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Notes and Comments

The Jesuit House of 1730

RENE JAVELLANA, S.J.

Between Calle Zulueta and the narrow side street of Binakayan stands a house which may be the oldest dated residence in Cebu, possibly in the whole Philippines (Plate 1). Unless one is an intrepid explorer bent on finding this rare remnant of a historic past, he will miss it altogether. For today a high concrete fence hides the limestone walls of this house from the curious passerby. Like many residences of the past, this house built in 1730,¹ has undergone a series of transformations under different owners. Today, it is the warehouse of Ho Tong Hardware, owned by the Sy family, the largest hardware chain in Cebu. Concepcion G. Briones, the historian of Cebu's Parian, tells us that after 1951 the residence was "the 'Club X', a somewhat exclusive club where high government officials and the bon vivant friends of the Governor (Sergio Osmeña, Jr.) spent the cocktail hour, had dinner and listened to relaxing music." Osmeña leased the house from the Alvarez family who were then its owner. How many years the Alvarez owned this house is not certain. Don Jose Alvarez, the patriarch of the clan, a wealthy landowner and rancher from Bohol and a respected businessman in Cebu, lived in this house with his big family. Briones claims that the family acquired the house during the late nineteenth century and that "they did not make any renovations, so it

1. Fr. Repetti writes that the medallion is made of wood and embedded in the fabric of the house. The upper stroke of the number "3" appears to be missing and may be a "5," though most likely we have an example here of an 18th century form of writing the number "3," (Archives of the Philippine Province [APP], "Miscellaneous jottings of Fr. Repetti," III - 3 - 1614 - 1768).

We were unable to check these observations when we visited the House of 1730 in October 1984. Wawel Mercado photographed the house for this essay; Richard Chu assisted in gathering data and measuring the place. Weng Kasilag drew the floor plans.

seemed.”² Happily, the house is in good repair, somewhat dilapidated but looking very much like the pictures in Fr. William Repetti's *Pictorial Records and Traces of the Society of Jesus in the Philippines and Guam Prior to 1768*.³ Fr. Repetti was a Jesuit seismologist who worked in the Manila Observatory but spent his free time gathering data about the history of the Society of Jesus in the Philippines. He was not a professional historian but he worked at his hobby with the same care with which he pursued his scientific career. One could say that for Repetti history was a second career. The late Fr. Horacio de la Costa in his history of the *Jesuits in the Philippines (1581-1768)* acknowledges his indebtedness to this predecessor.⁴

Repetti's book is no history, the scientist may protest, but a simple attempt to gather together a pictorial record of the churches and buildings erected under Jesuit sponsorship during the period of the “old Society,” that is, the Society prior to its suppression (1768 in the Philippines). The pictures are classified by island, then arranged in alphabetical order. Cebu follows Bohol. And in the Cebu section we find photographs of this house. Repetti has a view of the residence from the Calle Zulueta side, a view from the Mabini side, a sketch of the house with a tower, drawn from an old painting, a detail of the newel post from the house's staircase, the main gate at Binakayan with its monograms of Jesus, Maria and Jose, and the “sixteen-inch medallion in bas relief on one of the stone walls of the building's interior which bears these words: ‘Año 1730’ ” (Plate 2).⁵ It is on the wall that opens into a bridge that connects the houses comprising the residence.

Repetti has identified this house as the “Jesuit house of 1730.” Briones calls it “the Jesuit monastery or convento”; Mojares, “the Jesuit Residence in the Parian.” Its close proximity, to the Parian church built in the late 1700s and demolished by the Augustinians in 1878-79 could lead us to speculate that the residence was the

2. Concepcion G. Briones, *Life in Old Parian* (Cebu: University of San Carlos, 1983), p. 29.

3. William C. Repetti, *Pictorial Records and Traces of the Society of Jesus in the Philippines and Guam Prior to 1768* (Manila: n.p. 1938) pp. 22-26.

4. Horacio de la Costa, *Jesuits in the Philippines, 1595-1768* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961) p. vii.

5. Briones, *Life in Old Parian*, p. 29.



Plate 2: Medallion bearing date "Año 1730 (reproduced in Repetti's *Pictorial Records and Traces*.)

convento of the Parian church.⁶ But we would be wrong. It is true that the Jesuits began their ministries with the Chinese when Fr. Pedro Chirino was assigned to work in Cebu, but by 1600 the Jesuits ceded the parish to Bishop Agurto of Cebu. Agurto accepted on condition that the Jesuits take over the ministries of two settlements in Negros. The sixteenth century church built by the Cebu Chinese Christians and mentioned in Chirino's *Relacion da las Islas Filipinas* has not survived.⁷ In all probability the church was made of wood.

