

Traces from the Heritage of the Past: The Reconstruction of Baliwag Municipal Museum Architecture

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Abstract: The municipality of Baliwag is one of the first class municipalities in the province of Bulacan. The term Baliwag came from the native *tagalog* term “*maliliwag*” means slowpokes. Baliwag was founded in 1732 by Augustinian friars and was incorporated by the Spanish Governor-General on May 26, 1733. Municipal Museum of Baliwag became the centerpiece of cultural heritage of the town. It is one of the Spanish colonial heritage houses and cultural properties which was believed built probably in early 1800s. The old Municipal Hall was converted into a museum showcasing various historical accounts and documents about the town’s prominent people, events, and architectures. The house’s architectural compositions revealed countless facts and stories that have occurred over 170 years ago. The original architectural structure of the house is a typical bahay na bato (stone house) with the influence of Spanish design as a result of the 330 years of Spanish colonialization in the Philippines. This paper would like to share initial findings on the Baliwag Municipal Museum investigation as one of Baliwag, Bulacan, Philippines’ recognized cultural heritage.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Conservation, Archaeology.

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Introduction

The Baliwag Municipal Museum is a popular cultural heritage building located in the town of Baliwag. The municipality of Baliwag is situated in Central Luzon and one of the first-class municipalities in the province of Bulacan (Figure 1).

The museum became famous to the people because it was used as Municipal Hall during the American Period in the Philippines. Moreover, it was also used as headquarters of Maj. Gen. Henry W. Lawton during that time.

The term Baliwag came from the native *tagalog* term “*maliliwag*” means slowpokes. Baliwag was founded in 1732 by Augustinian friars and was incorporated by the Spanish Governor-General on May 26, 1733. Its church, the San Agustin Church, recorded a total of 30 curates since 1733-1898. Fray Esteban Diez Hidalgo and Fray Fausto Lopez served for 40 and 24 years, respectively and recorded to have the longest years of service among others (Villacorte, 1970).



Figure 1. Map of Municipality of Baliwag. Sources: Eugene Alvin Villar;

Mike Gonzalez

Since there is no research and archaeological activity carried out in the Baliwag Municipal Museum, the concentration of this study focuses on the exploration of physical remains of the structure. Written accounts of early historians of Baliwag were visited and analyzed for its future reconstruction and conservation plan of the local government without losing its heritage value. Historical exploration would also give a clearer understanding on how the Baliwag Municipal Museum has evolved since and before it was an old Baliwag Municipal Building.

The old municipal hall of Baliwag, now known as the Baliwag Municipal Museum, is one of the Spanish colonial heritage structures and cultural properties which believed built in early 1800s. Since 1971, the old municipal hall has been converted into a museum showcasing different historical accounts and documents about prominent people, and significant artifacts and events happened in the town over the years.

The historical significance of the Baliwag Municipal Museum contained countless remains and stories from over 170 years ago. Its architectural structure has a unique aesthetic value and cultural significance which the local government of Baliwag wants to reconstruct¹. The Baliwag Municipal Museum has been recognized by the National Museum (NM) with its name “Lumang Municipio” as an Important Cultural Property (ICP) cultural heritage in the year 2015 (Figure 2).



Figure 2. National Museum ICP Marker of Baliwag Municipal Museum (Source: Tolentino, R.P.G.)

In the year 2016, the local government of Baliwag executed a restoration of the Baliwag Municipal Museum exterior. The restoration took a year to show the color of the exterior wall of the second layer.

This study attempts to explore the Baliwag Municipal Museum to determine its possible history and original structural composition. The objectives were to determine the provenance of the Baliwag Municipal Museum; identify the existing parts of the structure and characterize the different ornaments in the architectural design; and retrieve a floor plan and take an aerial view to determine the layout of the structure and distance of each structure in the compound.

These objectives will give additional input on the plans of the local government of Baliwag to reconstruct and restore the Baliwag Municipal Museum architecture.

Archaeological Significance

Since there has no research and archaeological activity conducted in the Baliwag Municipal Museum, the concentrations of this paper focused on the reconstruction of Baliwag Municipal Museum as cultural heritage landmark of Baliwag Bulacan through historical archaeology.

The main purpose of historical archaeology is to interpret how diverse the events from the past and connect to the present state of the subject and derive meaning and purpose in order to understand and reconstruct the events from the past to present. Historical archaeology would give clearer understanding from how the Baliwag Municipal Museum has evolved since it was an old Municipal Building of Baliwag through semiotic analysis of arts, designs and adornments of the architecture.

Methods

The researcher employed historical research design with socio-archaeological approach to investigate the past in order to understand the present. Historical research was used to reconcile things, ideas, and objects which still exist since the period of its creation. Historical research design was also considered by the researcher to bring out significant ideas which may be found along the way of investigation.

