

The Sacred Images, Patronages and Rituals of Obando Church, Bulacan, Philippines: A Historical Investigation

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Abstract: Obando, Bulacan is famous for its fertility dance ritual that is celebrated in the middle of May in front the sacred images of Saint Paschal Baylón, Our Lady of *Salambao*, and Saint Clare of Assisi. Following a postcolonial trend of scholarship, many assume that this dance ritual existed prior to the Spanish colonization of the Philippines, and was merely subsumed under Catholic discourse to facilitate the conversion of the natives to Christianity. Using mostly 19th century Spanish publications, and 20th century American and Filipino publications, and viewing the sacred images, their patronages and rituals as a Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage, this paper challenges this rather naïve postcolonial line of thinking by arguing that the Obando assemblage that we more or less know today took more than three centuries to configure. This research paper does not only proffer a more textually grounded historical account of the configuration and reconfigurations of this popular religious assemblage, but also the first journal publication on the history of Obando Church's sacred images, patronages, and rituals. This paper therefore is an attempt to initiate

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a more sober scholarly discussion on the said history. Theoretically and historiographically, this paper tests whether the Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage framing of a local phenomenon could generate not just an alternative narrative, but a fuller and more sensible one. This paper contains two substantive sections: the first one gives a chronological account of the installations of the three sacred images in Obando Church; while the second one traces the changing configurations of the sacred images' patronages and rituals.

Keywords: Obando, Bulacan, Saint Paschal Baylón, Our Lady of *Salambao*, Saint Clare of Assisi, Patronages, Rituals, Assemblage of Deleuze and Guattari

Introduction

The Municipality of Obando is the southernmost town of the Province of Bulacan. As the map in figure 1 shows, it is bounded in the north by the Municipality of Bocaue; in the east by the Municipality of Marilao, and the City of Valenzuela, Metro Manila; in the south by the City of

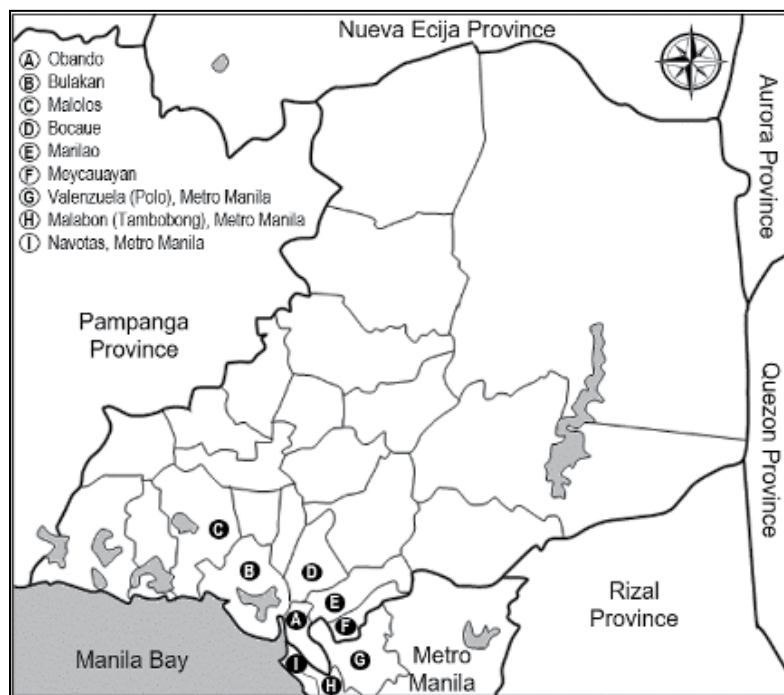


Figure 1

Map Showing the Location of the Municipality of Obando in the Province of Bulacan

Malabon, Metro Manila; and in the west by the Municipality of Bulakan, the City of Navotas, Metro Manila, and the Manila Bay. It is about 18 kilometers from the City of Manila, the country's capital; and about 20 kilometers from Malolos

City, the capital of the Province of Bulacan. Obando is a second-class municipality with a population of about 60,000.¹

Obando has a centuries-old stone church that serves as the center of its famed fertility dance ritual that happens in the middle of the month of May, in front of the church's three sacred images, namely: Saint Paschal Baylón (1540-1592), the Our Lady of *Salambao*, and Saint Clare of Assisi (1194-1253). Saint Paschal Baylón was a Spanish Franciscan friar; the Our Lady of *Salambao* is an icon of the Our Immaculate of Immaculate Conception that was fished out from Manila Bay through a fishing contraption called *salambao* (see figure 5 for a 1941 drawing of a *salambao*); while Saint Clare of Assisi was an Italian Franciscan nun. The Municipality of Obando, in its official webpage, follows a postcolonial trend of scholarship that assumes that this fertility dance ritual existed prior to the Spanish colonization of the Philippines, and was merely subsumed under Catholic discourse to facilitate the conversion of the natives to Christianity.² The sparse literature scrounged from Google Books suggests that it was the National Artist for Literature Alejandro Roces (1924-2011) who first thought of this as a hypothesis in 1980.³ The parish that holds jurisdiction over the old stone church and the fertility dance ritual, in its Facebook page, follows this same postcolonial assumption (Parokya ni San Pascual Baylon–Obando Church Facebook Page, 2018). The municipality and parish even mention a name for this hypothetical pre-Hispanic fertility ritual, *kasionawan*.⁴

There are three big problems, however, that will emerge once *kasionawan* is accepted as the under layer of the Obando fertility dance ritual. First, although *kasionawan* appears, as *casilonauan*, in the Tagalog-Spanish dictionary of Juan Noceda (1681-1747) and Pedro de Sanlucar (1707- ?) that was first published in 1754, it was just defined as “some old ceremonies.”⁵ Second, there are no Spanish texts that link *kasionawan* with any pre-Hispanic fertility dance ritual, much less with the hypothesized pre-Spanish fertility dance ritual of Obando. Third, a review of literature through Google Books again would suggest that linking of *kasionawan* with Obando's fertility dance ritual happened only beginning in 1981.⁶ This paper,

¹ Philippine Statistics Authority, *2015 Census of Population, Report No. 2: Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics Bulacan* (Quezon City: Philippine Statistics Authority, 2017), 12.

² Romulo De Los Reyes, “Obando: Alamat ng isang Sayaw” (1981), <http://obando81.angelfire.com/tg/home.html>.

³ Alejandro Roces, *Fiesta* (Quezon City: Vera Reyes, 1980), 85.

⁴ De Los Reyes; & Parokya ni San Pascual Baylon-Obando Church, “Kasaysayan ng Parokya,” Facebook (November 16, 2019).

⁵ Juan De Noceda & Pedro De Sanlucar, *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala* (Manila: Ramirez y Giraudier, 1860), 85.

⁶ De Los Reyes; & D.H. Soriano, *The Philippines, Pearl of the Orient* (Quezon City: Islas Filipinas Publishing Company, 1981), 129.

therefore, took a more complex line of exploring the fertility dance ritual of Obando by mainly using 19th century Spanish publications, as well as 20th century American and Filipino publications, and treating Obando Church's sacred images, their patronages and rituals as a Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage that took more than three centuries to achieve the configuration that we more or less know today. Basically, instead of individually constructing the ritual narratives of each of the three patron saints of Obando, the assemblage theory can holistically look into the interactions of the changing collection of elements, conditions, and agents that generate distinct ritual narratives from time to time.

Statement of the Problem

The main problem pursued by this paper is: what historical narrative may emerge from the changing configurations of Obando Church's sacred images, and their patronages and rituals, when explored from the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage? This main problem was broken down into the following sub-problems: 1) what is the chronology of the installations of the three sacred images in Obando Church?; and 2) what are the different configurations of the assemblage of sacred images, patronages, and rituals throughout the centuries?

Significance of the Study

This research paper does not only proffer a more textually grounded historical account of the configuration and reconfigurations of this popular religious assemblage, but also the first journal publication on the history of Obando Church's sacred images, patronages, and rituals. This paper therefore is an attempt to initiate a more sober scholarly discussion on the said history. Although there is actually a 2020 journal article by Maria Stanyukovich entitled "Fertility Dance: The Church of Our Lady of a Fishnet, of Dancing St. Pascual, and of St. Clara of Assisi (the Philippines) and its Ancient Pagan Heritage," this material is not only written in Russian and could not initiate a scholarly discussion among Filipino researchers but probably also follows the trajectory of Roces' problematic hypothesis.⁷ Theoretically and historiographically, this paper tests whether the Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage framing of a local phenomenon could generate not just an alternative narrative on the popular religious phenomenon of Obando, but a fuller and more sensible one.

⁷ Maria V. Stanyukovich, "Fertility Dance: The Church of Our Lady of a Fishnet, of Dancing St. Pascual and of St. Clara of Assisi (the Philippines) and its Ancient Pagan Heritage," *Bulletin of the Russian State University for the Humanities, Series Literary Criticism, Linguistics, Culturology*, no. 5 (2020): 112-139.

