

More Franciscan Mission Churches in Luzon Parishes

Sixth Paper: Great Mission Trail Series: Around Manila

Last month's paper on the Franciscan churches ended with Mecaauayan. This one begins with Bocaue, in the same province, Bulacan, and continues through Bulacan into other provinces.

Bocaue. Separated from Mecaauayan in 1606, with Fray Pedro de los Santos as the first priest. The Bocaue springs were formerly celebrated for the excellence of their waters. Date of the church not given. Its patron is San Martin Obispo, and the chapel is under the patronage of San Pedro Alcantara.

Polo. Separated from Mecaauayan in 1623, the name signifying *isla* being given because the district is isolated by the estuary flowing through it. Fray José Valencia built the church in 1632, and "Fray Vicente de la Puebla made extensive reparations, painted the church and improved it so much in 1852 that it has little or nothing to envy in the best churches of the islands. There is also an *ermita* dedicated to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception and another dedicated to San Roque."

San José. Separated from Mecaauayan in 1751, under the ministry of Fray Esteban Gadea. The church, dedicated to St. Joseph the Patriarch, was built in the first years of the 19th century but was destroyed in the fire of 1822 which burned the town down, and was later rebuilt with the aid of the parish and funds solicited by the Franciscans.

Obando. Formerly Catangalang, a barrio of Polo, erected in 1753 into the town of Obando by D. José Francisco de Obando, Marques de Obando, governor and captain-general of the Philippines, by his decree of May 14, 1753, giving the town his name. The church is dedicated to San Pascual Bailon and for building it the people were exempted from the tribute during two years. Commencing May 17 and lasting three days, one of the most celebrated fiestas is held at this church among all to be seen in the islands, and as it is but a short railway or motor trip from Manila there is no reason for any Manilan to fail of seeing it. The first day is begun with high mass and earnest preaching, but the second is joyfully devoted to the "miraculous image of the Conception of Our Lady, under the title of the Virgen of the Sarambao, which comes of its having been found by some fishermen in the bay of Manila, according to a document authorized by the registrar, Diego Pascual, in 1764. In this document it is stated that on Tuesday, June 19, 1763, two brothers, Juan and Julian de la Cruz, fishermen, threw their net in the place called Hilingdóon, and upon drawing it in, discovered, to their great admiration, the said image, which they joyfully carried into the town and later to this church, where it is venerated." Women who would bare their husbands children worship through this image at the time of the annual fiesta, when there are dancing, music and general rejoicing. The

third day is given to the Virgin Santa Clara de Asis, "whose very ancient image, placed in a small *ermita* pertaining to the pueblo of Mecaauayan until 1623, became thereafter the property of Polo, and ultimately that of Obando, remaining however in the *ermita* until the Obando church, where it now rests, was built. In difficult parturitions the image is taken down and laid upon the patient, proof that there have been experienced and are experienced salubrious effects."

Santa Maria de Pandi. Separated from Bocaue in 1792. Fray Francisco Javier began the church and Fray Tomás Marti completed it. It is dedicated to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. "There is a beautiful road leading to the pueblo of Bocaue, built in the year 1851 under Fray Antonio Roman and Fray José Miralles; and a horseshoe road to the pueblo of Angat, in which, over a small river, is a magnificent stone bridge built in 1845 with P800 donated by Fray José Balaguer, another donation from the Dominican in charge of Pandi hacienda, and the remainder from the pueblo." This brief note indicates how so many of the old roads of the islands, rebuilt in many cases into the present new roads, came into existence; they were the work of the friars.

Marilao. Separated from Mecaauayan in 1796. Marilao spring waters are bottled and



St. Paul's (Augustinian) Church, Walled City, before an earthquake in the 1870's destroyed the bell-tower on the left. A rare photo.

Here one beholds simple faith and Franciscan devotion that the modern world does not share, and the intelligent reader is unhappily able to trace a parallel between Franciscan instruction in the Philippines and that in California among the western Indians. Neither in the Philippines nor in California were they able to keep pace with time, a fact constituting one of the most poignant of human tragedies, since they were so earnest, so desirous of beneficent results from their benevolent labors.

erated and sold in Manila, being very popular among the poor. The church is dedicated to the archangel San Miguel. The Franciscans had difficulty in building this stone church at the beginning of the last century, the people showing little interest "notwithstanding continuous exhortations."

