

A Visual Documentation of Fil-Hispanic Churches

Part V: Parish Church of San Vicente Ferrer, Dupax del Sur, Nueva Vizcaya

Regalado Trota Jose

The Ancient Land of Ituy

Today's Province of Nueva Vizcaya covers roughly a third of the ancient province of Cagayan. Politically it was established in 1839, when the southern half of Cagayan beginning with Ilagan downwards was separated and named Nueva Vizcaya. (It was baptized thus after the homeland of Governor General Luis Lardizabal, a Basque, who decreed the separation). The capital was fixed at Camarag, now Echagüe. In 1856, the territory was further divided, with the northern towns of Carig (Santiago), Camarag, Angadanan (Alicia), Caoayan, Gamu, and Ilagan merging with the southern towns of Tumauini and Cabagan of Cagayan to form a third province, Isabela (named after the reigning Spanish monarch). The capital of the reduced Nueva Vizcaya was moved to Bayombong. The province then included the towns of Kiangan and Lagawe, which are now part of Ifugao.

17th and 18th century historians, however, described the area of what is now Nueva Vizcaya as comprised of two cultural areas. The northern part was known as Paniqui, and corresponded to territory around Bayombong, Solano, and the borders with Ifugao and Isabela. Paniqui (not to be confused with a town of the same name in Tarlac), was peopled by Gaddangs and those who were later to be identified as Ifugaos. The southern portion was known as Ituy or Tuy, said to have taken its name from a corpulent red tree similar to the narra. A small river called Tuy or Tue ran through the township of Aritao, one of the earliest places to be explored. Also, the name Tuy is said to have been preferred by Luis Perez Dasmariñas, who first reconnoitered the area in 1591, because it sounded much like a town with the same spelling in his native Galicia.

Evangelization among the Immeas

The dwellers of Ituy/Tuy were called by various names. Early documents refer to them as Ituys, but that name could not be recalled by them a century later. A shy people, they remembered stories by their ancestors of how they were pushed

from lands further north by more aggressive communities. Their northern neighbors in Paniqui called them Malaat; to the people further south in Pampanga they were known as Isinay. But they called themselves Immeas or Inmeas.

Attempts to evangelize Ituy were made by the Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians. Lack of personnel, poor health conditions for the missionaries, local resistance to the friars, tribal hostilities and scattered villages hampered Christianization until almost the middle of the 18th century. From the first decades of the 1600s, Manaoag, Pangasinan was developed by the Dominicans as the first “launching pad” for a route that saw the evolution of way stations into the eastern Pangasinan towns of Asingan, San Manuel, and San Nicolas. The opposite end of that route, the Valley of Ituy, was reached by trekking over endless badlands that are now called the Caraballo Sur Mountain Range (It is basically this route that was rehabilitated by the Dominican pioneer Fr. Juan Villaverde in the late 19th century and thus it is called the Villaverde Trail until today.).

In 1717 the difficult terrain was accepted as mission territory by the Augustinians, who were able to gather 18 settlements into nine proto-towns. The center of evangelization was Bujay, descendant of an earlier village called Burubur, itself the probable resurrection of the ancient Ituy (Burubur was also the primeval name of the mountain range known today as the Caraballos, and the river known as the Marang or previously Santo Rosario). This confusing change of place names bears witness to the travails of evangelization of the Ituy region in the 17th and 18th centuries. Mission stations were opened and closed not only because of lack of personnel or inhospitable natural conditions, but also because of constant tribal wars (Burubur itself was burned in 1703 by the Ilongots, and its offspring Bujay was resettled in present-day Aritao in 1773).

Dopaj

In 1727 Dupax was organized as a *visita* or mission station of Bujay, under the patronage of Nuestra Señora del Socorro (Our Lady of Succor). The name is said to have been taken from the word *dopaj*, with the archaic Spanish “x” corresponding to the local “h” phoneme of the local language, which meant “lying down in rest, with face up and legs extended.” The extremely challenging region was turned over in 1740 to the Dominicans, who accepted the four missions of Bujay, Dupax, Bambang and Bayombong. The first three quasi-towns were situated in what was known as the Ituy Mission. The last constituted the center of the Paniqui Mission, and was dependent on old Cauayan further north (near present-day Oscariz, Isabela) and not on its nearer neighbors to the south because Bayombong was peopled by the Ibalibons who were enemies of the Isinays.

