

## **“La Naval de Manila” at the Santo Domingo Church**

September 24, 2006 at 9:14 am



It is the traditional feast day that Manila society has forgotten...

It used to be that Manila's grandest ladies and gentlemen — from the Tuason, Legarda, Prieto, Valdes, Roxas, de Ayala, Zobel, Zaragoza, Araneta, Ortigas, Vargas, Madrigal, Cojuangco, and other affluent families — spearheaded the preparations for the annual event in honor of “Nuestra Senora del Santisimo Rosario” Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary...

Felix Roxas y Fernandez [ o 1864 - + 1936 ], Mayor of Manila from 1905 – 1917, recalled the “La Naval de Manila” novena at the Santo Domingo church in Intramuros and wrote in 1936: “Up to the age of nine [ in 1873 ], I remained under the care of my aunts who strove zealously to undertake the responsibility of my early education. All of them very devout women, they frequently took me along to the religious festivities, specially to the church of Santo Domingo during the nine-day novena of the Most Holy Rosary. The devotion to this Virgin, who is venerated in this church, has not diminished a bit in spite of the changes and social transformations in these islands. Last night [ October 1936 ], for example, the torrential downpour that continued during the hours of prayer was

not an obstacle to the filling of the church by a devoted crowd anxious to take part in saying its prayer to the legendary Virgin, to hear the sermon of the priest who preached from the pulpit, and to witness the solemn rites of those ceremonies.””

The great Dominican feast of “La Naval de Manila” pays tribute to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who, as “Nuestra Senora del Santisimo Rosario” Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary, wrought unbelievable naval victories for the Spaniards over the Dutch invaders of these islands in a series of battles in 1646. What made the Spanish victories more miraculous was that they only had two worn galleons, the “Encarnacion” and the “Rosario,” that battled the more numerous, and better-armed, fifteen Dutch frigates.

#### THE IMAGE OF ”NUESTRA SENORA DEL SANTISIMO ROSARIO”

Manila society venerated the magnificent and beautiful image of “Nuestra Senora del Santisimo Rosario,” a legacy of the Spanish Governor General Luis Perez Dasmariñas to the Manila Dominicans in 1593. It was carved from [ elephant ] ivory by a Chinese sculptor under the supervision of Captain Hernando de los Rios Coronel . The image is garbed in yards of precious “tisu de oro” cloth of gold embroidered with silver gilt thread. The crowns of Our Lady and the Child Jesus are of high-karat gold and are studded with many precious jewels, the gifts of generations, indeed centuries, of affluent devotees.

Felix Roxas inquired with the prewar Spanish Dominicans about the origin of the image of the “Santo Rosario”... “I have often asked myself if the actual image of the Virgin was imported or done by some local carver. My investigations uncovered the following facts:”

“The community of Dominican friars arrived from Mexico prior to the arrival of the Augustinians, the Franciscans, and the Jesuits in the Philippines [ Actually, the Augustinians were the first to arrive in 1565, the Dominicans arrived in 1587 . --- T.G. ]. About the last years of the XVI century, on the same site where the church of Santo Domingo is actually located in Intramuros, they erected a chapel where the Virgin of the Rosary, the image about two feet high, was venerated, the same image still conserved in an urn lying between the two towers of the belfries at the outer facade of the church. This original image was replaced by the present one which we owe to the chisel of a Chinese carver who executed the work without the intention of becoming a great artist, and completed it as if he were guided by a divine inspiration, something he himself did not take into account.”

“From August 16, 1587, this image has attracted the devotion of Catholic believers, who have multiplied manifold, encouraged by the favors they received from her. From the very beginning both the the Virgin and the infant Jesus in her arms have appeared with crowns on their heads. In this way they were venerated until Pope Pius IX prepared a ritual decreeing that the coronation of images of Virgins should be done by the highest ecclesiastical authority of each land beginning with the coronation of the Virgin of Savona, Italy, who was crowned by Pope Pius IX himself. Others followed this tradition, such as that of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico, who was crowned by a delegate of His Holiness. The turn of the Philippine images came in this century in the following order: The image worshipped in the church of Santo Domingo in Manila; that of Penafrancia in Nueva Caceres, Camarines Sur; that of Manaoag in Pangasinan; and last, that of Antipolo, recently crowned with great solemnity in the Manila Cathedral. The last-named coronation was special: the

Apostolic Delegate crowned the Virgin and the Archbishop of Manila crowned the infant Jesus [ sic ], each one by special instructions from His Holiness.””

[ "Nuestra Senora de la Paz y Buenviaje" The Virgin of Antipolo is actually a depiction of the "Immaculate Conception" and she does not carry the Infant Jesus as part of her iconography. Felix Roxas must have confused her canonical coronation with another revered image of Our Lady. ]

## THE HISTORIC JEWELS

Historian Basilidez Bautista explained that during the Spanish era, it was the tradition of rich and devout Filipino families, specially those of Spanish extraction, to consider the “Santo Rosario” as another ”heiress” to the family jewels. An entire lot was always apportioned and forthwith donated to the Virgin.

Three of the Virgin’s legendary jewels are ”the carbuncle,” the Roxas ”granada de oro,” and the Roxas “concha.”