Methodology

The data for this research paper were mainly scrounged from Spanish period, American period, and post-Second World War publications. Photographs, engravings, and a historical marker were also used. The data bases and search engines utilized were the Biblioteca Digital Hispanica of the Biblioteca Nacional de España, Google Books, Google Scholar, Hathi Trust Digital Library, Internet Archives, the Digital Collections of the National Library of the Philippines, the Digital Collection of the University of Santo Tomas, and The United States and its Territories collection of the University of Michigan. As this paper was done during the pandemic lockdown of 2020, unpublished archival materials were inaccessible. Thus, the authors of this paper are open to the possibility that an entirely different historical narrative may be woven once the unpublished archival materials are brought into the picture.

As already mentioned, the theoretical framework utilized by this paper is the concept of assemblage by the French philosopher and cultural critic Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and the French psychotherapist and intellectual Pierre-Felix Guattari (1930-1992), as simplified and appropriated by the American philosophy professor Thomas Andrew Nail of the University of Denver.⁸ Kim Dovey, in his essay “Assembling Architecture,” provides us with a useful definition of assemblage: “. . . a whole that is formed from the interconnectivity and flows between constituent parts—a socio-spatial cluster of interconnections wherein the identities and functions of both parts and wholes emerge from the flows between them.”⁹ It is unfortunate that Deleuze and Guattari did not fully expound their assemblage theory, and merely referred to it as they use it in their collaborative works (Nail, 2017). The Mexican-American philosopher and artist Manuel DeLanda, a leading expert on the thoughts of Deleuze and on assemblage theory, was forced to construct his own Deleuze-inspired assemblage theory rather than hermeneutically articulate such theory strictly from the writings of the two French thinkers.¹⁰ However, Nail, in his essay “What is an Assemblage?,” insists and demonstrates that it is possible to reconstruct a full theory of assemblage based on the dispersed texts of the said French thinkers.¹¹ Thus, this paper’s short discussion of its theoretical framework is heavily dependent on Nail’s hermeneutic project.

Deleuze and Guattari use the French word “*agencement*,” which is closer to the English word “arrangement” than to the English word “assemblage,” that was

⁸ Thomas Nail, “What is an Assemblage?” *SubStance* vol 46, no. 1 (2017): 21-37,

⁹ Kim Dovey, “Assembling Architecture,” Frichot, H. & Loo, S., Eds., *Deleuze and Architecture* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2013): 131.

¹⁰ Nail, 21.

¹¹ Nail, 21.

first used by Brian Massumi in his 1987 translation of the two French intellectuals' book *A Thousand Plateaus*.¹² Hence, when Anglophone writers and scholars use the word "assemblage" as the now widespread translation of Deleuze and Guattari's "agencement," there is that constant need for them not to conflate the translation with the ordinary meaning of "assemblage."¹³ This is because one of the first important characteristics of the Deleuzian/Guattarian assemblage is that it retains the multiplicity of its heterogeneous components, rather creating a unity. An assemblage is not an organism. "Arranging" does not necessarily connote unity, whereas "assembling" does. Because an assemblage does not have the unity of its heterogeneous components, it cannot have an essence in itself, and this is the second important characteristics of assemblage. One cannot talk about essence, because what an assemblage has is a multiplicity of events that are interacting with each other; because an assemblage is always in the process of becoming, where components come and go, and where external conditions change; and because the overall configuration of the assemblage's effects and results also change.¹⁴

This paper is premised on the conceptualization of the three sacred images of Obando Church, and their pre-defined patronages and rituals, as an assemblage, where these heterogeneous components, together with the Franciscan friars, who administered the Catholic faith in that part of the Province of Bulacan until the Spanish Revolution, and some sectors of the Obando population, as well as the pilgrims, interacted with each other to produce new patronages, rituals, and even new sacred images. It took the people of Obando more than a century just to have these three different images together under one shrine; it took them more than another century for the components of the assemblage to generate the configuration of sacred images, patronages, and rituals that we more or less now today; and there is no guarantee that such assemblage of sacred images, patronages, and rituals would stay in the same configuration in the future.

According to Nail, the assemblage of Deleuze and Guattari has three constitutive features, namely: conditions, elements, and personae.¹⁵ Conditions are the network of specific external relations that bind the elements and personae together within a given assemblage.¹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari refer to this network of specific external relations as an abstract machine.¹⁷ In the case of the popular religious

¹² Nail, 22; & Sam Page, "Assemblage Theory," *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* vol. 1. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2020): 223.

¹³ Nail, 22.

¹⁴ Nail, 23-24.

¹⁵ Nail, 24.

¹⁶ Nail, 24.

¹⁷ Nail, 24-25.

assemblage of Obando these conditions are: 1) the convention of subdividing towns and parishes as population and population centers grow; 2) the convention of assigning patron saints to newly established churches; 3) the convention of selecting patron saints from among the saints that belong to the religious order that manages a given territory; 4) the convention of following or re-assigning the feast days of these patron saints; 5) the practice of celebrating these feast days as fiestas, which are both civic and religious events that last more than a day; 6) the expectations of graces, blessings, and miracles from patron saints; and 7) the tendency to attribute miraculous powers to old sacred images and sacred images with unusual provenance.

Elements are the concrete and embodied components of the assemblage that serve as the skeletal framework of the assemblage.¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari refer to these embodied elements as the concrete assemblage.¹⁹ In the case of the popular religious assemblage of Obando these elements are: 1) the town/pueblo/parish of Obando, which is an offshoot of the town/pueblo/parish of Polo/Valenzuela, which in return is an offshoot of the town/pueblo/parish of Meycauayan; 2) the Obando Church; 3) the sacred image of Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) of Meycauayan Church; 4) the sacred image of Saint Clare of Assisi of Obando Church, which was formerly owned by Polo Church, and earlier owned by Meycauayan Church; 5) the sacred image of Our Lady of *Salambao*; and 6) the sacred image of Saint Paschal Baylón. Saint Francis of Assisi was an Italian friar who founded what we know today as the Franciscan Order. The main elements of the popular religious assemblage of Obando are the three sacred images, but these images carry with them their respective patronages and rituals.

Personae are the agents and mobile operators within the assemblage.²⁰ In the case of the popular religious assemblage of Obando these personae are: 1) the Franciscan friars; 2) the fishermen who retrieved the sacred image of Our Lady of *Salambao* from Manila Bay; 3) the expectant mothers and their relatives and friends who prayed in front of the sacred image of Saint Clare of Assisi; 4) the various sectors of the Obando populace, such as farmers, herdsmen, and fishermen; 5) the secular priests who inherited the administration of Obando Church from the Franciscan friars after the Spanish Revolution; and 6) the locals and pilgrims who reproduced and recreated the rituals of Obando Church.

In short, an assemblage is a temporary, whether short term or long term, configuration of conditions, concrete elements, and agents that interact together and lead to the emergence of equally temporary events and results. Neither the

¹⁸ Nail, 26.

¹⁹ Nail, 26-27.

²⁰ Nail, 27.

constitutive elements of an assemblage, nor its configuration, and nor its effects are permanent, because an assemblage is always in the process of change and becoming. According to Nail, there are four types of changes in the assemblage of Deleuze and Guattari.²¹ These four types of changes are combinations of two alternative values—namely, positive and negative—and two intensities or scope—namely, absolute and relative. Thus, these four types of changes are shown in table 1 as: 1) relative negative, 2) relative positive, 3) absolute negative, and 4) absolute positive.

Table 1

Generation of the Four Types of Changes in an Assemblage

		Intensity/Scope	
		Relative	Absolute
Value	Negative	Relative Negative	Absolute Negative
	Positive	Relative Positive	Absolute Positive

Relative negative changes are changes that maintain and reproduce a given assemblage.²² An example in the case of the popular religious assemblage of Obando, when the three sacred images of Obando Church were burned together with Obando Church just before the Japanese Imperial Army left the town, the secular priests and the populace responded by making replicas of the three sacred images. Thus, instead of a totally destroyed assemblage what emerged was a recuperated assemblage. Relative positive changes are ambiguous changes that neither contribute towards the reproduction of a given assemblage, nor towards the emergence of a new assemblage.²³ Absolute negative changes are changes that undermine a given assemblage including any possible emergent assemblage.²⁴ Absolute positive changes are changes that contribute towards the emergence of new assemblage.²⁵ In the case of the popular religious assemblage of Obando, this paper would demonstrate in the succeeding sections that the image of Saint Clare of Assisi used to be part of a different assemblage in Meycauyan Church but later on migrated to become part of a new assemblage in Obando Church.

²¹ Nail, 33-34.

²² Nail, 34.

²³ Nail, 35.