By 1740 the dwellers on the foothills to one side of the Marian and Apean valleys had been convinced to come down and settle on a site known as Dupax which straddled the Abanatan River. The Dominicans who arrived in this year found the people of Dupax living in 150 nipa houses, surrounded by fruit trees and irrigated ricefields. The shed of wood and light materials, like that erected in the other mission stations as a chapel, was repaired and improved with hardwood posts and boards. The Dominican saint Vicente Ferrer was made the new patron of Dupax.

This wooden church burned down in 1755; it was repaired with similar materials, and went down in flames again in 1766 (The extant Book of Baptisms thus begins in 1767). In the years in between, especially in 1758 and shortly thereafter, Dupax was struck by a wave of epidemics that severely diminished its population. The town was briefly linked to the national destiny as a result of the British Invasion of Manila in 1762. The silver subsidy from Acapulco (brought on a galleon providentially christened *Filipino*) was surreptitiously evacuated from its landing in Batangas to the mountains of Tayabas and then to Dupax before it finally reached the headquarters of the government-in-exile of Simon de Anda in Bacolor, Pampanga. It is said that this silver treasure included the wrought silver from Santo Domingo church in Intramuros, to a combined value of 111 thousand pesos. Not a dull moment, indeed, for the pastor whose tenure straddled these stressful times, Fr. Cristobal Rodriguez, O.P. (1753-1769). Padre Cristobal also introduced the cultivation of cacao, which brought so much income to the town that the Isinays could now pay in silver where before they would offer an animal.

First Masonry Church in Nueva Vizcaya

It remained to Fr. Manuel Corripio, O.P., vicar of Dupax from 1769 to 1786, to raise the existing church. In 1774, Padre Manuel brought some masons and workers down from Tuguegarao, whose grand church had been built in 1766. It certainly helped that Tuguegarao's builder, Fr. Antonio Lobato, O.P., had ministered in Bujay in his younger years (1755-1759) and thus could only sympathize with Fr. Corripio's predicament. Dupax was to be the first experiment in working with stone and brick in the entire Ituy-Paniqui region. The result was an enduring success, paving the way for the construction of similar churches in Aritao (begun 1780), Bambang (town separated from Dupax in 1751; church begun 1782, with the tower finished 1791); and Bayombong (church built within the tenure of Fr. Juan Crespo, O.P., 1773-1792, with the fifth and last level of the tower completed around 1800). With Dupax, these three churches bear the obvious influence of Tuguegarao in the gracefully catenated silhouette of the pediment and in the brick insets adorning the walls, doors and windows. Fr. Francisco Antolin, O.P., who was in charge of Dupax from 1786 to 1789, added that this "construction boom" also inspired the building

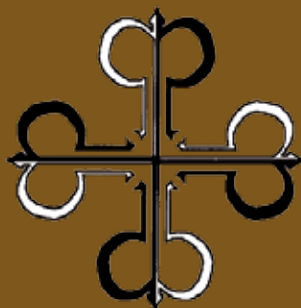
of churches in the Franciscan towns of Carranglan and Pantabangan in adjoining the Nueva Ecija province.

Two kilns were constructed, one for burning lime and the other for baking bricks. Lime was obtained easily, from whitish rocks along the rivers whose waters broke them down and drained them of salt. Fr. Francisco Rocamora, O.P., vicar for 35 years (1806-1841) noted that it took about a week of burning to produce excellent lime. Begun in 1774, work proceeded so smoothly that the church could be used in two years' time. A brick inset over the central doorway is marked "1776;" similar insets on the four levels of the belltower trace its construction: 1775, 1776, 1786 and 1788. The convento is said to have been finished in 1778. Work on the church building was completed in 1782.

Fr. Corripio's church survived the 1880 and 1881 earthquakes with very slight damage. It was built on the earnings from the cultivation of cacao, and further decorated in the second half of the 19th century with a second (and last) wave of cacao wealth. The oldest masonry church in Nueva Vizcaya, it is also the most intact, with its belltower, convento, churchyard, and incomparable Isinay stone carvings remarkably well preserved after more than two hundred years. It was declared a National Cultural Treasure by the National Museum on July 31, 2001.