Photo documentation using Nikon D7100 with DX VR AF-S Nikkor 18-300mm 1:3.5-6.3G ED was also done to capture significant figures, artworks, and designs of the architecture. Photographs were also used to compare relative features of the emblem, artworks, figures and other liturgical objects with significant symbols. Ethnography was also involved during the conduct of this study to cross-validate and confirm some or even most of the archival and historical findings of the study.

The gathering of data from Baliwag Municipal Museum was done by seeking approval from the office of the Municipal Mayor of Baliwag.

Initial Findings

The Baliwag Municipal Museum (Figure 3) is still recognized as Lumang Municipio by the people of Baliwag.

Beyond the understanding of many people of Baliwag is a significant historical value of this municipal heritage building which will give a new face on the history of the town.



Figure 3. Façade of the Baliwag Municipal Museum. Source: Recto, E.R.

1. Provenance and Parts of the Structure

The Baliwag Municipal Museum, as known by the community “Lumang Munisipyo” is not only an old municipal hall. Before it became a government property. It was once a one of the residential houses of the prominent family in Baliwag – the Gonzalezes.

The Gonzalez of Baliwag

The Baliwag Municipal Museum, prior to its popular name “*Lumang Munisipyo*”, was formerly owned by Jose Gonzalez, eldest son of Maria Amparo “Mariquita” Gonzalez (c.1850) who had an affair with Fray Fausto Lopez, OSA. When the Yoyongco residence in Baliwag got burned in year 1907, the government rented the huge house of Jose Gonzalez which happened to be the biggest house in town with heavy and unique materials (Diaz, 1998). The house was later on donated to the government. The Jose Gonzalez’s house was located along Sta. Leocadia Alto that is known as Gonzalez Street today. In front of the *Lumang Munisipyo*, there was a bigger house where Soledad Gonzalez, Maria Amparo Gonzalez’s eldest daughter, lived. The whole lot was later sold to the Church of Christ (*Iglesia ni Cristo*) to expand their church building. There’s a small house currently owned by Dr. Lavernie Gonzalez Esteban next to the compound of Church of Christ. The lot extends to Ponce Street and the small house still exists².

The Gonzalezes contributed during their time not only to the province, but also to their country during the Philippine Revolution. In fact, Dr. Joaquin Gonzalez – Jose Gonzalez’s younger brother was the first Filipino doctor and ophthalmologist before the recognized Philippine national hero Jose Rizal (Santiago, 1994). Dr. Joaquin Gonzalez also served as the first President of the *Universidad Literaria Y Cultura De Filipinas* (University of the Philippines) (Figure 4), and part of the congress/constitution^{3,4}.



Figure 4. Newspaper announcing the unveiling of the portrait of Dr. Joaquin Gonzalez, the first President of the University of the Philippines during the Spanish times called the *Universidad Literaria Y Cultura de Filipinas*. Source: Elsie Diaz

Since then, other members of the Gonzalez family have spread and become popular with their own achievements (Figure 5). The Gonzalezes story is related to the provenance of the Municipal Museum of Baliwag. In fact, the National Historical Institute placed a historical marker on one of the compounds of Gonzalez, across Baliwag Municipal Museum recognizing his contribution to the country. But since Dr. Joaquin Gonzalez was never a national hero, this fact has not been given as much notice. As far as Baliwag, Bulacan is concerned, Dr. Joaquin Gonzalez ranks next to Mariano Ponce as the second most illustrious revolutionary figure the town of Baliwag has ever produced. However, their genealogy needs to be further studied.



Figure 5. Luminaries of Gonzalezes (L-R: Dr. Joaquin Gonzalez; Dr. Vicki Bello [prominent dermatologist]; Br. Andrew Gonzalez, FSC [former secretary of education]; Ryan Aguncillo [prominent celebrity])

2. Existing Parts of the Structure

The architectural structure of the museum is a typical *bahay na bato* which consists of a ground floor with stone walls and an upper floor with wood structure (Ogura, Yap, & Tanoue, 2002). Some parts of the house are still evident. However, the partition for each room and other parts were modified from its original form and layout since it was used as *Municipio* of the town¹. This implied that the interior divisions of the museum were altered from being ancestral stone house. The entire building is being used venue for several tourism activities. The ground floor area is used as tourism office. Some of the portions particularly the stone arches are being used as storage rooms.

A. Second Floor

The second floor of the museum has wide space before its modified rooms. The living area is in the upper floor, which contains a large central space (Ogura, Yap, & Tanoue, 2002).

Flooring. Among the parts of the structure, majority of the flooring and ceiling are still intact but some of it are deteriorating (Figure 6). The entire wooden flooring of the second floor is made of floorboards (*tabla*). The furnished floorboard structure is made of wooden planks. A portion of the house has a flooring made of floor tiles (*baldosa*) with checkered design of black and white (Figure 7).



