

“Doctrina Christiana”: More than Four-hundred Years of Filipino-American History

October 28, 2019 by [Taru Spiegel](#)

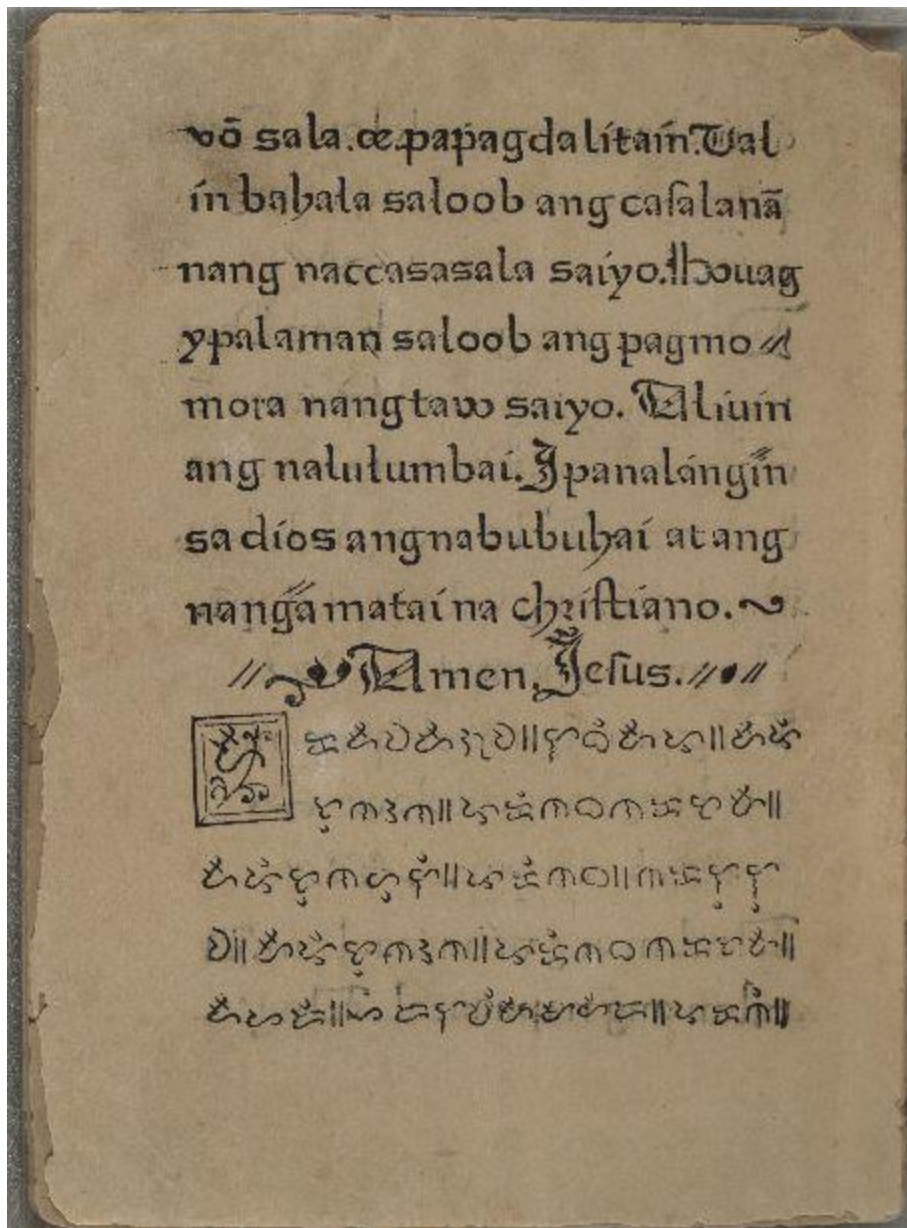
(The following is a post by Joshua Kueh, Southeast Asian reference librarian, Asian Division)

October is Filipino-American History Month. In looking back at the long history of Filipinos in the United States—which stretches all the way to the 16th century, a time before the birth of the current nation states of the Philippines and the U.S.—it seems fitting to draw attention to a rare book in the Library of Congress that speaks to this centuries-old, trans-Pacific connection.

The “[Doctrina Christiana](#),” dated to 1593, is one of the first books produced in the European tradition in the Philippines, and the only known extant copy in the world can be found in the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection in the Rare Book and Special Collections Division of the Library of Congress. This [unique title](#) has been digitized and is available to all for viewing online.



Title page for “[Doctrina Christiana, en lengua española y tagala ...](#)” (Christian Doctrine in Spanish and Tagalog). Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Rare Book/Special Collections Reading Room, Library of Congress.



In the “Doctrina,” we see one of the earliest examples of printed Tagalog in Romanized and Baybayin script (image 48). Baybayin was a writing system based on an Indic script, which was developed prior to contact with the Spanish, and speaks to the connection of societies in the Philippines to larger Southeast Asian trends—in this case, the adaptation of Indic writing for local languages. [“Doctrina Christiana, en lengua española y tagala ...”](#).

Printed by a Chinese printer in Manila under the auspices of Dominican clergy, both in the Spanish and Tagalog languages, the “Doctrina” embodies the meeting of cultures, worldviews, technologies, and languages. This catechism, printed in both Romanized and local Baybayin scripts, was shaped not only by missionaries—some of whom had experience interacting with indigenous populations in Mexico prior to arrival in Manila and also extensive dealings with Chinese—but also by local interpreters, teachers and craftsmen. In this sense, the “Doctrina” was both local and global. The work reminds us of the deep ties

that bind the Philippines and the Americas. To celebrate this history, the Embassy of the Philippines and Principalia Sa Bulalacao held a viewing of the “Doctrina” on October 28 at the Library of Congress.



Reproduction of the title page of the “Doctrina” as a postage stamp in 1949. The stamps and the first day of issue pictured here were part of a display on the “Doctrina” in celebration of Filipino-American History Month. Philippines Bureau of Posts, [“Postage stamp of 6 + 4 centavos.”](#) Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Rare Book & Special Collections Division.

Beyond the “Doctrina,” there are multiple holdings in the Library’s Asian Division that would be of interest to those keen on exploring Filipino-American history, like the [Royal F. Morales collection](#), part of the [Asian American and Pacific Islander \(AAPI\) collection](#). For those interested in Filipiniana, or materials related to the Philippines, the Southeast Asian rare book collection also holds examples of Filipino religious verses such as [“Casaysayan nang pasiong mahal ni Jesucristong Panginoon natin”](#) and a nineteenth-century [Spanish-Bisayan dictionary](#). Readers can learn more about Christian publications from the Philippines held at the Library of Congress by exploring an earlier blog post, [“Catholicism in the Philippines during the Spanish Colonial Period 1521-1898.”](#)

Materials in the Southeast Asian rare book collection or the AAPI collection are accessible to researchers in the Asian Reading Room by prior appointment. To make an appointment or to ask a question about the Southeast Asian or AAPI collections, please contact reference staff through the [Asian Division’s Ask-a-Librarian](#) online inquiry form.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/international-collections/2019/10/doctrina-christiana-more-than-four-hundred-years-of-filipino-american-history/>