



A Visual Documentation of Fil-Hispanic Churches

Part XIV: Parish Churches of La Santa Cruz, Maribojoc and El Santo Niño, Cortes, Bohol

Regalado Trota Jose

The town and port of Maribojoc lie along the Bay of the same name on the southeastern part of Bohol island. Greatly damaged by the earthquake on October 15, 2013, it continues to be one of the largest and culturally significant towns in the Province of Bohol. One of its parish priests, the Augustinian Recollect Fr. Lucas Martinez, noted in the parish's *Libro de Cosas Notables* that the place was formerly called Malabohoc, after a pine tree (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) that abounded in the area. On a 1793 bell in nearby Cortes, however, the name already appeared as Mariboho. An earlier name seems to be Dungguan, a place of anchorage. The area was first ministered by the Jesuits in the beginning of the 17th century. Malabohoc was one of the six towns that revolted against the Spaniards in 1621 (Loboc and Baclayon did not participate). According to Pedro Murillo Velarde's 1749 *Historia*, Jose Sanchez (1616-1692), an Austrian Jesuit, built part of Malabohoc church and its retablo. However, it seems nothing substantial of the Jesuit era, except for a book of marriages that commenced on December 29, 1766, had survived by the time Fr. Martinez was writing on the Notable Events of the town in 1895. On October 21, 1768, the Jesuits turned over Malabohoc to the Augustinian Recollects, who would remain until 1898.

Perhaps the first permanent structure that the Recollects built was a fort to defend the western coast of Bohol from pirates and slave raiders who were the scourge of the seas during the last part of the 18th century. Fort San Vicente was erected by Fr. Manuel Sanchez in 1796 on Punta Cruz, some three kilometers west of the town center. The inscription over the portal already mentions the veneration of the Holy Cross in the town.

A church is said to have been built from 1798 to 1816. The vestment chest in the sacristy, as well as the *retablo mayor*, some doors, and a 1793 bell now in Cortes could pertain to this early church. The present church with a transept was begun by Fr. Manuel Plaza on June 7, 1852 and was concluded in 1872, eleven years after his death. In 1884, the roof of the church was in danger of collapsing “due to too much lime.” The *batangas* or roof beams were renovated, the tiles were replaced by galvanized iron sheets, a ceiling of zinc sheets was installed, and a quadrangular dome was built, all by 1889. In this same year, the upper levels of the sides of the nave were completed with walls of galvanized iron sheets. Further works on the roof and walls with GI sheets were finished in 1892.

An early *convento* was built by Fr. Mauro de San Agustin either in 1814 or 1824. Its ground floor was of stone, while the upper levels were of *tabique pampango* (thin walls of interwoven wooden splats covered with lime). This was replaced by another layer of stone which began in 1877 and completed after 1886. The incorrupt remains of Fr. Mauro, who was parish priest for forty years, and of Fr. Plaza were discovered in the church in 1893 and given solemn reburial.

The Augustinian Recollects left behind other constructions for the community: a stone pier (1842), a school and tribunal of stone and *tabique pampango* (1856), five stone bridges (1841-1892), and a stone cemetery (1872). They also built a fountain called *Bocboc* which never ran dry. It was left to the Loboc-born priest, Padre Quiterio Sarigumba, to complete the decoration of the church with murals and five neogothic *retablos* in the 1930s. The parish church of the Holy Cross was declared a National Cultural Treasure by the National Museum on May 5, 2010.

Strong temblors were felt on December 12, 1896 and September 21, 1897, but these were nothing compared to the 7.2 intensity earthquake that flattened Maribojoc’s icon on October 15, 2013. As of this writing, plans are still being prepared for the resuscitation of the parish church of the Holy Cross of Maribojoc.

Note: All photographs were taken before the earthquake of October 15, 2013.

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View of the church complex from the shoreline of Maribojoc Bay.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Stone stairways leading to the elevated portion of the town, with the church in the background. The stairway was built under the direction of Fr. Pedro de San Nicolas, OAR, in 1842.

