

SPANISH-PHILIPPI

PROMPTED BY THE admirable motive of self-realization, patriotic Filipinos today are searching their history for evidence of a national native culture. Too often nationalistic sentiment limits this probing of the past to the post-Spanish era. Philippine culture, however, is not a product of political independence from Spain. In fact, archeological findings indicate that a developed culture flourished on the Philippine archipelago long before the Spanish arrived in 1521. This native culture persisted and expressed itself throughout the three centuries of Spanish rule.

If the above statements are true, we may expect to discover indications of native Philippine culture in artifacts of the Spanish period. My belief is that, even in the most characteristically Iberian product of the period—religious architecture, we can discern the selection and unique use made of European designs by the indigenous culture of these islands. Thus, instead of only shyly admitting the reality of Spanish influence, Filipinos should feel a deep cultural pride in the artistic achievements of Spanish-Philippine architecture.

PART OF MY GRADUATE training in the Henry Francis duPont Winterthur Museum program in early American culture included studying tech-

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niques of analysis and interpretation of European arts in a colonial situation. My intention, supported by a Fulbright grant, is to apply these techniques to Spanish arts in the Philippines. This student of Philippine art history is especially interested in ecclesiastical products of the Spanish period: church architecture and the liturgical arts.

My initial task is to record the important remaining artistic products of the Spanish colonial Philippines. The majority of these products comprise architectural forms such as churches, friaries (*conventos*), gates, towers, walls, fortifications, civic buildings, schools, and tombs. Also part of my survey of Philippine colonial arts are wood carving, painting, textiles, and metal work. All relevant objects must be photographed and fully described as to size, color condi-

tion, location, and use. For example, my cataloguing of colonial churches is done on five inch by eight inch file cards. Name, date, description, and history appear on the front of the card while photographs are attached to the reverse side. These church file cards are presently arranged by provenance. However, this arrangement by location is only tentative as more significant orderings are probable. One interesting possibility is to divide the church cards into groups corresponding to the missionary orders whose members designed and directed the building of these early edifices.

Such organization is, after all, only a necessary preliminary to my effort to analyze various artistic designs used in the Spanish Philippines. For the art historian, analyzation begins with research into the origin, transmission, and influence of

decorative elements. In considering a pair of Ionic columns, for instance, the architectural historian must ask: "Where was this motif first used?" "Where was it repeated?", and "How did it get to its present location?" Then, "What changes have occurred in the processes of repetition and transmission?" As a final step in analysis, the historian poses the most fascinating problem: "What significance had this motif for the various cultures which retained and employed it in preference to other possible designs?"

A society selects and develops only those designs which can be made acceptable to its own esthetic. And culture of national esthetics is based on the commonly held ideals of society. Previously, careful studies have been made of the problems of art history and esthetics in regard to Spanish colonial art in Latin America. Is it not time for similar examinations of Spanish arts in the Philippines?

HAVING SKETCHED THE nature of my research, I would like to suggest several characteristics of Spanish architecture in the Philippines which seem significant to me and also, I trust, to those Filipinos who earnestly seek their native heritage and national identity. These remarks are admittedly

limited by my recent arrival in Manila and by some lack of previous critical analysis of Spanish-Philippine architecture.

Even the most cursory glance at pre-1900 Catholic churches in the Philippines focuses our attention on one fact: these buildings were conceived by minds familiar with the Renaissance architectural vocabulary of decoration, structure, and use. A short check list of XVI century Italian architectural motifs, all modified by later *plateresco* and Churrigueresque decorative style of Spain and finally transmitted to the Philippines, would include scrolls, pediments, cornices, pilasters, columns, finials, niches, and arches. (Many of these features appear in the photograph of the facade of the Talibon church.) These designs, used throughout the Spanish period, are no less obviously European than the Gothic and Romanesque motifs employed on Philippine churches in the latter half of the XIX century. Needless to say, interiors of churches were graced with benches, candelabra, confessionals, pulpits, reredos, railings, ciboriums, tabernacles, and vestry chests all carved in the classical Renaissance and Baroque style. (The picture of the interior of the Argao church reveals the richness of Spanish-Philippine decor.) But we most readily dis-

tinguish Hispano-Renaissance decorative influence on facades and main entrances of our churches. The padres fully realized that "first impressions count," and they used every available decorative device to envoke the approaching supplicant with the drama of entrance into the house of God.

In addition to architectural designs and their appropriate use, the cultural baggage of Spanish priest-designers contained European techniques of construction. Four of the most exploited building methods imported by the Spaniards were 1) use of brick and stone, 2) minimum amounts of mortar between stones, 3) rubble-filled walls, and 4) structural arches. Thus the Philippines owes its knowledge of Renaissance decorative and structural design to Spain.

