

## Securing the City: Demolition, Exodus and Re-Planning Late 18<sup>th</sup> Century Manila

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Interestingly, the eighteenth century was a period that marked a significant urban change for the city and its immediate suburbs. The British Occupation of Manila from 1762 to 1764 spurred Spanish military engineers to secure Manila, the capital city of the Spanish colony of Filipinas, from future invasions. British forces invaded Manila in 1762 as an offshoot of the Seven Years War. The Spanish colony, which was militarily unprepared and at that time still reeling from the effects of a widespread smallpox epidemic, easily succumbed to the might of British offensive attacks. Manila was then a fortified city with bastions, bulwarks, ramparts and a moat. It was surrounded on the east and south by a fringe of suburban villages – Bagumbayan, Dilao, and San Miguel -- and the Chinese merchant ghetto known as the Parian. To the west was the bay of Manila and to the north was the river Pasig.

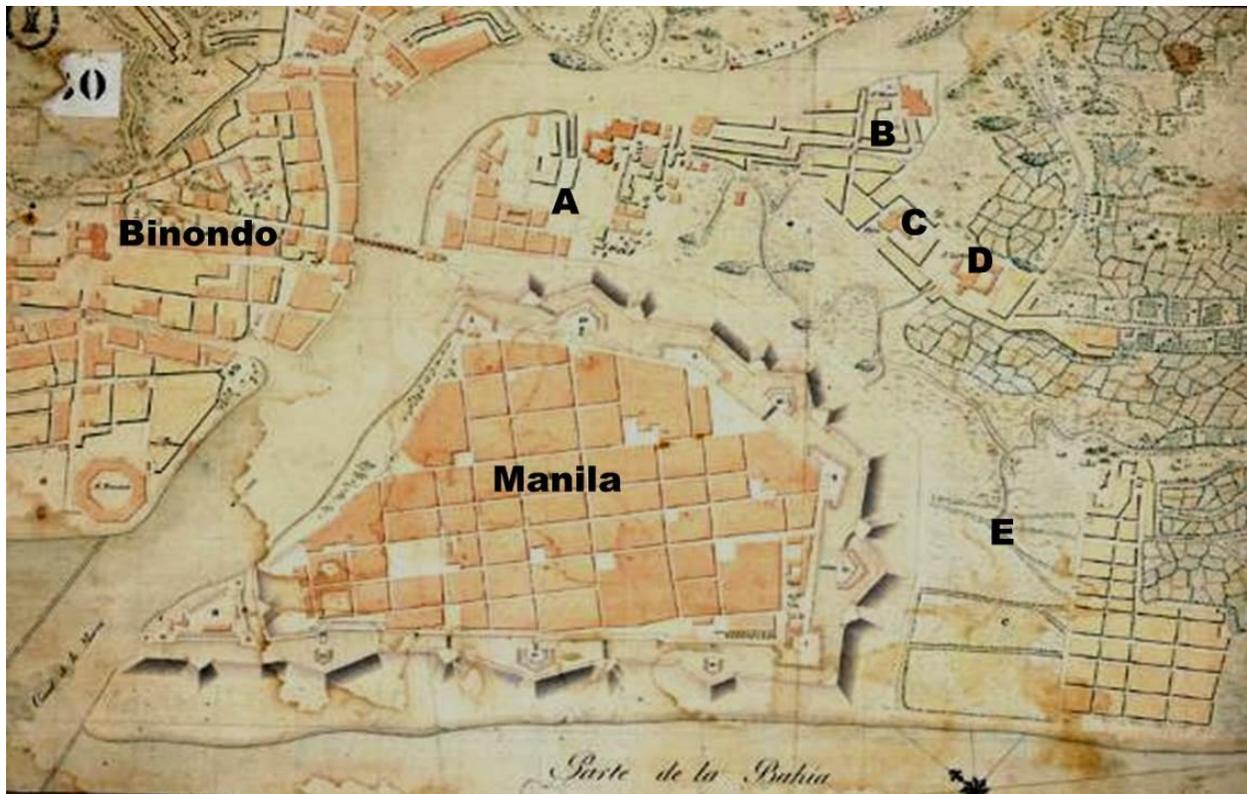
After the British left the colony at the end of the war, Spanish colonial authorities studied for a more secure plan ensure the protection of the city. The ease by which the British occupied Manila by making use of the nearby villages of Dilao and Bagumbayan as strongholds, necessitated a military strategy that focused on the clearing of the immediate suburbia – Bagumbayan, Dilao, San Miguel, and the Parian. Decrees were issued to clear the area of any structure that could serve as potential enemy strongholds in case of future invasions.

In effect, a massive demolition project ensued, deleting from the suburban landscape Bagumbayan, Dilao, and the Parian. The village of San Miguel, which was just adjacent to Dilao and was destroyed by a fire, was never reconstructed or rebuilt. It was transferred at the opposite shore of the Pasig River and annexed to the town of Quiapo. The town of Dilao transferred further south beside an estuary of the Pasig River and merged with the villages of Santiago and Peña de Francia. It later adopted the name of Paco. The Hospital de San Lazaro, then located at the village of Dilao, relocated to the old Jesuit estate of Meyhaligue in the northern town of Santa Cruz. This military strategy dissolved the village of Bagumbayan with its church and convent. The Parian was demolished and its Chinese residents moved to the Provincia de Tondo's different pueblos. By this time, the Chinese were no longer considered a threat to colonial security and were allowed to mingle with the rest of the native population. The dissolution of the Parian resulted in a massive exodus of non-Christian Chinese to the different towns of the old *Provincia de Tondo*. As a further security, a 1500 *varas*<sup>1</sup> radius was established from the city, within which no building made up of easily combustible materials could be constructed.

With the clearing of the immediate suburbs south of the Pasig River, the colonial government converted the areas once occupied by the Parian, San Miguel, Dilao and Bagumbayan, into a belt of green. *Jardin Botanico* found a home in the area once occupied by the Parian. The tree-lined main avenue known as *La Calzada* (The Street) stretched across the city moat like a green fringe, and the cleared area of Bagumbayan near the shore transformed to become a venue for afternoon promenades. This radial green outside the walls and moat became Spanish colonial Manila's security buffer.

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<sup>1</sup> The radius of 1500 *varas* is equivalent to approximately 1.254 kilometers.



18<sup>th</sup> Century Map of Manila showing Manila in relation to the villages of Binondo, and those in its immediate suburbia – the Parian (A), San Miguel (B), Dilao (C), Hospital de San Lazaro (D) and Bagumbayan (E). Map courtesy of the *Biblioteca Nacional de España*.