists in local memory, the surviving archive does not provide the narrative density found in Balangiga.

Historical responsibility requires that method precede memory. While the designation of "martyrs" is not empirically supported by the parish record, it remains normatively plausible within local memory as a retrospective moral interpretation of violent death. Under that view, "martyrdom" should be treated as a narrative construction that organizes memory by assigning moral significance to death. The designation 'martyrs' therefore belongs to the history of its reception, even if not to the document itself.

This does not entail that the event should be excluded from commemoration. On the contrary, the convergence of violent death, simultaneity, and the absence of sacramental preparation establishes the episode as historically significant, even if its meaning remains indeterminate. Commemoration is therefore justified under specific conditions: (1) that the designation "martyrs" be explicitly framed as a retrospective and normative attribution rather than an evidentiary claim; (2) that the limits of the parish record be made visible in any public representation; and (3) that alternative interpretations, including counterinsurgency execution, remain open rather than foreclosed. Under these conditions, remembrance does not distort the archive but remains proportionate to it.

At the same time, the present account is necessarily provisional. The conclusions advanced here are constrained by the use of a single primary source. Future work may alter or refine these findings should additional materials (e.g., military reports, civil records, baptismal records, oral histories, or ecclesiastical correspondence) be located and systematically examined.

[28] George Emmanuel R. Borrinaga, "José Rizal in the Emotional Landscape of Samar and Leyte at the Turn of the 20th Century," *The Journal of History* 66 (2020): 234–238.

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Conclusion

The Philippine-American War was asymmetric not only in material terms but in the forms of agency and meaning that shaped participation in it. As George Emmanuel R. Borrinaga has shown in his study of the Pulahan Movement, practices often dismissed as irrational—such as belief in the *anting-anting*—could enable fighters to undertake "bolo-swinging" charges despite overwhelming firepower.[29] What appears, from a distance, as implausible or marginal may in fact constitute the internal logic of action under conditions of asymmetry. Categories such as "combatant," "civilian," or even "martyr" are therefore not always transparently encoded in the historical record, but must be approached as interpretive constructs whose applicability varies with the evidentiary base.

This paper has returned to the parish record as the primary basis for interpreting the Trece Mártires de Batuan. In doing so, it has clarified the limits of the evidence and challenged the automatic identification of the victims as martyrs. The contribution is not to replace one narrative with another, but to re-establish the proportionality between claim and source. The document supports a coordinated execution; it does not substantiate broader claims of martyrdom. Where evidence is limited, interpretation must remain open. History is not strengthened by certainty unsupported by sources, but by clarity about what can and cannot be known.

This distinction has implications beyond historiography. Where the designation "martyr" is used in public memory, commemorative practice, or local heritage representation, it should be understood as a retrospective moral interpretation rather than a claim grounded in documentary evidence. Clarifying this distinction allows historical memory to be preserved while aligning public narratives more closely with the limits of the archive.

Commemoration must therefore proceed with explicit recognition of evidentiary limits, preserving the distinction between documented fact and retrospective meaning. The conclusions presented here remain open to revision as further sources become available. The parish record establishes a minimal but firm evidentiary core: a coordinated episode of execution by gunfire, affecting multiple individuals, under conditions that foreclosed sacramental preparation. What it withholds (motive, identity, justification) cannot be recovered by repetition, only by inference, and inference must remain marked as such.

[29] George Emmanuel R. Borrinaga, "The Pulahan Movement in Leyte (1902–1907)," *The Journal of History* 54 (January–December 2008): 232.

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For that reason, the appropriate response to evidentiary limitation is more a continuation than a closure. The persistence of the designation "Trece Mártires" demonstrates that the event has never existed as a purely archival problem. It lives in memory, in naming, and in the need to render violent death intelligible. That process cannot be settled by a single document, nor by a single interpretation.

This is precisely where commemoration becomes necessary. Commemoration is a structured space in which meanings remain open, contestable, and accountable to evidence. Commemoration, under these conditions, does not resolve the past—it sustains the conversation that the archive alone cannot complete.

The imperative then, is to hold both evidence and memory in productive tension. To commemorate is to acknowledge the deaths; to analyze is to delimit what can be claimed about them. Neither cancels the other. Instead, each defines the limits of the other. Jes Tirol recounts the story in the following manner:

> After their victory at Kabantian Pass on September 15, 1900, the Boholano patriots withdrew to the mountains. These mountains are located in the interior part of Bohol. The angry Americans searched for the Boholano patriots.
>
> On Sunday, September 30, 1900, an American patrol was at Batuan, Bohol. It was yet a barrio of the interior town of Bilar. Bohol but it already had a separate church.
>
> It was early in the morning and the people were preparing for Church Mass when the Americans arrived. Due to fear, the people huddled in groups inside the church.
>
> The Americans took representatives from the huddled groups and subjected them to torture to extract information. However, the Americans could not obtain any information on the whereabouts of the patriots. It could be that the people were loyal to the patriots or they really did not know anything. Actually, the headquarters of the Boholano Army at Cambaliga was only a few barrios away. In any case, the selected persons were brought to the front of the church for execution.[30]

What remains is an ongoing inquiry instead of a closed narrative: thirteen individuals, executed, recorded, and continuously reinterpreted. The archive fixes the fact of their deaths. Commemoration ensures that the question of their meaning remains open—and that it continues to be asked under conditions that respect both evidence and its limits. ✷

[30] Tirol, *Bohol from Spanish Yoke to American Harness*, 110.

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