
Document 1667D

The story of the statue of Our Lady of Conception which Fr. Sanvitores took to Guam

Extract from Fr. García's biography of Fr. Sanvitores.

...
[In 1671] the church and residence were surrounded by a stockade of tree [trunks] and branches. On the side toward the sea, on a point overlooking the beach, a tower was raised, which Fr. Sanvitores named *Castillo de Santa María y Santiago* [Castle of St. Mary and St. James], placing in it that which was to serve as *Castellana* [Warden] and guard of the castle, a **Statue of the Immaculate Conception**, blessed by the Archbishop [of Manila], which he had brought from Manila. He also placed there the gun that was salvaged from the **Concepción** [shipwreck].

On the side toward the mountain another tower was built, and was called *Castillo de San Francisco Xavier* [Castle of St. Francis Xavier], where the gun was placed which remained from the shipwreck [sic] that had cast Choco on these shores, the man who was the origin of all these wars and persecutions.¹

The soldiers, of whom there were 31 (12 Spaniards and 19 Filipinos) were assigned to their posts. They were armed, some with bows and arrows, others with firearms.

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1 Ed. note: As for Choco's champan, it was not shipwrecked but arrived in distress, perhaps at Saipan (where Choco had relatives). At least one gun remained behind when the ship left. Choco simply deserted, because he had killed one of his countrymen and feared execution. The so-called gun must have been something small if it was taken from Saipan to Guam by canoe, the same as the other gun from the galleon **Concepción** which was just a blunderbus. Soon after the building of the first camp, in September 1671 in fact, a severe typhoon destroyed the original church and residence, but the images were saved from destruction. Both the statue of St. Francis Xavier and the statue of the Virgin seem to have been moved to the church at some time before the typhoon.

Editorial comments.

The editor of the Guam Recorder says that the statue in question was believed (in 1938) to be the one that was then in the church at Sumay and had been renamed the Virgin of Guadalupe. It had been placed in the church at Pago in 1680 and was then called *Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción*; it remained in Pago for 70 years and when that village was swept by smallpox, which wiped out most of its population, the few remaining survivors fled the locality, taking with them the statue of the Virgin. A few of them settled in Agaña, others in Sumay, whither, possibly, they carried the statue. The following is a translation of a document which was in the archives of the Society of Jesus in Manila in 1938, and was loaned for the purpose of throwing some light on the matter.

Dedication of a statue of Our Lady, dated Manila 16 May 1667

Sources: Manuscript that was in the archives of the Society of Jesus in Manila; translated and published in the Guam Recorder, March 1938, pp. 12-13.

In the City of Manila, on the 16th day of the month of July 1667, His Illustrious Lordship, Don Manuel Poblete, being Metropolitan Archbishop of the Philippines, in the Pontifical vestments and having just said mass, there being on the altar of his oratory a statue of Our Lady, more than a yard in height, dressed in white with a blue mantle, with face and hands of ivory, [he] did bless this image with the title Our Lady of Conception, and granted 40 days indulgence to all the faithful who venerated or prayed before said Image, which Father Diego Luis de Sanvitores will soon carry to the Islands of the Ladrones, where he goes on a Mission and the conversion of those souls, with the help of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin and in the name of the Holy Trinity.

To all of which I, the Secretary, have been present at the above-mentioned blessing, and to which I am a witness.

Fr. Francisco de Velasco, Secretary.