View from the belltower of the unusually small and triangular plaza in front of the façade.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

The church is separated from the rest of the town by a small ravine and thick nipa swamp, as if intended as a natural defense against enemies from the mainland, not from the sea.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Regalado Trota Jose, 1998

View of the façade and belltower. Children like to play in its afternoon shadows.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Façade with a section of the two-level stone construction separating it from the tower.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



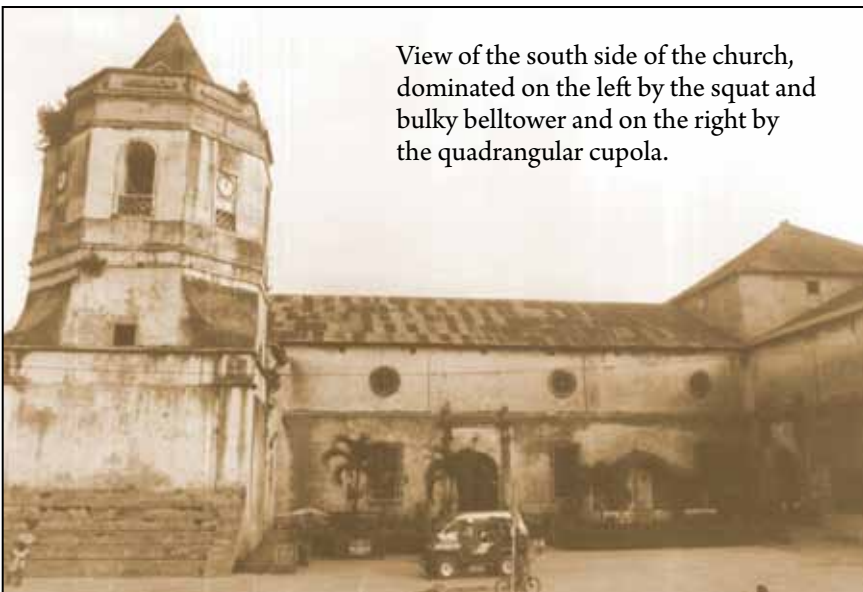
Bas-relief of San Vicente carved on the coralstone façade. The image and frame are highlighted with a reddish earth. The same artistic technique was also used in the church of Cortes.

“Cookie-cutter” flower-and-leaf motif on the cornice of the façade. The circular flowers slightly resemble those on the main door of the *convento*, as well as the wall carvings over the epistle transept of Talibon cathedral.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



View of the south side of the church, dominated on the left by the squat and bulky belltower and on the right by the quadrangular cupola.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



View from the tower looking over the south side and transept of the church, and the old *convento* which is now used as a school.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

View of the north side of the church, with the wide expanse of churchyard. This vacant space is said to have been a cemetery.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Entrance on the south side of the church. Note that the upper walls are thinner than the lower walls.

View from the vestibule, under the choirloft, looking towards the sanctuary.



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Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

View from the choirloft towards the sanctuary.

View from the sanctuary towards the choirloft. The paintings on the tin ceiling are by Raymundo Francia, who signed in one of the corners under the dome. The Maribojoc painting project was initiated by the San Tarcisio Martir Maribojoc Catholic Association. Francia was active painting churches in Bohol and Cebu in the 1920s-1930s.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Portrait of Fr Quiterio Sarigumba administering the sacrament of baptism, on the ceiling above the choirloft. Loboc-born Padre Sarigumba, who left his initials "P.Q.S." on Panglao, Jagna and other churches where he served, finished his theology at the University of Santo Tomas and was one of the four students who laid the cornerstone of the UST in its Sampaloc campus in 1911. He furnished Maribojoc with its five grand *retablos*.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

The two neo-gothic *retablos* in the north transept, dating from the 1930s.

The two neo-gothic *retablos* in the south transept, dating from the 1930s.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



The *retablo mayor*, dated 7 January 1934 in its upper reaches, also bears the name of its sponsoring agency—the *Comite de Obras* (working committee) of the parish—and the initials of Padre Quiterio Sarigumba. The elegant and finely crafted neo-gothic style of the five *retablos* was probably inspired by Fr. Sarigumba's visits to Santo Domingo church in Intramuros, next door to his alma mater, the University of Santo Tomas. It may be said that these *retablos* are the last in the long line of *retablo* masterpieces in Bohol, which includes those of Baclayon, Loboc, and Tagbilaran.

Section of the base of the *retablo mayor* with ecclesiastical symbols.



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Regalado Trota Jose, 1998



Panel from the base of the *retablo*, with a curious lurching mythical monster.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



This organ on its separate loft stylistically dates from the 1890s. Its metal pipes last sounded in 1975. The music stand over the keyboard is charmingly shaped like a butterfly.

