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Benita Legarda

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Colonial Churches of Ilocos

BENITO LEGARDA Y FERNANDEZ

Domine, dilexi decorem domus tuæ, et
locum habitationis gloriæ tuæ.

—Psalm 25

I. INTRODUCTION

UNTIL a few years ago one often came across the opinion that Philippine colonial architecture, especially church architecture, was merely imitative of Spanish models and therefore unoriginal and uninteresting. This view was occasionally reinforced by writers who saw little merit in the churches built in this country during the Spanish regime and stigmatized them as being merely derivative.

But around 1951 a group of *aficionados* brought together by Fernando Zóbel and including the writer began to question this popular opinion and looked more carefully at surviving examples of Philippine colonial architecture to see if this view might not indeed turn out to be a misconception.

At about the same time, several books on Latin-American colonial art were published, notably Pal Kelemen's *BAROQUE AND ROCOCO IN LATIN AMERICA* (N.Y.: The Macmillan Company, 1951)¹. The examples of artistic originality found in Latin-Am-

¹ See also Hector Velarde, *ARQUITECTURA PERUANA*, 1st ed. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1946); Elizabeth W. Weisman, *MEXICO IN SCULPTURE 1521-1821* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950); and Trent E. Sanford, *THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE SOUTHWEST: INDIAN SPANISH AMERICAN* (N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1950).

erican colonial art were striking. Was there any reason why analogous examples should not also be found in the Philippines? A challenging passage on page 74 of Kelemen's book attracted our attention and pricked our local pride.

Spanish colonial architecture in the Philippine Islands has been little photographed and still less studied... Spanish Baroque spread through the islands, but it was much modified. Native building methods introduced change, as did also the use of wood, cane, thatch, and other tropical materials. Tropical flora furnished new motifs to be ornately carved in stone. The sumptuous church interiors were decorated with treasures, many of them brought from China and Japan, so that local artisans could draw for inspiration not only on their own land and on Europe, but also on their Oriental neighbors.

An early study of the great number of colonial buildings that once stood on the eleven large islands and the hundreds of smaller ones which make up the Philippine archipelago would have greatly enriched art history. It is to be hoped that the damage wrought by World War II was not so extensive that this phase of Spanish colonial art will pass into oblivion, unexplored and unrecorded.

Cursorily examination of some of the most obvious examples confirmed our group's suspicions and Kelemen's surmises. With regard to images and artifacts, the evidence was especially striking, and some of it has been set forth by Fernando Zóbel in his classic article, "Philippine Colonial Sculpture", in the August 1958 issue of *PHILIPPINE STUDIES* (vol. VI, no. 3, pp. 249-294).

It soon became evident that the search for an original Filipino element in Philippine colonial² architecture would have to receive a sharper focus. One would have to define what one meant by the term Filipino element, which could conceivably

² The word "colonial" here is used without its current emotional overtones and simply refers to that period in Philippine history between 1565 and 1898. The puerile idea, implicit in some modern writings, that the Filipinos were too busy rattling their chains in colonial darkness to do anything creative finds no support in the surviving examples of colonial art, many of which are quite excellent. The American period is excluded, although it too is colonial, partly for analytical convenience and partly because little of artistic significance in this particular line of architecture was produced, the emphasis having shifted to commercial buildings and government offices. The period of Bornean hegemony preceding the Spanish regime could also be regarded as colonial, although many of our present day writers conveniently overlook this.

cover any or all of four distinct, although sometimes overlapping, meanings.

At its crudest and most unsophisticated, it may refer to the use of local materials by Filipino labor with Filipino skill. While this may suffice for purely economic significance, it is artistically unsatisfactory because exact imitations embodying all these characteristics would hardly qualify in an artistic sense to be called Filipino.

At a somewhat higher level of meaning, the term would cover the use of local motifs, such as local flora, in buildings and other works of art. At this level it begins to acquire some artistic significance.

An even more sophisticated view of the term Filipino in the arts would refer to the blending of native elements with Spanish, Latin American, Chinese and other foreign influences or elements. Thus a modified image following Chinese models, or a baroque building incorporating local elements, would be Filipino for the good reason that the Filipino of today is not a carbon copy of the "Filipino" of Lapu-Lapu's time but is the result of nearly four hundred years of inter-cultural fusion. While there are some purists who will dispute this definition, it is probably the most significant of all, and the one most relevant to artistic investigation at least.

Fourth, and lastly, the term Filipino may refer even to objects which, while not made by Filipinos, were made for local use, became part of the local scene, and embody a combination of artistic elements which can be found only in the Philippines. Examples of this would be some religious images attributed to Chinese artisans, the like of which are to be found nowhere else in the world except in the Philippines.

In searching for illustrations of these meanings of the word Filipino in colonial church architecture, especially the latter three, it was deemed advisable to proceed to a study by regions, and by an examination of the examples found therein to arrive at some common denominator or set of denominators which would be the Filipino element or elements in colonial architec-

ture. The presence of fairly well-defined geographic, ethnic and linguistic divisions in the country, often with a corresponding division of archdiocesan jurisdiction and of the spheres of operation of the major religious orders, made this a promising approach.

Moreover, more and more people are getting interested in these slowly-evolving ideas and there was increasing interest in whatever findings we might unearth. Field work was obviously called for, and the core of the group referred to earlier, composed of Messrs. Fernando Zóbel, Armand Fabella, Oscar López and the writer, decided to undertake it.

Unfortunately, this presupposed ample time and freedom from other duties. These conditions were not found in any of those interested in the project and only one field trip of major proportions was carried out, as will be related below, confining the validity of the results to only a regional level. Since it now seems that this original group will not be able to pursue its research systematically nor to extend it on a national scale, this article is being written in order to present what the group has found to date regarding what we believe is an interesting phase of Philippine culture and Philippine history. It is hoped that others may profit from both our findings and our shortcomings, take up the study of other regions or a deeper inquiry into that which we have only lightly covered, and perhaps, by a compilation and comparison of regional characteristics, arrive at the larger national conclusions which were the original objective of our investigations.

One thing can perhaps already be said, partly as an act of faith and partly as an inductive conclusion: colonial churches in the Philippines are for the most part Filipino, and it is high time we got away from the age-old habit of referring to them as being merely Spanish.³ One may, if one wishes, call them Fil-Hispanic, but to do so would practically amount to a definition of the term Filipino as, in our concepts as explained earlier, that term could have been used in 1898. To do this is not

³ However, I am informed by Mr. F. Sionil José that this fact is realized by the Ilocano intelligentsia.

to deny the strong Spanish element in our colonial art but on the contrary to fuse it inseparably into our national traditions.

II. SPANISH AND LATIN AMERICAN COMPARISONS

A few comparisons with Spain and Latin America may help to bring out some elements in the problem.

At the time Spain finally colonized the Philippines, in 1565, shortly after Philip II had ascended the throne, she had just made the Renaissance style her own, and still lagged behind the leading artistic centers in Europe, notably Italy, which were already evolving the Baroque style. A further lag can be presumed to have taken place in the introduction of these styles into her colonies, especially into the Philippines, which was ruled indirectly through Mexico and to which personnel and dispatches had to be sent across the Atlantic, Mexico, and the Pacific in a time-consuming journey. It would be interesting therefore to observe the effects of this double lag in the art of the former Spanish colonies.

Renaissance in Europe was an individual and personal style, and Baroque even more so. But it was not the anonymous and whimsical individuality of the folk artists of the medieval Romanesque and Gothic periods; rather, it was the identifiable individuality of known professional artists, informed by reason rather than whimsey, and by self-consciousness rather than sublimation.

But these generalizations do not hold true for Latin America and the Philippines. According to Kelemen (p. 22), "The participation of the Indians and mestizos in the construction of a church or convent was an act of faith, just as in the Middle Ages in Europe". The same can be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of the Philippines. When one looks at a primitive Philippine retablo, the word that occurs to one's mind is "Gothic". But it is not; the formal decorative elements and the iconography are Renaissance and Baroque. What happened was that a medieval spirit was poured into classical forms and molds, and what emerged was, like the art of Romanesque and Gothic Europe, the outpouring of an age of faith and intellectual innocence.

Thus, here we find a similarity to Latin America and a contrast to Europe which manifests itself in identifiable ways. According to Kelemen (p. 23), "The art of colonial Latin America is characterized by the sincerity and power that marked the early Christian spirit..." Whereas Baroque architecture in Europe was complex and elaborate in ground plan, "the Spanish American Baroque building was simple in structure. The decoration rather than the design was elaborated". The same things can be said of early Philippine colonial architecture.

There seems to be one point of similarity between Europe in the Middle Age and the colonies in the Renaissance. Émile Mâle, in his great works on French religious art, suggests that monastic manuscripts furnished the early models for nascent French sculpture.⁴ There is evidence that some of the decorative sculpture in wood, stone and stucco, and the iconography found in Philippine colonial churches were inspired by book designs and illustrations, printers' colophons, and similar details which probably came from published religious catechisms, devotionals, etc.

A tendency observed by Kelemen in Latin America, namely, the trend to the neoclassic in the nineteenth century, with its greater simplicity and lesser decorative detail (Kelemen, p. 135), is also found in the Philippines, together with other revival styles, such as Gothic. Much of the insipidity of nineteenth-century church building is attributable to the use of these styles.

But one trend observed in Latin America is not immediately verifiable in the Philippines. Kelemen says that the early churches were servile copies of European models, and that it was only after native talent had forged a new language that individuality and regional differences began to appear. It is difficult to find early examples of servile imitation in the Philippines; if such there were, they were probably to be found in Manila which, as the capital, was most exposed to influences from the ruling country. But only one of the early Manila

⁴ Émile Mâle, *RELIGIOUS ART FROM THE TWELFTH TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY*, N.Y.: The Noonday Press, 1958, p. 18.

churches has survived fairly intact to our day, and this one hardly bears out the point.

