

A Visual Documentation of Fil-Hispanic Churches Part XI: The Secular-Built Parish Church of San Luis Gonzaga, Pampanga

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Beginnings of the town

The Augustinians were the first evangelizers of this town, as they were in the rest of the sprawling and prosperous province of Pampanga. The place was first known as Cabagsac, a name said to be a contraction of the words *cabág bagsác*, meaning a place where plenty of fruit bats (*cabág*) could be caught. Next it was christened San Nicolas de Cabagsac, after its first missionary, Fr. Nicolas de Orduño.¹ This may have been around the year 1735 or 1740, the earliest foundation dates given for the town. It was already settled before this time, however, when it appeared in a 1732 census with 620 inhabitants.² Mariano Henson, the Pampanga historian, notes that these place names now apply to barrio San Nicolas on the northeast section of the town.³ San Nicolas is also on the east bank of the Rio Grande de Pampanga, which suggests that the town was eventually resettled to its present location on the west bank of the River.

Such a transfer could have been made after a disaster such as an epidemic or a flood, like that which inundated the town in 1974.⁴ Settling on the opposite shore could have resulted in a land dispute with Pinpin, the adjoining town to the north (now Santa Ana).

¹ This name could not be found in the catalogue of Augustinian priests in the Philippines, *Catálogo bio-bibliográfico de los religiosos de la provincial del santísimo nombre de Jesus*, compiled by Fr. Elviro J. Perez, O.S.A. (Manila: Establecimiento tipográfico del Colegio de Santo Tomás, 1901). Fr. Nicolas may have had an alternative name that was used by Fr. Perez.

² Perez, p. 820. Mariano A. Henson, *The Province of Pampanga and Its Towns (A.D. 1300-1965)*, 4th Rev. Ed. (Angeles: The Author, 1965), p. 116. Pedro G. Galende, O.S.A., *Angels in Stone. Architecture of Augustinian Churches in the Philippines* (Metro Manila: G. A. Formoso Publishing, 1987), p. 231: Cabagsa was mentioned for the first time in the Augustinian Chapter of April 14, 1742.

³ Henson, p. 158.

⁴ *The Philippine Collegian*, Sept. 2, 1974, p. 3. Mount Arayat then appeared as an island in a vast lake.

The dispute is said to have been resolved by a lawyer whose wife was named Doña Luisa. The grateful town not only adopted this lady's name but her patron saint, San Luis Gonzaga, as well. This is supposed to have taken place in 1761, just two years after the establishment of the town of Santa Ana.⁵ Augustinian spiritual administration of San Luis was abruptly interrupted in 1785 at the height of the so-called Visitation Controversy.

Half a century under the secular clergy

Throughout the 18th century, the bishops insisted on their right to canonically visit the parishes within their jurisdiction. This went against the religious orders who claimed that the administration of their parishes was subject only to their superiors and not to the bishop, who was after all appointed by the king. Responding to the Augustinians' repeated opposition, the Archbishop of Manila, Msgr. Basilio Sancho de Santas Justa y Rufina issued a drastic decree in 1771.⁶ Henceforth, parishes run by the Augustinians in Pampanga would be turned over to the Filipino secular clergy as soon as they were made vacant by the friar's transfer or death.

In San Luis, the historic event took place on the 14th of April, 1785. Fr. Domingo Thomas Bellveser, Augustinian pastor of San Luis for the past eleven years, turned over his charge to Bachiller Gaspar Macalinao.⁷ We know next to nothing about Father Macalinao, except that he obtained his bachelor's degree in Philosophy at the University of Santo Tomas in 1775.⁸ His term, at thirty-one years (1785-1816), was to be the longest of any pastor in this parish.

Thanks to the survival of a rare book of accounts of the parish, the *Libro de Cargo y Data*, we can trace how Fr. Macalinao worked for the church and community entrusted to him. The volume covers the years from 1785 to 1819, although there are summaries for the expenses of his predecessor Fr. Bellveser.⁹ We find, for example, that the parish at the time of turn-over was dedicated to Santo Tomas Villanueva, even though it was located in the pueblo of San Luis. There seems to have been a strong devotion to this Augustinian saint, as can be gleaned from expenses for his fiesta in September for the years 1787 (tar for illumination), 1798 (a new curtain) and 1803 (tar for illumination). Up at least until 1904, the poblacion was also called Santo Tomas.¹⁰ Could this devotion to Saint Thomas be connected in some way with Fr. Bellveser, whose second name was Tomás?