Photograph Credit abbreviations:

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View of the valley from the belltower. The Abanatan River that bisects the town is more like a creek most of the year, although it swells with the runoff from the mountains during the rainy season. It was breached by a bridge of stone in 1773 by Fr. Manuel

Corripio, O.P., the builder of the present church. The bridge collapsed in 1812 and was rebuilt in 1819, and has survived to this day except for a crack that appeared after the earthquakes of 1880 and 1881. A second bridge was built of wood and bamboo in 1887, this time to link with the Ilocano communities further south.

View of the town as approached from the Bambang-Dupax road. The back of the church and the tip of the belltower may partially be seen. The land proved quite fertile to the cacao introduced by Fr. Cristobal Rodriguez, who toiled here from 1753 to 1769. Fr. Francisco Antolin



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provided the populace with two orchards known as *comunes*, which were fenced in stone in the 1780s. He is also said to have introduced the cultivation of mongo, as evidenced by a patch which was called "Antolin." Fr. Francisco Rocamora, who worked from 1805 to 1841, procured four corrals of cattle and carabaos. Much of these improvements, however, were in decline by the second half of the 19th century.

AUST 1970



Aerial view of Dupax, showing the church complex from the back. A corresponding view of the complex from the front was published in *Acta Manilana*, December 1969, p. 107. The church, belltower and convento were completed in the last quarter of the 18th century. A *tambobo* or rice granary of stone was added to the convento in the first decades of the 19th century, while a reception hall protruding from the front of the convento went up in 1846. The tribunal (ancestor to today's municipal building), cemetery and two schools of brick and stone were also built by the Dominican missionaries. However, in 1872 the school for girls was levelled and one of wood built over it. In turn it was converted into the Tribunal when this building and the school for boys were destroyed by the 1880-1881 earthquakes. New wooden school buildings were constructed in 1887.



RTJ 1985

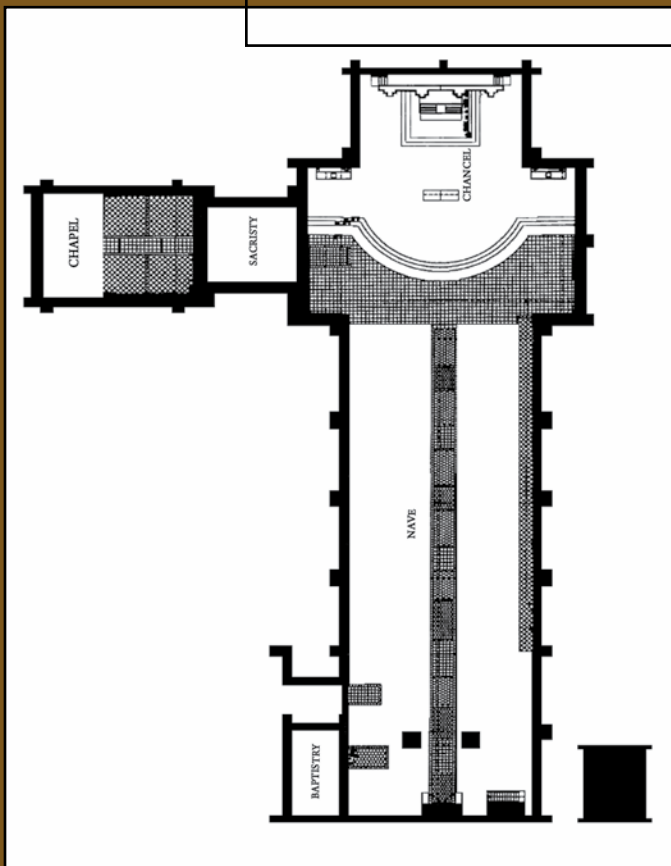
View of the church plaza and buildings, taken in the 1980s. Both church and convento were originally roofed with tiles, but by the 1870s these had been replaced with thatch. Only two portions of the roof by then had retained their tiles. Today all of the roofing is of galvanized iron sheets.



