



A Visual Documentation of Fil-Hispanic Churches

Part XII: Parish Church of San Pedro Apostol

Loboc, Bohol

Regalado Trota Jose

On October 15, 2013, a 7.2 intensity earthquake hit the island province of Bohol. In an instant, some of the country's most well-preserved and beloved churches were heavily damaged or even totally pulverized. The church of St. Peter in Loboc lost major portions of its walls, which caused the roofing to collapse. This article is being prepared then, not as an epitaph, but as an aid to assist in whatever intervention may be considered in favor of the church.

Formal Christianization in Bohol began with the arrival of the Jesuits in 1596. A chapel was first set up in Baclayon along the coast, and another in Loboc which was farther inland. Its location along a large river made Loboc an important trade and social center, and its distance from the sea made it more defensible against pirates. According to tradition, a chapel dedicated to San Miguel Arcangel was built on a site called Calvario or Sawang, some 500 yards from the present church. Because of its strategic position, the Jesuits established their residence, or regional headquarters, in Loboc. A *seminario* or boarding school for boys (different from today's school for priests) was opened in 1605. A fire in 1638 caused the transfer of the church to the present site.

A new church is said to have been up by 1670; architectural evidence points to the inner building of today's three-storey convento as the core of this church, making it arguably Bohol's oldest church building. This church was furnished with three *retablos* or altarpieces by the Jesuit Fr. Jose Sanchez, who died in 1692. Remnants of these *retablos* are possibly the two that stand facing each other at the ends of the transept of today's church.

The present church of coralstone running perpendicular to the 1670 building, was possibly begun in the 1730s. The carving of angels' heads and Jesuit seals on the walls was left unfinished when the Jesuits were expelled from Bohol and the rest of the country in

1768. A specially carved entrance to the sacristy leads scholars to assume that this part of the church also constituted the residence of the Jesuits.

The first Augustinian Recollects who took over in 1768 constructed the belltower near the river banks. In the second half of the 19th century, the church underwent major renovations, including a new portico-façade and a greatly expanded and decorated convento. A tile roof replaced that of thatch (which in turn required the buttressing of the walls).

Occupying American forces threatened to burn the church and the town in 1901 but this was averted by the parish priest. The church complex was declared a National Historical Landmark on December 12, 1998, and a National Cultural Treasure on July 31, 2001. The construction of a bridge in the 1980s that would separate the church from the plaza was stopped by a national outcry in 1999. Unmoved by the earthquake of 2013, the unfinished bridge remains as a reminder of man's folly, while another national outcry is moving for the rehabilitation of Bohol's churches. ■



Map of the Philippines with focus on the province of Bohol.

Detail of a map of Bohol, showing the location of Loboc.



Algué, Atlas de Filipinas, 1899

Pediment of the façade, featuring wooden bas-reliefs of the papal tiara over crossed keys, symbols of the parish's patron saint, St. Peter.

This section of the church was built in 1863-1866 by the Augustinian Recollects, as a new façade over the original one erected by the Jesuits. The

pediment is of galvanized iron sheets, while the lower two levels of the façade are of white coralstone (as is the rest of the building).



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Coralstone image of St. Peter the Apostle, in the left niche of the façade.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Coralstone image of St. Paul, in the right niche.

View of the church from the belltower, with the mortuary chapel (1867-1868) visible to the left.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1995



Idyllic view of the church, belltower, and civic buildings by the river, as taken by the Thomasite Luther Parker in the early 1900s. Note that the church has been newly plastered, except that the buttresses have grown mossy where they are beyond the reach of the