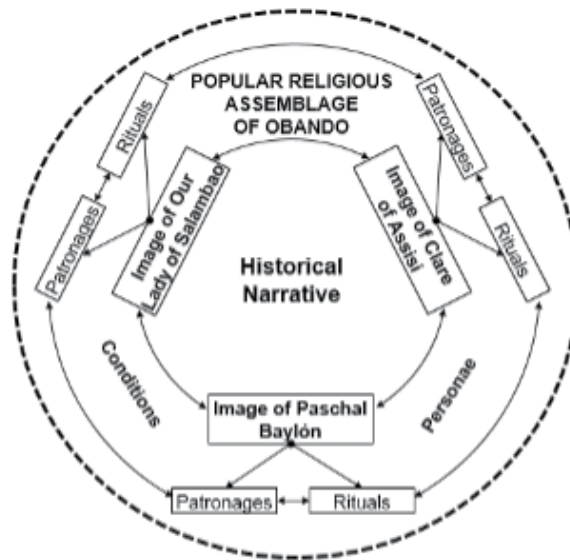
²⁴ Nail, 35.

²⁵ Nail, 36.

To clearly answer the research problems stated above, this paper contains two substantive sections. The first one gives a chronological account of the installations of the three sacred images in Obando Church, while the second one traces the changing configurations of the sacred images' patronages and rituals. Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework of this paper.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework of this Paper



Dating the Cluster of Three Saints

Before attempting to date the three sacred images of the popular religious assemblage of Obando, a short historical background on the history of Obando and Obando Church is needed. Both the pueblo and the parish of Obando are an offshoot of the old pueblo and parish of Meycauayan.²⁶ Figure 3 gives us an idea of how big the old pueblo/parish of Meycauayan was, as it encompassed the areas that are now occupied by the cities of Meycauayan and San Jose del Monte, and by the municipalities of Obando (Catangalan), Bocaue, and Marilao, all within the province of Bulacan; plus the City of Valenzuela (Polo) of Metro Manila.

²⁶Felix Huerta, *Estado Geográfico, Topográfico, Estadístico, Histórico-Religioso, de La Santa y Apostólica Provincia de S. Gregorio Magno, de Religiosos Menores Descalzos de la Regular y Más Estrecha Observancia de N.S.P.S. Francisco, en las Islas Filipinas* (Manila: Ymprenta de los Amigos del Pais, 1855), 83.

Figure 3

Map Showing the Old Territory of the Pueblo and Parish of Meycauayan in the Province of Bulacan



The old pueblo and parish of Meycauayan were founded in 1578 by the Franciscan friars. In those early times, Obando (Catangalan) and Valenzuela (Polo) were just two of the *visitas* of this huge parish. A *visita* is a chapel that is usually remote from its mother parish church and is just regularly visited by a parish priest. In 1623 Valenzuela (Polo) became a separate pueblo/parish and its territory included Obando (Catangalan). In 1754, Obando (Catangalan) became a separate pueblo/parish.²⁷ The old name Catangalan was derived from the name of a mangrove *tangal* that abundantly grows in the area's swamps. Tangal produces a brown red coloring material for the nets and fabrics of the old Tagalogs and the fermented coconut sap alcoholic drink *tuba* of the Visayans. The new name of the town was taken from the name of Francisco José de Obando (alternately spelled as "Ovando") y Solís (1693-1755), Marquis of Brindisi, and Spanish Governor General of the Philippines from 1750 to 1754, who was the one who established Catangalan as a separate pueblo.²⁸

A church, presumably of light materials, was soon built after the founding of the pueblo/parish. With finances sourced from a two-year collection of tribute, a more durable and cruciform structure of stone and mortar replaced that first church

²⁷ Huerta, 83.

²⁸ Huerta, 83.

not long after.²⁹ It was a well-constructed church with brick-tile roofing and stone bell tower.³⁰ The church was damaged during an earthquake in 1880, but was repaired soon after.³¹ During the retreat of the Japanese Imperial Army in 1945, the wooden parts of this structure were burned. Figure 4 presents two images, the left side is a 1912 drawing of the exterior of the church during a fiesta, and the right side is a photograph of the interior of church after the Second World War.

Figure 4

*Early 20th Century Drawing of the Exterior of Obando Church,³²
and Middle 20th Century Photograph of Its Interior³³*



When Obando Church was repaired in the early 1950s, the masonry of its bell tower, façade and side walls were retained, although covered with concrete plastering, which unfortunately is destructive to its Spanish period stone and mortar fabric.

²⁹ Huerta, 84-85.

³⁰ Manuel Buzeta & Felipe Bravo, *Diccionario Geográfico, Estadístico, Histórico de las Islas Filipinas* (Madrid: Imprenta de J.C. de la Pena, 1831), 370; & Adolfo Puya Ruiz, *Descripcion General de la Provincia de Bulacan, Acompañada de un Plano del Territorio que la Misma Ocupa* (Manila: Imp. de la "R. Mercantil," de Diaz Puertas y ca., 1888), 108.

³¹ Ruiz, 108-109.

³² Jose Sedano Calonge, *Almanaque Manila Galante para el Año 1912* (Manila: Imprenta Litografia y Encuadernacion de Juan Fajardo, 1912), 152.

³³ Parokya ni San Pascual Baylon-Obando Church.

The Image of Saint Paschal Baylón

When the pueblo/parish of Obando was established in 1754, the Franciscan friars, who spiritually administered the central southern part of the Province of Bulacan, selected the Franciscan Saint Paschal Baylón as the patron.³⁴ Presumably, the image of Saint Paschal Baylón had been in Obando since about 1754. Saint Paschal Baylón was a 16th century shepherd and Franciscan friar from Aragon, Spain. He was given the name “baylón” most probably because he was often observed by the other friars doing his unusual personal devotion in front of the image of the Virgin Mary, which is dancing some sort of Gypsy steps.³⁵ “Baylón” in Spanish means “dancer.” There is even a tradition in Spain that identifies Saint Paschal Baylon as the inventor of the fandango (Villergas, 1844). After his death, there were several reports of miraculous cures in front of his tomb. He was beatified in 1612, and canonized in 1690. He is considered the patron saint of Eucharistic congresses, shepherds, and cooks (Butler & Walsh, 1987, 363; & Foy, 1985, 262).

We do not really know the exact reasons why the Franciscan friars in Bulacan and Obando selected Saint Paschal Baylón as the patron of the then newly created pueblo/parish, but this paper can offer three hypothetical ones. First, Saint Paschal Baylon was a newly canonized Franciscan saint at that time, and probably the Franciscan friars were a little eager to promote his devotion and cult among the Filipinos. There are at least five other parishes, *visita*, and institution in the Philippines that were also dedicated to the said saint by the Franciscan friars around that period, namely: the parish/pueblo of Jiabong, Province of Samar, in an unspecified year; the parish in the pueblo of Jalala in 1676 (even if Paschal Baylón was still a *beato* at that time); the *visita* in Simangan, in the pueblo of Libas, Province of Eastern Samar, in around 1781; the Hospicio de San Pascual Bailón in Sampaloc, Manila, in 1794; and the parish in the pueblo of San Pascual, Province of Masbate, in 1845.

The second hypothetical reason for the choice of Saint Paschal Baylón could be auspicious date of his feast day, May 17, for an agricultural pueblo as it coincides with the summer harvest and planting season. The third hypothetical reason could be, following the line of thinking initiated by Roces, the biographical association of the saint with ritual dancing and the Christianization of the old Tagalogs’ pagan ritual dances. This paper, however, is inclined to believe that this

³⁴ Huerta, 84.

³⁵ Jan M. Ziolkowski, *The Juggler of Notre Dame and the Medievalizing of Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2018), 104.

third hypothesized reason is the weakest among the three. When the saint was made its patron, the old Catangalan already had over a century of Christianization through the parishes of Meycauayan and Polo. Thus, it will be unlikely that in 1753 the Franciscan friars would suddenly encounter these pagan dancers and think of superimposing on them the ritual dance of Saint Paschal Baylón. Had this happened in the 16th century, or even 17th century, the superimposition hypothesis would have been tenable. Furthermore, the same saint had been made patron in at least five other Philippine parishes, *visita* and institution, as mentioned above, without the need for a superimposition back story.

The Image of Our Lady of *Salambao*

Whereas this paper could not put an exact year when the image of Saint Paschal Baylón was actually enshrined in Obando Church, the enshrinement of the image of the Our Lady of *Salambao* can be dated with precision, although the year of its creation remains unknown. There existed a notarized document by the scribe Diego Pascual narrating how the fishermen brothers Juan and Julian dela Cruz found this image in their *salambao* while they were out on the waters of Manila Bay in 1763.³⁶ A *salambao* is a huge fishing net framed with bamboo slats or smaller poles and dipped into the waters while suspended from a long bamboo pole, as shown in figure 5. Because the image was just fished out from Manila Bay, we cannot ascertain its date of the creation. In figure 1, the location of this finding would be that inlet in between the Municipalities of Bulakan and Obando, and the City of Navotas. The two fishermen subsequently brought the image to Obando Church. This image is not the only one in the country with a thalassic/fluvial provenance. The image of the Our Lady Caysasay in Taal, Batangas was retrieved from a river in 1603; the image of the Our Lady of *Turumba* in Pakil, Laguna was retrieved from a lake in 1788; the wooden cross in Bocaue, Bulacan was retrieved from a river some centuries ago; and Obando has a wooden cross with a parallel provenance. These images most probably were unintentionally lost by their original owners as these were transported through the waters, as sea/river vessels were a major mode of transportation in the country centuries ago.