The belltower is entered through separate entrance beside the façade. The stone steps hug the curving sides of the tower, in the *caracol* (snail) style.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



One of two clocks on the belltower; this one installed in 1893 bears the name of Jose Altonaga, who ran a firm in Manila in the late 19th century.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

The clockwork inside the belltower. The San Vicente bell, from the 1870s, was connected to this apparatus. Of the seven bells, the earliest was from 1872, four were from 1884, and another from 1914.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



A *matraca* or noisemaker in the belltower, cranked during Holy Week when the bells are kept silent. Its size may be gauged by the bench next to it.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



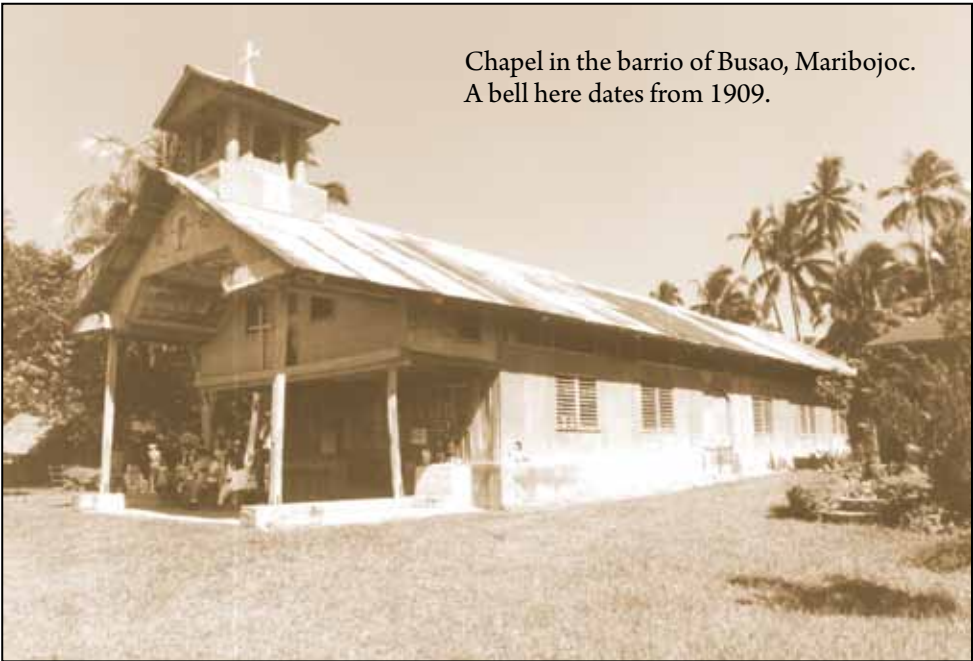
Section of the parish museum in the upper level of the old *convento*. The artifacts kept here included silver sacred vessels, ivory images, wooden furniture, and embroidered sacred vestments, among many others.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Cajonería or chest of drawers for keeping church linens and sacred vestments. The floral designs of this bulky piece of furniture and the companion smaller chests above are rococo-inspired, and may date from the 1790s church. These motifs link the *cajonería* with the *convento* doors and *retablo mayor* of Cortes, which most possibly were turned over by the mother parish, Maribojoc.

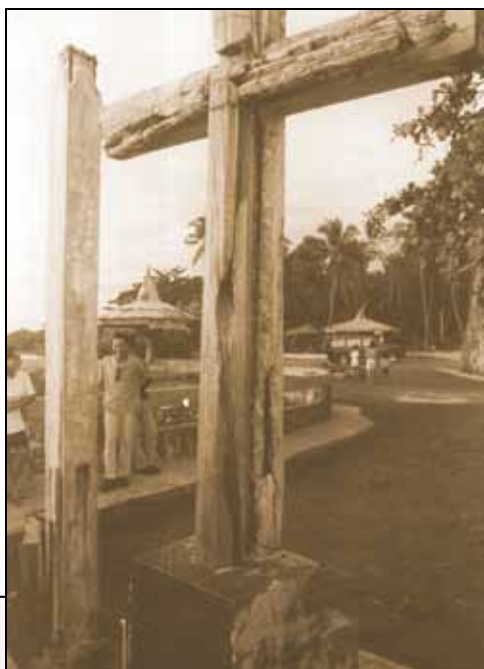
Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

