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# Spanish Churches of Central Luzon: The Provinces near Manila\*

RICHARD AHLBORN

THE influence of the missionary center of Manila on church architecture was far reaching. Yet, on the outskirts, different religious orders, different dates of development, and different local conditions produced diversified architectural forms. Moreover, the area was extensive, stretching in a wide arc around Manila Bay. In this article we propose to traverse this arc to examine examples of religious building in the provinces of Cavite, Bataan, Pampanga, Bulacan, and Rizal. The concluding article will deal with churches in Manila itself.

## CAVITE

Church construction in Cavite began and was carried on sporadically throughout the Spanish period. Existing structures betray a variety of XIX-century revival tastes. The townspeople of General Trías, for instance, joined during this period a new, 15-meter-wide facade of clean neo-Romanesque lines to the XVIII-century nave and octagonal tower of their church (Plate 1 a). Inside the church they had already executed fine retables and, later, corbels. Farther west and nearer the coast a stone church of grander scale and earlier date than that of General Trías rose at Naic. The facade (Plate 1 b) and tower contain gothiquesque elements that were appearing in stylish Manila churches at about the same time.

\* This is the second of three articles by Mr. Ahlborn, of which the first appeared in Vol. 8, No. 4 (October 1960) of this journal.

Four features seem to recur in the Spanish colonial churches of Cavite: first, we note the single-aisle nave, and second, square pilasters on the facade; third, close-fitting cut-stone surfaces, to which the church at Kawit is the only exception; and finally, the tower generally sited to one side of the facade. Except for the entirely square forms at Kawit and Naic and the central belfry at Noveleta, Cavite bell towers are octagonal superstructures set on square bases. The churches of Tanza and Bacoor (Plate 2 a) share a two-story facade design.

Several unique features must be recorded. The church of Noveleta, besides the pediment-finial belfry recalling two Zambales churches, possesses a stairway running into the nave wall. Similar masonry steps were built by the Augustinians in the Ilocos region for construction purposes. The best carving appears in the Kawit church, whose tower carries stylized floral forms of the XIX century. In addition to the lavish sanctuary retable, the right transept entry also suggests baroque movement in its projecting columns and boldly carved cartouche. In short, relatively less and late missionary activity in sparsely populated Cavite produced colonial churches of miniature scale and square severity, yet frequently of an interior richness comparable to Bohol and Cebu churches.

#### BATAAN

Across Manila Bay from Cavite projects the peninsula of Bataan. Though few of its individual churches are now of major interest, collectively they clearly illustrate an isolated missionary effort and subsequent struggles to preserve religious structures. It was the Dominican Fathers who developed the churches along the east coast of the province. Abucay, established in 1588, was the center from which the surrounding missions were developed. Substantial progress in building did not take place until the late XVII and early XVIII century. In 1647 a Dutch attack wiped out nearly all the churches, and during the subsequent two and a half centuries earthquakes, fires, and typhoons continued to inflict severe damage. As a result all Bataan churches standing today show signs of frequent repair, and have disguising metal roofs and thick coats of plaster.

Although recent renovation tends to hide the original appearance of Bataan's XVIII-century churches, several distinctive characteristics can easily be noted. First, XIX-century rebuilding often employed romantic touches such as the pointed Gothic arches of Hermosa and the tall, square central belfry there and at Pilar. Next, the bell towers of the Abucay, Balanga, and Samal churches possess octagonal pyramid domes capping five stories of fitted masonry pierced by round-arch windows. Moreover the church pediments at Abucay, Orion, and Samal rise in bold stone balustrades, displaying double swings in the first two cases. Finally, this broken cornice line of the pediment occurs not only at Abucay and Orion but adds a baroque air to church facades at Balanga, Hermosa and Orani.