“The carbuncle” is a mythologized large red gemstone that was believed to have crowned the forehead of a large serpent that inhabited the Pasig river. It was immortalized in a story by National Artist for Literature Nick Joaquin, an ardent devotee of the “Santo Rosario.” However, artist Rafael del Casal, who was privy to the Dominicans and to the image of the “Santo Rosario,” says — to great disappointment — that it does not exist. He knows that the largest red stone in the collection of the Virgin is neither a ruby nor a garnet but paste which looks like faceted red glass and is set in the “AM” / “Auspice Maria” / “Ave Maria” cipher on the Virgin’s 19th century ”plata” silver gilt dress. Mr. del Casal thinks that “the carbuncle” could have also referred to a pearl, and recalls that the Virgin has two big pearls which are set as drops dangling below the orbs in her two gold crowns. A pear-shaped pearl like the internationally famous and centuries-old ”La Peregrina” [ currently owned by actress Elizabeth Taylor ] is set in the 1811 Crown and an L-shaped baroque pearl is set in the 1907 crown for the Virgin’s canonical coronation.

Mr. del Casal is of the opinion that Nick Joaquin’s story of “the carbuncle” is actually a metaphor for the triumph of Christianity over paganism.

The Roxas “granada de oro” [ golden pomegranate ] and the Roxas “concha” [ shell ] had a more historic — and royal — provenance: King Norodom I of Cambodia visited the Philippines in 1872. At a ball given by the Arnedos in Sulipan, Apalit, Pampanga he met and fell in love with Josefa “Pepita” Roxas y Manio of nearby Calumpit, Bulacan. But he could not further his intentions because of their different religions. Before his departure, he gave Josefa Roxas a precious, pomegranate-shaped jewel [ called the "granada de oro" ] encrusted with diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and pearls and her sister Ana Roxas a smaller shell-shaped one [ called the "concha" ] also encrusted with precious stones. Both Josefa’s ”granada de oro” and Ana’s “concha” were donated by the sisters and their brother Rev. Fr. Manuel Roxas to the ”Santo Rosario” at the Santo Domingo church in Intramuros. The “concha” was inscribed “S.M. El Rey de Cambodia A La Sta. Ana Rojas 1872” [ "His Majesty The King of Cambodia to Senorita Ana Rojas 1872" ]. Most unfortunately, the ”granada de oro” was lost after prewar. It was last seen — hanging from the neck of the “Nino Jesus” — in a published photograph of the “Santo Rosario” in a supplement of the “Philippines Free Press” on 03 May 1930. That same photograph showed the “concha” pinned to the hem of the embroidered garment of the “Nino Jesus.”

Unfortunately, decades later, the “concha” also disappeared upon the death of Rev. Fr. Augusto Antonio, O.P., the chaplain of the Virgin, in 1982. He had carefully kept it in his bedroom for scholarly study and it could no longer be found after he died.

#### THE CANONICAL CORONATION OF “LA GRAN SENORA”

It actually rained torrentially during the canonical coronation of the “Nuestra Senora del Santisimo Rosario de ‘La Naval de Manila’” on 05 October 1907...

Felix Roxas reminisced the canonical coronation of the “Santo Rosario” in 1906 [ sic ], which took place during his tenure as Mayor of Manila, and wrote in 1936:

“”I remember the glorious day of the fifth of October, 1906 [ sic ], when the canonical coronation of our Lady of the Rosary, who was venerated in the Santo Domingo church in Intramuros, was pompously celebrated in this city by order of Pope Pius X.”

“At that time, in anticipation of the said day, the prior of the Santo Domingo convent announced to the faithful devotees who used to fill the pews of the church that from that time on Manila had nothing to envy the renowned sanctuaries of Zaragoza, Lourdes, Monserrat, Begona, and many other sites selected by the Most Holy Virgin Mary as the throne of her mercies.”

“On the day set for the coronation ceremonies, as foreseen, there was an extraordinarily large crowd consisting of delegations from the provinces, carried by their devotion to the Virgin of the Rosary, anxious to witness the event. The organizing committee in charge of the ceremonies secured a permit from me to erect a stage for the ecclesiastical authorities and lay guests invited to the memorable event on Magallanes Drive.”

“Preferential seats at the center of the stage near an altar were given to Governor General James Smith, the Commissioners, Chief Justice Arellano of the Supreme Court, the undersigned as Mayor and other officials of the insular and city governments.”

“An incessant and persistent rain fell at the precise moment when the image of the Virgin passed near the small altar where the Papal delegate, Monsignor Guidi, assisted by Mons. Petrelli as secretary, was preparing to place the crowns on the infant Jesus and on the Virgin. Despite the rain the Governor General, who was a Catholic, calmly assisted them in the coronation rites.”

“Dona Encarnacion Roxas, the sponsor of the coronation, and her retinue of ladies, without abandoning their posts and in proof of their devotion, brilliantly fulfilled their obligation of carrying and delivering the crowns adorned with a valuable collection of precious stones.”

“From this moment almost all of those who took part and witnessed those rites firmly believed they had crowned the Virgin of the Rosary as the patroness of the Philippines.””

..... “At the risk of being repetitious, I want to relate that it was in the afternoon of October 5, 1906 [ sic ], when, in the midst of a torrential downpour, high dignitaries of the church, of the government and of the Filipino people gathered around the platform erected beside the Ayuntamiento building toward Magallanes Drive for the ceremonies.””.....



### “PROCESION DE LAS PROCESIONES”

From his sickbed, Felix Roxas wrote in October 1936: “”This afternoon, if the weather permits, this image will leave in a procession that will start from the Santo Domingo Church and tour around the streets of Intramuros. Devotees will have the opportunity to look upon her once more, enthroned on the brightly lit carriage to spark the human imagination in beholding her at the height of her glory.””