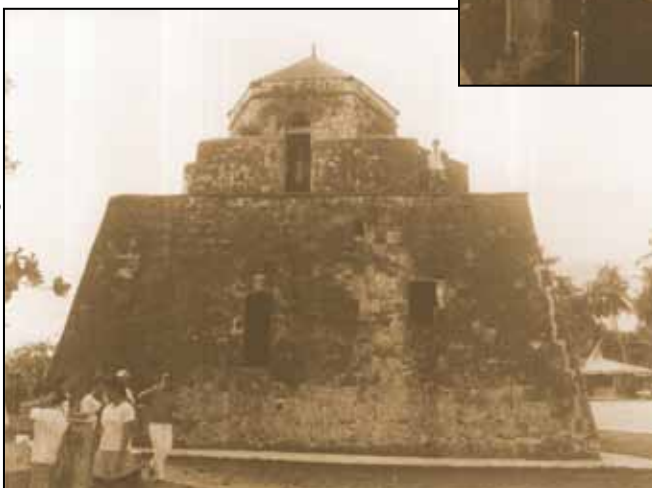
The *retablo* in the chapel interestingly carries the outlines of a baroque *retablo*.

The wind-worn wooden cross at Punta Cruz, a few kilometers west of Maribojoc and the westernmost point of Bohol island. Devotees light candles beside this ancient memorial.



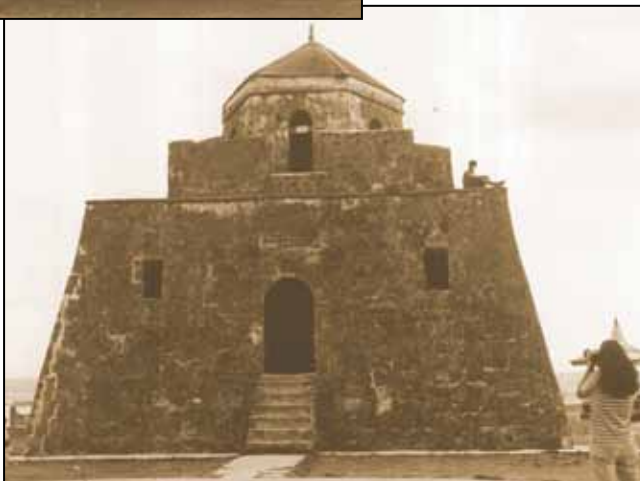
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This fort known as Castillo de San Vicente Ferrer was built at Punta Cruz by the Augustinian Recollect Fr. Manuel Sanchez. It was constructed in 1796 as part of the defense system in the Visayas against slave raiders and pirates from the South.

The fort is planned along the lines of an isosceles triangle, unique in the country. Over the ramparts rises a squat hexagonal tower. The *troneras* or gun emplacements could accommodate four cannons.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



The inscription over the main entrance to the Castillo de San Vicente Ferrer. The letters as well as the Spanish coat-of-arms on the walls are highlighted by a reddish earth.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

The central 'room' in the castillo has a niche where presumably religious images were housed. A tiny latrine has even been squeezed in a space just outside the doorway to the left.

Parish Church of Santísimo Nombre de Jesus (El Santo Niño), Cortes

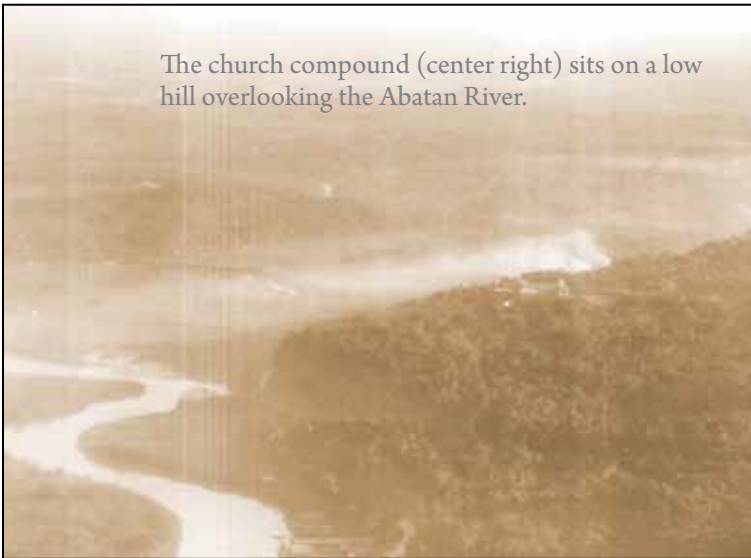
The town of Cortes evolved from a small fishing village across the Abatan River from Maribojoc. Its early name was Malabago, after a coastal tree with yellow flowers (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*). In 1769, it was a visita of Maribojoc, but it separated from its mother parish in 1793 or 1794. At this time its name changed to Paminguitan, referring to the hook-and-line fishing in the area. It seems to have been established as a municipality in or before 1862. In 1891, the town's name was changed again to Cortes, in honor of the Spanish conquistador of Mexico, Hernan Cortes. The parish was under the spiritual care of the Augustinian Recollects from its beginnings until 1898, when the secular clergy took charge.