One church can serve as a typical Bataan example: that of Balanga, which shares both history and construction details with those of Orion, Samal, and Orani. Balanga became an independent missionary center in 1739. It was probably at this time that the foundations for the extant brick structure were laid. The lower cornices of the 22-meter-wide facade were extended across the base cube of the bell tower, closely integrating it into the classical design of the front (Plate 2 b). Between 1838 and 1845 Father Miñano added the single stone arch which supports the choir just inside the entrance, and major improvements continued to be made during the additional half-century before the church's transfer to the secular clergy. Balanga thus represents quite adequately the Dominican-inspired, brick-constructed, often-repaired churches of Bataan.

#### PAMPANGA

Although only a small part of Pampanga's boundary consists of coastline, numerous streams from the north empty into Manila Bay, providing water routes along which the interior may be penetrated. By the XIX century the principal land route north from Manila lay through the heart of Pampanga, joining the missionary center of San Fernando with the capital of the colony. It was to the southwest of this town and along the descending streams that the major churches of the area

were built. The churches of Lubao, Guagua, Betis, Bacolor, and San Fernando are of particular architectural interest as large-scale XVIII-century structures of local Renaissance classicism.

The present Lubao was a Christian mission by 1602 and its first stone church was built between 1614 and 1630. Tradition has it that the structure was fabricated from locally made brick and sand mixed with egg albumin. Although the facade has obviously undergone recent resurfacing, a large part of the tower, which is  $12\frac{1}{2}$  meters wide, may be original (Plate 3 a). Stylistically, however, the great tower appears to belong more to the following century.

The churches of Guagua and its former dependency, Betis, are related stylistically as well as geographically. Facades are rendered in the bold classicism of late XVIII-century Spanish taste. At Guagua symmetry is strongly set by two tiers of four pairs of columns which are joined by heavy cornices and topped by a pediment with foliated scrolls (Plate 3 b). But scale is grander at Betis than at Guagua; furthermore, at Betis a remarkable XIX-century entrance has been placed at the right end of the transept, and inside the church huge capitals and window-spanning valences preserve the sense of expansive mass.

Nearer San Fernando another major church stands at Bacolor. Though the facade has been renovated, apparently in the second half of the XIX century, earlier stone work appears to the left of it. Here not only does a roofed entry pierce the nave wall, but the end of the transept has once again been richly ornamented (Plate 4 a). If there had been an entrance here originally, it has now been filled in. Two diagonally set buttresses project from the surface and are enlivened by relief scrolls similar to those at Paoay, Ilocos Norte. Along the raking pediment line of the transept appears a series of miniature arches recalling machicolations of Near-Eastern-cum-European usage (compare General Trias, Plate 1 a). This impressive transept terminus measures fully seventeen meters. Behind the transept occur several other features of interest. Well-turned balustrades and simply-carved corbels display the tra-

ditional skills of Pampango woodcarvers. In the cemetery behind the church stands a hexagonal funerary chapel with round windows, a XIX-century stone-block structure.

Owing to rebuilding and replastering the lifeless XIX-century classic facade of San Fernando is of slight interest. More noteworthy is the big bell tower. Its angled pinnacle suggests those of the churches of Bulacan, and contrasts sharply with the round dome and cupola on the tower of Bacolor. San Fernando may be considered typical of the grand but heavily remodelled church of Pampanga.

#### BULACAN

Bulacan was evangelized by the Franciscans, who were active in the area by the 1600's. However the most noteworthy of extant stone structures date from later centuries, with two exceptions: Polo and Meycauayan, which provide data on XVII-century religious architecture.

The history of the Polo church is not complicated. The original building, of rubble work, was completed in 1632. Only 220 years later was it considered necessary to undertake major repairs. The development of the Meycauayan church, on the other hand, was not only more complex but more typical of architectural practice in Central Luzon. The town obtained permission from the colonial government to build a stone church in 1599. By 1670 Meycauayan had its second stone church, a small structure measuring only 60 by 12½ *varas*. In 1740 the townspeople completed the stone friary and one hundred years later they renovated its woodwork. Decay dictated a similar renovation in the church itself in 1784. Five years after the turn of the century Fray Francisco Gascueña built a free-standing bell tower and the massive arch supporting the choir. Later the tower was joined to the church facade by an arch of cut stone. Finally, during the mid-XIX-century building and religious revival, Fray Benito de Madri-dejos carried out numerous repairs and had new retables carved.