But architecture is far more than an isolated set of ornamental forms and methods of construction. Architecture is building for particular purpose in a particular place. In the case of the Spanish Philippines, architecture was to provide for Christian worship in a tropical climate. The influence of environment is a pervasive one and, in the end, no less concrete in its evidence than the physical disposition of materials according to imported tradition of decoration and construction.

The locale itself brought about uniquely Philippine alterations in the traditional appearance of Spanish churches. To a limited extent various local building materials determined the type of carved decoration and wall construction. Employing adobe, limestone, granite, coral, and innumerable superb hard woods helped define the artistic and structural character of churches. In addition to the influence of regional materials, the damp, hot climate and the ever current danger of floods, fire, and earthquakes qualified the appearance of buildings. We quickly note the influence of climate in the sturdy shapes of buttresses, the extreme thickness of walls, the detachment of towers, the restricted fenestration, and even in the elevated location of the church.

Conditions of colonization modified Spanish architectural practice in the Philippines as they had in Latin America. To facilitate church and civil control of the natives and to assure their protection against piratical raids, the Spaniards might construct a compound. This area was far more than the santo campo for burial adjoining each church. The compound consisted of watch tower, major walls, grand portals, powder magazine, storage barns, schools, civil buildings, belfry, friary, and church. We can vi-

sit nearly complete church compounds in the towns of Argao, Boljoon, and Oslob on the south-eastern coast of Cebu.

FINALLY, WE MUST admit one more profound influence of Philippine environment on Spanish church architecture: the oriental artistic vision or esthetic of the Filipino. In using Filipino or Sino-Filipino workmen, carvers, and masons, the Spanish priest-designer might preserve European plan and construction practice. But he was powerless to prevent the interpretation of European ornament by native capability and preference. If one has not seen real lions, or does not visualize foliage as three-dimensional or will not accept classical proportions, he can produce Renaissance art as Spaniards recognized it. (The photograph of the Calumpit church can scarcely be said to show Spanish architecture.) Thus, the decorative arts of Spain, already bearing a latent Eastern artistic seed planted during eight centuries of Moorish rule, quickly and persistently felt the pressures of Philippine esthetics and environment.

It is too early for me to draw a precise picture of this Philippine esthetic. Nevertheless, I will suggest several elements that seem to reoccur in Hispano-Philippine church design,

though certainly not all at one time:

1) breaking up a surface into numerous, simple geometric areas, often vertical rectangles;

2) covering the surface with decorations: a sense of *horri vacui*;

3) decorating surfaces with bands of small, repeated, semi-abstract designs;

4) placing compact groups of decorative carving only at a few carefully selected points for accent;

5) isolating areas of decoration in order to contrast with the remaining unbroken surface; and

6) deepening the pediment and elevating groups of designs, which results in a top-heavy feeling.

Several of these qualities will be recognized as "Spanish" according to Oscar Hagen's *Principles of Spanish Art*. But what makes these qualities "Filipino" is the manner in which they are organized. I suggest that Philippine design, in comparison to Spanish, is more compartmentalized.

Whatever the exact nature of Spanish colonial esthetics, the church building in Spain was not mechanically repeated in her colonies, a fact proved by Kubler and Keleman in their studies on Spanish-American architecture. Moreover, I believe that we do not see a

thoroughly "Spanish" church in Manila any more than we saw one in Lima, Puebla, or Santa Fe. And, surely, a distinct native esthetic is as apparent in the churches of Naga, Cebu, Tigbauan, Iloilo, Paete, Laguna, or Morong, Rizal as in those of old Mexico.

In conclusion, one simple but vital concept has resulted from my studies to date: there has existed a native Philippine

culture since pre-Spanish times. When Europeans introduced the mature system of Renaissance decoration and construction to these islands, its inhabitants responded by transforming Spanish building tradition into truly native expressions couched in local artistic terms. Filipinos, therefore, have inherited the duty of preserving their early Catholic churches as a deeply significant symbol of their national culture.

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Business Mentality

The rising flood waters were a hazard to property, life and limb. Volunteers were out in rowboats trying to rescue people. In one of these boats was a banker who saw a competitor of his floating by in the fast-rising river.

"Hey, George," the fellow in the rowboat called out, concerned, "can you float alone?"

"Sure," George yelled back, "but this is one hell of a time to be talking business!"

Merry Mixups

A man was complaining that he had just bought a prefabricated house and that it had cost him \$50,000.

"Fifty thousand!" exclaimed one of his friends. "Isn't that a lot to pay for a prefab?"

"Yes," said the home-owner. "It didn't cost that much to begin with, but I told the factory I wanted it right away, and they sent it to me air mail."

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