Cortes sits on a low hill overlooking the Abatan River, which in times past was the route to the interior used by those refusing to acknowledge Spanish hegemony. Thus Cortes was strategically placed, like Loay at the entrance of the Loboc River. Some evidence indicates that part of the *convento* may have been built as a watchtower.

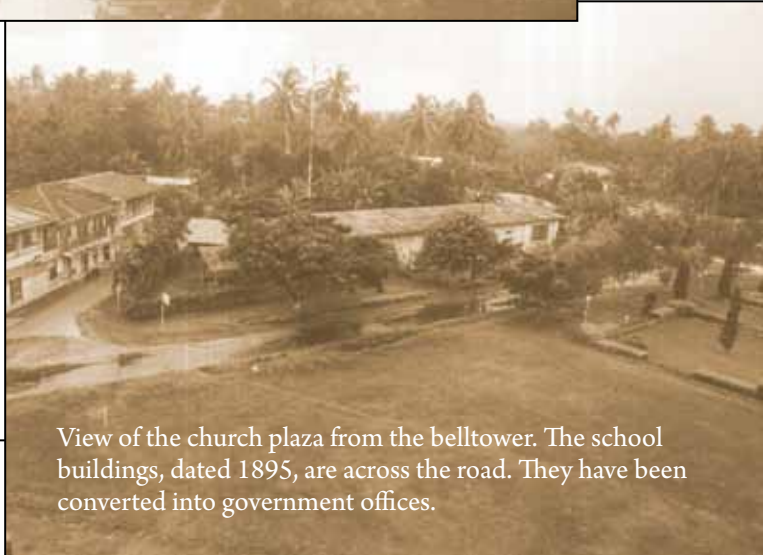
An early, thin-walled church was replaced by a more substantial one of cut coralstone which was begun in the late 1880s. This church is cruciform, with an octagonal dome over the crossing. The façade features an arcaded portico, a characteristic of many Bohol churches until the early 20th century. A baptistry was added by the epistle side, with 1892 inscribed over its entrance. As pointed out in the section on Maribojoc, some of the fixtures in Cortes may have been turned over by its mother parish, such as the 1793 bell, the *retablo mayor*, and some doors of the *convento*.

Across the church plaza, a longitudinal stone building was erected by the Recollects in 1895 as a school, with separate sections for boys and girls. In 1942, Japanese soldiers occupied the town and used this school as a garrison; later they burned down a number of houses as well. The earthquake of October 15, 2013 heavily damaged the arcaded portico of the façade and sections of the church walls, particularly by the sanctuary. This did not deter the National Museum's declaration of the parish church of the Santo Niño as a National Cultural Treasure a week after the disaster, on October 22, 2013. ■

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



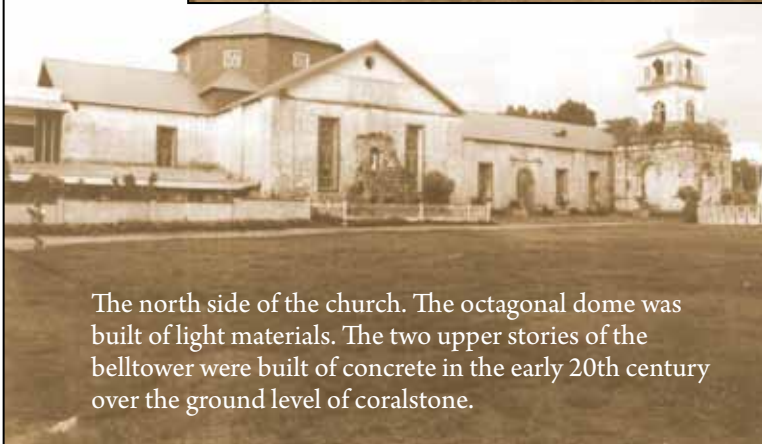
The church compound (center right) sits on a low hill overlooking the Abatan River.