Figure 6. Wooden flooring. Source: Tolentino, R.P.G.



Figure 7. Portion of the flooring made of *Baldosa*. Source: Tolentino, R.P.G.

B. Ground Floor

Balon. The source of water is no longer evident in the interior of the structure. However, the only indication of this portion is the presence of huge pulley attached into a window brim. The huge pulley (Figure 8.) was used to transport water from a well to the dish washing area and kitchen.



Figure 8. Huge pulley attached to the window brim. Source: Tolentino, R.P.G

It is noticeable a well attached at the rear side of the house below the huge pulley. This portion of the house indicates the location of the *cocina* and *bangguera*. The details of a typical *bahay na bato* was described by National Commission for Culture and the Arts (2015) in which the window of *cocina* has a *balon* used for water supply. The *balon* (Figure 9) is no longer functional because it is filled with sand and other scrap. The only recognizable part of the *balon* is the semi-circle mounted to the wall of the house and the huge pulley above it.



Figure 9. The rear of the structure with *Balon*. Source: Tolentino, R.P.G.

Arch rooms. The ground level of the Baliwag Municipal Museum consists of several arch rooms of different sizes and height. The construction technique used in stone arches was *de silleria* masonry (Huerta, 1855; Lizama, 2016).

It is a type of stone technology adapted from the Spanish building method using large four rectangular hard-cut stones and mortar (Lizama, 2016). Some of the arches were enclosed with hollow blocks and converted into a storeroom (Figure 10). It is evident that the ground level, particularly the arches, has been treated as storeroom for scraps and other material that are no longer needed for the Museum.



Figure 10. Arch room turned into *bodega*



Figure 11. Lowered arch room. Source: Tolentino, R.P.G.

Some arches have a doorway height, while the others have a lowered opening. The opening of lowered arch rooms has marks indicating that the stones were drilled (Figure 11). On the hand, some house features are still recognizable. It is evident that part of the stone features is dilapidated.

The Ornaments and Designs

The composition of the Baliwag Municipal Museum is still strongly carved and detailed on the walls, pillars and other details of the structure. On the other hand, there are features of the house which were modified through times resulting to defy its original characteristics.

The composition of ornaments in the Baliwag Municipal Museum portray numerous significant designs. The ornaments include geometrical figures such as arrow, circles, spiral, gear, hearts, and other symbolic figures.



Figure 12. Ornament on the Main Door (Second Floor)

The main door panel has a remarkable two-headed bird emblem and a sun rays carved on its panel (Figure 12). The double-headed bird has been a royal symbol throughout its history until today (Deeds, 1935).

Since then, the history of using the double-headed bird has been well documented in various contexts. It has been used as a heraldic emblem of many royal houses and is still a symbol of the state in some countries (Chariton, 2011). The two-headed bird has an unidentified figure above its heads that looks like initials (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Unidentified figure above the heads of the two-headed eagle. (Source: Tolentino, R.P.G.)

For example, the two-headed bird emblem is comparable with the many ornaments inside the San Agustin Church and Museum in Intramuros, Manila. The emblem signifies the official crest of the Order since they came to Manila from Cebu in 1571.

Other ornaments found in the San Agustin Church with the symbol two-headed bird such as: lectern found in the main altar of the chapel; liturgical vestment of the Augustinian friar found in the museum; and the liturgical chair (Figure 14), are also similar to the two-headed bird found in the Baliwag Municipal Museum.



**Figure 14. Liturgical Chair with Augustinian Emblem (c. 1700).
(Source: Tolentino, R.P.G.)**

The astonishing part of the two-headed bird is its centerpiece (Figure 15). The centerpiece is a cross-like image in a circular frame is a symbol of Cross of the Templar Cirlot, (1971).



**Figure 15. Left to right (centerpiece of two-headed bird; symbol of the templar).
Source: Tolentino, R.P.G.)**

Inside the Baliwag Museum, an eye-catching and remarkable heart-shaped artwork is etched on the doorway in the second floor (Figure 16). It is noticeable that the doorway carvings are similar to the *trompe l'oeil* (Figure 17) painting on the ceiling of San Agustin Church in Intramuros, Manila.



Figure 16. Wood curving on the doorway. Source: Tolentino, R.P.G.)



Figure 17. San Agustin Church *trompe l'oeil*. Source: Tolentino, R.P.G.

At a first glimpse, the geometrical figure is just a complicated structural design consists of circles, arrows and curves found in the Baliwag Museum. The structural designs of the interior beam have resemblance to most of the geometrical symbols like circles, arrows, spirals and flowers. At the closer look, the centerpiece of the beam (Figure 18) ensembles a two-headed bird which is similar to the crest deeply carved on one panel of the main door.