In its last days of glory prewar, all of Manila society, dressed in their grandest, congregated at the Santo Domingo church inside Intramuros for the annual “La Naval de Manila” procession, which was always celebrated every second Sunday of October.

The “La Naval de Manila” procession in prewar featured only ten Dominican images interspersed with the “estandartes” banners of the fifteen mysteries of the holy rosary. Yet, it was already the longest and the grandest of the Intramuros processions. It was headed by the image of San Pedro de Verona, ... Santa Rosa de Lima, and those of Santo Tomas de Aquino, Santo Domingo de Guzman, San Jose, and the “festejada,” the “Santo Rosario.”

Manila oldtimers remember that it was the time-honored custom for the faithful to kneel reverently, even on the Intramuros streets, as the image of the “Santo Rosario” passed by during the annual “La Naval de Manila” procession. It was a tradition that was portrayed on film by director Lamberto Avellana in his screen adaptation of Nick Joaquin’s “Portrait of the Artist as a Filipino.”

### “CARROZA TRIUNFAL”

Just before the war, Sor Catalina de la Visitacion [ the "heredera" / heiress Vicenta Osmena y Rafols of the affluent and venerable Cebu clan; she funded the establishment of the "Colegio de Santa Catalina de Matsuyama" in Shikoku, Japan ] of the Dominican sisters initiated — with her own substantial donation — a fund drive for the construction of a new, large, and magnificent “carroza triunfal” [ boat-shaped carriage ] entirely of solid silver [ 85 % ], an absolute masterpiece of the “Talleres de Maximo Vicente,” for the use of the Virgin during the “La Naval de Manila” processions. Carmen “Menggay” Reyes de Reyes [ Mrs. Vicente Cecilio Reyes ], the current “camarera” of the “Santo Rosario,” told Rafael del Casal that the prewar devotees had donated real silver coins [ 85 % ] for the “carroza triunfal.” Mr. del Casal also met the old Ireneo Taruc, a longtime silversmith at the “Talleres de Maximo Vicente,” who as a 19 year-old apprentice had labored on the elaborate silverwork of the ”carroza triunfal” just before the war. He too, remembered that it was entirely of solid silver. Unfortunately, it was burned inside the Santo Domingo church and convent in Intramuros during the war.

The present, simpler “carroza triunfal” was a memorable work of the “taller” of Santiago Santos in postwar [ in 1946 ]. The workshop was located at the back of the University of Santo Tomas.

## WORLD WAR II

The image of the “Santo Rosario,” along with the other treasures of the Manila Dominicans — the gold chalices, monstrances, reliquaries, ecclesiastical accoutrements, silver tabernacles, candlesticks, torches, missal stands, banners, ornate ewers and basins, important centuries-old documents, and many other valuables — had been stored by the Spanish Dominicans in their large vault located on the ground floor of the church complex. The late Rev. Fr. Augusto Antonio, O.P. described the Santo Domingo church vault to Rafael del Casal as having had very thick walls. As the fire raged for three days and nights, and while the Manila Dominicans prayed for the safety of their greatest treasure — the 350 year-old miraculous image of the “Santo Rosario” — the great and terrible possibility loomed that the image of the Virgin would not survive the extreme heat from the fire which had completely permeated the vault — and the entire church complex as well...

According to Carmen Reyes de Reyes, by that time [ prewar ] the regalia of the “Santo Rosario” — the 1811 and the 1907 gold “coronas” [ crowns ] of the mother and child, the 1811 gold “rostrillo” and “aureola,” the gold “cetros” [ scepters ] and “baston” [ cane ], and the many donated jewels — were no longer stored inside the “tesoro del convento” of the Santo Domingo church and convent in Intramuros, but secreted in the vaults of the old “Monte de Piedad” Bank in Santa Cruz, Manila. That is where her great treasure stayed throughout the war.

An eyewitness recounted:

“”In December of 1941, the Japanese warplanes bombed Intramuros. One of the first casualties was the Santo Domingo church and convent. The towers were destroyed and only the walls were left. The church and the convent burned for many days. Wisely enough, days before the bombings, The Dominican friars had stored the centuries-old image of the “Santo Rosario” and her more precious vestments in the “tesoro del convento” the convent treasury, which faced Plaza Isabel II. But because of the intensity of the fire, no one really knew if the image of the “Santo Rosario” had survived...”

## THE RESCUE OF THE “SANTO ROSARIO”

But she did, miraculously as always. The extreme heat of the fire had bent, twisted, deformed, and in fact almost melted several of the important gold and silver objects. But the 350 year old [ elephant ] ivory and hardwood image of the “Santo Rosario” actually survived the conflagration which had consumed her beautiful, rose-colored, Gothic-style temple from 1875 — the Santo Domingo church and convent in Intramuros, a masterpiece by the Europe-trained, patrician architect Felix Roxas Sr. — and it also finally laid waste to the historic site of her home beside the Pasig River since 1593.

An eyewitness recounted:

“”The prior of the Santo Domingo church and convent, Rev. Fr. Aurelio Valbuena, O.P. — a respected and trusted man — decided to transfer the image of the ‘Santo Rosario’ and the other church treasures to a safer place, to the University of Santo Tomas in Sampaloc District. That was, of course, if she survived...”