³⁶ Huerta, 85.

Figure 5

*Mid-19th Century Drawing of a Fishing Raft with a Salambao*³⁷



Why was the Image of the Our Lady of *Salambao* brought to Obando Church? Presumably the two fishermen were from Obando. But there is a local legend that asserts that the two fishermen attempted to bring the image to the pueblo of Malabon (Tambobong), yet it became too heavy to be moved to the said pueblo. When the fishermen decided just to bring the image to the pueblo of Obando, it suddenly became light again. However, this legend is not supported by Spanish texts. A review of literature using Google Books would suggest that this was only recorded by the folklorist of the University of the Philippines Diliman Damiana Eugenio (1921- 2014) in 1996.³⁸

In 1771, just about 8 years from the retrieval of the image of the Our Lady of *Salambao*, the printer and engraver Cipriano Romualdo Bagay made an engraving of this sacred object, and entitled it “The True Image of the Miraculous Statue of the Our Lady of Immaculate Conception. . .”³⁹ It is unfortunate that the authors of this paper could not locate an imprint of this engraving. It was the Spanish painter from Seville Francisco Pacheco (1564-1644) who standardized the iconography of

³⁷ Ricardo Galang, “Types of Watercraft in the Philippines,” *The Philippine Journal of Science*, 75 (3) (1941): plate 11.

³⁸ Damiana Eugenio, Ed., *Philippine Folk Literature: The Legends* (Quezon City: UP Folklorists, Incorporated, 1987), 100.

³⁹ Imelda Cajipe-Endaya, *Filipino Engraving, 17th to 19th Century* (Manila: Ylang-ylang Graphic Groups, 1980), 5.

the Our Lady of Immaculate Conception in the early part of the 17th century with a crown of 12 stars and a moon under the lady's feet.⁴⁰ Thus, even though the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was not declared until 1854, it was rather easy for the Franciscan friars, as well as for Bagay to identify the image that was fished out from Manila Bay as that of the Our Lady of Immaculate Conception. However, that same image remained to be more known as the Our Lady of *Salambao* than as the Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. In fact the feast day of this image was not celebrated on December 8, the official feast day of the Our Lady of Immaculate Conception, nor on June 19, the anniversary of image's retrieval from Manila Bay, but on May 18, a day after the feast day of Saint Paschal Baylón.⁴¹

The Image of Saint Clare of Assisi

Among the three images in Obando Church, it is the image of Saint Clare of Assisi which is presumed to be the oldest. It is also the most mysterious in the sense no one can date its year of arrival in Obando Church nor its year of creation. Saint Clare of Assisi was a 13th century Italian noblewoman who became one of the first followers of Saint Francis of Assisi, and founder of the monastic organization that is known today as the Order of Saint Clare. In this organization she served as an abbess until her death. She was canonized in 1255, just two years after she died. She is considered the patron saint for blindness and difficult childbirth, as well as of embroiderers, textile workers, laundrywomen, goldsmiths, and recently of television and mass media.⁴²

Although Saint Clare of Assisi is also a Franciscan saint, she and Saint Paschal Baylón lived almost three centuries apart, in two different countries, Italy and Spain. Their juxtaposition on a single retablo, or altarpiece, is a little incongruent. The fact is, the image of Saint Clare of Assisi belonged to another assemblage. It was already in a *visita* in Catangalan back in the times when the said area was still under the pueblo/parish of Meycauayan.⁴³ Since the pueblo/parish of Meycauayan was founded in 1578, and Catangalan and Polo separated from this pueblo/parish in 1623, the existence of the image of Saint Clare of Assisi could start in between 1578 and 1623.

⁴⁰ Lilian Zirpolo, *Historical Dictionary of Baroque Art and Architecture* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 306.

⁴¹ Huerta, 85.

⁴² Pablo Ricardo Quintana, *The Comprehensive Dictionary of Patron Saints* (Bloomington, Indiana: Universe, 2014), 50, 83, & 251; Rosa Giorgi, *Saints in Art* (Los Angeles, California: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), 94; & Rosemary Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Saints* (New York: Facts on File, Incorporated, 2001), 76.

⁴³ Huerta, 85.

The patron of Meycauayan is Saint Francis of Assisi, thus it was very logical that somewhere in its old and vast territory a chapel for his female counterpart should be set up by the Franciscan friars. After all, Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Clare of Assisi are usually placed together in countless old paintings and icons. Furthermore, in location that was part of a wider area where Philippine goldsmiths were once concentrated, a chapel for the patron saint of goldsmiths would be a convenient thing to have.

As to when the image of Saint Clare of Assisi was enshrined in Obando Church, Felix Huerta, in his 1855 book *Estado Geográfico, Topográfico, Estadístico, Histórico-Religioso de la Santa y Apostólica Provincia de S. Gregorio Magno, de Religiosos Menores Descalzos de la Regular y Más Estrecha Observancia de N.S.P.S. Francisco, en las Islas Filipinas*, only states that such happened after the stone and mortar structure was completed.⁴⁴ But since we not have a date as to when this stone and mortar church was constructed, this paper came up with the range of 1759 to 1808. The year 1759 was reckoned from 1754, the foundation order for the pueblo/parish of Obando, plus a year at least for the existence of the church that was made of lighter materials, plus two years of tribute collection for the construction of the stone and mortar church, plus another two years at least for the actual construction. The year 1808 was reckoned from a published citation of a transcript from a demonic possession trial of a woman in Obando, named Seberina Candelaria. It is mentioned in this transcript that a certain Don Josef Thoribio from Polo came to Catangalan around that year to light a candle in front of the image Saint Clare in the church (Bankoff, 1999).⁴⁵

Saint Clare of Assisi can be said to be the old patron of Catangalan/Obando, who was supposed to be replaced by Saint Paschal Baylón, but she resisted, and ended up becoming one of the three patrons of the pueblo/parish of Obando. From the perspective of the emerging Obando assemblage, the image of Saint Clare of Assisi's migration from the Meycauayan-Saint Francis of Assisi assemblage is an instance of an absolute positive change in the Deleuze-Guattarian sense. The official feast day of Saint Clare of Assisi is August 11 or 12. But in Obando, her feast day had to adjust to the feast day of Saint Paschal Baylón and move to May 19.

⁴⁴ Huerta, 85.

⁴⁵ Greg Bankoff, "Devils, Familiars and Spaniards: Spheres of Power and the Supernatural in the World of Seberina Candelaria and Her Village in Early 19th Century Philippines," *Journal of Social History*, 33(1), (1999): 44.

Stabilizing the Three Incongruent Concrete Elements of the Assemblage

The assemblage of three sacred images that were eventually enshrined on the retablo of Obando Church literally included at that time some new, old, and found things. Table 2 summarizes their temporal origins and dates of enshrinements, as well as the temporal adjustments some of them had to make on their feast days for the sake of constructing their assemblage.

Table 2

Summary of the Temporal Origins, Enshrinements, and Feast Days of the Three Sacred Images of Obando

Image	Year of Creation	Year of Enshrinement at Obando Church	Official Feast Day	Actual Feast Day at Obando
Saint Paschal Baylón	Around 1754	Around 1754	May 17	May 17
Our Lady of Salambao	Prior to 1763	1763	Dec 8	May 18
Saint Clare of Assisi	1578 to 1623	1759 to 1808	Aug 11 or 12	May 19

Table 2 shows that from the creation of the first image to the enshrinement of the last image in Obando Church there is a gap of more than a century. This means that it took the main elements of this assemblage a very long time to consolidate together as an assemblage. Temporally also, the two female patron saints had to adjust to the feast day of Saint Paschal Baylón. This temporal accommodation of the two female saints actually lend support to the already mentioned hypothesized reason for the selection of Saint Paschal Baylón as patron of Obando, that of his auspicious feast day for an agricultural pueblo.

If temporally, some adjustments had to be made to consolidate the assemblage, visually some adjustments had to be made as well. The cultural researcher Elmer Nocheseda was able to take a photograph of an old print from an engraving of the retablo of Obando Church from the files of the National Library of the Philippines, as shown in figure 6.

Figure 6

A Print from an Engraving of the Spanish-Period Retablo of Obando Church



In an email discussion with the expert on Philippine religious art, history, and culture, Regalado Trota Jose, the print is ruled out to be the one made by Bagay in 1771 (Jose, 2020).⁴⁶ Jose, however, is certain that this is a 19th century print based on the fonts used and the quality of the drawings (Jose, 2020).⁴⁷ The print shows the efforts undertaken by the people of Obando to visually stabilize their otherwise incongruent assemblage of three images. The image of the Our Lady of *Salambao* is placed at the center of the retablo, a place that should have been reserved for the image of the main patron, Saint Paschal Baylón. The images of Saint Clare of Assisi and Saint Paschal Baylón were made to hold, on opposite hands, staves: the abbess' crozier for the female saint and the shepherd's staff for the male. These staves are two different things, although symbolically related, yet these help achieve some sort of visual symmetry. It also appears like the two Franciscan saints are holding monstrances, still on opposite hands. Furthermore, the seals above the images' niches identified Saint Clare of Assisi with the heart of the Virgin Mary; the Our

⁴⁶ Regalado Trota Jose, (Unpublished Email Conversations). April 29 – May 5, 2020.