It seems that from the time of change of administration the Parian was ministered to by the secular clergy. We read that during

6. Resil B. Mojares, *Casa Gorordo in Cebu: Urban Residence in a Philippine Province* (Cebu City: Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc., 1983) p. 26.

7. Repetti (pp. 28-29) identifies the Parian church, built during the 18th century, as one built by the Society. However, a rare copy of Repetti, now in the possession of the SVD Fathers, contains marginal notations, probably from Repetti's own hand, correcting this misconception. Chirino tells us that the Chinese community at Cebu had built their own church to which the Jesuits were assigned. (Pedro Chirino, *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas*, trans. Ramon Echevarria (Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1969) pp. 109 and 350. See also De la Costa, *Jesuits* pp. 166-67.

the curacy of the Chinese-mestizo Don Pedro de Rafael y Velazquez (1791-1829) the sumptuous church of Parian was built. This was subsequently demolished by the Augustinians in a jurisdictional war. By the eighteenth century at the latest, the Parian church had its own convento. Today the convento's lower floor forms the walls of the fire department in the Parian and a small chapel marks the spot of the old Parian church.⁸

Mojares has identified the house correctly as "The Jesuit Residence." To understand the import of this label we have to take a quick look at Jesuit organization. The Society of Jesus is a monarchical organization, highly centralized, under a Superior General. For ease in government, the Jesuits worldwide are divided into provinces. Provinces in turn are divided into houses and colleges. In the Jesuit Constitutions, St. Ignatius uses the term houses (*domus* or *casa*) and colleges (*collegia* or *colegios*) in a technical way. Houses are "dwellings intended chiefly for formed Jesuits who have completed their studies and are engaged in apostolic work while living exclusively on alms." Colleges are "dwellings which could possess fixed or regularly recurring revenues and were intended chiefly for students (*scholares*, *scholastici*) or professors."⁹ Colleges, were not what we might suppose, that is, schools, rather they were boarding houses where students studying in a university could live under the supervision of Jesuit mentors. During the early years of the Society, colleges were set up for the benefit of scholastics, that is, seminarians studying to be priests and wishing to be admitted into the Society of Jesus. But later on and in different places and cultures, especially in mission areas where there were no universities like Europe's to speak of, Jesuits began admitting "externs," that is non-Jesuits, to their colleges. Courses or lectures were also given by the professor in the colleges so that, in effect, colleges were boarding schools for Jesuits and for the laity. That, in fact, was what they were in the Philippines.

8. For the story of the jurisdictional conflicts surrounding the Parian church, see Mojares, *Casa Gorordo*, pp. 25-27. Repetti (pp. 27-28) has pictures of the ruins of the Parian church and convento as these looked before the war. He also reproduces a print of the church.

9. Ignatius Loyola, *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, translated with an introduction and commentary by George E. Ganss (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970).

The conditions of a mission and a Christian frontier, produced their own peculiar nomenclature. The houses in the Philippine missions were so sparsely populated that Jesuits did not wish to bestow on their dwellings the honorific title "casa" Alcina reports that these were known as *residencia*. He defines *residencia* as a dwelling with no fixed income which includes only a few members under a superior called a rector. It was not a "casa," for the casa was more "appropriate for the professed members," and its head was known as *preposito*. The *residencia* did not have its own program of studies like the colegio. There was among the *residencias* of a given locality a chief one, usually found in a stable and populous town. This chief among the *residencias* was known as the *cabecera*. The *cabecera* served as the meeting place of the missionaries in an area. Here they repaired, "about four, five or six" of them "three or four times a year in order to concern themselves with spiritual matters." In the late 1660s the residence of the *cabecera* tended to be "more spacious and more solidly constructed" than the rest. Its church was also "better furnished." But it was not only for spiritual matters that the missionaries returned to the *cabecera*; there was the salutary effect of community life, an important ingredient in their calling as religious.¹⁰

Alcina also tells us that "whenever anyone becomes ill in the midst of his apostolic endeavors, he is brought to the main residence for attention and recuperation." For ease in running the mission stations, the superior of the *cabecera* took on the task of provider for the mission stations. His *residencia* became the stock-room and warehouse for such articles as wheat flour, wine, rice, cloth, sacred vessels, missals, books and whatever articles the missionaries might need.¹¹