“On 30 December 1941, three days before the entry of the Japanese ground forces, the Japanese air force had started the aerial bombardment of the city. Electricity had been cut off; blackouts were the norm. Word went around that massive looting would take place. Rev. Fr. Aurelio Valbuena, O.P., the Prior of the Santo Domingo church and convent, was advised by well-meaning friends and devotees to finally secure the treasures of the Manila Dominicans, paramount of which was the centuries-old ivory image of the “Santo Rosario.”

“And so, on 30 December 1941, at 4:00 p.m., everyone concerned — the Manila Dominicans, their friends and devotees of the “Santo Rosario,” two Augustinian Recollect priests, and some Manila policemen — got together at the ruins of the Santo Domingo church and convent in Intramuros to see if the ivory image of the ‘Santo Rosario’ had possibly survived the conflagration within the confines of the “tesoro del convento” the convent treasury, and if so, to bring her to relative safety at the University of Santo Tomas in Sampaloc...”

“The vault door of solid metal was extremely difficult to open. The group initially thought of blowing it up with a grenade but they found out that it would not be necessary...”

“They decided to use an acetylene torch. But the vault door resisted to a remarkable degree.”

“Nearly four hours later just before 8:00 p.m., They were still firing away at the mechanism of the vault door in complete darkness [ electricity had been cut off; blackouts had been imposed ]. It was very difficult to open!!!”

“Finally, by 8:00 p.m., They had already succeeded in making a small opening... A few minutes later, the mechanism finally gave way and they were able to force the vault door open...”

“The Dominican priests were eager to enter the vault but an infernal, boiling heat gushed out from it so they had to retreat!!!”

“But from the vault entrance, They saw that the image of the ‘Santo Rosario’ was intact. She had survived!!!”

“Tears of happiness gushed forth as they all immediately knelt down on the wet stone floor of the convent and prayed the “Salve” aloud. They had never prayed more intently. The silence, the blackout, the faint moonlight, the deep shadows, the wet walls... all contributed to the dramatic, almost ‘theatrical’ experience...”

“The silence was broken by the bursting of canned goods in the convent ‘almacen’ storerooms. All the factors: the darkness, the bombings, the fear, the assault... all contributed to the great emotion of the scene.””

After the image of the Virgin was retrieved from the smoking vault by the Spanish Dominicans, the Ortigas brothers, their Ramirez-Ortigas nephews, along with some other brave souls, undertook the perilous and heroic task of transporting her secretly, in a rundown “camioneta” truck through the back streets of Sampaloc district, to the chapel of the University of Santo Tomas, where she remained throughout the war.

“”The image of the ‘Santo Rosario’ was wrapped in a thick blanket. Her image as well as the wooden boxes containing her elaborate vestments were all loaded in the same truck.”

“The truck exited through the Colegio de San Juan de Letran side...”

“The silent caravan made its way to the University of Santo Tomas through the dark and deserted streets.”

“The truck was followed by several other cars who escorted the “Santo Rosario” to the University of Santo Tomas.”

“Several people were waiting for the rescuers at the University of Santo Tomas. In fact, there was quite a crowd waiting to receive the ‘silent procession’ from Intramuros.”

“Although the ‘Santo Rosario’ was not appropriately dressed, the priests lifted the thick blanket so she could be seen by the assemblage. The crowd knelt reverently and gratefully prayed the “Salve”...

“The Virgin was saved!!!”

“The next day, some priests returned to the ruins of the Santo Domingo church, to the “tesoro del convento” the treasury, to retrieve boxes of documents of lesser value, but these had already disappeared in the intervening hours. Had they not retrieved the image of the ‘Santo Rosario’ the previous night, she too, might have disappeared!!!”

“The most important thing is that the historical Virgin is still venerated at the new Santo Domingo church with the vestments, jewels, and crowns given to her by the Filipino nation.””

## PADRE AUGUSTO

Rev. Fr. Augusto Antonio, O.P. [ + 1981 ], chaplain of the Virgin, was the last aristocratic Dominican holdover from the old Santo Domingo of Intramuros. His tenure saw the last vestiges of the elite protocol and patrician elegance which surrounded the legendary “Santo Rosario.”

After his passing, it was left to Carmen Reyes de Reyes [ Mrs. Vicente Cecilio Reyes ], the longtime, tradition-bound ”camarera” of the image [ a lady of genuinely ”de buena familia” belonging to the old, wealthy, and prominent de los Reyes clan of Cavite [ Crisanto de los Reyes ] and the Reyes clan of Manila [ Capitan Francisco Reyes ]; all the previous “camareras” of the “Santo Rosario” were absolutely ”de buena familia” in order to fully understand the traditions of the image ], and an aristocratic lay holdover from the old Santo Domingo of Intramuros, to carry on the centuries-old traditions dictating the proper procedures in the conservation and preservation of the hallowed image of the ”Santo Rosario.”

.....  
As the eminent Dr. Nicanor Tiongson of the UP University of the Philippines observed: “The devotion to ‘Nuestra Senora de La Naval’ was always traditionally aristocratic in nature.”

\*unfinished\*

Notes:

\*According to the memoirs of Felix Roxas y Fernandez [ o 1864 - + 1936 ], Mayor of Manila from 1905 – 1917, Josefa and Ana Roxas y Manio were the sisters of Rev. Fr. Manuel Roxas y Manio and were the children of Rafael Roxas y Arroyo, one of the twelve sons [ actually fifteen children ] of Antonio Roxas and Lucina Arroyo of Binondo. According to Felix himself, Antonio Roxas was the progenitor of the “poor” branch of the Roxases. He further said that these Roxases “spelled their surname interchangeably with an “x” or a “j” and were often mistaken for the proletariat” [ it explains why the inscription on the Roxas "Concha" was "... A La Sta. Ana Rojas..." ]. Antonio Roxas was a brother of Domingo Roxas [ + 1843 ], the progenitor of the very rich Roxas-de Ayala-Zobel-Soriano clan. Antonio and Domingo Roxas were two of the three, or five, children of Mariano Roxas and Ana Maria de Ureta.