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In 1990 an earthquake toppled the cross and its pedestal from the pediment. It was replaced by a replica, while the original cross was re-erected in front of the main entrance. Fr. Paul Bollen, C.I.C.M., parish priest of Dupax from 1976 to 1997, instituted a number of efforts to conserve the church and its artifacts. The C.I.C.M. (Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary) or “Belgian Fathers” spiritually administered Dupax for almost a hundred years in the past century, until they turned over the parish to the Diocese of Bayombong.

Site plan of
the church
compound.
After Angel
Lazaro, 2004.



Plan of the church, belltower and
baptistry. After Angel Lazaro, 2004.

RTJ 1994



Central niche of the façade, with an unidentified female saint. A brick inscription bears the date 1776.

Portion of dentilated cornice over one of the two windows lighting up the choirloft.



RTJ 2000

RTJ 2000



Niche with image of San Vicente Ferrer on the ground level of the belltower. A brick inscription bears the date 1775.

RTJ 2000



Brick inset of the sun with a wide-eyed, pug-nosed and smiling face.



RTJ 2000

Brick inset of the crescent moon.



RTJ 2000

Brick insets of the crowned anagrams of Jesus and Mary.

Brick insets of symbols pertaining to the Dominicans. The dog with a torch was dreamt of by Blessed Jane of Aza when she was conceiving St. Dominic, which was interpreted that her son would one day set the world on fire with the truth. The *fleur-de-lis* pertains to Dominic's noble family, as well as to the lily of chastity.



RTJ 2000

These designs also appear on the cathedral of Tuguegarao, and it is most likely that Fr. Antonio Lobato sent the moulds of these insets along with the masons of his church.

Baked clay statuette of an unidentified female saint. The dress richly decked with ribbons and lace, her unveiled and long hair and a cup in the hand suggest that this is Mary Magdalene, the patroness of the Dominican Order.



RTJ 2000



RTJ 2000

Baked clay statuette of San Vicente Ferrer. The head recalls quite entrancingly the Neolithic jars found in Maitum, Sarangani Province in Mindanao. Sadly, this rare piece (no other examples of baked clay sculptures of saints are found elsewhere in the country, except for a handful of churches like Santo Tomas, Pampanga) was stolen in 2006.

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Baked clay bas-relief of a winged angel's head. This whimsical piece, and others like it on the façade, seems to be a local creation, as it is not in the repertoire of the Tuguegarao motifs.

North wall of the church.



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Section of the wall showing brickwork.

Apse (rear end) of the church.



RTJ 2000

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View showing the apse (left) linked by a passage (center) to a chapel (right).

Entrance from the outside to the passage linking the chapel (left) and church (right).



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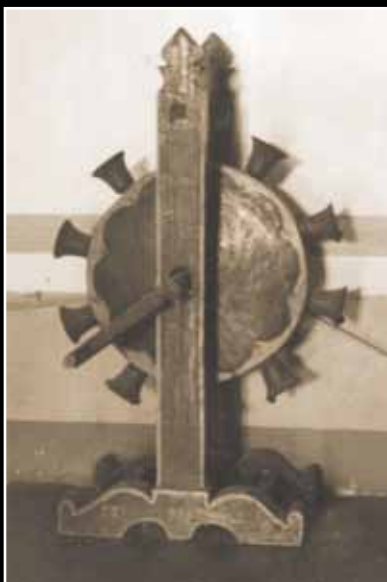
The interior of the church towards the high altar, viewed from the choirloft.

The interior of the nave viewed from the high altar towards the main entrance.



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Rueda, a wheel of bells rung to highlight certain parts of the mass.

RTJ 1994



Central *retablo* or altarpiece.

Retablo to the right of the central altar, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The corresponding *retablo* to the left has an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.



RTJ 1994

RTJ 1994



Pulpit



Presider's chair

RTJ 1994

RTJ 2002



Image of San Antonio de Padua. This statue was most probably introduced by Fr. Antonio Xabet (no other missionary had this name) in the second half of the 19th century. A statue of San Ignacio de Loyola, formerly in the adjoining chapel but now missing, may similarly have been introduced by his namesake and co-Basque, Fr. Ignacio Cabido, the last Dominican vicar of Dupax (1882-1898).

