

A notice of the Alphabets of the PHILIPPINE ISLANDS. Translated from the "INFORME SOBRE EL ESTADO DE LAS ISLAS FILIPINAS," of DON SINIBALDO DE MAS, Madrid January 1843. Vol. I. p. 25. By HENRY PIDDINGTON, Sub-Secretary Asiatic Society, &c. &c. With a plate.

The Indians were not strangers to the art of reading and writing. I give (fig. 1. of the annexed plate) some Alphabets of different provinces which I have procured. It will be seen, at once, that they have all a common origin, or rather that they are one and the same. The little communication amongst these people for many years or ages, introduced alterations in their caligraphy as in their language, which was also probably at first but one stock.

Father Juan Francisco de San Antonio says, that they write like the Chinese, in perpendicular lines, and this error was copied by Father Martinez Zuniga, M. Le Gentil and others, who have written on the Philippines. Nevertheless, by documents which I have had in my possession, particularly from the archives of the convent of St. Augustin, in Manilla, I have ascertained that it is read from left to right, like our own. In fig. 2, is represented a fragment of a transfer of landed property, written in Bulacan in 1652, on Chinese writing paper :

And in fig. 3, two signatures with their equivalent renderings of the names, in our characters. To this same family of written characters would appear to belong (fig. 4) an inscription cut on a plank, which was found in 1837, by a detachment of Troops, in the mountains inhabited by the savage tribes called Igorrotes.

But withal, no books nor any kind of literature in this character are to be met with, except a few amatory verses written in a highly hyperbolical style, and hardly intelligible. It would appear, that their letters partook of this oriental redundancy.



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