Both the Latin American and Filipino craftsman had one disadvantage as compared to the European. The latter, as Kelemen points out, was surrounded by the religious masterpieces in every branch of the arts of his own and previous periods, and could study them with his own eyes. The American indigenous peoples and the Filipinos were rooted in their own localities and probably worked out of sketchy plans, models, or illustrations.

But the Filipinos had one further handicap. Whereas there was a long and glorious tradition of stone-work in pre-Columbian America, there was none in the pre-Magellanic Philippines. Stone, brick and stucco as structural and decorative materials were new to the Filipino craftsman, and their products, if less elaborate than those of their Latin American counterparts, probably had equal merit as artistic efforts because of their unfamiliarity with the materials used.

There were also differences between Latin America and the Philippines as regards the influence of foreign builders and craftsmen, whether they came from the ruling country or elsewhere. Kelemen argues (pp. 20-21) that "the number of European artists of rank working in the colony are too few (even though many more may be discovered through research) to have directed the entire artistic orientation of the vast territory comprising the New World". If they were few in the Americas (Kelemen gives a partial list), they were even fewer in the isolated and beleaguered garrison-colony that the Philippines was during most of the Spanish regime. The name of the ill-starred Augustinian, Antonio Herrera, comes to mind immediately; research should uncover others. The point is that the merits of colonial art cannot for the most part be attributed to these few imported European artists.

But in the Philippines there was another foreign influence present which was not to be found in Latin America, namely, the Chinese. It is known that Chinese artisans were oftentimes used in the construction of both religious and secular buildings,

and in sculpturing religious images from stone, ivory and wood. It is presumed that they imparted some of their knowledge and their techniques to Filipino craftsmen. Sometimes we find a combination of European baroque and Chinese elements. Were such combinations put together by Chinese or by Filipinos? In many cases, it is impossible to tell; as Fernando Zóbel tartly remarks, "the influence is obvious, not the nationality of the manufacturer". It remains indisputable that the Chinese influence was very great, indeed, and forms an important element in Philippine colonial art.

III. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF COLONIAL ILOCANO CHURCHES

Our group decided to make the Ilocos provinces the object of our first —and as it turned out, our only—major field trip. We were intrigued by pictures of certain churches in that region which were occasionally published. The area was geographically well-defined, being the coastal strip of northwestern Luzon lying west of the Cordillera Central for about 300 kilometers between Rosario on the south and Bangui on the north. Ethnically and linguistically, it was also easy to define, being the homeland of the Ilocanos, whose thrift and industry have become proverbial in Philippine life, qualities which have been strengthened by widespread small landholdings and the absence of large estates, and by the aridity of the climate and the niggardliness of the soil. It is also within fairly easy traveling distance from Manila, and thus within reach of those whose work permitted only short out-of-town trips. Finally, it forms the archdiocese which probably suffered least from the ravages of World War II, that of Nueva Segovia.

Due to weather conditions and the demands of practical life, this trip had to take place in two widely separated stages, the first in 1952 and the second in 1956. On the latter trip we were joined by Lt. K. D. Haley of the U.S. Air Force, a Harvard graduate like the other members of the group, and on both occasions our driver was Mr. Eulogio Montañés.

It should be emphasized that these field trips were conceived as being exploratory in nature, adequate photographic equipment was not available for all purposes (especially for

interior views and details), estimates of dimensions had to be derived roughly from pacing off distances rather than from exact measurements, and there was invariably a lack of time.⁵

The general findings resulting from these trips could serve as starting points for the researches of others who might be interested and are enumerated hereunder.

1. **GROUND PLAN.** The transept as an architectural feature is almost completely absent from Ilocos churches. Of the approximately four dozen church buildings examined, only three — Santa Lucía, Sinait and Badoc — have transepts, the last one no longer in use. In certain other instances as in Narvacán, there are remains of transepts, but these were later additions and not part of the original structure. At Vintar, however, the old walls project at about the area of the chancel, and although the projecting area is now abandoned, it may once have formed a transept. The chapel in the Bacarra cemetery seems from a distance to possess a transept, but it was not one of the structures examined at close range.

All the other churches have a very simple and straightforward ground plan, consisting of a rectangular barn-like struc-

⁵ Later, the author was able to make several short follow-up expeditions to the area which, while they did not completely make up for the earlier inadequacies, did permit an extension of both geographic and photographic coverage and a reappraisal of first impressions. Furthermore, Fernando Zóbel made sketches in the course of the two major trips accompanied by written comments, on which I draw generously. I wish also to acknowledge my debt to H. E. George Lisle Clutton, K.C.M.G., former British Ambassador to the Philippines, with whom I had numerous exchanges of views on the subject, and who was a most knowledgeable traveling companion on one of the follow-up expeditions. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the hospitality and helpfulness of Archbishop Santiago Sancho, Coadjutor Archbishop Juan Sison and Fr. Antonio Mabutas in Vigan; Gov. Juan L. Valera in Abra; Msgr. Quintín Velásquez in Luna; and Fr. Rosario López, formerly of Aringay, together with numerous other whom lack of space forbids me to mention. Some of the pictures used here of churches in La Union and Ilocos Sur were taken by Mr. Ephraim S. Caedo who, together with the writer and the former editor of this quarterly, motored to Vigan in December 1958. Hospitality on that occasion was accorded them by Mr. and Mrs. Honorio Donato of Vigan.

ture such as Kelemen observed among the early Latin American churches. At most there may be in some cases (as at Balaoan) a slight narrowing of the structure at the chancel, perhaps a suggestion of a rudimentary apse.

2. **SIZE.** The absence of transepts is partly explainable by the striking size of many of the churches in Ilocos. The lack of such transepts, Fernando Zóbel suggests, may be a purely structural safety-feature in a style that is appropriately labelled "earthquake Baroque". The dimensions of the naves of these churches put many modern structure to shame. Rough measurements of some of the major churches will be given later on; it is sufficient to note here that the churches of the small hill towns of Naguilian and Piddig are both about seventy paces long, while Sarrat, the longest one still in use, is one hundred and four paces long and twenty across. (These may be compared with the length of Taal, Batangas—eighty-nine paces — reputedly the largest colonial church in the country, perhaps because its great width—forty paces at the nave and perhaps half again as much at the transept—gives it so much floor space. One pace as used here is roughly equivalent to one meter.)

The practicality of these large structures is another question altogether, for most of them are obviously beyond the present economic capacity of their parishes to support and pose thorny problems to parish priests and diocesan administrators. Were they built in an access of religious fervor and over-optimism? Or to accommodate a formerly larger population? Or because greater comparative wealth existed at one time in the region, as some evidence seems to indicate? Or, since the Spanish government granted exemption from tribute to towns which were building churches, was this a means of lengthening out the period of tax-exemption?

3. **MATERIALS.** The materials used in building the Ilocos churches differ somewhat from those used in Central and Southern Luzon. Brick, coral, or river rock, although not necessarily found together, are plastered over with stucco and make up the walls, whereas in Central and Southern Luzon the most com-

mon material is adobe stone.⁶ (One wonders if the Ilocos builders realized the limitations of brick in an earthquake country.) Glazed tiles are sometimes employed as flooring, as in Santa Maria. Pillars may be of wood or less commonly of brick or stone. Ceilings, where they exist, are of wood, tin, or *sawali*. Roofs are now generally of galvanized iron, but formerly must have been of thatch or tile.

4. EARTHQUAKE BAROQUE. The use of thick walls or buttresses is also a characteristic of many Ilocano churches. Many of them fully deserve the appellation of "earthquake Baroque" given by Kelemen to some churches in Central America. The narthex of Laoag church is an example of the thickness attained by some Ilocano church walls (plate IIa). The outstanding buttresses are those in Paoay decorated in stucco with S-curves. Each buttress projects five and one half paces from the wall of the nave and is two paces thick (plate VIb). The buttresses at Badoc, a nearby town, show a nearly identical design, with the S-curves somewhat more flattened; the church at Luna, La Union, also has large buttresses of different shapes.

5. EXTERIOR STAIRWAYS. Probably the most puzzling feature of the churches of Ilocos is the presence in the majority of them of stone, brick or tile stairways built outside against the wall of the nave and leading up to the roof. Some churches have them only on one side, some on both, and at least one (Laoag) has (or had, before subsequent alterations) two on one side (plates Vc, VIb, VIIIC, XIVd).

The function of these stairways is unknown and such parish priests as were consulted could not tell why they were

⁶ Cf. the sweeping statement by an *anté bellum* art commentator: "With very few exceptions... all the churches constructed during the Spanish regime are of adobe stone. It may be said, as a matter of fact, that the Spanish era is the adobe era of architecture in the Philippines. For every building of importance erected during the period both residential and public, are [sic] of adobe stone, held together by mortar composed of lime and sand" (I.V. Mallari, "Architecture in the Philippines", *PHILIPPINE REVIEW*, vol. I, no. 3, May 1943, pp. 54-60). This generalization must have been made on the basis of observations in Central and Southern Luzon, for the exact opposite is true of all of Northern Luzon, i.e., Ilocos and the Cagayan Valley.

built. Although they may act as buttresses to some extent, this could not have been their main function as they are found side by side with proper buttresses. The most plausible hypothesis, put forward by Fernando Zóbel, Hans Steiner and others, is that the constant adjustment and repair required by either tile or thatch roofing may have made such stairs convenient, especially as they might also perform a double function as buttresses. Roofing has always been a thorny problem in church building, in medieval Europe as in the colonial Philippines, and in the latter, besides the traditional risk of fire, the troubles were compounded by typhoons which blew away thatch roofs or by earthquakes which dislodged tiles. But might it not have been just as easy to secure access by means of bamboo ladders or wood scaffolding and to carry the needed materials up by means of simple pulleys? More important, why is this feature found only in the Ilocos churches as a group and not elsewhere? Rodrigo Pérez III suggests that ceremonies connected with the inauguration of the building or the installation of the cross on the front pediment, and requiring the personal attendance of the priest or bishop thereon, may be the explanation. Whatever the answer, these exterior stairways are a distinctive feature of colonial Ilocano churches.