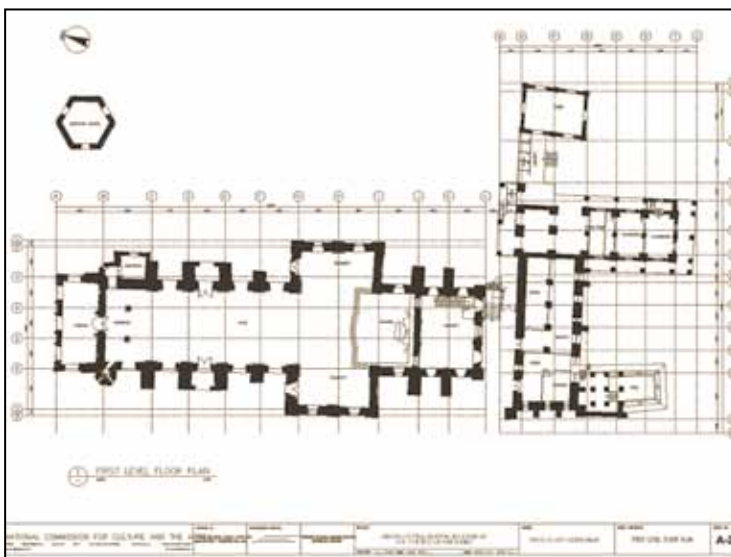
tile roof. The roof over the 1860s façade is of galvanized iron sheets.



1930s view of the church from the belltower. The Augustinian Recollects buttressed the walls (1891-1893) as a response to previous tremors, and to bolster the structure after a heavy tile roof replaced the one of nipa in 1873.

Porticoes were built over

the side entrances to minimize rainwater getting inside the church (1895-1896).



Plan of the church complex prepared c.2008 by architect Richard Tuason-Sanchez Bautista. The hexagonal mortuary chapel is at the upper left. Across to the right is the kitchen, built as an extension to the convento which runs perpendicular to the church.

1930s view of the transept, apse and convento from the river, when the riverbanks were still free from visual obstructions. A floating bridge of wooden poles links both banks of the Loboc River.



Repetti, 1938

Regalado Trota Jose, 2001



A computer-stitched view of roughly the same aspect of the church complex, taken 60 years later. A wooden “apartment” links the church, built perhaps in the 1730s, with the *convento*, itself built over the remains of the 17th century church.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1996



Seal of the Jesuits framed in a cartouche and topped with an imperial(?) crown. The appearance of motifs like this in various stages of completion indicate that the church was still in the process of decoration when the Jesuits were made to leave in 1768.

Head of an angel with a feathered bonnet, at the base of a window of the sacristy. The opening was closed when a passage was constructed between the apse and the *convento*.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Inner façade, which was the original entrance of the 1730s Jesuit church.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



A section of the inner façade, featuring fluted and medallioned pilasters, capitals, and blind niches. Only the pilasters in the right flank, as here, carry portraits of saints which are barely recognizable.

Leafy volutes comprise the carved decorations on the pair of towers that flanks the original façade.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Regalado Trota Jose, 2001



Above the entrance to the sacristy, a wooden bas-relief of St. Ignatius is flanked by two ladies holding shields and dressed in flowing robes and feathered bonnets. The special decoration here has led scholars to surmise that this section of the church may have been the Jesuit residence for southern Bohol, until it was transferred to Dauis in the 18th century.

Interior of the sacristy. The door leads to the space between the apse and the *convento*. On the right is a cabinet fitted into the wall. Beside it the year 1854 is inscribed; this may have been the year when the *convento* next door was expanded. Below this inscription is another one, indicating that the floor level was raised in 1969 (as a response to the floods). At the base of the cabinet is a *piscina*, a basin where sacred vessels were cleaned; its supports manifest the pierced coralstone decorations similar to those at the small *retablo* by the gospel side (p. 227, lower left).



Regalado Trota Jose, 1996

Regalado Trota Jose, 1995



This barely discernible bas-relief in stucco over the sacristy doorway seems to depict St. Ignatius and the first Jesuits before the Christ Child and the Blessed Mother.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1995



View of the nave from the choirloft.

Regalado Trota Jose, 2001



View of the nave from the sanctuary.