Tombstone of Fr. Antonio Xabet, O.P. Barcelona- born Fr. Xabet was at the forefront of the Dupax mission for 41 years in four terms (1841-1864, 1866-1868, 1870-1876, 1876-1885). He was revered as a defender of the natives against government abuses.



RTJ 1994

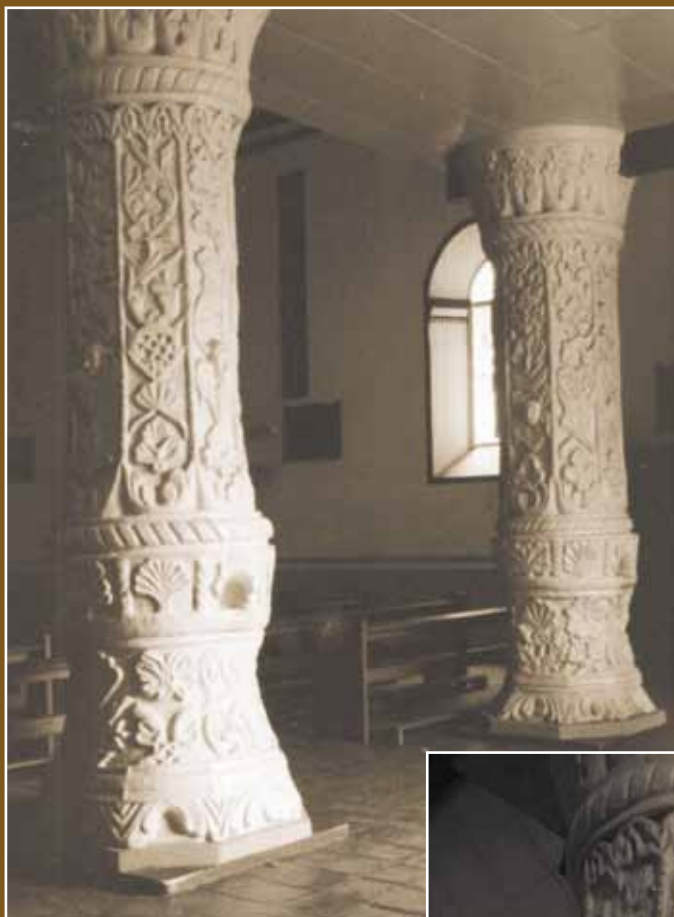
He was actually sent to jail in Bayombong by the provincial governor but was later exonerated. With the income from cacao raised by his predecessor, Fr. Xabet procured new sets of vestments and ornaments for the church and constructed a reception hall for the convento. He died among his beloved flock on Sept. 5, 1885, aged 70 years, and was buried in the center of the church.



RTJ 2000

Pedestal of flagpole, with a modern brick plaque bearing the name of Fr. Antonio Xabet, the year 1873 and the name of the sponsor (Knights of Columbus).

RTJ 1994



Pair of carved stone pillars supporting the choirloft. Each pillar has a height of 13.3 feet and a circumference of ten feet. The pillars are of a type of sandstone with calcitic content. At some time the cracks in the stone were filled in with cement and the surfaces painted with latex. This covering prevented moisture from leaving the stone which resulted in its slow deterioration. Subsequent to the

taking of these photographs, the pillars and baptistry were conserved by the National Museum upon the intervention of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. The deteriorative agents were meticulously stripped with organic solvents and the stone was consolidated.

Detail of carvings on the column.



RTJ 2002

RTJ 2000



Carved stone *retablo* in the baptistry, of the same sandstone material as the pillars outside. Curiously, the standard scene featuring St. John baptizing Christ has been replaced by an equally unusual figure of Christ seemingly waving a welcome to the baptismal party.

Detail of carving on the wall of the baptistry. The Dupax pillars and baptistry are unique in the country for their carving style, which interprets 18th century Baroque motifs in the local idiom.



RTJ 1994



RTJ 1994

Section of baptistry wall opposite the *retablo*, with the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.



RTJ 1994

Section of carved ceiling over the baptistry, showing the Holy Spirit surrounded by rays of light, stars, and flowers. This fantastic carving is squeezed into a room measuring only 3.60 by 4.20 meters.