6. DIRECTION OF LONGITUDINAL AXIS. An overwhelming majority of churches in Ilocos have their facades on the west or toward the sea (technically speaking, they are "oriented," i.e., with their altars in the east). Of the approximately four dozen churches covered, all have their facades in a general westerly direction except seven which have them on the north, three on the south, and three on the east. It seems that where churches are located on a coastal plain between hills and the sea, they generally tend to have their facades toward the sea; on the east coast of the Bataan peninsula, for example, all the churches have their facades on the east, i.e., toward Manila Bay, and on the east coast of Cebu the same arrangement prevails.

7. DETACHED BELL TOWERS. Bell towers separate from the nave of the churches are the most common provisions made for bells, exceeding in number either attached single belfries or

twin bell turrets or towers. This is especially true in the northern sections of the region. Reading from north to south, Bacarra, Sarrat, Laoag, Paoay, Magsingal, Vigan, Bantay, Narvacán, Santa María, and Tagudin are the outstanding instances (plates Va, VIa, IXa, XIVa, XVIa). Vintar, Piddig and Balaoan have bell towers that are very largely in ruins although still in use, while in Agoo the only remnant of the old church is the base of an old tower covered with vegetation. Of the instances mentioned, all towers are located to the right of the nave (i.e., to the left of the viewer), except Vintar, Vigan, Narvacán, Santa María and Balaoan. Sometimes the bell tower is connected to the nave but does not form an organic part of the architectural whole, as at Tayum and Aringay (plates VIIa and XIIa).

The most remarkable of the bell towers is the huge one at Laoag (plate IIId). At one time, it is said, a man on horseback could easily enter through its gate but now, whether because the street level has risen or because the building has sunk, a tall man's head would touch the ceiling. The entrance is flanked by engaged columns topped by knobs rather than capitals, and is surmounted by a roughly hewn pointed niche containing an image (plate IIc). Huge engaged columns anchor the structure on four sides, and spring upward into flying buttresses. Its decor and dome are reminiscent of Romanesque and Moorish elements. This extraordinary combination of different styles seems to indicate that it was not designed by an architect but by a *maestro cantero* or master mason deriving his notions from what he had seen in Spain (if he was Spanish) or from books (if he was Filipino), or perhaps by a Filipino stone-mason getting his general notions from a Spanish priest.

Unfortunately for the contemporary viewer, a jungle of structures — gasoline stations, tailor shops, etc. — has grown up around its base, effectively obstructing the view. It is said that the archdiocese of Nueva Segovia has decreed its destruction because of earthquake damage which would take an estimated ₱60,000 to repair, and is already constructing a new and more modest belfry. Also, it occupies a valuable piece of real estate which, once it is pulled down, could yield a consi-

derable rental income and help to support the archdiocesan seminaries. High though its purpose may be, the deliberate destruction of this great tower would be a crime against Philippine history and culture, and it is devoutly to be hoped that some kind of civic-religious effort can be organized to save and repair it.

Visually more impressive, because it can be seen from the flat countryside for miles around, is the ruined tower of Bacarra (plate XIVb) which for some reason is always surrounded by flights of wheeling, screaming birds. It has a more consistent style made up of classical elements. Its impressiveness is due, besides its size, to the fact that an earthquake sheared off its topmost story, depositing its conical dome at a skewed angle on the two lower stories.

Two other towers deserve special mention: Vigan, because of its classic grace and the fat white weathercock (symbolic of St. Peter) surmounting it (plate IIIc), and Santa María because of its slight tilt and its position (plate IXa).

8. **FACADES AND DECORATIVE MOTIFS.** Several things stand out when one examines the facades and decorative motifs of Ilocano colonial churches.

There is a certain type of facade which can probably be considered the epitome of Ilocano Baroque. It is characterized by simplicity and strength but is also capable of attaining a certain grace, and its distinctive features are a low silhouette, an angular pitch of the roof, the decorative use of columns or piers against the wall without pediments, and the presence of numerous finials shaped like urns, knobs or pyramids. The three great examples of this type of facade are Laoag, Vigan, and Paoay, which will be described at greater length below together with related facades.

Other churches show a somewhat more conventional but often interesting use of Baroque and Renaissance elements. Volutes or S-curves are often found⁷ sometimes as a small fringe

⁷ This fondness for curves and scrolls may, however, merely be a metamorphosis of pre-Spanish Indonesian decorative motifs. According to Leonhard Adam, "The decorative art of Indonesia... is distinguished by curved lines and arrangements as the predominant and most con-

decoration to top a facade, and sometimes as a larger decorative element, as we have seen in the buttresses of Paoay and Badoc. Of the latter, one may also mention as examples the side portal in Luna, the facades of old Dingras and Tayum, that at Piddig where the stucco is nearly gone and only the bulge in the brickwork shows where room was made for the scroll, and the facades of Bacarra, Sarrat, Candón, Santa, and San Fernando (plates XIa, VIIa, VIIIa, XIVa, XIVc, XIVd). The elaborately sculptured stone facades of southern Luzon and the Visayas are completely absent here.

Recessed, rounded, broken, or irregular pediments, so dear to the Baroque temper, are also found aplenty for both outside and inside decoration. These can be seen in altars at Laoag and Santo Domingo (plate Ic), and in external features at Vintar, San Nicolás, Sarrat, Magsingal, Santa and Luna (plates XIVa, XVa, XIVc). Probably the most graceful one is at San Vicente, where the main lines forming what would ordinarily be the raking cornice dip down slightly and then sweep upward like waves, seeming to hold up the gable on their curling tips (plate XVc).

A classical element found in most Ilocano churches is the use of engaged columns or (less commonly) piers. Where columns are used, there is a tendency to prefer coupled columns to single ones; even the interior of Paoay and old Dingras have engaged twin columns marching down the length of their walls. It is possible that what appear as piers in some renovated facades may once have been engaged columns. Little attempt seems to have been made to achieve the proper sequence or orders, only the Vigan facade showing a "correct" superposition of the Ionic order on the Tuscan (plate Va). In Balaoan, the bulging of the top row of columns goes contrary to classical proportions but achieves an unusual and exotic effect; a some-

spicuous patterns. Thus we here find a great variety of scrolls, coils, and concentric circles. These curvilinear patterns are typical of Indonesia" (*Primitive Art*, London: Penguin Books, 3rd ed., 1954, p. 128). Again, "...the principal patterns of decorative art in Indonesia are curvilinear, consisting of scrolls, coils, spirals, concentric circles" (p. 135). The term Indonesia as used here includes the Philippines.

what similar technique is used on the columns of the main altar at Laoag. In some cases (Vigan, Laoag, San Vicente, Cabugao, Lapog), one can see the decorative use of columns without pediments such as Kelemen observed in Latin America.

One baroque feature missing in the exteriors of all Ilocos churches is the twisted or salomonic column. It is found only on the richly carved gilt-and-white retablo at Magsingal, the most elaborate altar in all Ilocos and the only remaining one of its kind, which unfortunately has been partially covered by later accretions in poor taste (plate XVb). It is known that this feature was present in Philippine churches in other regions—witness the eighteenth-century structures in the Cagayán Valley—and its absence in Ilocos is slightly puzzling. Brick weathers easily; is it possible that these columns were once present but were hidden due to later re-plastering?

Of certain Spanish decorative features there are only minor traces. There is only one espadaña with bells in the whole region, that at the Vigan cemetery chapel (plate IIIa), a charming facade topped by small scrolls and with caryatids holding up the corners of the lowermost order of pilasters.

Neo-Mudéjar features are also only slightly in evidence. Horizontally grooved pilasters are found at the Paoay convent (plate VIc). The facade of Narvacán is featured by squat-based piers narrowing towards the top into finials, interlaced by a spare combination of curving lines, scrolls and angles. The Mudéjar spirit seems to be present in the way the center finial rests on a horizontal line held up between two scrolls; one might almost call it an inverted Mudéjar arch (plate XVIa).

One other detail of exterior decoration remains to be noted: religious insignia and royal coats-of-arms. This was Augustinian country and the insignia of that order, the transfixing heart and the tasseled hat, are to be found almost everywhere: over the Laoag main altar, over the main doors at Santa Lucía and Sarrat, over the convent entrances at Paoay and Santa María, etc. (plates Ic, Xa, XIVc, VIc, IXc). The Spanish royal coat of-arms is best depicted over the main portal of San Nicolás

in colored stucco (plate XVa), over that of Sinait in wood, and over that of San Ildefonso in stucco.

Unfortunately, perversions of design, unrelated either to climate or to local tradition, are becoming more numerous and are taking their toll of colonial facades. This seems largely due to an uncontrollable modern mania for revival styles, particularly Gothic. The worst examples are found right around the supposedly conservative city of Vigan itself. The chapel at Caoayan has Gothic windows which are visibly superimposed over older round arches; with the Gothic portal and blind arches of the lower story, they coexist uneasily and quite unharmoniously on the same facade with rows of twin columns left over from the classical elements of the old colonial facade. The church at Bantay, damaged during World War II, is neo-Gothic mixed with some pseudo-Romanesque elements and the bell tower on a nearby knoll has a blind Gothic arch over its doorway. The Gothic motif in Bantay seems to date from the nineteenth century. These are the most egregious examples. There are others. Santa has Gothic windows. Bangar has a Gothic portal and a Gothic central window and San Esteban has quasi-Gothic blind windows flanking its main portal, while San Fernando has blind Gothic arches over its second story windows.