⁴⁷ Jose.

Lady of *Salambao* with icons of the Trinity and the Holy Spirit; and Saint Paschal Baylón with sacred heart of Jesus.

During the burning of Obando Church by the retreating Japanese Imperial Army, the three sacred images were also incinerated. But after the Second World War, and after the Obando Church was repaired/rebuilt in the early 1950s, the assemblage recuperated as the people of Obando created replicas of their otherwise lost sacred images. As already mentioned in the methodology section of this paper, this change is an example of a relative negative change in the Deleuze-Guattarian sense. The Filipinas Heritage Library has a digital file of the post-Second World War retablo of Obando, taken specifically in 1969, and shown in figure 7.

Figure 7

*A Digital File Photograph of the Retablo of Obando Church,
Taken in 1969, from the Filipinas Heritage Library's Collection*



In figure 7, the image of Saint Paschal Baylón reclaims the central place on the retablo, while the images of the Our Lady of *Salambao* and Saint Clare of Assisi are respectively placed on the left side and right side of the same retablo. At present, the retablo still exists, although with more gilding, but the image of the Our Lady of *Salambao* reverts to its old center position, with the image of Saint Paschal Baylón taking her Post-Second World War place.

The Changing Configurations of the Patronages and Rituals of the Three Saints

In the preceding section, this paper already mentioned that the Catholic Church-endorsed patronages of Saint Paschal Baylón are for eucharistic congresses, shepherds, and cooks; while those of Saint Clare of Assisi are for blindness, difficult childbirth, embroiderers, textile workers, laundrywomen, goldsmiths, and recently television and mass media. The Our Lady of Immaculate Conception, however, has no similar patronages endorsed by the Catholic Church, instead her patronage extends to territories and nations, such as Spain and the Philippines (Holweck, 1910).⁴⁸ It must be noted that as early as 1771, based on the title of Bagay's engraving, the people of Obando already considered the image of the Our Lady of *Salambao* a miraculous one, although we do not know specifically what miracles were attributed to such image at that time. This section explores how their patronages were selectively observed, created, re-created, and ritualized in Obando. For example, Saint Paschal Baylón's patronage for Eucharistic congresses might be a little too irrelevant for the rural people of Obando, leaving a vacuum for a more concrete patronage. Another example, the Our Lady of Immaculate Conception's patronage for the whole Philippines might be a little too broad and general from the perspective of the people of Obando, especially for their image with a mysterious provenance.

This section's exploration of the shifting patronages and rituals of the three sacred images of Obando Church is sub-sectioned into five parts, that are specifically pertaining to: 1) the early to the middle 19th century publications that mentioned the religious assemblage of Obando; 2) the late 19th century publications; 3) the early 20th century publications; 4) the middle to the late 20th century publications; and 5) a synthesis on the documentary findings.

Early to Middle 19th Century Published Documents

There are three publications that this paper was able to retrieve from the early to the middle 19th century, namely: 1) Manuel Buzeta and Felipe Bravo's 1831 book *Diccionario Geográfico, Estadístico, Histórico de las Islas Filipinas*; 2) Huerta's already mentioned 1855 book; and 3) Joaquin Coria's 1856 article "Noticia Descriptive de la Fiesta en Obando por la Declaracion Dogmatica del Misterio Inmaculado de Maria Santisima."

Buzeta and Bravo's book specifies that Obando Church was a very crowded structure, especially in the month of May when the faithful present their oblations

⁴⁸ Frederick Holweck, *Immaculate Conception. The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910).

and prayers to the Our Lady of *Salambao*.⁴⁹ It does not refer to the other two patrons of the said church. Huerta's book offers the most comprehensive account on the history of Obando Church, as well as of its popular religious assemblage, among all of the 19th century publications gathered by this study. It notes the three patron saints of Obando, as well as their respective feast days. It also recounts the provenances of the images of the Our Lady of *Salambao* and Saint Clare of Assisi.⁵⁰ More importantly, the book talks about the patronage of Saint Clare of Assisi for difficult childbirth, and its accompanying ritual of borrowing her image's crozier to be laid over a laboring woman.⁵¹ This specific miraculous power attributed to the image of Saint Clare of Assisi could have been the factor that made the Franciscan friars and the people of Obando decide to transfer the said image from its own old chapel to the then newly constructed stone and mortar Obando Church. Although Huerta does not elaborate about the patronage of the Our Lady of *Salambao*, he refers to it as miraculous.⁵² Coria's article indicates that there was a grand fiesta celebrated in Obando on December 8, 1855, a year after the Vatican declared the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. It cites elaborate novena masses that culminated in a spectacular procession that featured the Our Lady of *Salambao* with the two other patron saints of Obando.⁵³

What these early 19th century publications collectively convey are: first, Obando Church was able to develop a crowd-drawing fiesta celebration in honor of its three patron saints just less than a century after its pueblo/parish's creation; and second, among the patronages of Saint Clare of Assisi, the people of Obando/Catangalan/Polo/Meycauayan narrowed down on her patronage for difficult childbirth, and developed a presumably native ritual that centered on the use of her image's crozier. By corroborating these documents with the late 18th century engraving of Bagay, it would appear that the crowd drawing fiesta celebration of Obando had been initially founded on the miraculous images of Saint Clare of Assisi and of the Our Lady of *Salambao*. Their being together on the same retablo reinforced each other's attributions of miraculous powers and most probably even rubbed some these on the image of the male member of this emerging popular religious assemblage. Had the people of Obando temporally scattered the feast days of these three patrons to different months of the year, it would have been difficult for Obando Church to draw so many pilgrims together.

⁴⁹ Buzeta & Bravo, 370.

⁵⁰ Huerta, 85.

⁵¹ Huerta, 85.

⁵² Huerta, 85.

⁵³ Joaquin Coria, "Noticia Descriptiva de la Fiesta en Obando por la Declaracion Dogmatica del Misterio Inmaculado de Maria Santisima." *Chronica Ecclesiastica* 1, no. 19, (Suplemento 1856): 1.

What are not tackled by these early 19th century publications are: first, the patronages and rituals of Saint Paschal Baylón and of the Our Lady of *Salambao*; and second, the fertility dance ritual.

Late 19th Century Published Documents

There are six published documents that this paper was able to retrieve from the late 19th century, namely: 1) Ramón González Fernández and Federico Moreno Jerez' 1875 book *Manual del Viajero en Filipinas*; 2) Jose Montero Vidal's 1876 collection of short stories *Cuentos Filipinos*; 3) Francisco Javier de Moya's 1883 book *Las Islas Filipinas en 1882*; 4) Jose Rizal's 1887 novel *Noli Me Tangere*; 5) Adolfo Puya Ruiz' 1888 book *Descripcion General de la Provincia de Bulacan, Acompañada de un Plano del Territorio que la Misma Ocupa*; and 6) Joseph Earle Steven's 1898 book *Yesterdays in the Philippines*.

Gonzalez Fernandez and Moreno Jerez' book identifies the patronage of Saint Paschal Baylon as for the cure of all illnesses, petitioned by the faithful through a dance ritual performed during the fiesta on the streets of Obando, as well as outside and inside its church.⁵⁴ The book specifies that while doing the ritual dance, the faithful touched their own infirm body parts. The authors estimate that the pilgrims during the fiesta celebration of the three saints could reach as many as 30,000, due to the fact that Obando is very near the City of Manila.⁵⁵ Around that time, the population of Obando was only about 8,300. Montero Vidal's collection of short stories includes one entitled "Enriqueta" that refers in passing to Saint Paschal Baylón's patronage for the cure of all illnesses, as well as for the protection against possible illnesses. Such patronages were petitioned by the faithful again through the dance ritual with the same touching of their own infirm body parts. Montero Vidal's estimate of the fiesta pilgrims is at 40,000.⁵⁶

Javier de Moya's book cites again Saint Paschal Baylón's patronage for the cure of all illnesses, petitioned by the faithful through the same dance ritual with the same touching of their own infirm body parts. Javier de Moya estimates that the fiesta pilgrims could reach 18,000 to 20,000.⁵⁷ Rizal's famous novel is the first publication

⁵⁴ Ramón González Fernández, & Federico Moreno Jerez, *Manual del Viajero en Filipinas*, (Manila: Est. Tip. del Colegio de S. Tomás, 1875), 112.

⁵⁵ Fernandez & Jerez, 112.

⁵⁶ Jose Montero y Vidal, *Cuentos Filipinos* (Madrid: Imprenta, Estereotipia y Galvanoplastia de Aribau y C, 1876), 41.