The Calumpit church merits careful examination. Lack of documentation as to date adds a fillip of curiosity to our ap-

preciation of the thoroughly unique carving which forms frothy bands on the facade and the right side of the nave (Plate 4 b). Stone has been deeply cut into crowded, nervous strips which enclose niches, form cornices, surround entries, cling to columns, and fill the pediment. The scenes depicted seem to be apocalyptic visions ecstatically revealing the evangelists and Christ in glory. Meandering up the pediment are fanciful scrolls. On the side (Plate 5 a), floral columns, even more elaborate than those of Paete, springily support what may be the parents of the Virgin, as well as the Virgin herself saluting Elizabeth. Judging from an attached bell tower which I suppose to be contemporary with, if not later than these carvings, it seems proper to date them after 1800. At any rate, the carvings are certainly the work of local craftsmen of Asian taste who have raised Western form and subject matter to a mystic level and produced one of the most distinctive and stylistically important churches in central Luzon.

The churches of Bulacan have few characteristic features. Generally speaking facades are extremely flat and may be relieved only by thin columns and simple niches. Pediments are equally plain and invariably triangular. When stone carving occurs it too preserves the planar quality of the surface and is usually well executed, as on the typical facade and vestry entry of the early church at Guiguinto (Plate 5 b).

Although most Bulacan churches were built in the XVIII century and are small in size, the variety of their styles suggests that they belong to something of a no-man's-land. They were too far removed from Manila to feel her direct architectural influence; but, on the other hand, with the exception of the most distant, Calumpit, were not sufficiently isolated to develop strong local characteristics.

#### RIZAL

Rizal, known as Morong throughout the Spanish period, is the province that envelops Manila to the eastward. Because of its nearness to the capital, it has felt the influence not of one but several missionary groups. Before

1700, for instance, Binangonan was successively under Franciscan, Jesuit and Augustinian jurisdiction. Rizal churches were also subjected to the usual series of calamities: Chinese uprising in 1639, British attack in 1763, fires, floods, earthquakes. The result of changes of administration and repairs following damage was, of course, variation in age, scale and style.

Building programs in Rizal followed the pattern described in our first article when treating of the churches of Laguna. A wealthy lay donor often gave the land for the site, as well as funds for building. Further sums were collected as alms and gifts. Permission to build was almost always granted by the government. The priest, who provided the rough sketch of plan and décor, would encourage and manage construction by native and Chinese craftsmen. The church took several years to build, during which period the town was often exempted from taxes. Subsequently, other structures — tower, friary, school — would be put in hand. Eventually, repairs would be undertaken in accordance to need, available labor, and the zeal of the padre.

The earlier churches of Rizal seldom equal the proportions of the later-built and more distant churches of Zambales, Pangasinan and Batangas. Stone work can often be dated to the first half of the XVII century. The average structure has a ground plan of 20 by 60 meters. Stylistically, facades were normally given a simple classical treatment of diluted Renaissance flavor. At old Antipolo, Baras, Binangonan, Mandaluyong, Parañaque, Las Piñas, Pateros and San Pedro Makati, relatively uncomplicated fronts were enlivened by classical niches, cornices and columns. These designs in stone were balanced by equally crisp wood carving. Prime examples of the latter are the side entry door at Malabon and the corbels of Parañaque. But of Rizal's many fine churches four are particularly significant to our study: Tanay, Morong, Guadalupe and San Juan del Monte.