View of the church plaza from the belltower. The school buildings, dated 1895, are across the road. They have been converted into government offices.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



The north side of the church. The octagonal dome was built of light materials. The two upper stories of the belltower were built of concrete in the early 20th century over the ground level of coralstone.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Bas-relief of the Santo Niño carved of coralstone over the north side entrance. It is colored with a type of reddish earth, the same material used to highlight images and elements on the exterior walls of Maribojoc.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Door from the nave leading to the baptistry, inscribed 1892.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Detail of stone carving over one of the pediments, with a mango-shaped heart aflame symbolizing the Augustinian Recollects who built the church.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

View of the nave towards the sanctuary from the choirloft. The ceiling murals were painted by Raymundo Francia, who signed over the choirloft.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

View of the nave from the sanctuary, looking towards the choirloft.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Central *retablo*, with the image of the patron, the Santo Niño, in the center. This baroque altarpiece, with its twisted columns and rocaile motifs, most probably originated from the earlier church of Maribojoc.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Late 19th century *retablo* left of the main altar, with the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the center.



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Late 19th century *retablo* right of the main altar, with the image of San Roque in the center. Near this altar is the final resting place of Fr. Hilarion Casas del Niño Jesus OAR, who died in 1869.

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Main doorway to the *convento*, with chrysanthemum-like motifs.

This *convento* door has the same late 18th century floral motifs as on the Maribojoc sacristy chest (see p. 132), and could in fact have originated there.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

The banister of the stairway in the *convento* manifests Art Deco motifs, similar to those used in the tower of Anda (1950-1952).

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



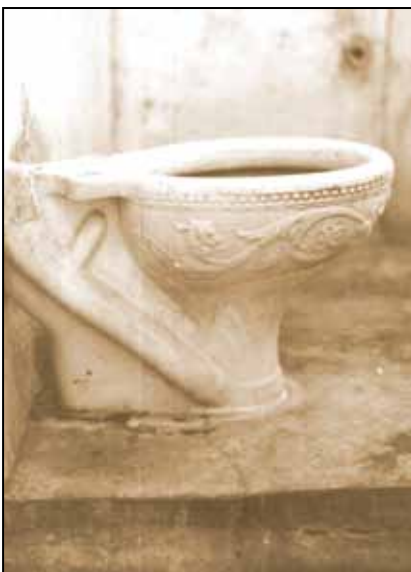
Rear of the *convento*.
The lower level sports
a round opening,
where a quadrangular
window would usually
be. This section may
have previously served
as a bulwark or fortress,
in view of its strategic
position overlooking
the river.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



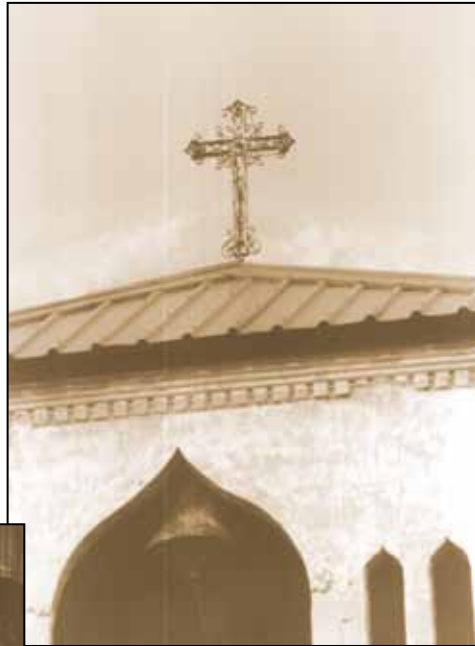
This *matraca* in the
belltower resembles an
ironing board.

Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



A rarely encountered ornate toilet-bowl,
found in the *convento*.

A beautiful 19th century wrought-iron cross over the tower, built in the early 20th century. The ogee arch of the window links it to the revival of the mudéjar style, which incorporated Islamic elements in Christian architecture in Gothic and early Renaissance Spain.



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997



Regalado Trota Jose, 1997

Images of Our Lady in the convento. The one in the center seems to be the Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, from the 19th century.



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The oldest bell in Cortes is inscribed: MARIBOHO ECLESIE CRUZIS ANNO DE 1793. Another bell is dated 1801, while a third is inscribed: "Ntra. Sra. del Rosario, devoto de Paminguitan, 1884."



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

Detail of a map of Bohol, showing the location of Maribojoc and Cortes.



Algué, Atlas de Filipinas, 1899

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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.