Late 19th
or early
20th
century
tornavoz
(sounding
board) of
the pulpit.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Beside the pulpit are marked the levels reached by the floods of Nov. 13, 1990 and Sept. 2, 1984. Similar deluges occurred in 1848, 1874, 1876, 1889, 1947, 1955, and 1964.

Regalado Trota Jose, 2001

Regalado Trota Jose, 2000



Gospel-side *retablo* (left of the main altar), one of the four *retablos* in the transept dating from the 18th century Jesuit era.

Repetti, 1938



Epistle-side *retablo* (right of the main altar). This photo was published in 1938, when the walls of the church were still elaborately painted.

Regalado Trota Jose, 2000



Small *retablo* left of the gospel-side *retablo*. The two inner columns are intricately pierced, resembling Chinese ivory pieces. The neo-Classical niche above was added to house the image of St. Isidore the Farmer, the devotion to whom was commenced in 1891.

Regalado Trota Jose, 2000



Small *retablo* right of the epistle-side *retablo*. The neo-Classical niche above was added to house the image of the Santo Niño, the devotion to whom was also commenced in 1891.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1995



Retablo in the sacristy, still with its gold-leaf intact.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1996

The *veronica* above the sacristy *retablo*, recalling the medieval tradition that Christ left three imprints of his features on the cloth used to wipe his face on the way to Calvary.

This languorous S-shaped motif flanking the *veronica* recalls the *armalis* motif of Mindanao okir art.



Regalado Trota Jose, 2001



Regalado Trota Jose, 1996

Image of an unidentified Jesuit martyr, similar to the one with a palm and cross in the *retablo* of Santa Cruz, Marinduque. This bas-relief in polychromed stucco—a unique example in the country—is a remnant of the original Jesuit central *retablo*. It can be barely seen behind the present neo-Classic *retablo*.

Regalado Trota Jose, 2000



The neo-Classical central *retablo* was perhaps commissioned during the renovation of the church in the mid-19th century. Its framework, as seen behind the niches, incorporated some of the twisted columns separated from earlier *retablos*.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



The image of the patron saint, St. Peter, is curiously smaller than that of St. Paul. The latter image may have been acquired at a later date when devotion to St. Paul was promoted.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, based on the black image venerated in Guadalupe, Extremadura, Spain. The image was brought from Manila in 1843 when an epidemic raged in Loboc.

Regalado Trota Jose, 2001



The background of Our Lady's niche, with its gilded wooden interlacing leaves, is unmatched in its artistry.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1996



Head of the Crucified Christ in the sacristy *retablo*. The parallel wavy strands of hair may date from the 18th century.

Regalado Trota Jose, 2000



A folk-style crucified Christ in the small Epistle-side *retablo*. An image of the Sorrowful Mother used to stand at his side.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Crucified Christ in the Gospel-side *retablo*.

Image of Our Lady of Consolation, formerly in the center of the lowest niche of the Epistle-side *retablo*. Its transfer to the niche to its right has altered its significance in the narrative of the *retablo*.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1995

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Image of Saint Raphael the Archangel, from the Gospel-side *retablo*. A sword in the left hand may have mistakenly replaced his iconic fish.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Image of Saint Lucy, from the central *retablo*. This saint, together with St. Francis Xavier, was chosen in 1697 to be the town's protector against typhoons, floods and alligators.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



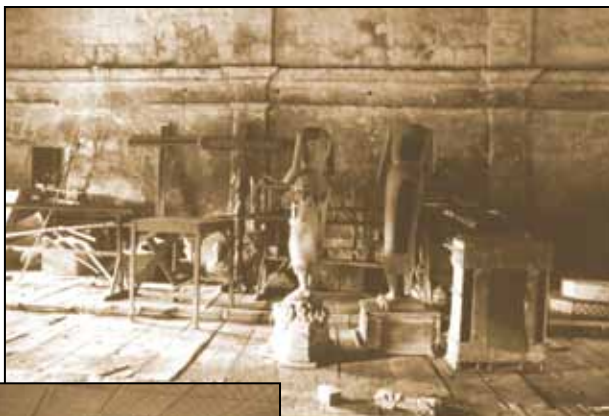
Image of Saint Vincent Ferrer, from the Epistle-side *retablo*. His head was stolen, together with that of St. Francis Xavier, in 2003.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Image of Saint Nicolas de Tolentino, from the Gospel-side *retablo*.