9. INTERIOR OBJECTS. The interiors of the Ilocos churches contain an uneven assortment of altars, pulpits, images and artifacts. Altars at Magsingal, Vigan, Laoag, old Dingras, Tayum, Sinait, Cabugao and Luna, and the pulpit at Luna, are worthy of mention (plates IVa, IVb, Ic, XIc). Ivory images of the Blessed Virgin and of other saints are not uncommon, but neither are they too plentiful; perhaps the best one is found in Bauang (illustrated in F. Zóbel's article in *PHILIPPINE STUDIES*, vol. VI, no. 3, August 1958, p. 284), and there is another good image in Bantay, Ntra. Sra. de la Caridad. There is an ivory image of the patron saint in San Esteban, and a St. Michael in wood (not, however, an early piece) in Santiago. Fernando Zóbel has already discussed (*PHILIPPINE STUDIES*, vol. V, no. 3, September 1957, pp. 261-267) the metal ex-votos found in Santa Lucia; other ex-votos, less in number and in-

ferior in quality, are found at San Vicente. There are also metal guidons, crucifixes, candle holders, censers, and texts of parts of the mass, which will be seen in greater detail later on. Charming stucco designs surround the holy water recesses at Cabugao, Santa María and Sarrat, the first one being probably the best of the lot (plate XVd). There was one painting at Sarrat in poor condition, and faint traces of murals in Piddig and (before its recent re-painting) Naguilian. A wood relief such as is often found in Philippine churches hangs in the Luna baptistery, probably polychromed at one time but now plastered over with a coat of white paint (plate XIc).

But in the interiors, too, there have been disastrous attempts at repainting altars. Most often this takes the form of painting stucco and wood to look like marble. The effect is often incongruous and insipid. An honorable exception must, however, be made. At Lapog, which suffered damage in World War II, the altar has been redone rather tastefully and in a restrained modern manner that would merit the approval of followers of the "Liturgical Arts" movement. This was reputedly the work of an engineer named Tongson from Vigan.

10. CHINESE ELEMENTS. As elsewhere in the Philippines, Chinese influences can be discerned in the Ilocos church buildings. The most obvious are the Fu dogs found at the entrance to the Vigan seminary and at the tops of pilasters of the facade of the Vigan Cathedral (plate IIIb). Also showing a strong Chinese influence are the carved choir beams in Aringay depicting Baroque angels battling Chinese dragons (plate XIIc). Less obvious are statues of the Virgin at Luna and Sarrat, and the remnants of stylized clouds on the raking cornice of Cabugao church, a feature also found at Paoay, Santa Lucia, and Philippine churches elsewhere.

11. COMMON FEATURES, BUT NO UNIFORMITY. One particular hypothesis which does not seem to hold true for the Ilocos region (although it does for certain other parts of the country) is that there should be a uniformity of architecture within the region due to the unifying effect of evangelization by one religious order. Although nearly all parish posts in this region were

filled by Augustinians (with the exception of the cathedral city of Vigan, whose bishop between the mid-18th century and the end of the Spanish regime was invariably a Dominican, and Santo Domingo, Ilocos Sur, which has always been under the secular clergy), there is no uniformity of design such as one finds, for example, among many churches in the Cagayán Valley. There are, we have seen, common features and similarities, but the uniformity imposed from above by the pervasive control of one religious order is absent. The similarities seem to be regional and folk-inspired, and to have sprung from below, from the esthetic sense of the people. This probably signifies two things: first and most obviously, the churches were not built at the same time but over a considerable span of years and even centuries; and second, they were probably designed and built by craftsmen (e.g., stone masons) rather than by professional architects, with the possible exception of Vigan (of which more anon) and of some of the more recent (i.e., nineteenth century) structures.

12. SOME GENERALIZATIONS. One comes away from a survey of Ilocano colonial churches with an impression of simplicity, sincerity, straightforwardness and strength. We have seen that they contain native modifications of foreign elements, native combinations of such elements, as well as some native elements themselves. (F. Zóbel remarks, "The use of the 'fat' or 'flattened' curve is typically Filipino".) All of these qualify them for inclusion under the term Filipino (Fil-Hispanic or Hispano-Philippine, for those who prefer hyphenation) colonial art. But in addition there are also regional elements not found elsewhere (such as certain facades and the use of exterior stairways) which amply justify their being labelled Ilocano Baroque. Indeed, it makes much more sense to use this term than to proclaim (as a certain historical marker on a building in the region does) that such-and-such a church is built in the "Italian Renaissance" style.

Ilocano Baroque, because of its inherent simplicity, does not have the elaborateness nor exhibit the skill and sophistication of, say, the rococo churches in the Cagayán Valley, or of certain churches in the Tagalog region (e.g., Morong), or the

Visayas (e.g., Miagao). But it has a rude⁸ charm and a folk attractiveness about it.

The better to appreciate these qualities, we shall now turn to the examination of individual churches as integral units rather than, as we have done so far, using individual details from various structures to illustrate some general proposition. First we shall go over the three churches that best epitomize Ilocano Baroque—Laoag, Vigan and Paoay; and then we shall look at six other churches which are worthy of a fairly close look for different reasons — old Dingrás, Tayum, Santa María, Luna, Aringay, and Santa Lucía.

IV. ILOCANO BAROQUE: THREE GREAT CHURCHES

The most strongly characteristic Ilocano colonial churches are Laoag, Vigan, and Paoay, and we shall now examine them in some detail.

(a) LAOAG

The earliest in point of time is Laoag whose foundations, according to a historical marker, were laid in 1612. Although it underwent extensive repairs in the mid-nineteenth century, it is believed that its present general form follows the original outlines, as it is not at all nineteenth-century in conception and spirit.

Bold lines characterize the facade, anchored on both sides by huge columns on which incipient volutes seem to lean as they converge upward to form the raking cornice. Four pairs of twin engaged columns with foliate capitals (one can hardly call them Corinthian or Tuscan) and topped by urns range across the lower story, each set of two pairs flanking a niche containing interesting primitive⁹ statues, with the center being occupied by the main portal. The second story also has twin engaged columns, shorter and slimmer, with knurled knobs for capitals and topped by what look like knurled cones or urns.

⁸ In the archaic sense of this word.

⁹ This word is used here in a broad sense and includes what Leonhard Adam calls peasant art or (quoting A. L. Kroeber) "derivative primitive art". See L. Adam, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

Of the five pairs of columns, the center one flanks a niche containing a statue, two other pairs flank two windows (which have received latter-day pseudo-Gothic inner arches, fortunately not of a permanent nature), and the remaining two occupy the outer flanks of the whole pediment. Urn-like finials once topped both sides of the raking cornice, but those to the right of the viewer are now gone. (Plates 1a, b.)

The rear wall of the church shows a gable with knob-like finials but without stucco designs. The side portal is recessed in tiers, and the side walls are very thick and in addition have shallow buttresses. Two sets of exterior stairways used to feature this wall, but one of them was converted in 1958 into a grotto of Lourdes.

The facade's primitiveness is underlined by the lack of integration between the various levels. The lines of the lower story do not continue to the upper story, which has a pattern of its own, and this in turn does not continue up to the finials. Withal, it is a strong and manly facade. Unfortunately, after the earthquake of 1957 and subsequent repairs, it was painted a powder-puff pink color, and now gives the impression of being an architectural transvestite.

Some idea of its size may be had from rough measurements. Its length is 97 paces from front portal to altar; its inside width is 18 paces and its outside width at the facade is 25 paces, the difference being accounted for by walls and buttresses.

A clear view of the facade from the main plaza is now impossible due to a gasoline station which has been set up in front on church land "to help support the seminaries," thus illustrating once again the apparently insoluble dilemma between the esthetic and the utilitarian. The church, convent, and belfry (earlier commented on) together with the large town plaza must, before the filling stations and tailor shops sprang up, have formed a magnificent panoramic vista.

(b) VIGAN

Vigan's facade has more grace and less power than Laoag's and the cathedral as a whole shows a more professional archi-

tectural touch than is evident in most Ilocano colonial churches. This is probably because of its position as an episcopal see, and because it was built at a later date, the end of the eighteenth century, having been completed around 1800.¹⁰

The silhouette of the facade is softened by having its raking cornice slightly curved, and the finials are pyramids and knobs rather than urns. As already mentioned, twin engaged Ionic columns superposed on Tuscan grace the central part of the facade, flanking the central doorway on the ground floor and the arch framing an equestrian statue of the conversion of St. Paul on the upper story. Further out to the sides, single engaged columns of the same orders flank two more windows. The outermost features to the side are two doors in line with the side aisle which are flanked by pilasters (rather than engaged columns) on the tops of which sit Chinese Fu dogs. The first order is topped by a frieze complete with triglyphs, me-

¹⁰ The historical marker on the cathedral, which says it was built in 1641, is not very clear as to the history of its construction. Recent archival research in Spain has revealed the following facts: Construction of the cathedral to replace the dilapidated parish church of San Pablo was authorized by the celebrated Governor José de Basco y Vargas in 1786, and the cornerstone was laid on 31 January 1790 during the incumbency of Bishop Juan Ruiz de San Agustin, the structure being projected as a three-aisle church 87 $\frac{2}{3}$ varas long by 35.5 varas wide, with the main aisle alone being 18 varas wide. (1 vara—.835 meter.) By May, 1794 the stone walls were up, the baptistery and sacristy were finished, the facade completed up to the cornice, the tower built up to its second story, and the materials for completion of the work assembled. These included tiles for roofing as, according to the Bishop, *there were in Ilocos at that time no buildings roofed with tiles*, all of them being then covered with thatch and thus constantly exposed to fire hazard. In 1797, Tomás and Alejandro Arenas, two Chinese experts (*maestros*) well-versed in the Spanish language, inspected the structure in compliance with a *real cédula* and reported that the ceilings of the side aisles, the altars, pulpit, and cemetery were still unfinished. By 1799 work was at a very advanced stage, and in 1800 the Bishop sent to Spain the ground plan of the new cathedral. See María Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelc Spínola, *ARQUITECTURA ESPAÑOLA EN FILIPINAS (1865-1800)* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1959), pp. 352-354. Research in the archives of the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia should bring to light more interesting facts.

topes, taeniae, guttae and regulae (but not mutules). (Plates Va, b, c.)