RTJ 2000

Interior of the chapel adjoining the sacristy. This space may have served the religious needs of the community while the church was being constructed.



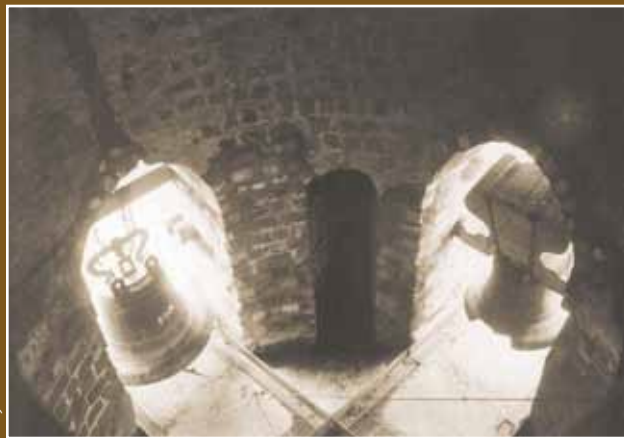
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Frame over the tabernacle in the chapel.



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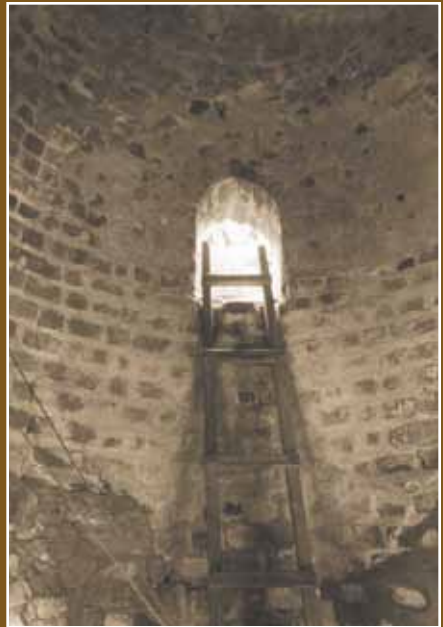
Inside the belltower, showing the very narrow doorway (left of the round window) leading to the stairway that ends in the level of the bells themselves.



RTJ 2000

Inside the fourth level of the belltower, showing the portal of the stairway between a bell dedicated to Santo Tomas de Aquino in 1884 and commissioned by Fr. Antonio Xabet (left), and a bell dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary in 1888 and commissioned by Fr. Ignacio Cabido. Both were cast in the Manila foundry of Hilario Sunico. Two other bells date from 1855 (dedicated to San Vicente Ferrer) and 1858 (San Antonio de Padua); both were commissioned by Fr. Xabet. The view was taken from the top of the stepladder that connects this level to the opening to the dome.

One has to climb this stepladder to reach the arched opening that leads to the dome and its parapet.



RTJ 2000

RTJ 2000



Section of the octagonal dome, with brick insets of St. Dominic's *fleur-de-lis*. The belltower was repaired during the time of Fr. Francisco Rocamora, 1805-1841.

From the top of the stepladder, one emerges onto the parapet surrounding the dome.



RTJ 2000



Façade of the convento, erected in the 1770s. Fr. Paul Bollen pointed out to this author the windows that flared outwards, built perhaps to facilitate the aiming of weapons in times of siege. In 1846 Fr. Antonio Xabet erected a large hall for visitors, perpendicular to the axis of the convento.



Section of the façade looking towards the stairway leading to the reception hall erected in 1846.

RTJ 2000



View from the belltower looking over the *convento*, covered *azotea*, and extension (possibly the one built in the first half of the 19th century by Fr. Francisco Rocamora, O.P. to store grain). To the right may be seen the chapel extending perpendicularly from the nave.

View of the arcaded extension of the *convento*, possibly the *tambobo* or grain storehouse built in the early 1800s. A stairway leads diagonally from the junction of the *azotea* and storehouse to the sacristy.



RTJ 2000

RTJ 2000



Thick bushes and wrought iron sheets partially hide a cylindrical well, just outside the storehouse and chapel.

The wall of the *convento* extension as it abuts the covered *azotea*.



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Portion of the covered *azotea*, with a stairway leading to the *convento*.