⁵ Henson, pp. 112, 116, 157.

⁶ Archbishop Sancho, throughout his long career (1767-1787) championed the cause of the Filipino secular clergy. Dr. Luciano P.R. Santiago, *Laying the Foundations: Kapampangan Pioneers in the Philippine Church 1592-2001*, (Angeles City: The Juan D. Nepomuceno Center for Kapampangan Studies, Holy Angel University, 2002), xvii.

⁷ Augustinian absence from San Luis is also implied in a table of population statistics for Augustinian-administered towns between the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1732, 620 souls were reported. There were no figures given for the succeeding years 1788, 1799, 1812, and 1824. The next population count was given in 1838, by which time the Augustinians had returned. Perez, p. 820.

⁸ Archivo de la Universidad de Santo Tomas (AUST): Diligencias de Grados, Filosofía, 1775.

⁹ *Libro de Cargo y Data, e Ynventario de varias alajas de plata, y ornamentos de esta Parroquia de S. Luis Gonzaga, que comprehende la maior parte del gobierno de ella su proprio Cura d.n Gaspar Macalinao. Año 1785.* Kept in the Archdiocese of San Fernando Archives, Mother of Good Counsel Seminary, San Fernando, Pampanga.

¹⁰ Henson, p. 157.

Fr. Bellveser handed over a newly built convento to Fr. Macalinao (the Augustinian paid 300 pesos in 1784 to finish it). We do not know if it was of stone or of wood. Neither do we have an idea of how the church looked like, but from the minimal expenses for its upkeep it seems to have been rather stable and well furnished. The central *retablo* (altarpiece) was flanked on either side by smaller *retablos*, each with their frontals, tabernacles, and appurtenances, all of gilded wood and donated by the young men and ladies (*Baguntaos y Dalagas*) of the town. In September 1785 Fr. Macalinao had the *retablo* whitewashed, and in November he had the churchyard fenced off with stone balusters.¹¹ In 1787 he re-enforced church security by acquiring an iron crossbar (*aldaba*) for the principal entrance.

The San Luis Libro de Cargo y Data is exceptional because it is a rare example of a type of canonical book whose constant updating was mandated in each church. However, it is also significant for the receipts (all of them handwritten) that Fr. Macalinao inserted in the Libro as records of purchases and services. These fragile receipts are an art historian's "gold mine," because they provide names of artists, details of processes, names of materials, and prices of products.

Based on such receipts, we list some of Fr. Macalinao's major purchases in his first years in office:

1786 Jan. 10 Set of three *sacras* (frames with mass prayers for the priest) and a crucifix, all of silver. Purchased from Francisco Duran, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Manila. The set was purchased in Intramuros for 68 pesos (that is, the total amount of silver coins used in the manufacture of the pieces).

1786 July 20 An image of the Santo Entierro (Christ lying in state), 6 *palmos* in length, and a *bastidor* (framework) image of Our Lady of Sorrows, both costing 33 pesos; vestment for Our Lady, 15 pesos. All purchased in Santa Cruz, Manila.

1789 July 9 Pair of *ciriales* (processional candlesticks) and processional crucifix, of silver, for 250 pesos. Paid to Casimiro de los Santos, through Doña Agustina Ygnacio and Father Mariano Josep. From other sources, we know Casimiro de los Santos was a secular priest, who obtained a bachelor's degree in Philosophy from the UST in 1774, a year before Fr. Macalinao obtained his. Apart from being a priest, Fr. de los Santos was the head of the *Gremio de Mestizos* of Tondo, Binondo, and Santa Cruz. As such he hired Don Domingo de la Cruz Gonzalez, an architect, to draw up plans for the Monastery of Santa Rosa de Lima in Binondo in 1788. Bachiller de los Santos also had artistic inclinations. In 1789 he drew a *Last Supper* which was engraved by Felipe Sevilla; and in 1798 he himself engraved an altar table for a manual for the liturgy published in Manila. All these activities indicate that Fr. de los Santos was some sort of middleman for the artistic needs of the Archdiocese.¹²

1789 A bell cast by the *maestro fundidor* (master metalsmith) Nicolas Roque. For this project, the metal from a broken bell was augmented with more

¹¹ "Siete pesos por setenta i cinco cavares de cal para el nuevo pretil de la Yglesia y su calle con el de las Barandas."