⁵⁷ Francisco Javier De Moya, *Las Islas Filipinas en 1882: Estudios Historicos Geograficos* (Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfico de El Correo, 1883), 391.

collected by this paper to report the patronages of all the three saints of Obando, as well the fertility dance ritual. Rizal specifies that the patronage of Saint Paschal Baylón was for those who desire to have sons; while of the Our Lady of *Salambao* and Saint Clare of Assisi were both for those who desire to have daughters.⁵⁸ According to Rizal, the faithful petitioned these favors through the same dance ritual.

In Puya Ruiz's book, the attention shifts back on Saint Paschal Baylón, whose patronages were for single women who desire to have boyfriends, for newly widowed women who desire to have new husbands, for childless couples who desire to have children, and for everyone who desire whatever good things and blessings they longed.⁵⁹ The author states that the faithful petition the saint through the same ritual dance, but childless women, for maximum effect, should anoint their bellies with oil taken from the lamps that illuminated the image of the said saint.⁶⁰ Puya Ruiz hopes that this massive pilgrimage to Obando will not disappear in the future as this brings peace and harmony among the virtuous and honorable Filipinos.⁶¹ Stevens' book cursorily talks about the Obando fiesta, and did not even note the church's three patron saints, nor their patronages and rituals. But it noticed the intense dance ritual of Obando that lasted for a number of days each year.⁶²

What these late 19th century publications collectively convey are: first, the stature of Saint Paschal Baylón appeared to have overshadowed the older miraculous images of Saint Clare of Assisi and of the Our Lady of *Salambao*, with his patronage for the cure of all illnesses and protection against possible illnesses; second, the dance ritual is finally noted; third, the patronage for couples who desire to have children is also noted; fourth, the patronage for women who desire to have boyfriends or husbands is cited; fifth, other rituals consisting of the faithful's touching of their own infirm body parts, and of the childless women's anointing of their bellies with votive oil are also cited; and sixth, there seemed to be a disagreement on the attribution of patronages to specific saints, in the sense that four documents lump all of these patronages on Saint Paschal Baylón, while only one document share one patronage to both Saint Clare of Assisi and the Our Lady of *Salambao*.

The situation from the preceding cluster of documents seemed to be reversed in this present cluster of documents, in the sense that it is now the turn of

⁵⁸ Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere (English Translation)* (Manila: Philippine Education Company, 1912), 47.

⁵⁹ Ruiz, 109.

⁶⁰ Ruiz, 109.

⁶¹ Ruiz, 109.

⁶² Joseph Earle Steven, *Yesterdays in the Philippines* (New York: Scribner, 1898), 94.

Saint Paschal Baylón to rub his attributions of miraculous powers on the images of the female members of the popular religious assemblage of Obando. The patronage attributions to Saint Paschal Baylón for the cure of all illnesses, the desire to have children, and the desire for boyfriends or husbands, are not part of the saint's patronages that are endorsed by the Catholic Church. These patronages are neither part of the two female patron saints' patronages as endorsed by the said Church. The patronage of male patron saint for the cure of all illnesses could be traced back to the recorded miracles that were part of his canonization process more than a century earlier. But his patronages for the desire to have children, as well for the desire to have boyfriends or husbands, as well as the dance ritual, the touching of infirm body parts, and the anointing of barren bellies with votive oil all appeared to be native patronages and rituals.

What are not mentioned by these publications is the specific form of the dance ritual. These days we ordinarily presume this to be fandango, but the published documents do not suggest such. On the contrary, what they describe looked more like just some raucous and frenzied swaying and jumping.

Early 20th Century Published Documents

This paper selected six important publications from the early 20th century, namely: 1) Berta Metzger's 1914 musical sheet "Santa Clara;" 2) Norbert Lyon's 1922 article "Sibul Springs, the Radio-Water Resort;" 3) a 1928 article in the *American Chamber of Commerce Journal*, entitled "More Franciscan Mission Churches in Luzon Parishes: The Story of the Obando Images;" 4) Bernardo Garcia's 1932 article "May and Its Antipolo Time;" 5) Raymundo Bañas' 1937 book *Brief Historical Sketches of Philippine Catholic Churches*; and 6) Lydia Villanueva-Arguilla's 1940 article "Philippine Folk Dances."

Metzger's musical sheet is a simple arrangement of the traditional Obando folk song about a pilgrimage vow to the image of Saint Clare of Assisi. In this folk song, the dance ritual is suggested to be pandango, or the Philippine adaptation of the Spanish fandango.⁶³ Lyon's article briefly refers to the patronage for childless couples who desire to have children of an unspecified patron saint of Obando, as well as to the dance ritual that was described as "strange."⁶⁴ Lyon reports that the Obando fiesta

⁶³ Berta Metzger, "Santa Clara," Romualdez, Norberto, Ed., *The Philippines Progressive Music Series for the Primary Grades* (New York, Silver Burdett Company, 1914): 125.

⁶⁴ Norbert Lyon, "Sibul Springs, the Radio-Water Resort," *American Chamber of Commerce* vol. 2, no. 7 (July 1922): 10.

celebration attracts visitors from Manila.⁶⁵ The article “More Franciscan Mission Churches in Luzon Parishes” appears to be heavily based on Huerta’s 1855 book. Thus, it more or less repeats what Huerta already stated a little more than 70 years earlier about Obando Church and its three patron saints, especially the old patronage of Saint Clare of Assisi.⁶⁶ Although it does not mention the ritual of borrowing the crozier, it replaces this with the borrowing of the whole image and imposing it upon a laboring woman (Author unknown, 1928).⁶⁷ It is very possible that the American author of this article, most probably a protestant, was not familiar with the word “baculo” that Huerta used for crozier.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the article specifies other things, the patronage of the Our Lady of *Salambao* and its accompanying ritual, which is for childless couples who desire to have children and petitioned through the same dance ritual.⁶⁹

Garcia’s article shifts the attention back to the image of Saint Paschal Baylón and explained that his patronages are for the cure of all illnesses and childless couples who desire children, to be petitioned by the faithful through the same dance ritual.⁷⁰ Bañas’ book cites the patronages for the cure of all illnesses, couples who desire to have children, and individuals who desire to find their love or spouses, as well as the same dance ritual.⁷¹ But the book does not specify the attributions of each of these patronages to which among of three saints of Obando.⁷² Villanueva-Arguilla’s article comments that the dance ritual of Obando is one of the Philippine folk dances, that such dance ritual is performed for Saint Paschal Baylón for his patronage for childless couples who desire to have children (1940, 267). The article describes this dance ritual not as the graceful pandango, but as a “nondescript” movement “consisting mainly of jogging and skipping,” and even “funny to the spectator” (Villanueva-Arguilla, 1940).⁷³

⁶⁵ Lyon, 10.

⁶⁶ “More Franciscan Mission Churches in Luzon Parishes: The Story of the Obando Images,” *American Chamber of Commerce Journal* vol. 8, no. 1. (1928): 7.

⁶⁷ “More Franciscan Mission Churches in Luzon Parishes: The Story of the Obando Images,” 7.

⁶⁸ Huerta, 85.

⁶⁹ “More Franciscan Mission Churches in Luzon Parishes: The Story of the Obando Images,” 7.

⁷⁰ Bernardo Garcia, “May and its Antipolo Time,” *Philippine Magazine* vol. 28, no. 1 (May 1932): 625.

⁷¹ Raymundo Bañas, *Brief Historical Sketches of Philippine Catholic Churches* (Manila: Philippines Commonwealth Press, 1937), 79.

⁷² Bañas, 79.

⁷³ Lydia Villanueva-Arguilla, “Philippine Folk Dances,” *Philippine Magazine* vol. 38, no. 1 (July 1940): 267.

What these early 19th century publications collectively convey are: first, there seemed to be a persistence of the disagreement on the attribution of the patronage for childless couples who desire to have children to which specific saint, in the sense that one document places this under the Our Lady of *Salambao*, while another document under Saint Paschal Baylón; second, there appeared to be a vagueness and disregard for clarity on the attribution of each of the identified patronages to a particular saint, as if suggesting that what matters was that such patronages belong to the assemblage anyway; third, the patronage of Saint Clare of Assisi for difficult childbirth is reaffirmed, although this might be due to the concerned author's heavy use of Huerta's book; third, the patronage for the faithful's search for love and spouses is extended to cover both sexes, whereas in the preceding cluster of documents this was true only for single or newly widowed women; and fourth, there is also a disagreement on the form of the dance ritual, one document suggests that such is *pandanggo*, while another insists that such is just an inchoate swaying and jumping.