The Jesuit Residence of 1730 is not to be confused with the College of San Ildefonso (Plate 1). This was a separate institution, located in what is today M.J. Cuenco Ave. beside Plaza de la Independencia. The very first Jesuit residence of Cebu which Sedeño bought in 1595 with the ₱500 contributed by encomenderos in Cebu may have been at the very site of San Ildefonso as Mojares surmises. But this house "near the beach in a pleasant section of town" was already in disrepair by 1604, even earlier if we follow

10. Ignacio Alcina, "Historia de las islas e indios de Bisayas Bk. II", Pablo Fernandez and Cantius J. Koback, trans., in *Philippiniana Sacra* 15 (1980): 269.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 270.

the *Catalogus rerum* of 1600 which tells us that although the Jesuits had a house in Cebu it was in great need of repairs.¹² From this original first house the College of San Ildefonso grew.

Some time after 1605, when the Philippine vice-province was raised to the status of a province, Jesuits felt that for ease in government it was better to consolidate the work of all the residences and mission stations of the Visayas by appointing an overseer, a roving supervisor of missions, who was to act as a liaison among the mission stations and with the provincial superior and civil government. In the *Catalogus brevis personarum* of 1632 this overseer was called the superior of the Visayan residences. He lived in Cebu and belonged to the community of the College of San Ildefonso. With the year 1654 the office of the vice-provincial of the Pintados begins to appear in the catalogues.¹³ The vice-provincial's name falls under no house. Presumably he had a residence all his own, of which the 1730 residence would be an eighteenth century example.

Repetti tells us that the 1730 house was not the only Jesuit residence built in the Binakayan area. He speaks of the ruins of an old house adjacent to the 1730 residence which he says had been identified by tradition as the site of an early house of the Society. In his work cited earlier, Repetti shows us a row of low walls (the first floor of the residence) and bas reliefs of St. Catalina and Nicolas Tolentino found on the second floor of a house built upon the ruins of what was apparently an earlier house.¹⁴ Although we have not had occasion to check this datum we surmise that the first floor of the earlier residence that Repetti refers to is the row of limestone blocks running parallel to the perimeter wall of the 1730 residence.

THE PHYSICAL PLANT OF THE RESIDENCE

What does the 1730 residence look like? We are not speaking of only one building, for within the Ho Tong compound we find two buildings, one nearer Binakayan the other nearer Zulueta, both joined together by a bridge. Let us call the first "House A" and the latter "House B" (Plate 3).

12. Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI) Phil. "Catalogus Rerum, 1600".

13. See ARSI Phil. "Catalogus brevis personarum, 1632 and 1654".

14. Repetti, *Pictorial Records*, pp. 13-14.

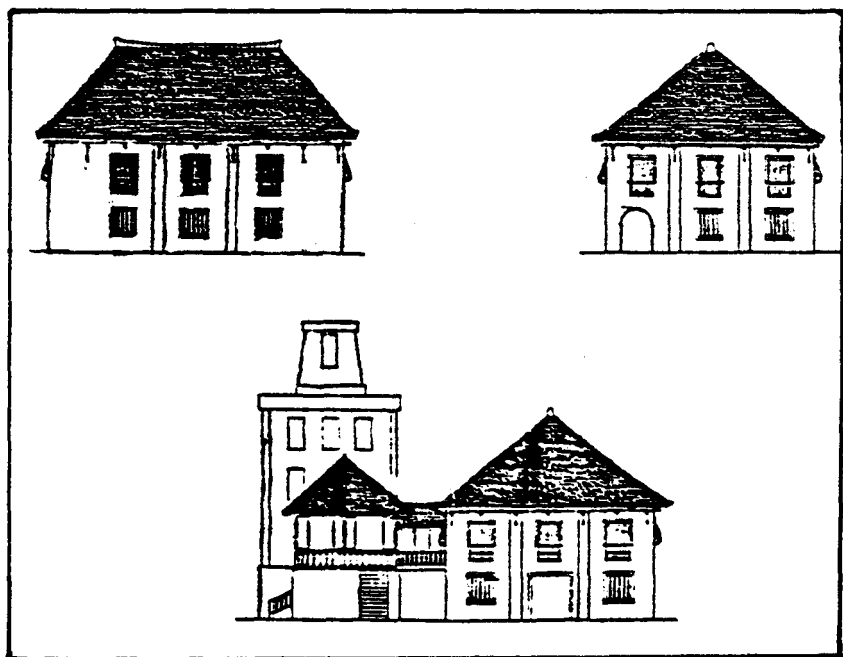


Plate 3: Reconstructed house. Top, left: Elevation, House A; top right: House A front view; bottom: House A and B rear view

