

■ A tradition which gives hope to childless couples.

DANCING IN OBANDO

To have a child, or a sweetheart, or spouse, dance and pray before the three patron saints of Obando.

The three patron saints — “San Pascual,” “Virgin of the Salambao,” and “Santa Clara” — are known for their miraculous power of granting requests for those without sweetheart or child.

Tourists flock to Obando on the feast day of the patron saints, which is held in May every year.

The town fiesta is a three-day affair, beginning May 17 and ending May 20.

The first day is devoted to “San Pascual.” Suitors pray to him for a wife.

The second day is in honor of the “Virgin of the Salambao.” The virgin is mediatrix for childless couples. On the third day, luckless girls turn to “Santa Clara” for a beau.

A procession of the three saints is held, during which devotees pray, dance, and

kiss the images’ carriages.

Prayers are sung, while pilgrims swing and sway.

The prayer song goes: “Mahal na poong San Pascual, bigyan po ninyo ako nang asawa... (Beloved St. Pascual, please give me a spouse), “Santa Clara, pinong pino, bigyan po ninyo ako ng nobiyo... (Saint Clara so fine, please give me a fiance), and “Mahal naming Nuestra Señora, anak po ako’y bigyan na...” (Our beloved Lady, please bless me with a child).

Successful supplicants often name their child “Clara,” if it turns out to be a girl, and “Pascual” if it is a boy.

“Maria Clara,” the heroine in Jose Rizal’s “Noli me Tangere,” was named after “Mary” (Virgin of the Salambao) and “Santa Clara.”

She was reportedly conceived after her mother, Don Pia, made a pilgrimage to Obando.

According to records, the

dance follows no definite pattern. It is not really dancing in the strict sense of the world.

Devotees simply sway, skip or hop in the church, on the church plaza or on the streets, during the procession.

This custom of dancing before the saints is believed to have originated with San Pascual Baylon, who belonged to the order of barefooted Franciscans, called Soccolans.

It is said that he used to commune with holy spirits and danced with joy while doing so.

Nobody knows however, when and how the custom of dancing before the saints of Obando started.

It was said that the church frowned on the practice but the zeal of devotees has kept church authorities from outright banning of the custom.

Records said that the town earlier had two patron saints — “San Pascual” and “Santa Clara”. The “Virgin of the Salambao” reportedly was enshrined in the town church only after a “miraculous event.”

In 1855, Fr. Felix de Huerta, a Franciscan historian who

recorded the legend, said that two brothers — “Juan” and “Julian,” both surnamed de la Cruz, of Malabon, Rizal — went fishing in the waters of Obando.

Thinking that they caught a big fish, “Juan” and “Julian” reportedly raised the net. To their surprise the catch turned out to be an image of the Virgin Mother, standing upright in the net.

Their first impulse was to return to Malabon but the boat reportedly refused to move, no matter how hard they rowed.

When they tried to row towards Obando, the boat glided forward, and required almost no effort on their part. The brothers brought the image to Obando church where it has, since then, been venerated as the “Virgin of the Salambao.”

“Santa Clara” is the first and oldest patron saint. The image was first enshrined in Mevcauyan.

In 1923, it was transferred to Polo where it remained until it was moved to the new town of Obando. — *I. C. Santos, Manila Bulletin, Mar. 1968.*