The continued disagreement and vagueness on the attribution of each of the identified patronages to a specific saint hints that it was not the Franciscan friars, nor the secular priests who came after them, who controlled the selection, creation, and recreation of the patronages of the three saints of Obando, otherwise they could have easily codified and textualized these in clearer terms. It was the people of Obando and the pilgrims who appeared to have the greater control of the assemblage's process of becoming. The documentary disagreement on the form of the dance ritual indicates that the now famous *pandanggo* of Obando could not be traced far back to the Gypsy steps and rapid footwork of the Spanish *fandango* that some tradition would claim to have been an invention of Saint Paschal Baylón. This means, from the very start this dance ritual was not Spanish *fandango* that through time evolved into a Filipino *pandanggo*. Instead, it started as a formless swaying and jumping that was much later choreographed into a more graceful *pandanggo*. Thus, this dance ritual was not something that was superimposed by the Franciscan friars on the people of Obando. Instead, it emerged from the popular religious assemblage, formless at first and eventually taking the form of *pandanggo*.

Middle to Late 20th Century Published Documents

There are four publications that this paper selected to represent the documentation about the popular religious assemblage of Obando from the middle to the late 20th century, namely: 1) Margarita Guevarra, Felicidad Bautista, Natividad Tecson, and Rufina Cruz' 1953 manuscript "History and Cultural Life of the Town

of Obando and Its Barrios;” 2) F. Landa Jocano’s 1967 article “Filipino Catholicism: A Case Study in Religious Change;” 3) Marina Pottier’s 1977 article “Festivités Annuelles aux Philippines;” and 4) the National Historical Institute’s 1984 historical marker “Simbahan ng Obando.” This selection strategically avoided the publications that were contaminated with Roces’ Christianization of pagan ritual hypothesis. Guevarra, et al.’s manuscript is considered published in the sense that this document is available online from the Digital Collections of the National Library of the Philippines; the same is true with the National Historical Institute’s historical marker in the sense that the metal plate is publicly displayed at the Obando Church while its image is widely circulated in the internet.

Guevarra, et al.’s manuscript appears to be heavily based also on Huerta’s 1855 book. Thus, it more or less repeats what Huerta already stated almost a century earlier about Obando’s patron saints, especially the old patronage of Saint Clare of Assisi (Guevarra et al., 1953).⁷⁴ The manuscript, however, does not mention the ritual of using the image’s crozier (Guevarra et al., 1953).⁷⁵ Jocano’s article recounts a slightly different configuration of the patronages of the three saints of Obando, namely: Saint Paschal Baylón for men who desire to have girlfriends or wives; the Our Lady of *Salambao* for childless couples who desire to have children; and Saint Clare of Assisi for women who desire to have boyfriends or husbands.⁷⁶ The article supports the side of those who insist that the dance ritual of Obando was not really *pandanggo*, but a formless swaying, skipping, and jumping.⁷⁷ The article furthermore notes a belief that the dance ritual of Obando is connected with the personal dance ritual of Saint Paschal Baylón.⁷⁸

Pottier’s article narrates still another configuration of the patronages of the saints of Obando: Saint Paschal Baylón, as a Spanish shepherd, had a special relationship with the carabao, or water buffalo, and goat herders of the said town; Saint Clare of Assisi for childless couples who desire to have children; and the Our Lady of *Salambao* had been blessing the fishermen of the said town with abundant catch.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the article repeats Rizal’s reference to the three saints as the

⁷⁴ Margarita Guevarra, et al., *History and Cultural Life of the Town of Obando and Its Barrios*, (1953).

⁷⁵ Guevarra, et al.

⁷⁶ Felipe Landa Jocano, “Filipino Catholicism: A Case Study in Religious Change.” *Asian Studies* vol. 5, no. 1 (1967): 53.

⁷⁷ Jocano, 53.

⁷⁸ Jocano, 53-54.

⁷⁹ Marina Pottier, “Festivités Annuelles aux Philippines” *Archipel* 14, no. 1 (1977): 9.

collective patrons for childless couples who desire to have children.⁸⁰ The article also points to the dance ritual as the way for the locals and pilgrims to petition the saints' patronages.⁸¹ The National Historical Institute's historical marker appears to be dependent also on Huerta's 1855 book. But it conveyed still another configuration of the patronages of Obando's saints: Saint Paschal Baylón for childless couples who desire to have children; the Our Lady of *Salambao* for fishermen and farmers; and Saint Clare of Assisi for difficult childbirth.⁸² The dance ritual as the faithful's way of petitioning these patronages is cited as well.⁸³

What these middle and late 20th century publications collectively convey are: first, the patronage of Saint Paschal Baylón for the cure of all illnesses faded from the picture; second, a rural themed patronage for farmers, fishermen, and herdsmen emerged; third, the patronages for childless couples who desire to have children, for individuals who desire to find love and spouses, and for difficult childbirth are reaffirmed; fourth, the vagueness and lack of consistency on the attribution of each of the identified patronages to a particular saint persisted; and fifth, the contestation that the dance ritual was *pandango* remained. The dependence of two documents on Huerta's 1855 book could be the reason for the continued affirmation of Saint Clare of Assisi's patronage for difficult childbirth.

Summative Look at the Changing Configurations of Patronages and Rituals

Table 3 summarizes the changing configurations of the patronages and rituals of the three patron saints of Obando. In the early and middle 19th century, the popular religious assemblage had been dominated by the image of Saint Clare of Assisi, and probably secondarily by the image of the Our Lady of *Salambao*, as suggested by the title of Bagay's 1771 engraving. It was very likely that the two older miraculous images stood as the initial local and pilgrim magnets that created the tradition of very crowded Obando fiesta celebrations. By the late 19th century, the image of Saint Paschal Baylón had surpassed the predominance of the two female images; while the 20th century saw more or less the balancing of the attributed powers among the three sacred images of the said popular religious assemblage.

⁸⁰ Pottier, 9.

⁸¹ Pottier, 9.

⁸² National Historical Institute, *Historical marker "Simbahan ng Obando,"* (1984).

⁸³ National Historical Institute.

Table 3

*Summary of the Changing Configurations of Patronages and Rituals
of the Three Sacred Images of Obando*

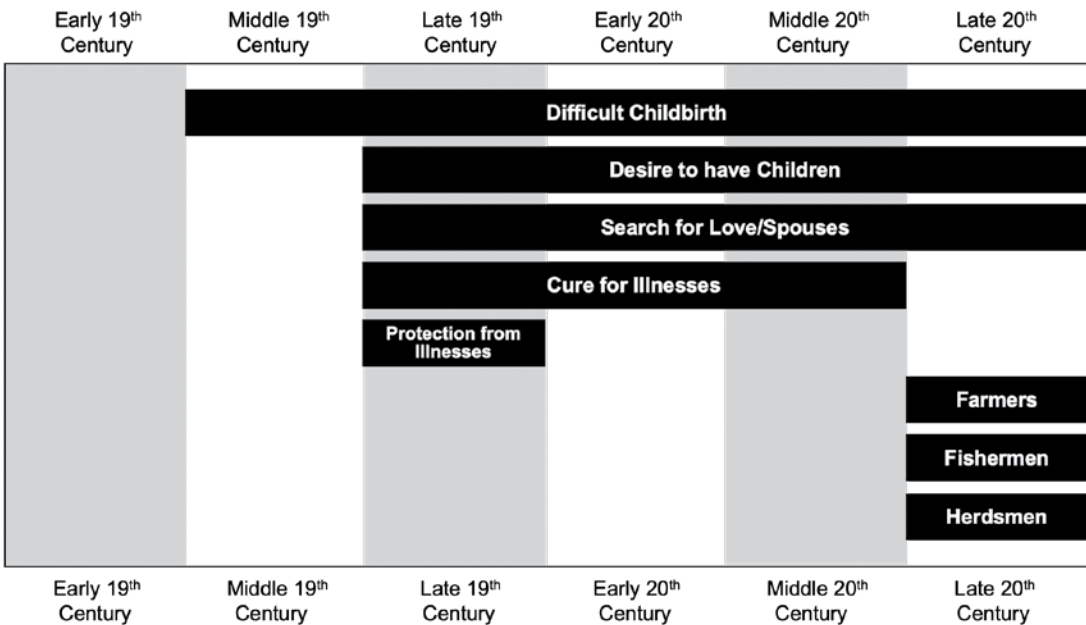
Image	Early to Middle 19 th Century		Late 19 th Century		Early 20 th Century		Middle to Late 20 th Century	
	Patronage	Ritual	Patronage	Ritual	Patronage	Ritual	Patronage	Ritual
Saint Paschal Baylon			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cure from illnesses •Protection against possible illnesses •Desire to have sons/ children •Desire to have boyfriends/ husbands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Dancing and touching the infirm body part •Anointing the belly with votive oil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cure from illnesses •Desire to have children 	•Dancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Desire to have girlfriends or wives •Desire to have children •Herdsman 	•Dancing
Our Lady of Salambao			•Desire for a daughter	•Dancing	•Desire to have children	•Dancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Desire to have children •Fishermen •Farmers 	•Dancing
Saint Clare of Assisi	•Difficult childbirth	•Imposition of crozier on the belly	•Desire to have daughters	•Dancing	•Difficult childbirth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Imposition of the image on the belly •Dancing (pandanggo) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Desire to have boyfriends or husbands •Desire to have children •Difficult childbirth 	•Dancing
All of the Three					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Desire to have children •Cure from illnesses •Desire to have boyfriends/ girlfriends/ husbands/ wives 	•Dancing	•Desire to have children	