Although at present entrance to the Ho Tong compound is through a breach in the perimeter wall at the Zulueta side, the original main entrance was at Binakayan. Today a steel gate covers the *tugas* (molave) and iron door of the entrance, but the medallions of Our Lady, the Society's IHS, and St. Joseph are clearly discernable at the portal. Two steps lead from the level of the street to the level of the compound. The perimeter wall encloses a quadrilateral area of unequal sides, approximately 43 x 39.5 meters.¹⁵

House A, a two-story building (19.24 x 13.41 meters), has an exterior of limestone, and a tile roof whose lines suggest those of a pagoda. The limestone blocks are neatly carved and although they have been whitewashed and in parts cemented over there are

15. Due to physical difficulties encountered at the site, all measurements given are approximations. Briones (p. 29) describes the Jesuit residence as cruciform, the same outlines that appear in the map of Rivera-Mir. Our own examination of the site shows an H-shaped house. Could other wings have been demolished in the course of time, thus altering the shape of the residence?

areas of wall where the original dull white of the blocks shows. We can describe the house, in the language of the day as "de silleria," that is, of regularly cut stones. From the outside we see the rectangular windows of the lower and the upper story. The upper story windows protected by grille work of the type known as *buntis* are of larger dimensions than the lower story's which have wooden bars, and wooden shutters.

The lower floor has two entrances. The main entrance, a Roman arch, perpendicular to Binakayan street, is surmounted by the medallion of the Society. From the main entrance we are led to the staircase, sealed by its present owners. But a detour to the right leads to a small door, a few steps down and an enclosed room. The room itself has a narrow door which leads to a bigger chamber that opens to the rear entrance, of lintel and post construction.

If the stairwell had not been blocked, the staircase would lead us straight to the second floor and what appears to be an anteroom. What catches our fancy are the elegantly carved corbels that jut out of the wall and do not support the roof beams. That some corbels support nothing leads us to suspect that the current ceiling was a foot or so lower than it is today. From the anteroom we enter the main hall. The dimensions of this hall are difficult to determine since the walls dividing the second floor are of new construction. Perhaps if the newer walls were removed we might find clues of earlier construction. From the main hall we can enter the rooms to the left and right. Again we cannot be certain if these rooms conform to the original floor plans. Everywhere in this house we are struck by the wrought corbels, and the massive tree trunks that serve as posts.

The floor might easily escape our notice but a careful look shows it to be made of wide planks of alternating shades of light and dark (*tugas* and *narra* perhaps.) The floors bear a sure sign of antiquity. For most of the boards are not nailed but doweled to their frame, and where nails are used they are of the "cuatro cantos" type, four-cornered nails rather than the more modern rounded wire nails.

Repetti in his unpublished notes in the Philippine Province Archives describes House B (15 x 6.9 meters) as an *azotea*. Today this building is a house in itself with walls and ceiling. It hardly fits the description of an *azotea* for these were often sundecks covered

by a trellis in some instances. Were the walls, roof and ceiling a later addition? The decorative corbels that support the roof are similar in motif to the corbels found inside House A, and hence could point to the same historical period. But the method of construction of House B differs from House A in that the walls of the second story of House B are of wood while those of House A are of cut limestone. Could House B have been a roofed azotea with the wooden walls added later? This could explain the similar motifs found in the corbels of both House A and B. Both houses are connected by a covered wooden bridge (2.8 x 2.6 meters).

At one end of House B is the base of a tower. Repetti has a sketch of this tower copied from a tattered painting of the residence. Of this tower, Repetti remarks that it is of later construction and does not belong to the era of the Old Society.¹⁶

The residence had an elaborately carved newel post in its stairwell, but when the Alvarez family sold the house to the Sys, they asked for the post and its whereabouts have not been traced. Repetti speaks of an altar in the house but this too is gone.¹⁷

HOUSE FURNISHINGS

In the addendum to his book *Pictorial Records* Repetti mentions a bed dated 1710 and carved with the Jesuit colophon IHS and the monogram of Mary in the possession of the Villa family in Cebu. This bed was said to have come from the old Jesuit house facing the house of 1730.¹⁸ Since none of the furnishings of the house remain, we are left to speculate.