The early history of the church of San Ildefonso of Tanay repeats a familiar pattern of changes of site and form. In 1606 the mission of Tanay was separated from that of

Pililla and soon afterwards built her first major church. Eighteen years later the town site was moved and a second church built. Moved back to the original site in 1640, the town provided itself with a third church. After still another change of site the extant church was inaugurated in 1783. Its facade, which spans over 16 1/2 meters, displays Renaissance motifs modified by local taste. Angels, plaques, floral designs and columns of Corinthian and Ionian intent reveal improvisations on classical proportion, shape and spacing. Added to these features are the Franciscan and Dominican crests and images of saints in niches. On the left nave wall a highly developed entry presents San Ildefonso as well as Saints Peter and Paul (Plate 6 a). Corners of the first tier of the tower bear pear-shaped finials. All this work is chiseled in *batong buhay* (living stone), while carved beams, an XVIII-century set of Stations of the Cross, retables (Plate 6 b) and a wooden tabernacle establish the ability of the local wood carvers.

It is fitting that Morong, the early missionary center of the region, should possess one of the Philippines' most impressive churches. The town was founded in 1578, but both town and church were burned in 1612, with the loss of the parish archives. Within three years the basic fabric of the present adobe structure was raised under the direction of Chinese master masons. Thus Father Huerta, who then proceeds to describe in detail the erection of the new facade between 1850 and 1853 by Fray Máximo Rico (Plate 7a). The new front rose on the small round-ended church which measured only 12 by 42 *varas*. Fearing weakness in the front and not wishing to interdict future lateral extension, Father Rico decided to widen and deepen the facade foundation by a full *vara* in order to support a central belfry. The new facade, which rises over 20 *varas*, has a composite design which includes the arms of the titular saint, San Jerónimo, the Franciscan crest, and pear- and jar-shaped ornaments for illumination. Rising above the facade is the columned, balustraded, octagonal belfry with statues of the four cardinal virtues and more pear-shaped cups for oil lamps. At the pinnacle stood an angel with sword and cross standard.

Father Huerta's description concludes with the valuable information that the work was directed by a 66-year old Paete master, Don Bartolomé Palatino. He kept costs down to slightly more than one-fourth of the official six-thousand-peso estimate. This was of course made possible by the fact that the townspeople transported the stone from nearby Piedra Blanca and supplied lime for mortar. Thus, because of its well documented history and its romantic design of unique local character, the facade of the Morong church is of great importance to the study of Philippine colonial architecture.

Two structures which stand just outside Manila will fittingly close this discussion: the remains of the XIX-century Makati church and the church of San Juan del Monte. The Makati church, dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe, was completed in 1629. It was severely damaged by Chinese rebels ten years later, but Chinese Christians subsequently made up for it by making it one of their devotional centers. Remarkably well built, both church and priests' house withstood the earthquakes of 1645, 1658, 1754 and 1863. However, the masonry roof finally succumbed to the tremors of 1881 and was rebuilt the following year in its present neo-Romanesque style by Father José Corujedo. The site was abandoned in 1899, after fire had gutted both church and convento. Until recently, imposing double-tiered arcades stood in the old convento (Plate 7 b). Today, both front and nave walls still exhibit the Romanesque treatment popular in late XIX-century Philippine churches (Plate 8 a). Carefully repeated floral ornament arch over all openings and large bust medallions appear between simple salient buttresses. The interior, measuring 17 by 33 meters, reveals neatly fitted stone surfaces and precisely cut patterns repeated from the exterior. Until the arches were razed to the ground, Guadalupe was one of the finest examples of later Spanish architecture in the Philippines.