Although the decorative lines of the facade are not carried up into the finials, these having a rhythm of their own, it is more sophisticated and better integrated than that of Laoag. Its central part, at least, is a harmonious unit integrating two levels and ending without a pediment of its own (a feature commented on earlier) within the larger pediment of the building as a whole.

This cathedral has the usual distinguishing features of other Ilocano colonial churches, such as buttresses and exterior stairways. But it has other features betokening a higher level of architectural sophistication. A three-aisle church, it has a clerestory which is (at least visually) held up by flying buttresses, on the upper sides of which tiles form a "spine" (plate Vc). Some Vigan clergymen are skeptical of the structural value of the flying buttresses, contending that during earthquakes they tend to hang from the clerestory walls rather than to hold them up. Be this as it may, these features are absent from other Ilocano colonial churches and, together with the graceful and fairly well integrated facade, give ground to suppose that a professional architect rather than an improvising artisan was responsible for this particular building.

Its dimensions are 67 paces from the front door to the altar rail with an outside width of 28 paces. Being a three-aisle structure, its interior is featured by a succession of arches leading toward the High Altar (plate IVa). But the best of the altars is not this one, but that of the Blessed Sacrament on the congregation's right side, which has fluted Corinthian columns and fourteen medallions around the main niche representing the mysteries of the Holy Rosary (the fifteenth surmounts the altar itself; plate IVb). The altar on the left aisle is reserved for exposition of the Blessed Sacrament on Holy Thursday, at which time silver plated shields are mounted on it (plate IVc). The design of the altar rail should also be noted. Another altar worthy of mention is the wooden one in the baptistery,

whose base is decorated with primitive carvings of considerable charm (plate IVd.)¹¹

(c) PAOAY

If Vigan represents a softening of the general outlines of the Laoag facade, then Paoay (1704, with the convent from

¹¹ The Vigan cathedral does not stand by itself but is the focal point of a series of ecclesiastical buildings spread out over two plazas, one in front of the cathedral and the other (and principal) one to its side. The beautiful bell tower and the seminary with Fu dogs flanking its entrance have already been mentioned. This seminary for a short period was in the care of the Spanish Jesuits; they left behind a small museum of natural history which appears not to have been touched since their departure in the 1920's.

There remains the archbishop's palace, reputedly the only such structure dating from the Spanish regime (probably early 19th century; see Díaz-Trechuelo, *op. cit.*, pp. 354-355) still intact in this country (plate IIIId); wooden pegs rather than iron nails can still be seen as having been used in its construction. Of its contents, only a few things can be mentioned here. First, there are six primitive paintings (five of them unsigned, while the sixth one is signed Severino Flav. Pablo) of 18th and 19th century archbishops of Nueva Segovia. Then there are silver artifacts formerly used at Mass. One is a magnificent rococo piece depicting the Last Supper, with the text of the Gloria and Credo on the side panels. Three others are silver pieces in the shape of crowned two-headed Hapsburg eagles, the larger one of which is inscribed with the text of the Consecration, while the two smaller ones have the Lavabo and the Last Gospel. All the silver pieces are most probably Spanish, and the eagles are hallmarked with the letters AV (or possibly AY). They should be compared with a woodcarving of the same emblem found over the inner portal of a chapel at Balaoan (plate XVIIId). There is also a carved throne in dark wood with a canopy in the main reception room.

The existence of this complex of well-preserved ecclesiastical buildings makes Vigan worth visiting to those who are interested in Philippine colonial art. This attraction is enhanced by the fact that Vigan itself is probably the best preserved example of a Philippine colonial city, although it is visibly decaying and will probably suffer substantial defacement in a few years unless a great civic effort is made to arrest the decay and at least preserve the external appearance of the old town, as was done with the so-called French Quarter in New Orleans. Another of Vigan's attractions is the series of excellent primitive paintings dating from 1821 depicting the so-called Basi Rebellion or the Bantaoay uprising of 1807; these are in the care of Mr. Buenaventura Bello, Principal of the Northern High School and World War II patriot.

1707 and the bell tower from 1793), represents the opposite tendency. It is the best integrated of the three facades, the vertical lines of the piers carrying through up to the finials and giving it a vertical rather than a horizontal stress. Rosettes, emblems, and coats-of-arms decorate the upper part of the facade but due to weathering are difficult to distinguish from a distance.

It is also the "hardest" of the three facades we are examining, the lines of its raking cornice containing not the faintest suggestion of a curve, and the angularity of the silhouette is broken only at the sides by two pairs of volutes. Also, it utilizes rectangular piers rather than the rounded engaged columns which are found at Vigan and Laoag. (Plate VIa.)

The church itself is made of stuccoed brick and coral blocks, the tower entirely of the last without stucco. The lower part of the facade is made of brick and the upper part of coral blocks, but this arrangement seems to be reversed in the other three walls. (Plate VIb.)

Besides its striking facade, two other things are notable about Paoay. The first is its great size, being 103 paces from front door to rear wall and 20 wide inside. The second are its huge buttresses, the like of which are found nowhere else in the region and perhaps in the whole country. There are eleven on each side and two in the rear, each of which projects 5 1/2 paces from the wall and is 2 paces thick, as mentioned earlier. The two side walls each have an exterior stairway of different slopes (plate VIb.) The side portals are flanked by badly weathered plant motifs in stucco (plate VIc). The gable of the rear wall has remnants of what were at one time stylized Chinese clouds.

To the viewer with a purely western orientation, Paoay is the ultimate cry of despair against earthquakes; if these buttresses do not hold up the walls, nothing will. But to those with a greater affinity to the Orient, Paoay appears to be, in the words of Fernando Zóbel, "one of the finest and most exuberant examples of 'earthquake Baroque'".

(d) RELATED FACADES

Other facades in the region show affinity in some way or another with the three great examples just discussed here. It is sufficient to single out two. The one at Bangui, the most northerly of the Ilocano colonial churches, has the straightforwardness in miniature of the Laoag and Paoay facades, and also shows other similarities such as finials and engaged columns ending in knobs; the twin bell turrets, however, seem to be of slightly later date, especially the balustrades at the top.

Balaoan (plate XVIb) has a more elaborate facade whose division into five sections rather than three and whose treatment of the openings of the three central sections is reminiscent of Vigan. However, the vertical sweep of the three sets of four pairs of engaged columns carries on up to the finials; the columns of the first and third levels show a slight bulging at the base that seems more Indian than Grecian; and the raking cornice is broken up into several curves of different slopes. In appearance it is one of the most arresting and characteristic facades in all Ilocos, and the first forceful one encountered in coming up from the south.

V. SIX OTHER CHURCHES

Having seen the most characteristic Ilocano colonial churches, we shall now turn to six other churches which have special features to recommend them.

(a) OLD DINGRAS, THE MAGNIFICENT RUIN

About twenty kilometers inland and upriver from Laoag lies the town of Dingrás, in the heart of a region that was once a great rice-growing area and in the nineteenth century supplied much of the rice exportation to China (a fact forgotten in a country that knows so little of its own history, and where even self-proclaimed nationalist "historians" try to rationalize their own ignorance by depreciating the importance of the past and censuring any interest therein). Lean times have come on the town. Rice exports stopped in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, whether from climatic or other reasons is un-

known, and other regions in the country far surpassed it in output and in reputation as rice-growing areas. Catholicism, too, has come in for its share of hard knocks. The religious upheavals of the Revolutionary period, especially here in the home province of the founder of the Aglipayan schism, cut deeply into its membership, and Roman Catholics now form a little less than half of the town's population.

When the town's large church — ninety paces long by twenty wide — was unroofed by typhoons and cracked by earthquakes, it proved economically impossible to restore it. A new one was built to one side, inferior in size and design (pseudo-Gothic arches again!) to the old one, whose ruins have however been allowed to stand to this day, an impressive monument to the past.

Many features of other Ilocos churches are found here—S-curves on the facade, brick as the main building material, absence of a transept, the presence of an exterior stairway, and the facade at the western end (plates VIIa, b, c). The upper part of the facade has horizontal grooves reminiscent of Neo-Mudéjar touches, and there are still faint remnants of stucco decoration (plate VIIa). Evidently, from traces left on the backside of the west front, there were at least two roofs of different pitch at various times (plate VII b). Perhaps these two roofs represented different facades, for the central window of the present one seems to have been superimposed (probably in the nineteenth century) over an earlier round opening, a feature also found at San Fernando, La Union. Like the other towns of the Ilocos Norte heartland south of the Laoag river (San Nicolás, Paoay, and Badoc) rectangular piers form the facade's main structural support, unlike the towns north of the river (Laoag, Bacarra, Vintar, Sarrat, and Piddig) which have engaged columns. The chancel has a retable-type high altar and two side altars with engaged columns, and (as mentioned earlier) paired engaged columns with composite capitals decorate the walls of the nave at intervals.

Dingrás is unique in the Ilocos region because of one thing: it is the only disused ruin that has been allowed to stand.

Elsewhere ruined churches have either been repaired, or pulled down and new ones built in their places. Here, as nowhere else, we have the old and the new standing side by side.