The left section of the space connecting the apse (whose wall is in the background) and the *convento* is now a storage room.



Regalado Trota Jose, 2004

Regalado Trota Jose, 1996



The right section of the same space is the “lobby” before the museum.

What was formerly a window in the right section was converted in 1921 into cabinet for the *panal* (glass funnels for carriage lights) and the *berina* (glass housing of images).



Regalado Trota Jose, 1998

Regalado Trota Jose, 1996



A pair of corbels (beam supports) carved as dragon heads and painted indigo leers over the upper reaches of the apse.

Regalado Trota Jose, 2001



The unusually thick and tall stone walls inside the wing of the *convento* parallel to the transept lead one to assume that these constitute the hulk of the 1670 church. From the angle of the photograph, a balustered deck and its adjunct elevated pool(?) can also be seen.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1998



In the 19th century, an extension was added to the *convento*, giving it its typical L-shape.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1996



Beam support for the *volada* (cantilevered outdoor gallery) carved in the form of a bulging-eyed, tall-nosed and fanged monster.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1996

The pair of monster beam supports for the *convento* is similar to that over the church's apse (opposite page, bottom).

Regalado Trota Jose, 1995



Plank-type *tabique pampango* wall of the “apartment” connecting the apse and the *convento*.

The thin *tabique pampango* wall of the *volada* is composed of woven strips of bamboo. The outside face is covered with lime *palitada*, some of which has crumbled. The base of the *volada* is trimmed with a lace-like wooden edge.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1995

Regalado Trota Jose, 1998



The inner face of the *tabique pampango* wall in the upper reaches of the *convento*, unseen by most people, is left without a lime coating. Details as these reveal the *convento*’s close connection with vernacular architecture.

Regalado Trota Jose, 2001



Waterspout in the form of an angel's head in the "pool" or cistern next to the *convento*.

Regalado Trota Jose, 2001



A room overlooking the northern flank of the church is the most decorated in the *convento*. It boasts of floor-boards of light and colored wood

arranged in a chevron pattern. The large sliding window panels utilize colored glass squares instead of capiz panes. The cornices are finely carved and gilded. Unfortunately, soot from the adjoining kitchen has darkened the walls. The table in the foreground is dated 1922.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Corbels supporting the beams of the *convento volada* resemble fiddle heads.

The walls of the largest room in the *convento* were elaborately painted and fitted with a stamped tin ceiling in the 1920s. In this precious setting, the world-famous Loboc Children's Choir regales Francesco Cardinal Marchisano and members of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church.



Regalado Trota Jose, 2002

Graffiti of a ship with an American flag perhaps marks the room where occupying officials enjoyed the “hospitality” enjoined from Filipino parish priest Fr. Cayetano Bastes in 1901.



Regalado Trota Jose, 2000

Regalado Trota Jose, 1996



Detail of the blue ornamentation on the whitewashed walls of the third floor of the *convento*.

The third floor corridor is wider than that of the floor below.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1995

Regalado Trota Jose, 2000



Timberwork over the extension of the *convento*. In 1881, the nipa roof was changed to galvanized iron sheets.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1996



This cabinet used to hold the archives of the parish. Registers dating to 1602 (still extant in an 1886 survey) disappeared under the onslaught of floods.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1998