¹² AUST: Diligencias de Grados, Filosofia, 1774. Regalado Trota Jose, *Simbahan. Church Art in Colonial Philippines 1565-1898*, (Makati: Ayala Foundation, 1991), pp. 139, 143.

“bell metal”, so that the new bell weighed thirteen *arrobas* (one *arroba* is equivalent to 25 lbs.) and three pounds. For this, Roque was paid 98 pesos and 5 reales. Most likely the bell was cast in a foundry constructed within the church premises. The bell still hangs in the central tower of the church. Roque recast a smaller bell weighing two *arrobas* and two pounds for San Luis in 1791.¹³

But in that same year of 1791 Fr. Macalinao embarked on an ambitious project: nothing less than the rebuilding of the parish church of San Luis Gonzaga. In the *Libro de Cargo y Data* entry for May of that year, we find that 8 pesos and 3 reales were spent for nipa shingles to roof the new church that was being built *a funtamentis*. In the next few months, expenses were recorded for stone, brick, paint, workers, and even a *banca* (to ferry materials). Work seems to have slackened the next year; was there a fire, an epidemic, an earthquake or some other disaster? Or were there not enough funds? Work seems to have begun on another church in 1793, for on the 19th of April of that year, a Friday, Archbishop Juan Antonio de Orbigo y Gallego blessed and laid the first stone of the *new* parish church of San Luis Gonzaga. The Archbishop instructed Fr. Macalinao to record this momentous event in the *Libro de Cargo y Data*.

From that time we find various expenses for materials and services for the church “that is actually being built,” as noted in June 1796. Curious details abound, such as the wire that was acquired in November 1797 that was used to slice the clay for roof tiles and bricks. By August of 1800 carpenters were assembling the church benches, and the next year they were constructing a pair of large *tindalo* cabinets for the sacristy.

By 1801, most of the church must already have been finished, because Fr. Macalinao was slowly but steadily furnishing it. We read again from the receipts:

1801 April 17 A pipe organ of three *castillos* and five registers, three *varas* in height, with its case of narra. Purchased from Maria Antonia in Binondo, Manila; 420 pesos. The organist and the *fuellero* (bellows operator) were paid two pesos a month. (The modest musical forces then included a violin and a bass viol, acquired in 1790 and 1791 respectively. In 1804 Fr. Macalinao bought two flutes, and hired a master flutist to teach two youths to play these instruments).

1801 Sept. 12 A large *lampara* (sanctuary lamp), consisting of a *palangana* (basin) formed from 367 pesos and 3 reales worth of silver coins. The *lampara*, including silver, labor and other materials, cost 507 pesos and 4 reales. Paid to Paulino Gabriel, silversmith in Santa Cruz, Manila.

1805 Aug. 15 A tabernacle of silver with gilded parts. 50 pesos paid to Josef Zamonte, *maestro escultor*.

In March 1806 the Archbishop of Manila, Msgr. Juan Antonio Zulaybar, conducted his episcopal visitation of San Luis. His remarks inscribed in the *Libro de Cargo y Data* include his joy upon seeing the church of San Luis, which was begun only a few years ago, now in a “state of perfection.”

¹³ Regalado Trota Jose, *Of War and Peace: Lantakas and Bells in Search for Foundries in the Philippines, Part Two: Bagting*, (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2009), pp. 52, 212-213.