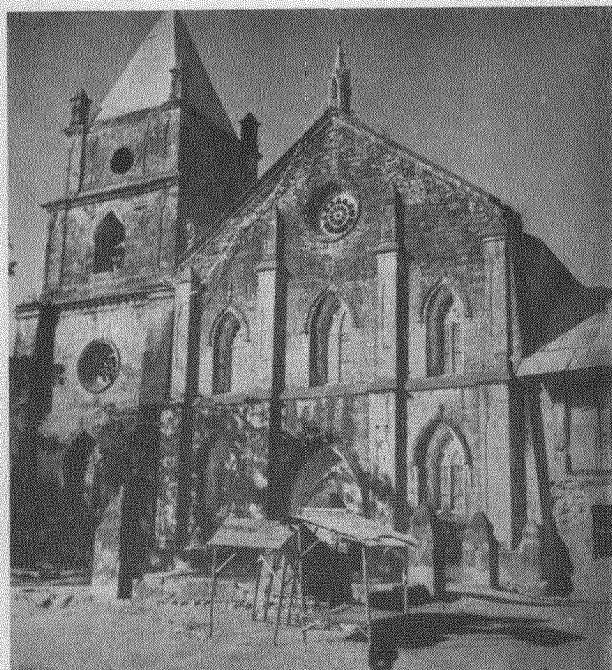
Between 1602 and 1604, the church of San Juan del Monte rose under Dominican auspices on land donated by Captain Julián de la Cuenca. This first church was des-

troyed in the Chinese uprising of 1639, and the second during the war with the British in 1763. The existing church was completed in 1774, nine years before Tanay church. It was briefly occupied by Revolutionary troops in 1898. Massive polygonal buttresses stand in the patio of the friary and project from the facade to form a unique arched portecochère (Plate 8 b).

The great variety of form and skill of construction which characterize the colonial churches in the area peripheral to Manila are indicative of the missionary élan of the Spanish period. Renaissance, neo-Gothic and neo-Romanesque styles were well worked into soundly joined stone. There was a constant desire on the part of missionaries and parish priests to build more than adequate sanctuaries for their congregations. The tempo of this ardor for building seems to increase in direct proportion to our approach to the capital of the Philippines, whose churches will form the subject of our third article.