The Roxas y Manio siblings were the first cousins of Felix along with Rosa Roxas de Zaragoza [ daughter of Mariano Leon Roxas y Arroyo and Carmen Arce; married to Jose Zaragoza y Aranquiza { + 1895 }, the publisher of the much-admired sophisticated magazine "La Ilustracion Filipina," which ran from 1890-95 ], the mother of Carmen Zaragoza y Roxas, who married the famous lawyer { Atty. } Gregorio Araneta y Soriano Ditching of Molo, Iloilo. The prominent couple Gregorio and Carmen had fourteen children — Carmen [ died young ], Jose [ married Mercedes Lopez ], Salvador [ married Victoria Lopez y Ledesma ], Consuelo [ married Jesus Cuesta ], Pacita [ married Luis Lopez Obieta ], J. Antonio [ married Margarita Rebullida ], Rosa [ married Manuel Alcuaz ], Ramon [ married Rita Valdes ], Teresa [ married Antonio Albert ], Vicente [ married Paz Zaragoza ], Concepcion [ died young ], Margarita [ married Raha Singh ], Luis Maria [ married Emma Benitez ], and Rev. Fr. Francisco “Fritz,” S.J. — and were known as “Los Araneta de R. Hidalgo.”

Another first cousin was Felix’s sister, Lucina Roxas y Fernandez, who married Enrique Brias de Coya. The parents of Felix and Lucina were the prominent architect Felix Roxas y Arroyo { Sr. } [ o ca. 1820 ] and Cornelia “Concha” Fernandez. Felix Roxas y Arroyo { Sr. } had designed, among others, the Neo-Gothic Santo Domingo church and convent in Intramuros, completed in 1875. He also designed the Neo-Renaissance San Ignacio church, also in Intramuros, begun in 1878 but completed 11 years later in 1889, after his death.

Also a first cousin was the unfortunate Francisco L. Roxas y Reyes — the only son of Juan Roxas y Arroyo and Vicenta Reyes of Binondo — a rich and prominent businessman who, despite his being a “consejero” adviser to the administration [ along with his second cousin Pedro Pablo "Perico" Roxas ], was accused of sedition by the King’s representative Fiscal Castanos in late August of 1896, imprisoned in Fort Santiago, and executed on 08 January 1897. He was married to Maria Elio, a Spanish lady from an influential family from Yarte, Pamplona. They had six children: Salvador, Maria Vicenta, Juan, Presentacion, Carmen, and Javier.

Another branch of the family was that of the painter Felipe Roxas y Arroyo [ o 1840 - + 1899 ] married to Raymunda Chuidian. He lived and died in Paris.

Yet another branch of the family was that of Andres Roxas y Arroyo married to Eleuteria Punzalan. They settled in Calauan, Laguna.

[ \*Rev. Fr. Augusto Antonio, O.P. should have been the first Filipino to become a Dominican priest in 1946. But he gave way to Rev. Fr. \_\_\_\_\_ Vargas, O.P., who gained that distinction. Fr. Augusto Antonio was of Chinese ancestry; his original family name was Tantungco. His mother, Maria Tantungco-Antonio, was from the Tambunting clan. According to him, his mother, who was devoutly Catholic, had strongly opposed the family's entry into the pawnshop business, and that her opposition had caused a bitter feud in her extended Tambunting family. ]

---

## **“Santo Rosario” of deepest affections**

September 27, 2011 at 10:59 am

[ Please be advised: This is a wholly Roman Catholic blog post; it's a sister post to "La Naval de Manila at the Santo Domingo church" of 24 September 2006 { search window }. Christian fundamentalist, Lutheran, Episcopal, et. al. sensibilities could react. "Idolatry!" you could charge, but of course as a Roman Catholic and as a Marian devotee, I couldn't care less if you fell into the Philippine Deep. You have been advised accordingly, in the first place. ]



From the time my grandmother Lola Charing [ Rosario Espiritu Arnedo-Gonzalez, 13 December 1903 - 18 May 1977 ] brought me as a young child [ early 1970s ] along to the Santo Domingo church to pray with her before the “Santo Rosario,” to this day, 4 decades later, I have held the deepest affections for the Blessed Mother...

Tuesday, 26 July 2011...

As always, through the centuries, 2 long candles on tall silver candelabra were lit before her, and the holy rosary, led by the Rev. Fr. Prior, was recited...

I was told by the ladies that the “Virgen,” when shorn of her crowns [ "rostrillo," "corona," "aureola" ], “joyas” jewels, and embroidered finery, actually looked like a comely 14 year-old girl. It was also in that state that what Rafael del Casal described as the delicate tilt of the head and the oh-so-slight turn of the face towards the right, to the “Nino Jesus,” were easily observable.

As Rafael restored the “encarna” of the “Virgen” and the “Nino Jesus” to their “traditional” appearances, he constantly referred to the famous prewar, black-and-white photograph of the “Santo Rosario” in “La Vanguardia” magazine and tried his darndest best, annoyingly stubborn paints from the previous “encarna” notwithstanding, to recreate that old-fashioned but correct look for the current “encarna.”