Fr. Gaspar Macalinao's successor may have been his own relative. Fr. Francisco Arriola Macalinao first appeared in the Libro de Cargo y Data as the parish's coadjutor or assistant to the parish priest in 1816. The next year he was identified as the interim priest, and then in 1818 as the parish priest himself. This succession of events suggests that Fr. Gaspar took ill and eventually passed on to a better life. Like his presumed relative Fr. Gaspar, Fr. Francisco continued to acquire objects for the beauty of his church, as seen in the list below. Every year for at least three years, a silver ornament was commissioned from the local master silversmith, Manuel de Santa Ana.

1816 Sept. 1 A set of six silver candlestands that also serve as *ramilletes* (silver fronts) beaten to resemble flowers or other designs), used to decorate both sides of the tabernacle. 90 pesos in silver coins plus 30 pesos labor, 126 pesos in all, paid to Manuel de Santa Ana, a silversmith who resided in San Luis.

1817 Sept. 27 Repair of an *azetre* (pail for blessed water), a *vinajera* (small container for water for consecration), and a *platillo* (small tray for the *vinajera*). 3 pesos and 4 reales for the *azetre*. 3 pesos in silver coins added to the 5 pesos worth of silver of the *vinajera* and *platillo*, plus 4 pesos for fashioning these liturgical objects. Paid also to Manuel de Santa Ana.

1818 July 1 Flowers and *galón* (ornamental braid) for the vestment of the image of Sto. Tomas de Villanueva, fashioned from 30 pesos of silver, plus 15 pesos labor. Likewise paid to Manuel de Santa Ana.

The return of the Augustinians

Already in the late 18th century there were moves to restore Pampanga to the Order of St. Augustine. Governors General Jose Basco and Rafael Maria Aguilar recommended the return of the Augustinians. Charles III issued an order that these friars take over the parishes in Pampanga as these were vacated, but this could not be complied with at the time due to scarcity of missionaries. The order was renewed by Fernando VII in a Real Cédula dated 8 June 1826. Thus, by 1833 the towns of Apalit, Macabebe and San Fernando were under the fold of their former ministers.¹⁴ San Luis was entrusted to the Augustinians in 1837, when Fr. Jose Benito Rosendo took over from a still unknown secular pastor. By this time the livelihood of the residents consisted in agriculture: the short harvest of rice was offset by the abundance of indigo and sugar. The women were engaged in weaving, a craft virtually non-existent today.¹⁵

According to the Dominican historian Fr. Valentin Marin y Morales, the enormous church was restored in 1883 by Fr. Isidoro Bernardo. This must have been the time as well when the three neo-classic retablos were added. (One wonders what happened to the earlier retablos, which would have had elements of the Baroque or Rococo). Fr. Bernardo also built the cemetery of cut stone. The old convento was restored and enlarged in 1875 by Fr. Enrique Garcia and then by Fr. Francisco Diaz.¹⁶

¹⁴ Francisco Villacorta, O.S.A., *Administración espiritual de los Padres Agustinos Calzados de la Provincia del Dulce Nombre de Jesús de las Islas Filipinas* (Valladolid: Imprenta de H. Roldán, 1833), p. 76.

¹⁵ *Mapa General de las Almas que Administran los PP. Agustinos en estas Islas Filipinas* (Manila: Estab. tip. de los Amigos del País, por D. Miguel Sánchez, 1848), p. 45.

¹⁶ Valentin Marin y Morales, O.P., *Ensayo de una síntesis de los trabajos realizados por las*

An avant-garde church of the late 18th century

The facade of Fr. Gaspar Macalinao's church provokes a gasp. It is in a class by itself for a number of reasons. Its massing is audacious and bold, not resorting to the standard three- or two- horizontal levels at the time. Its plane is not flat, as in most facades of any period, but concave: that is, the central entrance is pushed back and deep, where in all other cases it would be flush with its flanking walls. In this it recalls many Baroque Mexican church facades. No other Philippine facade comes close to the particular sweep of this one. The San Luis facade is crowned not by one, nor two, but by *three* towers.

Rising from the pilasters at the point where the facade “caves in,” are a pair of finials that look like the open maw of a monster, with the upper jaw ending in a coiled “nostril.” These are called *Dientzenhofer motifs*, after a family of architects that was famous for their Baroque buildings and churches in central Europe. These Dientzenhofer motifs may be found in Philippine retablos of the 18th century, but only San Luis seems to have recognized their decorative function on architecture as well. All the elements mentioned above qualify San Luis Gonzaga church as extremely modern for its time, *avant-garde* if you will.