Based on table 3, figure 8 presents the timelines of eight different patronages of the three saints of Obando. The longest stretch is the patronage for difficult childbirth that was exclusively attributed to Saint Clare of Assisi. This distinction was most probably accomplished by the early textualization undertaken by Huerta. If the Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage is said to be always in the process of becoming, textualization may tame this process or slow it down. The second longest stretches

are the patronages for the desire to have children that is shared among the three saints; and the search for love/spouses, that is shared at least by Saint Paschal Baylón and Saint Clare of Assisi, or at most among the three saints. The third longest stretch is the patronage for the cure of illnesses that is at least exclusively attributed to Saint Paschal Baylon, or at most shared among the three saints. This sharing of attributed powers points out to a situation where the locals and pilgrims approach more the popular religious assemblage of Obando as a whole, rather than any of its three component sacred images. The shortest ones are the patronages for the protection against illnesses, that is at least exclusively attributed to Saint Paschal Baylón, or at most shared among the three saints; the patronage for farmers, that is exclusively attributed to the Our Lady of *Salambao*; patronage for fishermen, that is also exclusively attributed to the Our Lady of *Salambao*; and the patronage for herdsmen, that is also exclusively attributed to Saint Paschal Baylón.

Figure 8

Timelines of Eight Patronages of the Saints of Obando



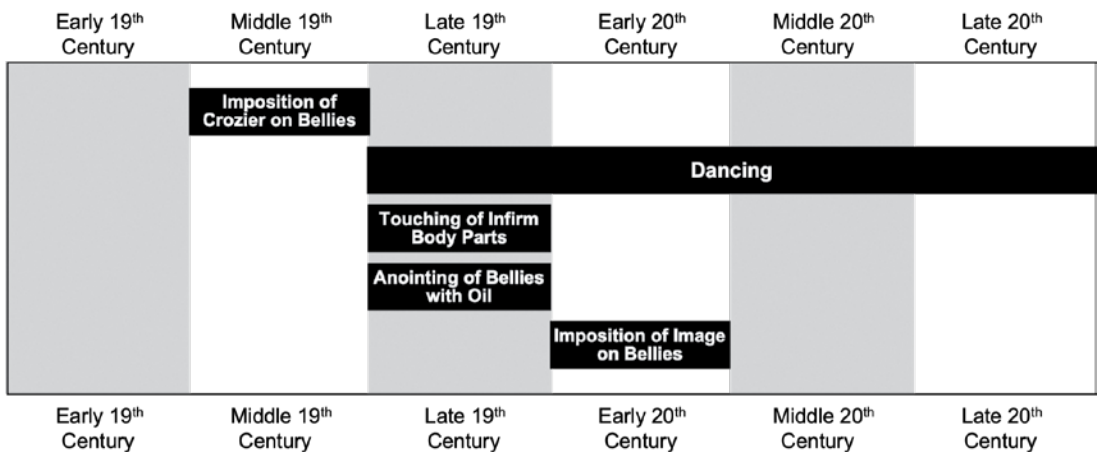
In its totality, the popular religious assemblage of Obando had been known first for its patronage for difficult childbirth, which shifted to a patronage for the cure of illnesses, then finally to a patronage for the desire to have children and to find love/spouses. At present, the patronage for the cure of illnesses had already started to

fade from picture, especially since it is not among the patronages that are mentioned on the historical marker installed by the National Historical Institute on Obando Church.

Based on table 3, figure 9 presents the timelines of five different rituals for the three saints of Obando. The longest stretch is the ritual of dancing that is shared among the three saints. The shortest stretches are the rituals of the imposition of the crozier on laboring women, that is exclusive for Saint Clare of Assisi; the ritual of the imposition of the whole image on laboring women, that is also exclusive for Saint Clare of Assisi but could just be translation error of a Protestant American author; the ritual of the touching of infirm body parts while dancing, that is exclusive for Saint Paschal Baylón; and the ritual of the anointing of bellies with oil from votive lamps, which is also exclusive for Saint Paschal Baylón. Saint Paschal Baylón has three exclusive and shared rituals; Saint Clare of Assisi also has three exclusive and shared rituals, although one of these exclusive rituals may just be a result of the already mentioned mistranslation; while the Our Lady of *Salambao* has only one shared ritual and no exclusive one. This distribution of rituals attests to the fact that for a certain period, Saint Paschal Baylón surpassed the predominance of the two older images.

Figure 9

Timelines of Five Rituals for the Saints of Obando



The Our Lady of *Salambao*, however, has a recent emerging ritual that joins her image with a wooden cross that was also fished out from a river in Obando. But because this ritual started around the late 1970s, this was not captured by the

published documents consulted for this paper (De Los Reyes, 1981).⁸⁴ This could be an example of a new ritual that was formed when a sacred image of the popular religious Obando assemblage momentarily migrates and joins another sacred image to form another momentary but recurrent assemblage. This recurrent migration and return of the image of the Our Lady of *Salambao* is an instance of absolute positive change within an assemblage.

Table 8 points out that the ritual that is shared among the three saints persisted to the present times, while the rituals that were specific only to particular saints faded from the picture. These contrasting facts lend support to the idea that for the locals and pilgrims of Obando what is more important is the whole popular religious assemblage, rather than any of its three component sacred images.

Conclusion

This paper's historical investigation on the sacred images, patronages, and rituals of Obando, using published documents as textual data and the theoretical framework of the Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage, has demonstrated the untenability of the hypothesis, which is unfortunately gaining popularity, that the Obando fertility dance ritual is a product of a Christianization of a pre-Spanish Tagalog fertility ritual. The old published documents simply do not support this superimposition theory. On the contrary, the popular religious assemblage of Obando took centuries to develop and finally stabilize into the configuration that we are more or less familiar with these days.

But how do we explain the origin of Obando's famous fertility dance ritual then? When the authors of this paper embarked on this historical investigation they held a faint alternative hypothesis that such fertility dance ritual originated from the personal dance ritual of Saint Paschal Baylón, which was believed to be fandango, and fandango in Spain is reputed to be a fertility dance.⁸⁵ Although there might be no actual phenomenon in Spain that directly linked the saint with a fertility dance ritual, there is this rather tenuous conceptual connection in between them that might had been triggered into actual practice in Obando by the Franciscan friars or other Spaniards who might be familiar with such conceptual connection. But even this faint alternative hypothesis was not supported by the old publications consulted by this paper.

⁸⁴ De Los Reyes.

⁸⁵ Ramón Soler Diaz, "The Fandango in Malaga: From a Dance to a Rending Song," K. M. Goldberg & A. Piza, Eds., *The Global Reach of the Fandango in Music, Song and Dance: Spaniards, Indians, Africans and Gypsies* (Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 45.

It looked like that in Obando the patronage for fertility and its accompanying dance ritual separately emerged from the popular religious assemblage. The patronage for fertility could have been churned out from the collision among the patronages for difficult childbirth of Saint Clare of Assisi, and for the cure of illnesses of Saint Paschal Baylón, as well as the official ecclesiastical title of the Our Lady of *Salambao* as the Lady of Immaculate Conception. The dance ritual, on the other hand, could have started from the frenzied swaying and jumping of the locals and pilgrims in front of the popular religious assemblage.

Was that emergent dance ritual performed as Saint Paschal Baylón's fandango that later on evolved into the Filipinized pandango? No old publication ever said that the form of the dance ritual of Obando at any point had been the Spanish fandango. The Filipinized pandango may have been mentioned in an old folk song, recorded by Metzger, but there was no assurance that the folk song was describing the actual form of Obando's ritual. Pandango could have been mentioned by that folk song because it rhymed well with Obando. As late as the 1960s, the dance ritual of Obando was still described as something formless, and it was only in 1980s that the secular priests of Obando Church insisted that the dance should be the more restrained pandango, and it was only in 1993 that it was finally choreographed in its standard form these days as pandango by a parishioner Ched Domingo.⁸⁶

In 1888 Ruiz already hoped that then already massive pilgrimage to Obando will not disappear in the future as this brings peace and harmony among the virtuous and honorable Filipinos.⁸⁷ Almost one and a half centuries later, the rituals and pilgrimage churned out by the assemblage show no signs of fading away and this certainly has reinforced and even propagated Catholic Christianity in this and the neighboring parts of the country.

The use of the Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage as a framework in historically analyzing the three patron saints of Obando, including their patronages and rituals, indeed resulted to this present paper, which is not only an alternative narrative about this popular religious phenomenon of Obando, but more so a sensible and tenable one. But devoid of access to archives, this paper stands as an initial scholarly narrative that will always be open to revisions, modifications, or even outright refutations. This paper is therefore an invitation to start a scholarly conversation on the history of the popular religious assemblage Obando.**PS**

⁸⁶ De Los Reyes.

⁸⁷ Ruiz, 109.

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