(b) TAYUM, THE UNSPOILED

In the western foothills of the Cordillera Central stands the central Abra town of Tayum. By a stroke of good fortune it was spared the tender ministrations of both Japanese invaders and American liberators, and its church stands today as a symbol of what other churches in the region once must have been, and today could still be if some care were taken about their upkeep and preservation.

It is striking in appearance and looks more Latin American in appearance than any other church in the area. Vertical in stress, it is topped at the sides by two huge urns which faintly resemble rice-pots, and in the center by a differently shaped urn or knob. Its lower stringcourse is unusual, for this region, in being a series of shallow sagging arcs rather than a straight line. The gable also curves downward from the center in two S-curves. Some foliate stucco designs are still faintly discernible. The tower seems to be of later construction. The rest of the building contains familiar elements — altars of stuccoed brick or stone, broken pediments, buttresses, exterior stairways, and absence of a transept. There is a dark-colored hardwood baptismal font with magnificent primitive carving, just the sort of thing that would send the agents of greedy art-collectors scampering into Abra to try to buy it; one can only pray that the Holy Spirit will enlighten the clergy and parishioners of Tayum and help them to resist these monetary blandishments. (Plate VIII a, b, c.)

What is most important about Tayum is not so much that it has preserved its appearance as that it seems to have preserved its *spirit*. It was Holy Week when we visited it. The church was spic and span and showed traces of constant care. All around its interior were groups of images depicting the Passion and Death of Our Lord. They were not old; their raiment was quite new; but they all had a folk quality about them, an intensity, a sense of drama, that one no longer finds in more

"sophisticated" groups of images with their platitudinous iconography and perfunctory execution, and which one must travel to places like Tayum to find. May the good people of Tayum be fortunate enough to continue enjoying the things of the body and of the spirit which are their priceless legacy from their fathers.

(c) SANTA MARIA, THE STRATEGIC

The oft-photographed church at Santa Maria, Ilocos Sur, is probably the most magnificently situated in the whole region, and misses being the focal point of a truly great architectural composition only because of a series of uncoordinated gaucheries. Located atop a hill overlooking the coastal plain for miles around, a magnificent stone stairway sweeps up to it from the town on its western side, and a similar stairway (now blocked by barbed wire) comes up to it on the eastern side, from which one can view a cemetery with a pretty chapel far below.

The position of the tilted octagonal tower detached from the church is unique in the region, being at about the mid-point of the longitudinal axis of the nave, instead of being in line with the facade or forward of it as in almost all other cases.

The church itself shows solidity of construction. Dating from 1769, it has brick buttresses, probably the best-preserved exterior stairway in the region, absence of a transept, what looks like either a brick reviewing stand or outdoor stage in back of it, the Augustinian transfigured heart with hat and tassels excellently executed in stucco over the *convento* entrance, floral and foliate designs around its holy water recesses, glazed tiles flooring the altar area, and (somewhat of a discordant element) a sawali ceiling (plates IX a, b, c). At the foot of the western stairway is a pair of buildings (formerly twin chapels, or were they granaries?), one of which is now in ruins and the other used as a school building. The church's facade is not particularly prepossessing, but this is of little consequence as it is not its most important element. In length it measures 81 paces from the front door to the back of the altar, and it has an interior width of 16 paces.

The principal evidence of clumsiness is the placing of the convento in front of the church. Consequently it is impossible to get a front view of the facade, or to have an unobstructed view to the north from the church. Worse, the convento has been connected to the church by a structural bridge, thus also blocking off the view to the east. Had the convento (now a school) not been placed where it is, perhaps another approach to the church leading directly up to the facade would have been possible. And the view both of the church and from the church would have been unobstructedly magnificent. Even in its present state, it has one of the most impressive approaches in the whole country.

(d) SANTA LUCIA, THE ECLECTIC

This church is like nothing else in the area, being a mixture of several styles; not a folk-mixture as in the tower at Laoag, but an attempt at sophistication.

The recessed portals are Romanesque, but the capitals of the columns are Egyptian. A tinplate Renaissance dome crowns the transept, the only one in the area. Consoles holding up short engaged columns sprout from the upper part of the facade and range up and down the gable; from a distance the effect is one of seeing curtains hanging rather than of columns being held up. Just above this are stylized Chinese clouds. Foliate designs abound in the interior stringcourses. The most interesting object of all is, of course, the dark image of Sta. Lucía, object of veneration, which has been described by F. Zóbel in his article on silver ex-votos already alluded to. (Plates X a-d.) The nave has an interior width of 14 paces and measures 76 paces from the front portal to the rear wall of the apse—the presence of this feature being again a rarity in the region.

Dating this church is tricky. Somehow the date 1808 comes into my mind, but I do not remember its source. A painted sign in Ilocano underneath the choir says that the church was renovated in 1936 through the common effort of the townspeople, but the structure is obviously much older than that, there being an Augustinian transfixed heart in the iron-work over the main portal.

While one can hardly share the enthusiasm which terms it "one of the most beautiful churches in the whole Archdiocese,"¹² it is not unhandsome and has a character and a mild fascination of its own.

(e) LUNA AND ARINGAY: TWO WELL-KEPT CHURCHES

Traveling farther south, we come across two churches which, while not exceptionally prepossessing in their exteriors, are well-kept, and between them possess a collection of objects which illustrate in concentrated fashion what one finds elsewhere scattered over many parishes. These are Luna and Aringay.

Luna has a pleasing though not exceptional 19th-century (1872) facade which recently has received an application of white and yellow paint helping to bring out the decorative detail. The facade has three sets of two pairs of engaged columns and two sets of single engaged columns farther out to the sides, flanked by twin bell-towers (plate XIa). A side portal has a recessed pediment, volutes, finials, etc. (plate XIb). The side walls each have a brick exterior stairway of different design, and, as seen earlier, cannon buttresses as well as ordinary ones. Inside, there is a stone pulpit with primitive carvings, wooden altar bases decorated with foliate designs, a statue of the Virgin (*Nuestra Señora de la Correa?*), and what must formerly have been a polychromed wood relief of the Baptism of Christ, now painted over entirely in white and hanging in the new baptistery (plate XIc). Luna's is not an exceptional church, but its preservation of many little details makes it worth visiting.

Aringay is the southernmost of the Ilocano colonial churches worth seeing. Its facade was retouched with cement in 1929, but the basic design was probably left unaltered; at one point it may have had engaged columns ranging across its facade, but if so these are now only partially in existence, the missing parts being suggested by linear designs on the concrete. It has certain similarities to the churches of Joco-ro in El

¹² NUEVA SEGOVIA BI-CENTENNIAL SOUVENIR, Manila: University of Santo Tomás Press, 1957.

Salvador and La Merced in Comayagua, Honduras (Kelemen, plates 73a and 77a). The nave is about 75 paces long, and there is no transept. It has some interesting images and altars, especially a disused altar in the baptistery at the bell tower which has engaged columns shooting up into what could be pointed tongues of flame. Unfortunately, someone has built a pseudo-Gothic altar beside it (plates XIIa, b, c).

In two respects, however, Aringay is outstanding. First, it has (or had when we visited it) an excellent collection of metal objects—guidon, crucifix, and candle-holder (plates XIII, a-d). The rococo crucifix is about on a par with that at San Juan, La Union, except for the magnificent sun adorning the latter, and is better than that at San Vicente. The candle-holder has charming foliate and floral designs, also rococo, and is more elaborate than most such candle-holders we found in the area. The guidon is the best of all; it is filled with a gentle humor and shows strong traces of Chinese influence. On one side a chalice and host stand on Chinese clouds, while two angels with the faces of naughty children swing censers before it and two other angels with similar expressions look down from clouds in the two upper corners. On the other side, the upper corners are again occupied by naughty-looking cherubs in Chinese clouds gazing down on an oddly shaped Lamb of God curled up on a book (like a dog on a rug) while carrying a pennant. Other parishes in the area (e.g., Bacnotan) have similar guidons, but none as good as this one.

The other outstanding feature of Aringay is the set of beams holding up the choir loft. Originally there must have been eight of them, but one is now gone and another is almost completely defaced. A strong Chinese influence is evident. A uniform coat of white paint obscures the details but the most common scene depicted is that of an angel holding open the toothy jaws of a mythical monster. The best preserved of the beams tapers off at the end into the legs of a squatting person—either a reflection of Igorot influence¹³ or a throwback to Gothic Europe. The other beams show another type of mythical monster which seems to be a horned quadruped. The com-

¹³ An observation of Ambassador George Clutton's.

bination of theology and myth, of rococo, Gothic and Chinese elements, is unique and captivating, and the Aringay choir beams are probably an outstanding example of the mixture of various elements in Philippine colonial art.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This brief survey cannot pretend to be an exhaustive and professional compendium of Ilocano colonial churches. Rather, it aims at suggesting further avenues of research and at stimulating expert examination so that an authoritative study can eventually be put out. Such a study should not be limited to the Ilocos region alone but should embrace as many parts of the country as there are scholars willing to undertake the job. It is *after* the completion of such studies that it should be possible to define the main elements of Philippine colonial artistic idiom. Three general (and overlapping) avenues of study suggest themselves at once.

First, there is a crying need for factual and historical research — when the present structures were built, what other structures preceded them, what architectural and decorative modifications they underwent, what were the sources of building materials, etc. In particular, the influence of individuals—whether they be parish priests, professional architects, public officials, stonemasons, or craftsmen — should be carefully evaluated. It is not very meaningful to say that a particular church was built under the direction of Father So-and-So, or *Capitán* So-and-So; the important thing is how they influenced the design and the decoration of a particular church. The effect of government tribute-exemption is another point worth looking into.