Other towns of Bulacan were not under the Franciscans. Fray Felix de la Huerta (an account of whose life the *Journal* hopes to publish in the fullness of time) goes next into

SOCONY

MOTOR LUBRICANTS



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"LOOK FOR THE BLUE TIN"

northern Nueva Ecija, and then farther north, with his sketches of the missions.

Pantabangan. "The only information found in the records of the Franciscans is that this mission was founded in 1701 by the Augustinians, who administered it until September 1, 1759, at which time it passed to our charge, Fray Andrés de San Miguel becoming our first minister there. . . . The church, dedicated to San Andrés Apostol, is of stone and brick, constructed during the period 1837 to 1841 under the indefatigable Fray Benito de la Pila," who, the chronicler goes on to say, was hard put to it for funds, as anyone would find himself today who should try to duplicate the work. The bells and the image of Our Lady are from the abandoned mission of Binatangan and were taken to Pantabangan in 1800.

Caranglan. Founded by the Augustinians in 1701 and taken over by the Franciscans in 1759, under the ministry of Fray Antonio Anguita de la Cruz. Fray Miguel Soriano laid the foundations of the beautiful church in 1765. The patron saint is San Nicolas de Tolentino. There is a huge natural bathing pool at Caranglan, and all this region is unsurpassed for outings, being in the mountains and not far from the San José road over Balete Pass. (Readers are referred to "Puncan: Trail-Ends in Sociology," which appeared in the *Journal* some years ago and makes a chapter in the book, *The Khaki Cabinet and Old Manila*.)

Puncan. Also **Pungcan.** Another of the Augustinian missions to the pagans of Nueva Ecija established in 1701 and turned over to

the Franciscans in 1759. The first Franciscan priest was Fray Mateo Castuera, and Fray Jose Cordero built the church, of brick, in 1801. The missionaries saw the natural advantages of the soil, altitude and climate, and accordingly stimulated the growing of coffee, cacao, tobacco and other products; but ruin has come upon all their efforts, the churches are in decay, the plantations abandoned, the roads in disrepair, and the cloying hand of the usurer is seen to have dampened the ardor of the peasantry.

If you would observe how fatally circumstances during the past forty years have affected once prosperous communities, by all means visit Puncan, Caranglan, and Pantabangan. (Readers with a gift for writing are advised that in this neighborhood are the abundant materials for a book.)

Umingan. Formerly Langolango, a *visita* of Tayug, until attached to Lupao in 1832 by Archbishop Fray José Seguí, and later, in 1843, made into an independent pueblo with Fray José Miralles as its first parish priest. The village of Langolango was thereupon transferred to the new site of Umingan. Miralles built a bamboo church, but his successor, Fray Castor Perez, built the present edifice in 1851, dedicating it to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception.

Rosales. "In 1827 a *principal*, D. Nicolas Ibañez, of San Nicolas, then pertaining to Pangasinan, established himself with his servants and herds at this site, giving it the name of Balungao from a nearby mountain. Other emigrants followed him, and as his dependents founded the

village, which in 1840 was attached to the pueblo of Lupao. In 1843, Balungao was separated from Lupao and attached to the new pueblo of Umingan then being organized, and in 1853 it was detached from Umingan and made into a new pueblo called Rosales, in honor of the senior assessor general of the government, D. Antonio Rosales Liberal, Fray Juan Bautista Martínez being assigned as curate. . . . The church, under the advocacy of San Antonio de Padua, is a miserable temporary *camarin* (storehouse, or granary), of bamboo and nipa, since as a new town the place wants even the most necessary buildings."

San Quintin. Formed of the districts of Langolango, Lagasit and Baligayan into a pueblo in 1863. At the time Huerta wrote, 1865, time had not elapsed in which to build a church, the usual *convento*, and *casa tribunal*. These structures now to be seen in San Quintin are therefore recent.

Next month the *Journal* will follow the Franciscans into Laguna, and tell the story of the hanging bridge of Mahayhay, which throws a flood of light upon the public works the friars built throughout the islands. It is hoped that interest increases as the old mission routes are traveled again in our humble pages. It has been a pleasure to learn from several travelers that the chronicles already published have been a helpful guide during motor excursions into the northern provinces. Then, too, by learning what the friars actually did, a better estimate of it—of their successes, of their failures—can be made, and history better understood.

Do Our Negritos Date Back to World's Golden Age?