Upon Rafael’s and Tita Tunggay’s urging, I sat down beside the “camarera” Tita Menggay and asked her many, many questions about the now 418 year-old “Santo Rosario,” all of which she answered sweetly and charmingly. Somewhere in the haze of memories of her 95 years, Tita Menggay spoke, to my increasing wide-eyed interest and bewilderment, of the “Virgen’s” feet painted to look like shoes, covered by gold slippers decorated with “gravado” work which she and the old nuns would polish every year before the fiesta. Tita Tunggay seriously doubted it, saying that her mother was probably talking of another Virgen. To prove her point, she asked abruptly: “Mommy!!! Does the Virgin have feet???” to which Tita Menggay instantly replied, shaking her head: “No!” Still, I gave Tita Menggay the benefit of the doubt. After all, as Tita Tunggay’s protege seminarian Vince Salac pointed out, Tita Menggay was the last one who saw what was inside the indigo blue painted wood planks [ now faded to a Venetian terra cotta ] with painted rococo C-scrolls of gold “polvorina” paint which was the base of her “bastidor” body, before the missing plank at the back was replaced decades ago, sealing it forever.

Rafael remembered that the Nino Jesus was described in an 1800s document as having a “sono liento” “sleepy-eyed” expression and he tried his best to interpret and recreate that look.

Because the Nino Jesus had to be upright while Rafael was restoring its “encarna,” Mang Rolly and Tita Tunggay’s proteges, former seminarians Vince Salac and Reynard Ong, patiently took turns carefully carrying the heavy ivory image by its chest and stomach over the two-tiered table while Rafael carried out his delicate, painstaking work...

While Rafael was satisfied with his “encarna” of the Virgen, he thought that the eyes of the Nino Jesus still had that sharp look which needed interference. He decided to complete the “encarna” of the Nino Jesus on Thursday.

The team was scolded by Tita Menggay when she observed that the Virgen and the Nino Jesus had been in their undergarments for a few minutes already as the team struggled to unfurl the antique “Numero Uno” “vestida” and the “capa” of the Virgen and the “tunico” and the “babero” of the Nino Jesus. Tita Menggay was vehement that the Virgen and the Nino Jesus were to be dressed immediately with the new vestments as soon as the old ones and some of the undergarments were removed. “The Virgen and the Nino Jesus must not be left undressed even for a few minutes! It was never done and it is never done! Bring their vestments now! Act quickly!” she reprimanded in a mix of Spanish and English. Under no circumstances were they to remain a minute more in their undergarments, even if the Virgen had a full dress of gold-colored silk satin and 5 layers of lace-edged “nagwas” beneath and the Nino had a lace-edged cotton “camisa chino.” Tita Menggay repeated her strong disapproval many times until the Virgen and the Nino Jesus were fully dressed and the “capa” was finally installed.

The team was also scolded by Tita Menggay when she saw that a part of the Santo Rosario’s “capa” was touching the floor. Tita Menggay was vehement that the Santo Rosario’s vestments were not to touch the floor at all under any circumstances. “Those are the Virgen’s vestments! Those are expensive, those are precious!” she snapped in a mix of Spanish and English. Tita Menggay repeated her strong disapproval many times until the vestments were finally piled neatly, properly, and respectfully on a table.

It was amazing to witness 95 year-old Tita Menggay’s [ born 1916 ] surprising acuity and alertness, and sometimes surprising assertiveness, whenever the high standards she had learned prewar from the old Dominican “frailes” and the old “camareras” in the conservation of the “Santo Rosario” were in danger of being replaced by today’s unapologetically mediocre, frankly lackluster, and downright disrespectful practices.

One great advantage of digital photography was that, through repeated pixes by the patient photographer, Rafael was able to produce the exact shade of ivory with which to conceal the distracting and notorious hairline crack extending from the right side of the Virgen’s mouth to her chin. The covered hairline is now temporarily invisible, even in pixes/photographs.

Two days later, on Thursday, 28 July 2011...

Following centuries-old protocol in the dressing of the “Santo Rosario,” the gentlemen were only allowed inside the hall once the ladies had finished their delicate regimen of cleaning the ivory face and hands by dabbing cotton with a mild solution of “esencia de rosa” rose essence diluted with water [ “esencia de rosa” is acidic and strong and used by itself is caustic ], changing the 5 layers of lace-edged “nagwas” underclothes [ only 3 changed for everyday wear ], and the hallowed image was already wearing a simple dress of contemporary gold-colored silk satin over the traditional 5 layers of lace-edged “nagwas,” her long dark brown hair, a “velo” [a white, French late 18th century-style bonnet with ruffled lace edgings ; very “Marie Antoinette” ], and a “cuello” neck ruff of white lace. The gentlemen were needed to install the heavy “plancha de plata” gilt silver dress and the even heavier “capa ‘Numero Uno,’” the magnificent, late 19th century cape of “binanig” laidwork “tisu de oro” cloth-of-gold fabric embroidered with flowers, leaves, and symbols in high relief.

Tita Menggay reminisced: “In old Santo Domingo in Intramuros, nobody, but nobody, was allowed to touch the ‘Virgen’s’ face, by strict instructions of the Spanish Dominican ‘frailes’ and of the

‘camarera,’ Dona Angelita Leyba. The most, the very most, that was done was a very gentle dabbing — with cotton with a mild, mild solution of ‘esencia de rosa’ and water — of the ‘Virgen’s’ face by Dona Angelita herself.”