To proclaim to all visitors under whose management this monument was built, Fr. Gaspar placed the Papal tiara and the keys of St. Peter—the “seal” of the secular clergy—above the main entrance. (The Augustinians used a flaming heart pierced by two arrows). Fr. Gaspar also chose images of two saints named San Luis that re-enforced the town's identity but who were normally not associated with the Augustinians. San Luis Gonzaga was an Italian saint of the Society of Jesus, a congregation that had been expelled from the Philippines and many European empires just 20 years before Fr. Gaspar begun his church.¹⁷ The other Saint Louise was French; he was bishop of Toulouse and a Franciscan tertiary (he is the namesake of San Luis Obispo in the Franciscan-founded California Mission chain).¹⁸ A Jesuit and a Franciscan represented in formerly Augustinian territory: more audacity!

We can only wonder where Fr. Gaspar picked up his innovative scope and touches. From his alma mater, the University of Santo Tomas? From his erstwhile schoolmate, Fr. Casimiro de los Santos, a priest with artistic connections? The builders of his church may have been the same ones who built Betis, Santo Tomas, and Santa Ana in Pampanga. The walls of the San Luis nave, transept, base of the dome, and certain sections of the convento are built of rows of rectangular blocks of stone regularly interrupted by “squares” of brick, in such a way that the overall effect is not unlike a checkerboard. Such a checkerboard wall is also found in Betis (especially in the sacristy) and in Santo Tomas—itsself built by the secular priests, as attested to by the Papal tiara and keys over the entrance. The quadrangular dome with volutes at the corners is very similar to that in the neighboring town of Santa Ana.

Corporaciones Religiosas Españolas (Manila: Imprenta de Santo Tomás, 1901), p. 83. The church was 56 meters in length, 13 in width, and 11 in height. Fr. Marin based his writing on accounts he requested from the various religious orders.

¹⁷ San Luis Gonzaga was canonized in 1726. His feastday is June 21. The Jesuits were expelled from the Philippines in 1768.

¹⁸ San Luis Obispo de Tolosa (+ 1279) is also known as Luis de Anjou, for he was from this royal lineage. His feastday is August 19. Thus he is the patron saint of Manuel Luis Quezon, who was born on this day.

The church of San Luis takes its place as one of the earliest built by the secular priests. Its secular contemporaries would be the church at Indan (now Vinzons), Camarines Norte, and Makati City (Saints Peter and Paul church). Its dignity and integrity have been maintained fairly well until recent times. The grassy, verdant space in front of it has been overlaid with cement. In the 1990s, a brazen blue portico was transfixed on its stately entrance; the Augustinian church historian Fr. Pedro Galende was able to convince the authorities to take it down. It is to be hoped that the successors of Fr. Gaspar Macalinao will honorably maintain his vision and message as clear and unburdened as possible.

PASTORS OF SAN LUIS, PAMPANGA (1744-1898)¹⁹

<u>YEARS</u>	<u>PARISH PRIEST</u>
1744-1745	Fr. Ambrosio de S. Agustin, O.S.A.
1762-1763	Fr. Juan de Oro, O.S.A.
1763-1765	Fr. Gabriel Homar, O.S.A.
1771	Fr. Sebastian Moreno, O.S.A.
1774-1785	Fr. Domingo Thomas Bellveser, O.S.A.
1785-1816	Br. Gaspar Macalinao.
1816-1819	D. Francisco Arriola Macalinao, coadjutor, <i>substituto</i> , <i>cura</i> respectively.
1819-1837	No data; most possibly a secular priest.
1837-1844	Fr. Jose Benito Rosendo, O.S.A. (first Augustinian to take over after the seculars)
1844-1847	Fr. Jose Maria Lopez, O.S.A.
1848	Fr. Manuel Diaz, O.S.A.
1848-1849	Unnamed secular priest, interim.
1849-1851	Fr. Pedro Medina, O.S.A.
1851-1862	Fr. Jose Maria Lopez, O.S.A., second time.
1863	D. Eugenio Tuason, interim.
1863-1866	Fr. Eugenio Alvarez, O.S.A.
1866-1877	Fr. Enrique Garcia, O.S.A.
1877-1883	Fr. Francisco Diaz, O.S.A.
1877	D. Luis de los Reyes, coadjutor.
1883-1885	Fr. Fausto Reguero, O.S.A.
1885	Fr. Isidoro Lopez, O.S.A.
1885-1886	Fr. Fermin Sardón, O.S.A.
1886-1892	Fr. Isidoro Bernardo, O.S.A.
1892-1895	Fr. Agustin Muñoz, O.S.A.
1895-1898	Fr. Galo de la Calle, O.S.A.