It was a religious house. Hence it was probably spartanly appointed. Aside from a bed the sleeping quarters would probably have a desk, chair, some shelves for books, shelves for pillows and linens, a cabinet for clothes. This cabinet would be practically empty since the Fathers were by law allowed no more than two changes of the religious habit. Tables would have a crucifix or an image of Our Lady, probably in wood or ivory, a rosary, some books, notably the Breviary, the Bible, and possibly St. Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*.

16. APP, "Miscellaneous jottings of Fr. Repetti."

17. Ibid.

18. Repetti, *Pictorial Records*, p. 114.

The house would have a library where other books were found. We can have a fair idea of the titles available by looking at the 1768 inventory of another Jesuit house, the convento at Indang, Cavite for which we have a partial list.¹⁹ The large hall of the house would be furnished with some chairs for guests. The walls were probably decorated with holy pictures, and maps.²⁰ A chapel for the house would be provided for the daily celebration of Mass. It would have a small altar and a cabinet for other Mass appurtenances.

The kitchen and refectory of the house would not differ much from other Philippine homes, except that the refectory would have set places for the community members and a special place for the Superior or Vice-provincial. Since it was the custom to have a pious book read while all were at table, a lectern for this purpose may have been provided.

The azotea would have been a convenient area for praying alone or for community gatherings and recreation. The Visayan mission stations were known for their gardens, so the house may have had a garden of its own. Part of this may have been planted to medicinal herbs which were part of the missionaries' regular array of "tools."²¹

The lower floor of House A could have been a storage area. This would explain why one room is dark, and enclosed so that it could be securely bolted. If this were so, mission provisions were kept here: rice, wine, missals, books, chalices, and maybe, arms for the mission stations plagued by raiders from the South.

Except for the medallions, nothing in the House of 1730 marks it out as a religious residence. Its floor plan and many building techniques hew closely to those of the rural conventos which in turn are nothing more than oversized *bahay na bato*, better constructed perhaps, but *bahay na bato* nonetheless. Except for

19. See Archdiocesan Archives of Manila, "Inventario, Indang, 1768".

20. The Brother Manuel Rodriguez (1657-1734) painted the Church of San Ignacio in Manila. He also decorated the Fathers' residence with pictures and maps. He was active in the Visayan missions till 1713 when he was sent to Rome and Mexico as the companion of the Father Procurator. He returned to the Philippines and in 1719 he was assigned to all manner of work. Could he have decorated the Residence of 1730 as he had the residence of the College of San Ignacio?

21. The Jesuit Paul Klein who lived around this time wrote a book of remedies for simple ailments. The College of Manila maintained an herbarium. Letters from the Visayan mission frequently mention the use of medicinal herbs. It would not be far-fetched then to presume that this central house would raise some medicinal herbs.

the colleges and the more populous communities, there seems to have been no conscious effort at creating a residence specifically "religious." This certainly was the attitude of Antonio Sedeño who founded the Cebu mission. He willingly accepted a house offered to him by the city corporation. After a few renovations to meet the demands of common life, Sedeño moved his Jesuits in. In this way, the Philippine Jesuits followed the example of St. Ignatius who during the early years of the Society willingly accepted from benefactors whatever house they had to offer. St. Ignatius insisted that the Jesuits' manner ought to be ordinary and that their lifestyle should be no different from the secular priest of modest means.

The House of 1730 attests to this by its very simplicity. The House of 1730 needs to be rescued from the obscurity to which it is now condemned.²² In spite of gaps in our chronology, this house has an adequately documented history; hence, it becomes a benchmark for a still unwritten architectural history of the Philippines.

House A, in particular, can be described as "transitional." Unlike European residences where walls are load-bearing and where pillars embedded in the fabric of the walls support a heavy roof, House A supports its tile roof by means of *molave* posts raised independently of walls. Frequent earthquakes called for structures with sufficient give and take. The independent post and curtain wall structure becomes an oft-repeated formula used in the construction of many *bahay na bato* of the nineteenth century. But House A is not fully nineteenth century in construction. Often these *bahay na bato* employed a bipartite scheme: a lower story of stone or rubble and an upper one of wood. House A is not fully that since the walls of both floors are of cut stone. Another noteworthy feature are the oversized *media agua* (eaves) built as a protection against strong rain. These features point to a virtuoso display of improvisation characteristic of missionary architecture in the Philippines and in the Americas.

22. The residence of the family of Bp. Juan Gorordo (1862-1932), the first Filipino bishop of Cebu (1910-32) was restored in 1983 by the Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc. The residence in Lopez Jaena St. is now a museum. Binakayan St. is two blocks away from Lopez Jaena.