Second, as an aid to this sort of activity, institutions of higher learning (especially but not exclusively the Catholic colleges and universities) should encourage the writing of term papers or of masters' theses on groups of historic churches or even on individual structures. Sometimes the material lies ready to hand in the numerous friar histories of the various ecclesiastical provinces under the different regular jurisdictions; some-

times parochial, diocesan, and archdiocesan records and archives have survived the ravages of time and only await the advent of a patient scholar to yield valuable information; sometimes the records have been destroyed and the churches defaced, and the student has to hunt down indirect references, old pictures, and oral tradition in order to make even an approximately accurate presentation of the facts of the case.

Third, there should be a general study of the use of Renaissance-Baroque-Rococo idiom in the Philippines. Thus far, the most general assumptions have been that this idiom was merely a carbon copy of European models, and that deviations from orthodoxy were gauche and ugly. We have seen enough, however, to realize that carbon copies are quite uninteresting in themselves, and that the deviations are more often than not of considerable artistic interest and may characterize, if not a new style, a hitherto unsuspected variant of one, or a new and unique combination of several. Field trips by art classes to surviving examples of Philippine colonial architecture should be encouraged.

Moves like these should help to awaken public interest in the upkeep of such artistic monuments as may really be of some merit. But there is no time to lose. So far it has been assumed that the ravages of time, natural disaster, and war have taken the greatest toll of our buildings. It should be apparent, however, that there are other equally strong factors threatening the artistic integrity of such colonial churches as have survived.

One of them is intellectual ignorance or artistic bad taste coupled with economic prosperity. The perversions of design which we have noted in Ilocos continue apace throughout the country, and as wealth grows, the itch to re-do churches and altars in the image and likeness of calendar and magazine art may be irresistible. In Ilocos the building of good roads and the paper-fueled Virginia tobacco boom are changing the face of the land (not always for the better, as shown by accelerated deforestation). The old region where moonlight serenaders called out to Manang Biday to open her window and look down

is changing into a land of electrical sound amplifiers, "piped" music in tobacco re-drying plants, and savage politically-motivated ambushades. Will the art of yore survive the impact of new conditions, or will it succumb to the poor taste and low artistic standards so prevalent in the country today?

The other factor threatening the integrity of colonial churches is the growing interest in building up private collections of colonial art. Altars, statues, paintings, and metalwork are disappearing from churches and turning up in the hands of art brokers or private parties. In some instances, they may actually be performing a useful service by salvaging worthwhile pieces already consigned to the dust-bin or the flames, refurbishing them, and preserving them for posterity. But one suspects that they also actively seek out objects which are still in use and persuade parish priests to part with them, for a consideration.

The parish priest is, of course, violating church regulations in so doing. But he is often faced with pressing practical problems on which he gets little help from above. A leaky roof needs repair and the parish priest's concern is, above all, the housing of his congregation; he knows the price of galvanized iron roofing, but not the value of art objects. The temptation to barter some "old discolored 18th-century wormwood" for some "nice, shiny 20th-century plaster" is too much for many of them to resist, especially if a nice pecuniary contribution is made on the side. Incidentally, this method may enable him to circumvent the safeguards set up by busy diocesan administrators, for if there is only an exchange of objects, the switch will not show when taking inventory, unless the inventory specifies the period of the objects in question.

Another type of art collector seeks to absolve himself of responsibility for the destruction of colonial churches by alleging that he only buys pieces which are already out of the churches and in the art broker's back-room. But this is cynical hypocrisy: if he did not stand ready to purchase the art-broker's loot, there would be much less legalized plundering of churches, which takes place precisely because the art-broker

knows he can invariably dispose of his booty at a good price. (Quite often an unscrupulous broker, in order to cover up his trail, will deliberately misrepresent the provenance of a particular object, thus robbing that object of much of its value to the art historian, and making infinitely harder the identification of periods and places of origin.)

What can the Church do under these circumstances? Negatively, it can tighten its methods of taking inventory and exercise closer supervision over alterations of structures and dispositions of sacred objects by parish priests. But this will hardly work unless coupled with a more positive approach. We have seen that the artistic standards prevalent among parish priests are a reflection of their training. The first and most obvious step that can be taken, therefore, is to give seminarians a thorough grounding in art appreciation — not scattered and occasional lectures, but serious full-time courses complete with field trips. Unless one attacks the problem thus at the parish-priest level, one cannot hope to stop the constant attrition of colonial art objects from the churches. It should not be too difficult to make the average priest realize that good art costs no more than bad, and is more enduring; the time, money, and effort spent in chipping or plastering a round arch into a pointed pseudo-Gothic one could be much better employed in something more practically useful and esthetically pleasing.¹⁴

At the diocesan level, there can be constant consultation with knowledgeable persons before alterations are made or objects disposed of. Perhaps getting in touch with the participants in the Liturgical Arts Movement would be a good step to take.

If the diocesan administrators despair of taking effective measures at the parish level, they could erect a diocesan or

¹⁴ —However, a devout Catholic layman who is also an art connoisseur writes me as follows: "I doubt very much whether teaching appreciation of art in the seminaries will achieve very much. Art and piety have never been good bedfellows. What I believe is required to prevent the spoliation of the churches is first of all action by the Bishops and the appointment of diocesan surveyors who have inventories of what is in the churches and who will take action if anything is missing from them."

archdiocesan museum in which would be deposited all worthwhile colonial art objects in the diocese. Admission would be charged, and the proceeds (after expenses) pro-rated among the contributing parishes. But this is clearly a counsel of despair. The proper place for such objects is their original churches, not a museum or a private collection. Besides, the proceeds would, if at all, be hardly enough for the maintenance of the museum, and the returns to the parishes would be negligible — unless a widespread national interest in these matters is kindled.

For in truth the problem is not the Catholic Church's alone, but the whole country's. The Philippine colonial church is not merely a place of worship for adherents of a particular religious denomination; it is a cultural treasure belonging to the whole country, and ways should be sought of securing wide civic and governmental support for its preservation. In Texas and California, the old missions, now mostly located in non-Catholic communities, are kept up by the cooperative efforts of Catholic and non-Catholic groups — a broad spectrum of civic organizations including certain entities that at other times and in other places have reputedly been hostile to the Catholic church. Some of these missions have much less artistic and historical merit than many Philippine colonial churches. If a practical, hard-headed, and supposedly unhistorical-minded people like the Americans have undertaken such a broadly-based movement for cultural preservation, might not something similar be achieved in the Philippines? This will of course have to take place on the local level, and the formula will vary from place to place; but this very adaptability is this method's greatest source of strength.

Another non-religious remedy remains, and that is officially to declare the more meritorious colonial churches as national monuments. This might, for example, be one way of saving the Laoag tower. But the implications of such a move must be clearly understood. In its most advanced form this would presuppose the state's financial support for the upkeep of these monuments. Unfortunately the state is in chronic financial difficulties. What remains, then, is the implication that no altera-

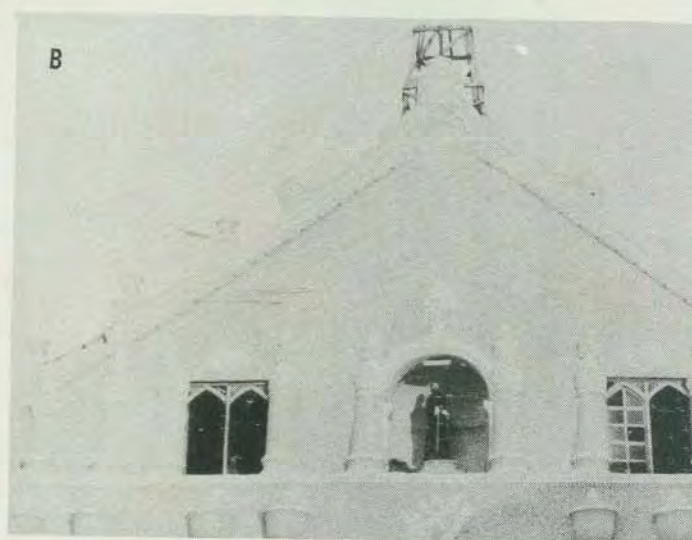
tions or repairs can be made without permission from some superior authority. But which office will constitute this authority, and will it have personnel qualified to pass judgment on the matter? Might this not simply lead to the churches' being in a state of chronic disrepair?

Preserving the meritorious objects inside the churches is a somewhat different matter. Among the art collectors is an increasing number of foreign cultural carpetbaggers who are supplied by Filipino cultural quislings. What seems called for is what so many other countries have done: a law banning the exportation of national cultural treasures, i.e., objects of both artistic and historical merit. This should serve at least to keep such objects in the country until a national appreciation for them has been generated. If one waits until such an appreciation is engendered before putting on the ban, as has been superciliously suggested by a foreign art collector, there may be nothing left for our people to appreciate.

It seems that a combination of diocesan action combined with local civic support is the best way of preserving our cultural heritage, behind the protective barrier of an export ban on national treasures. It is hoped that all who read this article will take an interest in Philippine colonial art and help to preserve it. It should be part of our national education to teach our people to appreciate the handiwork of our ancestors, and to cherish it. For it is in doing so that we can best find our national identity, and thus know ourselves.