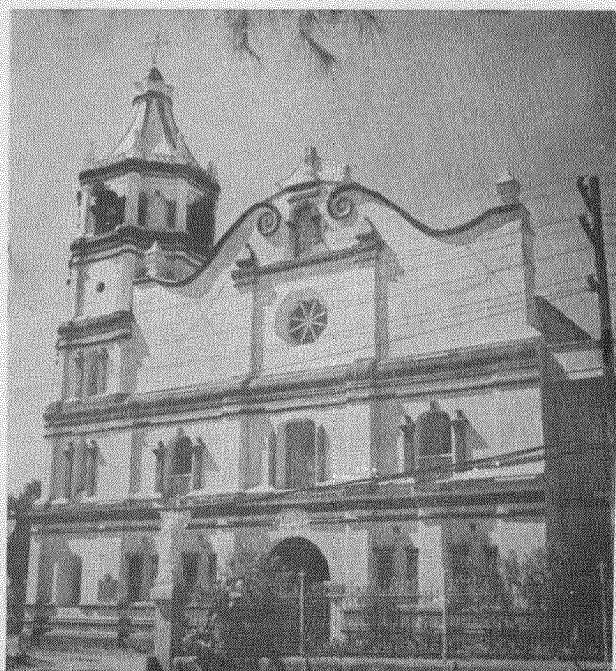
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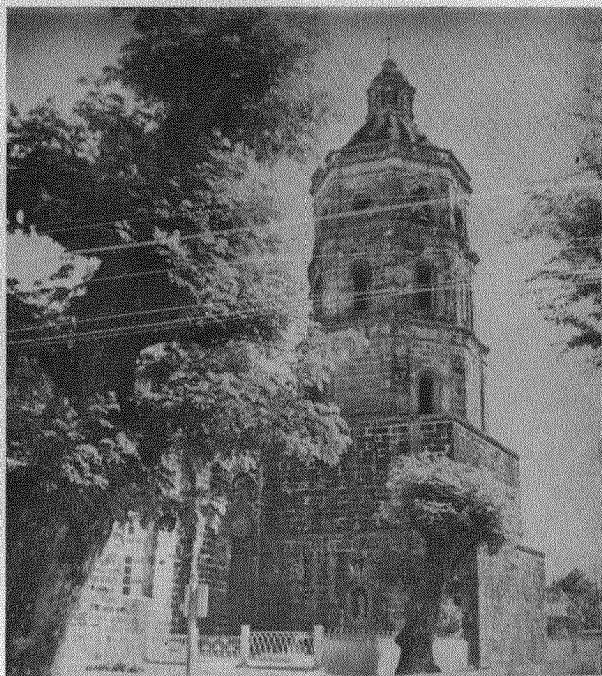
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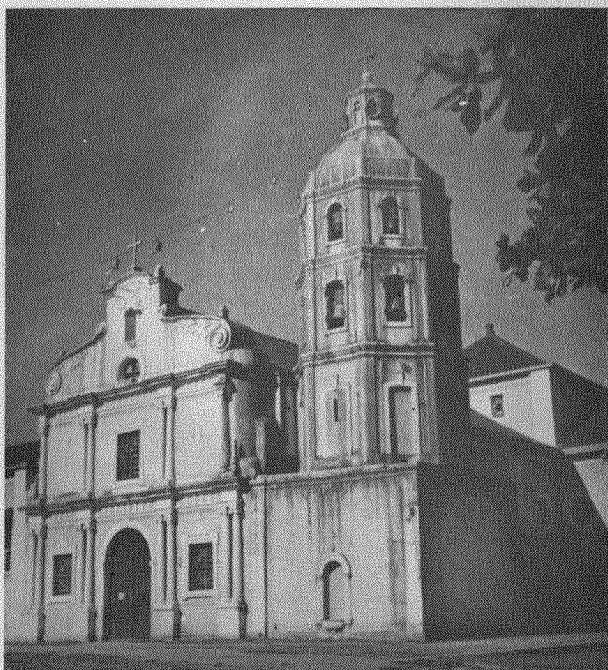
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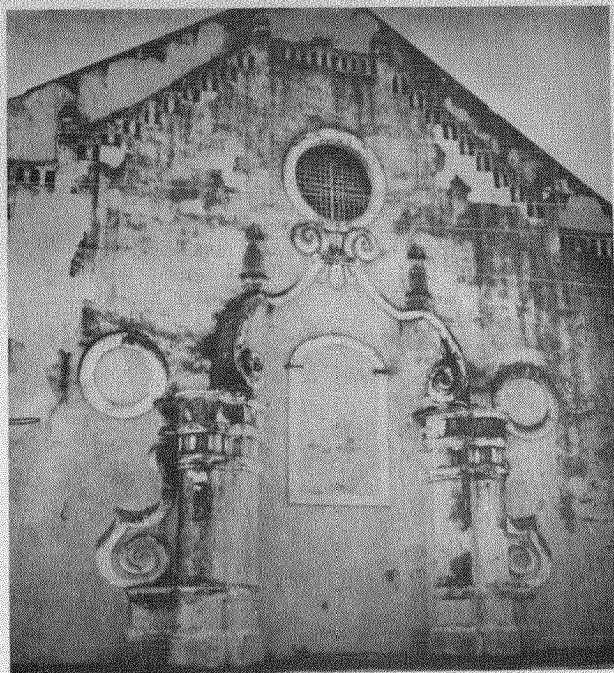