¹⁹ Sources: Perez 1901; Libro de Cargo y Data ...de S. Luis Gonzaga [1785-1819]; Regalado Trota Jose, *Curas de Almas* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, Publishing House, 2008).

Luther Parker Album. Courtesy of the National Library of the Philippines



The imposing mass of the church and convento of San Luis, as photographed by Luther Parker in 1909

Courtesy of the Juan D. Nepomuceno Center for Kapampangan Studies, Holy Angel University, Angeles City, Pampanga



Façade of San Luis

Regalado Trota Jose 2004



Fr. Gaspar Macalinao placed the Papal tiara and the keys of St. Peter over the main entrance by about 1805, signifying the church was built by the secular clergy. The seal is framed with flame-like *rocalla* elements, popular during the second half of the 18th century

Corner of the quadrangular dome over the crossing

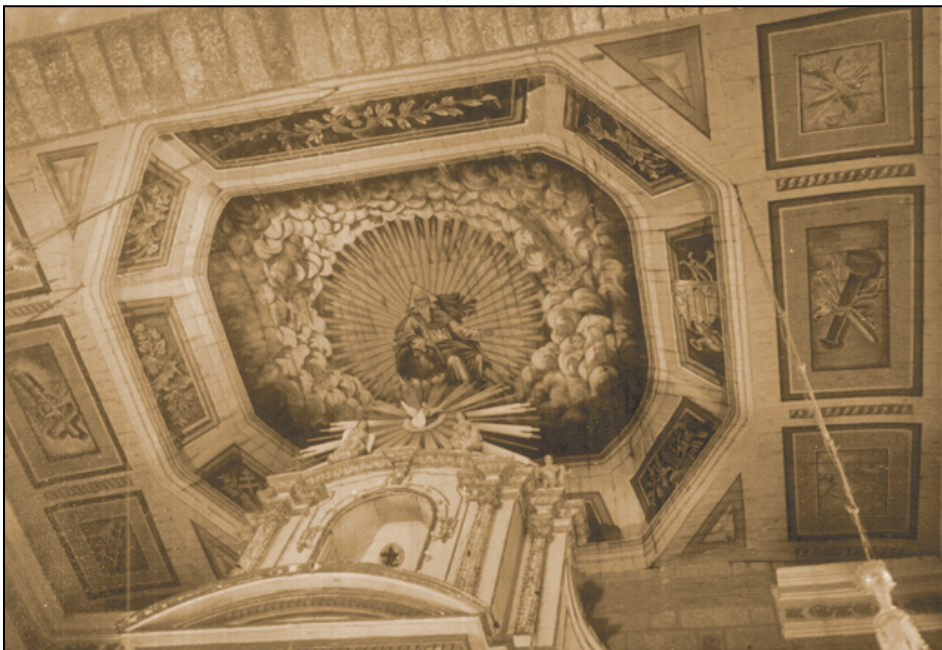


Regalado Trota Jose 2004



Regalado Trota Jose 2004

Painting of the Virgin Mary appearing to San Luis Gonzaga [Courtesy of the Archdiocese of San Fernando Museum, University of the Assumption, San Fernando City, Pampanga]



Regalado Trota Jose 2004

Painting of God the Father over the central *retablo*

Regalado Trota Jose 2004



Central *retablo*, with the image of the patron saint, San Luis Gonzaga, in the topmost niche