Figure 18. Centerpiece of the beam. Source: Tolentino, R.P.G.



Figure 19. Wooden pillar. Source: Tolentino, R.P.G.



Figure 21a. Vicinity Map

However, an aerial shot was made to expose the present property line of the Baliwag Municipal Museum and the boundary of Gonzalez’s property through a vicinity map, based on the data given by the existing elders of Gonzalezes (Figure 21a-b). The map shows that the compound of the cultural property is not maintained because it is being used by some vendors, as basketball court, and parking area for delivery vans.

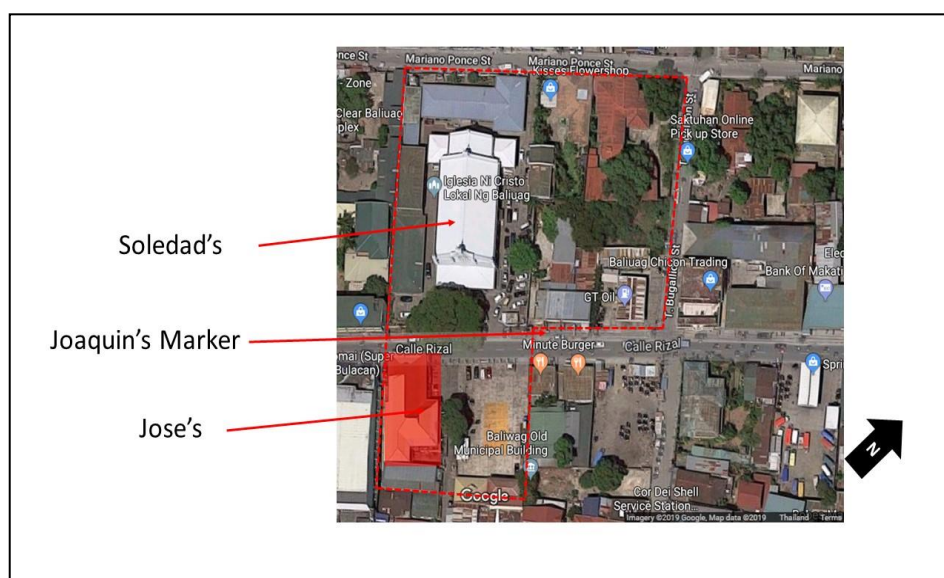


Figure 21b. Vicinity Map (Mariquita Gonzalez’s Property, c.1850)

Discussion

The initial historical and archaeological exploration of Baliwag Municipal Museum indicates that the structure was formerly owned by the Gonzalez. The municipal museum curator as well as the Gonzalez elders validated that there is no existing of an old vicinity map and floor plan of the original structure of the museum as reference.

Only some random pictures of the museum are traceable on written literature of Baliwag emphasizing that the museum was an old municipal hall. The local government of Baliwag had their first attempt to restore the exterior part of the museum but failed to achieve the original color which brought a great confusion to the local community because of the outcome color. More so, the *stone* portion of the Baliwag Municipal Museum found set aside and least prioritized of restoration and conservation. It is noticeable that portion of the ground level are dumped with garbage and scrap of woods and other unnecessary junk. However, the local government of Baliwag has a plan to reconstruct the structure as the second phase of the initial restoration.

It is also noticeable that some parts of the museum were removed and modified for aesthetic and tourism purposes under the supervision and management of the local government unit of the town. Baliwag tourism management remains the museum's caretaker through the curator. Outside and inside the museum compound, vendors and public basketball court contribute noise, confusion and irresponsible littering around the area.

Recommendations

For future reconstruction and conservation of the Baliwag Municipal Museum, it is quite commendable to reconsider the early history of the structure including the early occupant – Gonzalezes, to understand the evolution of the structure. Recognize the Baliwag Municipal Museum as "Gonzalez House", not only as "Lumang Munisipyo" to give significant historical value of the house as the former property of Gonzalezes of Baliwag. Genealogy of Gonzalez clan is also recommended to add the socio-demographic profile of the Gonzalez House, a.k.a. Baliwag Municipal Museum.

Regular monitoring by the National Museum property division to maintain the physical condition of the structure since it has been recognized as Important Cultural Property. It is also recommended to have archeological excavation which may help to trace other existing structures related to the properties of Gonzalez. Application of Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) and Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) prior to the excavation is also encouraged. Coordination with the LGU and residents should be considered in every undertaking because the place to be excavated and explored is surrounded by a residential area.

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1. Interview with Ms. Susie Villanueva
2. Interview with Msgr. Tom Gonzalez
3. Interview with Ms. Maria "Elsie" Gonzalez Diaz
4. Interview with Ditaz Gonzalez

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