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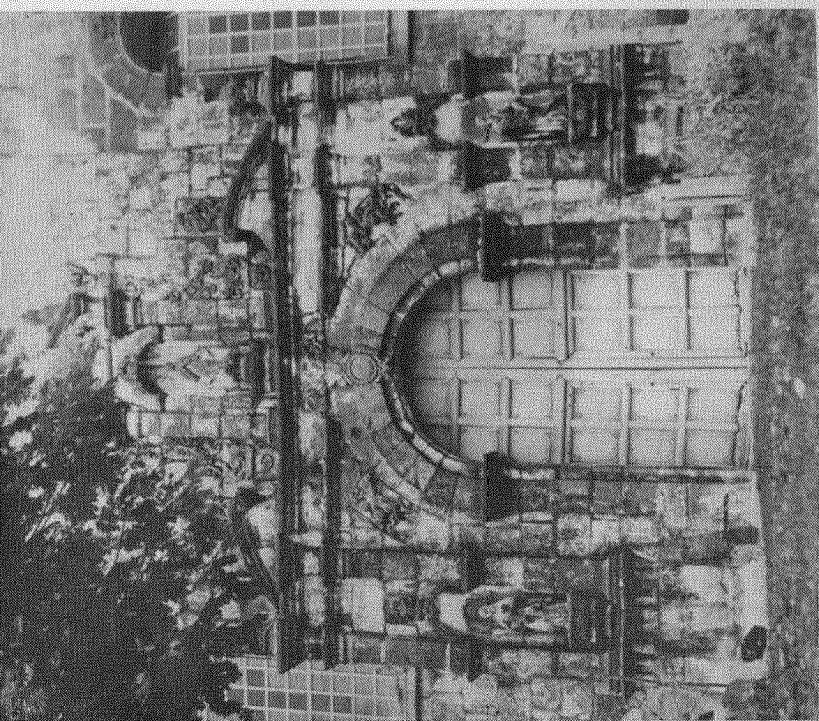
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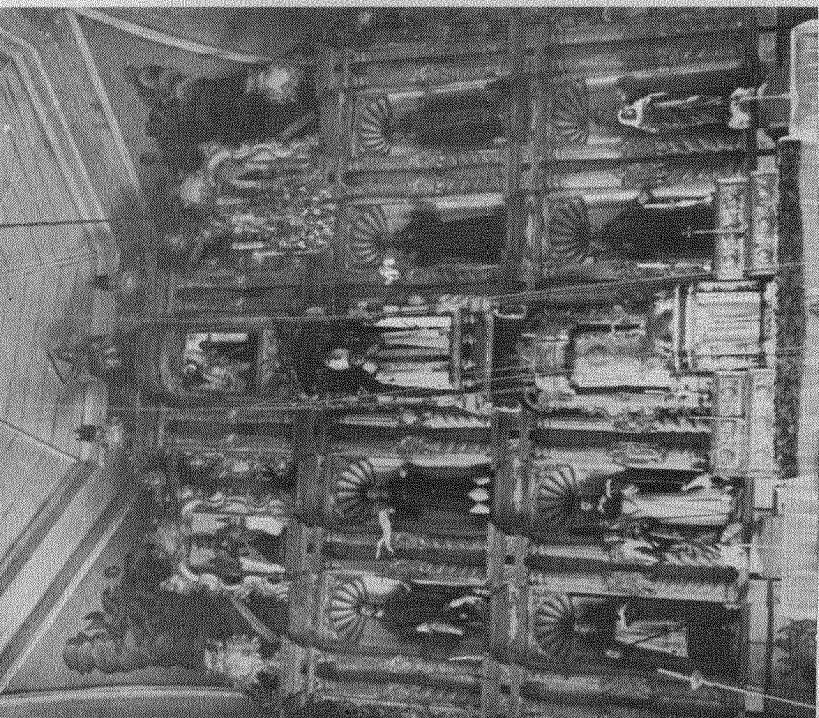
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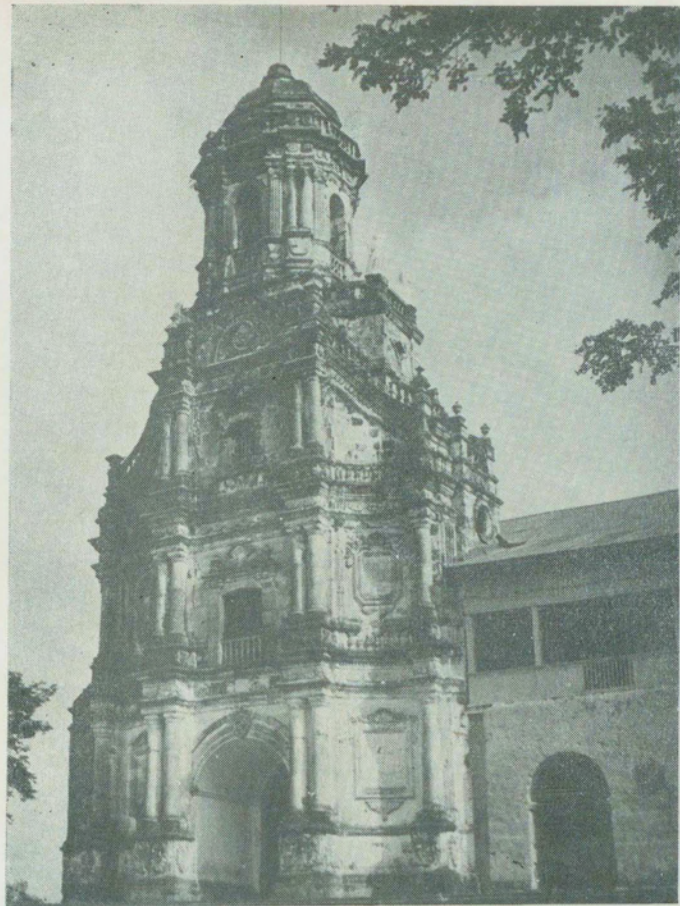