The Virgen’s hair was usually not removed during the dressing [ unless it was being replaced with a new one or in the occasional case that her face was being restored by Rafael del Casal, as was the case that evening, although, of course out of protocol, I did not see it ]. Usually, the first things installed after her being dabbed with a solution of “esencia de rosa” and water were her “velo” lace-edged bonnet and “cuello” neck ruff of white lace. An hour before that, the late 1800s necklace of Colombian emeralds and diamonds [ or any other necklace or ornament ] had been carefully sewn on to the neck ruff, ensuring that it was centered.

[ During the prewar, when all her magnificent jewels were still used for the "La Naval de Manila" procession, one of the first things that had to be put on the Virgen was her antique pearl "rosario," before the "plancha de plata" vest and sleeves, and gold "rostrillo." It would be nearly impossible to install her "rosario" correctly once the "plancha de plata" vest and sleeves, and specially the gold "rostrillo" were already in place. If one or the other was inadvertently forgotten [ as as the case that evening ], one would have to find an alternate way and gingerly sew it to the “cuello” neck ruff of white lace behind the sharp-edged gold “rostrillo,” quite a painful process since one’s hands would be repeatedly pricked by the “rostrillo” and the various jewels on it; it also would not hang correctly, and would be noticed by the meticulous eyes of the “camarera” Tita Menggay, displeasing her. ]

While I stood awestruck and mesmerized, as always, before the “Santo Rosario,” Tita Menggay nudged me gently and related that, for the longest time, the hole in her neck had been left open, a deliberate decision of the Spanish Dominicans to remind everyone of the sacrilegious deeds committed by the British invaders from 1762-64. The hole was supposed to have been caused by a British soldier’s sword which had effectively decapitated her. According to Tita Menggay, it was only after World War 2, already at the new Santo Domingo church in Quezon city, that the Spanish Dominicans decided to have the hole filled in by a master “santero” with similar, high-quality ivory. Again, I gave her the benefit of the doubt. The more scholarly and more plausible theory, shared by scholar par excellence Regalado “Ricky” Jose, historian Ramon “Boy” Villegas, artist Rafael del Casal, and the Virgen’s steward Rolando “Rolly” Tayo is that the hole is actually the dowel that holds the 7 separate pieces of the Virgen’s head — remarkably engineered to support heavy gold crowns by the unknown Chinese carver in 1593 — together. According to Mang Rolly, the dowel seems to extend all the way to the back of the “Virgen’s” head, it seems to come out just above her nape. That would support the more scholarly theory.

I found it curious that the Virgen only had an antique pearl “rosario” — albeit of covetable, natural saltwater pearls — of standard size and the Nino Jesus only had an antique pearl “rosario” of standard size worn on their necks, albeit with interesting “diamante”-studded crosses from the late 1700s, the way all Filipinos wore their “rosarios” during the Spanish era. Where was the outsize, big rosary of the Virgen? Rafael explained that the big goldplated brass rosary formed to an intertwined “AM” / “Auspice Maria” / “Ave Maria” on the skirt was actually an innovation of the late Rev. Fr. Augusto Antonio, O.P.. It was never the style of the “Santo Rosario” in the old Santo Domingo church in Intramuros; for centuries she and the Nino Jesus only had precious “rosarios” of standard size worn from their necks in the traditional style.

I wondered aloud if the natural saltwater pearls used for both the Virgen's and the Nino Jesus' "rosarios" were the very ones listed in the 1907 inventory as "gifts from our Muslim brothers in the south"? No one could answer my query. In any case, both "rosarios" by their archaic style, specially the crosses, seemed to predate 1907...

The exceedingly cute "Nino Jesus" was actually notorious for being difficult to dress, even in years/decades/centuries past, despite his small size. The ladies attending to him as he lay on a high table often "cooed," cajoling him to finally allow them to dress him. In the end however, it was still a man's job to dress the Nino Jesus: Mang Rolly wielded the big needle with thread that finally assembled the spectacularly embroidered "babero" bib and "tunico" tunic of the image. One did not simply slip the "tunico" to the Nino Jesus: there was a traditional, specific way of folding it in order to resemble the Dominican habit with the scapular. Mang Rolly took pride that he had been taught to dress the Nino Jesus with the "tunico Numero Uno" by Rafael del Casal, who in turn learned it from the late Rev. Fr. Augusto Antonio, O.P..

Quietly but intently observing the dressing of the Nino Jesus on a quilted white satin mat and pillow atop a simple two-tiered table, Tita Menggay sweetly reminisced that during prewar at the old Santo Domingo church in Intramuros, the Nino Jesus had a bed-cum-crib, with a cotton mattress, simple with some carvings, which was big enough to accommodate him lying down, standing up, and sideways as he was being dressed, without leaving its confines. I asked her why they did not come up with a replacement bed-cum-crib postwar at the new Santo Domingo church; she just smiled and shrugged, as if to say there were more pressing priorities during those days. We decided right there and then that we would reconstruct it; Rafael immediately volunteered to sketch its design.

For an inveterate researcher of Filipino colonial jewelry like I, having the ultrarare opportunity to see and study the 1811 & 1907 crowns and the antique jewelry of the "Santo Rosario" at close range was a fantastic education and reeducation.