From the viewpoint of the anthropologist the little Negritos of our Philippine mountains are one of the world's most important peoples. Some of the rationalists of England are saying that they probably date from the fabled *golden age* in the history of mankind, like the Veddahs of Ceylon and the Punans of Borneo; and a few are prepared to take this age out of the realm of fable and proclaim that it really did exist, prior to the advent of agriculture, the evolution of laws respecting property in land, and the ensuing struggle for the possession of land.

When the agricultural period came, society fell apart into classes which in time hardened into castes or estates. When some chap had successfully led his companion yokels in the defense of their boundaries, the attacks of the neighboring tribe had been so persistent that the campaign was prolonged and a degree of professional skill developed among some of the defenders, while a just pride of leadership shaped the ambition of the leader; and thereafter he continued to lead, which was easier than returning to the mattock, and he kept around him a retinue of his armed men and established the first standing army. That's two estates already, and a third, the disbanded yokels returned to the land. The priestcraft would then be needed to teach social order and contentment, read the auspices and evolve moral regulations; and out of the necessity for them they would come. In their most primitive character we still observe them in many tribes of the Philippines; they are the elders who exorcise evil spirits and placate the wrath of heaven or command its mercy through their savage incantations and ritual sacrifices.

But to their belligerent world the Negrito has not moved on; instead, he has moved to the mountains. When he came to the Philippines he was a lowlander. He knew nothing about navigation, however; he came here long ago by way of the land bridges then existing. After him came the Indonesians, who were warlike and had gods and priests and notions of property; so the Indonesians drove the Negrito into the highlands—following him there when the Malay invasions occurred.

Just as he left the lowlands, the Negrito is found in the highlands today. If he has a spear, it is a borrowed one, for his native weapons are the bow and arrow. He respects property in chattels, he does not steal his brother's bow; but he has no fixed abode and resorts but little

to the sown field. He has never made a boat, never learned even to swim, and will go around the headwaters of a shallow stream rather than wade across it. He barter for rice, salt and flamboyant muslins, exchanging for them wax, honey and resins, rattans and the like products of the mountain forests. His alleged depredations upon lowland settlements are of an extremely dubious character, more probably they are reprisals undertaken to return to his family members who have been stolen or enticed away.

He is not aggressive, has no thought of wars of conquest, and only desires to be let alone in his habitat, where he has learned to keep his wants simple and to supply them from the marts of nature. The social unit among Negritos is the family, there is no tribal organization strictly speaking; but elders enjoy the respect and obedience of the young because through them the traditions are passed on and they are wise in the lore of nature. Negritos are monogamous, the wife quite on a level with the husband, and the best authorities remark a genuine affection among the members of Negrito families.

Maternal constancy prevails, and marriages are of course natural romantic affairs with the usual laws of consanguinity observed. If the sacred law of a Negrito's home has been violated, the outraged husband takes one bow shot at the offender. True, it is usually curtains for the offense, but if it does not prove fatal no further revenge is sought and the man with the unfortunate aim moves away to leave the adulterers in peace. There is no feud, no further aftermath. The avenging arrow is never poisoned; but the Negrito knows how to poison his arrow points, and resorts to such arrows to bring down the fleeing deer which would otherwise escape him. The dog is his only domestic animal, which he uses in the chase. He is fond of fish, which he shoots from the stream bank, accurately calculating the deflection of light in the water. His bow is made of *palma brava*. Very strong men have been astonished at their inability to flex a bow which the Negrito flexes with apparent ease.

According to researches recently made by Belgian priests endeavoring to establish missions among the Negritos, these people are free from the benighted superstitions afflicting other peoples of the Philippines. To the Negrito the thunder's roll and the lightning's flash are but natural phenomena, as are the coming and going of life among mankind and animals, as well as



These Negritos are in borrowed finery. (See text)

plants: In other words, the Negrito has no conception of ghosts and resorts to no gods, good or evil. He propitiates no spirits of any kind; he does not say that his god is a jealous god who will have no other gods before him, for that kind of faith would at once take him out of character, convert him into an aggressor and make him a conqueror; and the resulting conflicts would summarily destroy him. But he has no chronicles, even his spoken vocabulary is extremely stunted, and therefore it isn't known definitely whether he brought a god to the mountains with him or no. It is probable that he didn't; if he did, he abandoned him as excess baggage.

"What becomes of the good man when he dies?" was asked of an old Negrito.

"He is buried."

"What becomes of the bad man?"

"He too is buried."

But it was hard for the Negrito to comprehend what was meant by *good* and *bad*; he had no