Regalado Trota Jose 2004



The Holy Spirit worshipped by two angels

*Retablo of the left
transept*



Regalado Trota Jose 2004



Regalado Trota Jose 2004

*Retablo of the right
transept*

Regalado Trota Jose 2004



Image of San Agustin, on the central *retablo*



Image of Santa Monica, on the central *retablo*

Regalado Trota Jose 2004



Image of Santo Tomas de Villanueva, now in the *convento*

Regalado Trota Jose 2004



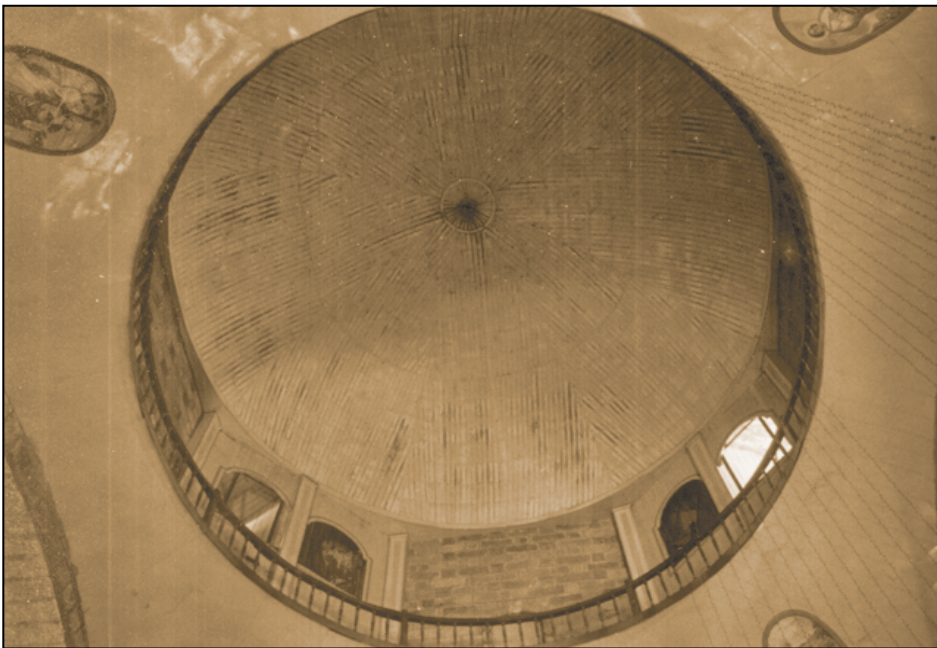
Regalado Trota Jose 2004

View of the nave towards the choirloft

Regalado Trota Jose 2004



The checkerboard pattern of the bricks and stones can be clearly seen in this view of the right transept



Regalado Trota Jose 2004

Underside of the dome

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Detail of the frieze on the upper reaches of the walls



Regalado Trota Jose 2004

19th century *azulejos* (glazed tiles) of different designs on the pavement

Regalado Trota Jose 2004



Cajoneria (chest of drawers for vestments) in the sacristy

Regalado Trota Jose 2004



Detail of the foot of the *cajoneria*, featuring a grotesque mask



Portion of the exterior wall of the *convento*. The *palitada* (protective lime plaster) on the second floor has been retained, but where it has fallen off, the checkerboard pattern of brick and stone can be seen. The opposite wall of cut stone pertains to the 19th century extension of the *convento*



Section of the inner wall of the *convento*, showing the earlier construction (brick and stone) and the later one just of stone

Regalado Trota Jose 2004



Tabernacle, 2nd half of the 19th century, at the central *retablo*



Regalado Trota Jose has advocated for the study and protection of the cultural heritage of the Catholic Church in the Philippines since the 1980s. He has worked with numerous local public and private organizations such as the Ayala Museum, the University of the Philippines (A.B. Anthropology, 1978; M.A. Philippine Studies, 1991), and the University of Santo Tomas. He is now the Archivist and professor at the Cultural Heritage Studies Program of the University of Santo Tomas. He can be contacted at trotajose55@yahoo.com.