Finally, after hours and hours of careful vesting, the 418 year-old "Santo Rosario" towered before us in all her 19th century magnificence, in exactly the same way Filipino historical figures — Jose P. Rizal, Juan & Antonio Luna, Gonzalo Tuason, Trinidad Ayala de Zobel, et. al. — beheld her over a century ago. "Viva La Virgen!!!"

What was surprising was, despite the overwhelming majesty and beauty of the "Santo Rosario" garbed in the magnificent regalia assembled through the centuries, the dazzling profusion of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, pearls, and diamantes in the crowns and aureoles of solid high-karat gold... the sheer splendor and opulence did not detract from the spiritual presence of the Infant Jesus and the Blessed Mother... the only feeling I had while standing before her and the Nino Jesus was PEACE. It was a very powerful, very unusual, very different kind of peace. There was the settling and the ordering of all interior chaos, the immediate flight of persistent demons, the calming of all cerebral turbulences, the stilling of emotional waters, the dissipation of tempestuous passions... In their healing presence, I felt a profound, settled peace that eludes me most hours of my life. Although I could not verbalize it that time, I simply wanted to stay in their presence... forever.

Tita Menggay looked over the big, early 19th century gold "aureola" with its exquisite "sala-salamin" details [ ref. to Martin I. Tinio ] and revealed that the genuine gems were concentrated on its upper half and that most of the stones in the lower half were of paste [ faceted glass ].

Rafael excitedly pointed to the very lovely and exceedingly rare “gota de aceite” Colombian emerald set in the 1811 crown of the Nino Jesus.

The “Santo Rosario” had to be moved several times during the course of the pictorial by Mang Rolly’s team of 4 – 6 strong men [ who gallantly stayed up the whole night to help out ] using the “pinggas” hardwood poles. It was always a stressful process because of the fragility of the magnificent 1811 crowns and the “capa Numero Uno”; every movement could cause a gem to fall off the crowns or the gilt silver threads to unravel off the “capa.” Tita Tunggay’s assistant Vince Salac, possessed of excellent eyesight and hearing, diligently stood guard with all senses on alert in case anything would fall off or unravel, and was always the first to crouch on the floor on all fours if there was even a slight, suspect sound. Practicing such care and diligence, there was not a single mishap involving the treasures of the “Santo Rosario” during the pictorial.

Constantly mindful of the great honor and privilege of being there, all through the 15 1/2 hours, I silently prayed intermittently for the millions of devotees of the Blessed Mother, venerated as the “Santo Rosario” — ladies and gentlemen, girls and boys — who would have given anything — anything at all!!! — to be in my place that one unforgettably marvelous evening and I mentally [ psychically ] tried to share my joy with them.

After the pictorial, the jewels and the crowns of the “Santo Rosario” were quickly removed, diligently returned to their packets and boxes, carefully accounted for, and immediately returned to the bank with the tightest security.

\*\*\*\*\*

Nearly 2 months later, on Sunday, 25 September 2011...

At 1:30 p.m., 2 long candles on tall silver candelabra were lit before the “Santo Rosario” and the holy rosary was recited...

Rafael spent the afternoon making improvements on the eyes of the “Virgen” and the “Nino Jesus”...

\*\*\*\*\*

The next day, Monday, 26 September 2011...

3 days before the “Santo Rosario’s” planned visit to the UST University of Santo Tomas for its Quadricentennial 1611 – 2011 celebrations [ Wednesday - Thursday, 28 - 29 September 2011 ], and 4 days before the Enthronement ceremonies that would begin the “La Naval de Manila 2011” novena [ Thursday, 29 September 2011 ], the Rev. Fr. Prior, the “camarera” Tita Menggay Reyes, the Mother Superior of the Dominican Sisters of Sienna, Tita Tunggay Reyes, Mang Rolly Tayo, and a very small team of devotees gathered at the hall at 8:30 a.m. for the gala vesting of the “Santo Rosario” for “La Naval de Manila 2011”...

It had been decided weeks before by the Rev. Fr. Prior and the “camarera” Tita Menggay that the vestments commissioned and donated by the Chua family in 2004 would be used for this year’s “La Naval de Manila 2011”...

At exactly 8:30 a.m., as was the custom through the centuries, 2 long candles on tall silver candelabra were lit before the “Santo Rosario” and the holy rosary, led by the Rev. Fr. Prior, was recited...

As always, the gentlemen were not allowed into the hall until the “Virgen” had been gently cleaned with the mild solution of “esencia de rosa” and water, her several layers of exquisite “nagwas” changed, and she was already wearing her formal, fully-embroidered dress. It was the gentlemen’s function to help install the heavy gala “capa” and the heavy crowns, specially the big, Swarovski crystal-studded “aureola,” which the ladies could not handle by themselves.

And I witnessed a bit of the “camarera” and her assistants at the prewar Santo Domingo church in Intramuros...

“Tunggay! It’s too high!” Tita Menggay scolded her dutiful daughter sternly from her wheelchair. The new ‘cuello’ [ neck ruff ] of white lace, donated by a devout Chinese banker [ personally made by the latter, from instructions provided by Rafael del Casal ], was obscuring the chin of the “Virgen.” Tita Tunggay promptly untied it, repositioned it, and then knotted it again.

“Tunggay! It’s too high! Lower!” Tita Menggay demanded. Again, Tita Tunggay diligently untied it, repositioned it, and then knotted it again. But the old lady was still not pleased with the result.

“Mommy, when the ‘rostrillo’ is installed, the ‘cuello’ [ neck ruff ] will go down too, by itself...” Tita Tunggay reasoned patiently with her increasingly assertive mother.