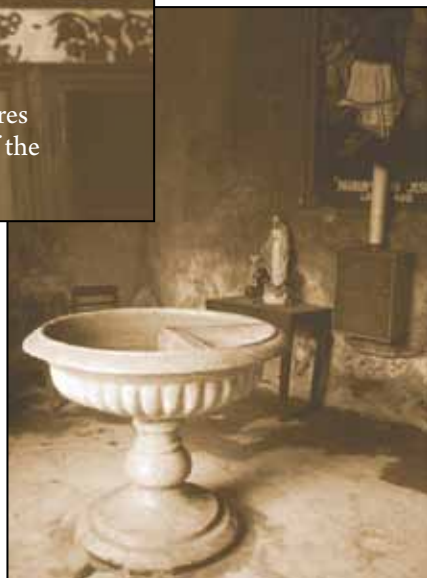
A table is one of the few examples of Bohol furniture still in their original contexts.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1998



This grand cupboard in the dining room features an elaborate wooden applique with the seal of the Augustinian Recollects.

The new baptistry by the north side of the nave was finished in 1897.



Regalado Trota Jose, 2001

Regalado Trota Jose, 1995



The belltower was erected by the first Augustinian Recollects in the last quarter of the 18th century. A tower clock from the Altonaga shop was installed in 1893. Seven bells were hung, the oldest cast in 1863 and two, dated 1914 and 1937, commissioned during the term of Fr. Cayetano Bastes.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1995



The hexagonal mortuary chapel was built from 1867 to 1868. It used to house a *retablo* with the same Baroque elements as those in the transept, but this disappeared when the chapel was converted into an office.

Regalado Trota Jose, 2000



Tomb of

Fr. Aquilino Bon, Augustinian Recollect parish priest of Loboc for five terms (from 1855 until his demise in Loboc in 1883). He was buried in the epistle side, close to where a saintly Jesuit, Fr. Alonso de Humanes, was laid to rest 150 years earlier.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Ceiling mural depicting the saving action of Our Lady of

Guadalupe during the great flood on Nov. 26, 1876. At this time the high tide prevented the rainwater from emptying into the sea, and so the waters reached five meters up the church walls. More than 400 people sought refuge in the *convento*.

Signature of Rey Francia, a Cebu-based artist who decorated many churches in the Visayas.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

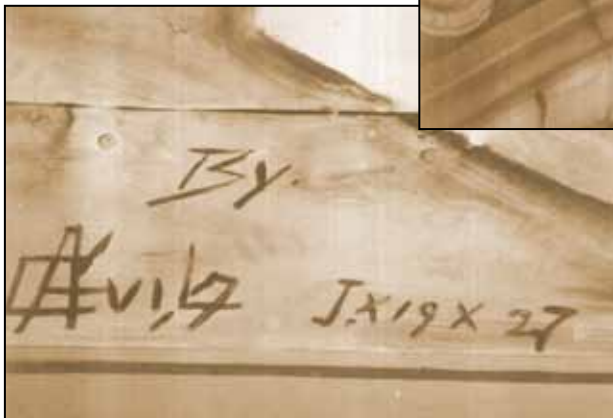


Signature of Canuto Avila, another Cebu-based artist who did most of the painting on the Loboc ceiling.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

This signature of Avila (born 1878) informs us that he was a sculptor as well.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Another signature of Avila, this time in English and in a "modern" style.

A silver *atril* (book stand), signed Thomas Enriquez de Lossada and dated Loboc, June 17, 1776.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1998



Regalado Trota Jose, 1998

The front of the *atril* features the seal of the Augustinian Recollects: a flaming heart transfixes by an arrow, surmounted by a bishop's hat and tassels.

A stamped tin altar frontal with monogram of Mary (19th century).



Regalado Trota Jose, 2000

Regalado Trota Jose, 1998



A closer view of a monstrance shows double-lined clouds, typical of Chinese influence.

The tripartite construction of the pipe organ links it with the workshop of Fray Diego Cera, an early 19th century Recollect justly famous for the Bamboo Organ he installed in his Las Piñas parish outside Manila.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1995

Regalado Trota Jose, 1998



A pixy-ish 18th century image of the Santo Niño.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1998



Side view of the Santo Niño, showing the interesting conical form of the curls.

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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), the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 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.