Plate I
laong



B



C

laong

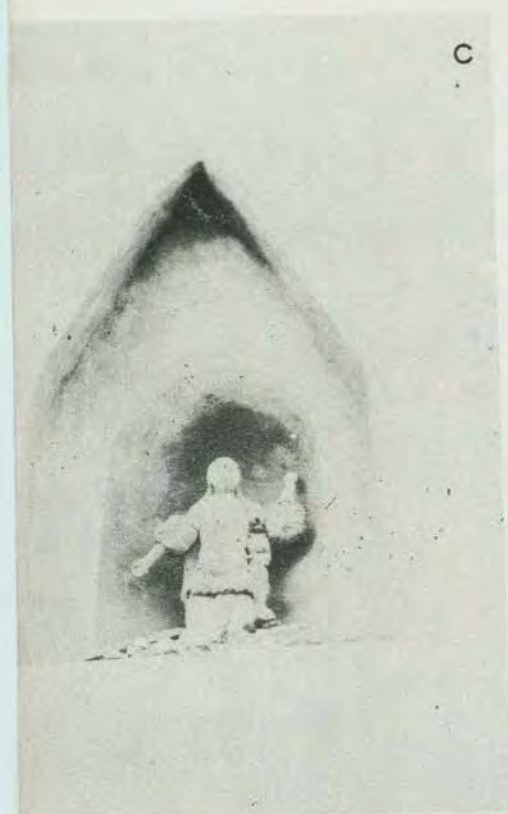
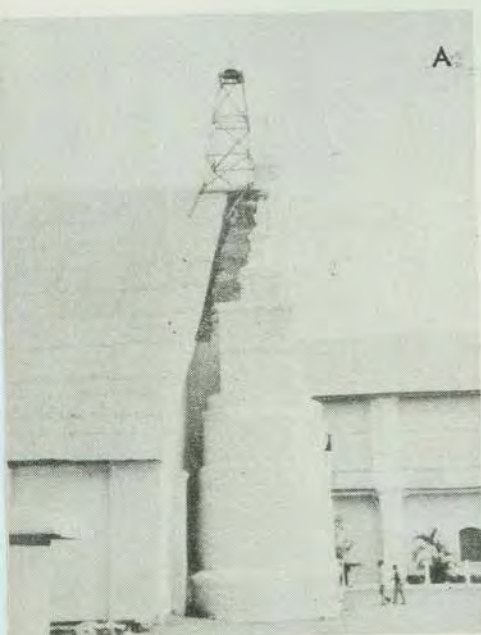




Plate III

Viggo

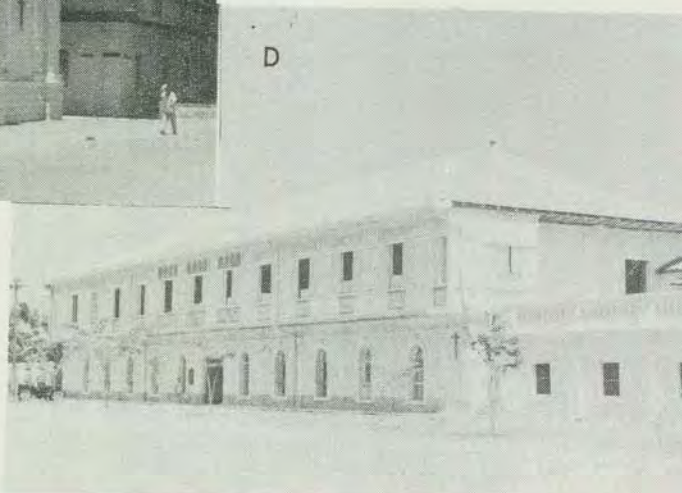
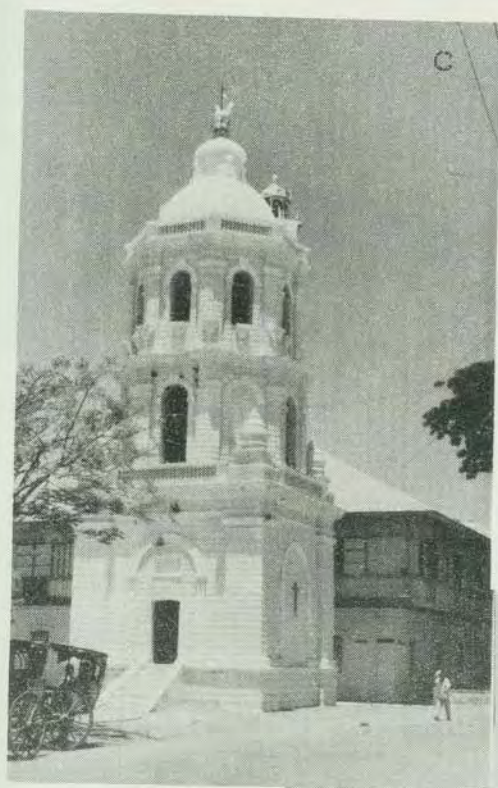
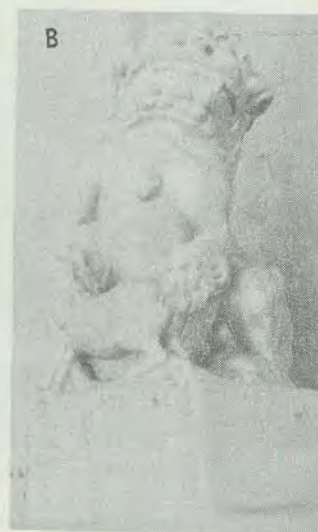


Plate IV

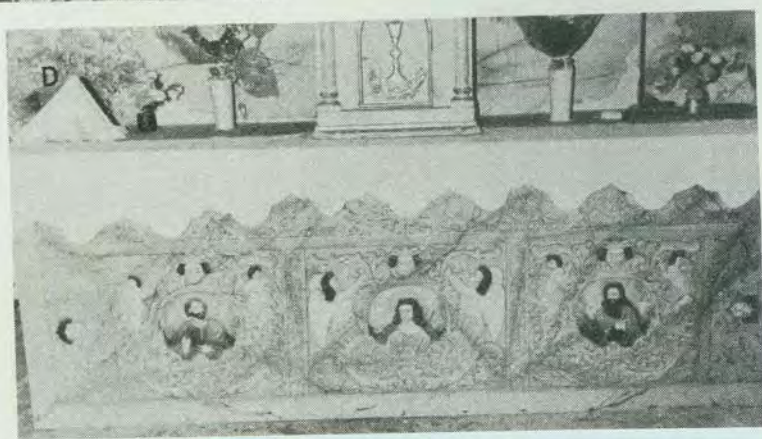
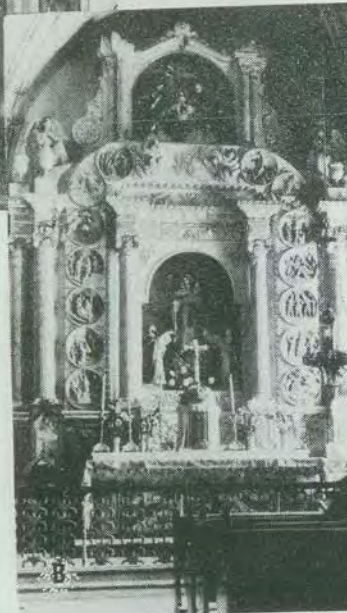


Plate V





Plate VI



Plate VII



Plate VIII

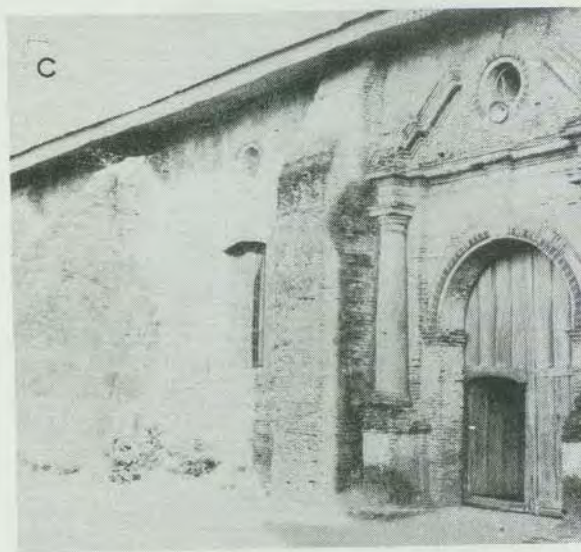


Plate IX

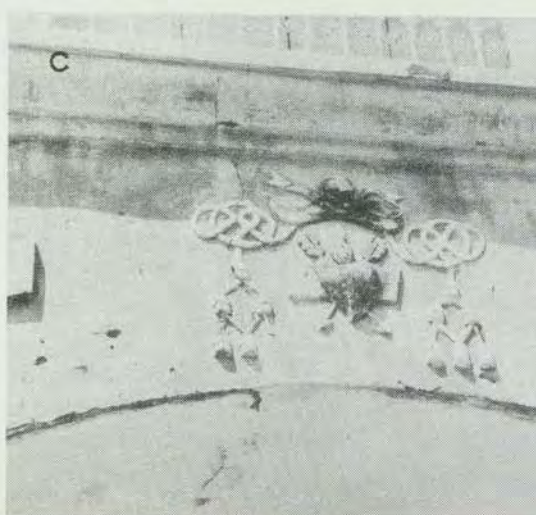
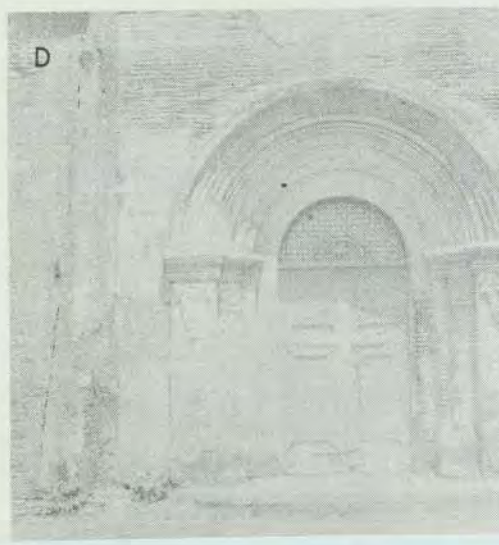




Plate X





A

Plate XI



C



Plate XII





Plate XIV



Plate XV





Plate XVI