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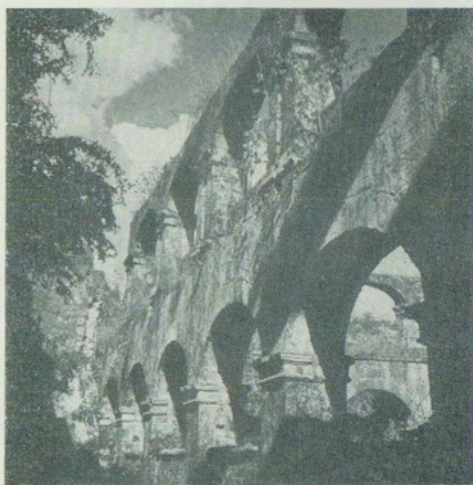
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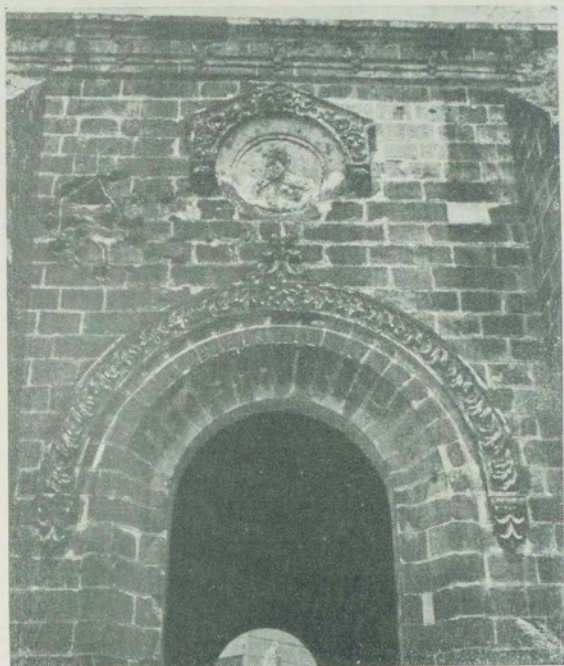


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(Photo by Severiano Lizarraga)



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