Section of the *convento* kitchen.



RTJ 2000

RTJ 2000



Processional coffin of the *Santo Entierro* (Dead Christ), brought out during Good Friday.



RTJ 2000

Processional images on their *andas* (platforms borne on the shoulders). A statue of San Luis Beltran is partially hidden (left).



RTJ 2000

Guion, a processional banner borne on the Feast of Corpus Christi, with 18th century silver cutouts depicting winged angel heads worshipping the Blessed Sacrament and a chalice containing the Blood of Christ.



RTJ 2000

The other face of the *guion*, showing an angel incensing the Lamb of God (perhaps this angel originally appeared on the other side).

RTJ 2000



Main hall of the museum in the convento. To the left hangs a rare example of the blankets woven by Isinay women. Fr. Francisco Antolin, O.P. wrote in the late 18th century that cotton, brought in from Pangasinan, was expertly dyed with

indigo (prepared with lime) and combined with silk (steeped in red *sapang* dye) by the weavers. Their products such as blankets, wrap-arounds and loincloths were more compact than those from Malabon or the Ilocos, and were traded and valued throughout the region.

The museum also features a catechism in Isinay dated 1915, as well as the hand-operated press that printed it.

A corner of the museum. To the left is a statuette of the Christ Child standing on a hourglass-shaped pedestal, typical of the 18th century. On the right are five of six silver reliquaries containing the relics of the martyrs San Mansueto, San



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Pablo Apostol, Santa Praxedes, San Liberato, San Teodoro and Santa Justina. Some of these silver frames contain precious miniature paintings.

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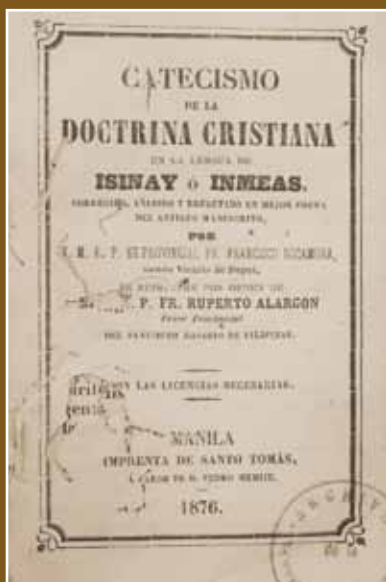
Title page of a catechism in Isinay printed by the University of Santo Tomas Press in 1833.

First page of the 1833 catechism, with the Our Father in Isinay.



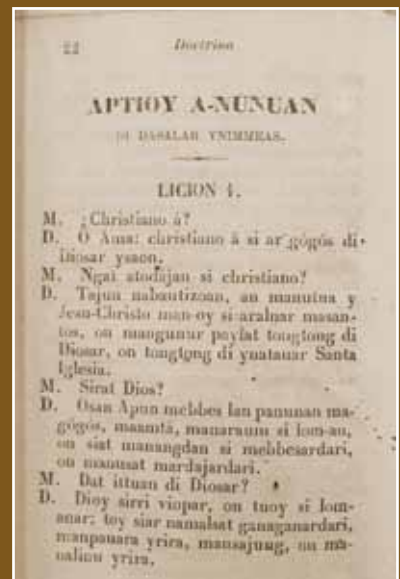
AUST 2011

AUST 2011



Title page of a revised catechism in Isinay, printed by the University of Santo Tomas Press in 1876.

First page of the question-and-answer section of the catechism.



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A grammar book, dictionary and catechism of the Isinay language was prepared by Juan Ormaza, O.P., missionary in Bujay (1740-1745) and Dupax (1747-1752). The catechism was revised by Fr. Francisco Rocamora, who evangelized in Dupax from 1805 until 1841 when he was elected provincial of the Dominicans in the Philippines. It was printed in 1833 and again, in a revised edition, in 1876.



An elaborately woven palm for the Palm Sunday rituals.

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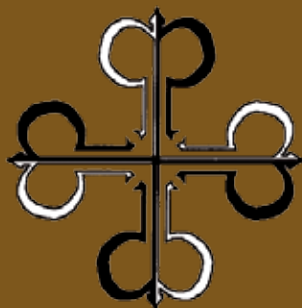
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