

HISTORICAL DATA OF THE PARISH TEMPLE OF SAINT JOSEPH.

The construction of this temple, whose plans were sent by the Count of Oropesa, began in 1691. In 1702, the architect Toribio Martínez de la Vega, settled in Murcia and took charge of the works. The construction of the temple finished in 1712, the date in which it was consecrated by the Bishop Luis Belluga. In those times José Vives Ruiz was the priest of the town, Juan de Cereceda y Carrascosa was its commander and José Salar and José Lajara were the mayors of the council.

The temple is formed by one rectangular nave, with the exterior dimensions of 40.80 metres long by 18.50 metres wide, with barrel vaults in a Latin cross and lateral arcade, where the chapels are placed. The crossing is crowned by the semispherical dome. Its internal frieze is bordered by the emblem of the Order of Calatrava, under whose administrative jurisdiction was the town until 1873. Its architectural style is fitted in the Murcian sober baroque.

The temple underwent damage in 1936. The church windows were originally made of alabaster. The stained glass windows were placed here in 1998. They were made by VIART workshop. After the last restoration in 1998, the temple was declared BIC (Bien de Interés Cultural; Good of Cultural Interest) in 2009, under the category of Historic Monument.

1. PRESBYTERY

The altarpiece is a work of Jacinto and Antonio Perales, sculptors from Orihuela, between 1723 and 1762. From the original figures, only Archangels Saint Gabriel and Saint Raphael are kept, as well as the Immaculate Conception. They were placed in the upper part. Saint Michael, the Guardian Angel, Saint Fulgentius and Saint Benedict are works by Nicolás Martínez in 1957. The sculptor Ramón Cuenca carved Saint Joseph. In the year 2004 this figure replaced the one made in 1941, which is now in Saint Anne Hermitage. The blazon placed over the niche of Saint Joseph probably belonged to the council, in the 18th century. The altarpiece in Saint Michael Church, in Murcia, is similar to this one. Both altarpieces were made by the same sculptors. The High Altar and the showcase, located at the foot of the altarpiece, were made in the decade 1940. The tabernacle, restored in 1998, was made in 1950. Antonio Llopis painted the paintings of the vault and the sides in 1757. The pictures of the evangelists on the pendentives were placed here in 2007. The ambon and the current altar, to celebrate facing the parishioners, are works by José Félez Bernard and they were consecrated on the 17th of November 2012, due to the celebration of the third centenary of the Church.

2. ALTAR OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS.

This altar was made by Anastasio Martínez in the decade 1950; however, its existence dates from 1719, like the altar of Saint Francis. The current figures of the Immaculate Conception, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Saint Francis and the Christ in Repose, which are all made of plaster, are from the 1940's.

3. OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY CHAPEL.

This chapel is a work made by Anastasio Martínez in the decade 1950, although its existence dates from 1719. The current figure, work by an unknown sculptor, was also made in this decade. The painting of Saint Dominic de Guzman in the upper part is a work of Salvador Riquelme Sánchez, a painter from Abanilla.

4. SAINT ANTHONY AND OUR LADY OF THE ASSUMPTION CHAPEL.

It is the most distant reference that has appeared in the 19th century. The current scene and its figures, made of plaster, are from the decade of 1940. The altar table is a remodel of the throne of Our Lady of the Assumption, which took part in processions until 1960.

5. OUR LADY OF SORROWS CHAPEL

The existence of this chapel dates from the 18th century, with a clothed sculpture by el sculptor Roque López. The figure, which measures seven hands and four fingers high, was carved in 1790 and destroyed in 1936. The current scene is from the decade of 1940 and Our Lady of Sorrows by José Sánchez Lozano, a clothed sculpture as well, with only one foot, comes from the previous one. Saint Cecilia and Saint Lucy are placed in the lateral niches. The carved image of the Crucified Christ, by an unknown author, was made at the end of the decade of 1950.

6. THE TOWER, THE BELLS AND THE CLOCK.

The tower has four sections and its topographic height is 223 metres above sea level. Its coordinates are 38° 12' 28" North and 1° 2' 33" West, based on Greenwich meridian. The biggest bell, which is located to the North side, was casted in 1862 by Jaime and Vicente Roses and is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. This bell was the only one which was not destroyed in 1936 because it marks the hours. The bell located to the South side was casted in 2000, because of the breakage of the bell which had been there since 1941. The bell placed to the East side, similar to the South one, although with a bigger diameter, was casted in 1941 by Juan Bautista Roses. Our Lady of the Pillar and the Cross of Saint James are engraved on it. The bell located to the West side was casted in 1986 by Hijo de Manuel Rosas and is dedicated to the Saint Cross. Although the first clock had been placed here in 1792, in 1929 another clock, with illuminated faces, was installed. Nowadays it does not work with weights but with an electric engine. The forge structure that crowns the tower was put with the new clock in order to hold the carillon which marks the quarters of an hour.

7. GATE AND BLAZON

The gate of the main entrance, the original from the temple, has the peculiarity that its two hundred and thirty- eight carved and golden decorations are very varied. Although they are similar, they are not the same. The marble blazon placed on the floor might belong to the commander don Juan de Cereceda y Carrascosa. The date 1712 refers to the consecration of the temple. The gate of the eastern entrance was placed here in 1998. There is no evidence of a previous gate in the same place.

8. BAPTISMAL FONT, COLUMN AND CHOIR.

There is a column made of marble from Macael above the baptismal font. The column, carved by Juan Sansuí, is twin of other columns which were made in order to be placed in the cloister of Santo Domingo school in Orihuela. However, this cloister was not made. Because of the alarm caused by the earthquake of Lisbon and due to fear of the collapse of the arch which holds the choir, this column was placed here in 1763. There was an organ in the choir until 1936; however we do not have references to its characteristics. The painting hanging on the front wall, which is a work of Salvador Riquelme Sánchez, alludes to the apparition of the Saint Cross in Mahoya.

9. BAPTISTERY.

The baptismal font is the original from the temple. The current floor is formed by the stones and blazons of the burials in the crypt of the temple. This crypt was covered in 1974. The vertical stone, where the Saint Cross is carved, refers to a death because of an accident and it possibly dates from the 19th century. This stone was previously placed in the old Barinas road, in the spot of Mascosa. The pictures, alluding to the Saint Cross pilgrimage on the 3rd of May, were painted by A. Cano and M. Lax in the decade of 1970. The banner of the Saint Cross brotherhood is from 1945.

There are more figures placed in the baptistery although on a provisional basis: The Risen Christ is a work of the sculptor Valentín García Quinto (2003); the Glorious and Blessed Virgin, by José Antonio Hernández (2006) and Our Lady of Sorrows (Virgen de la Amargura), by Juan José Páez (2011). From 1939 to 1943 the monstrance of the "Lignum Crucis" was located above the Byzantine style crucifix displayed in a painting.

10. OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP CHAPEL.

This chapel was placed here in 1960. The scene, the icon of the Virgin and the figures of Saint Gerard and Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, on both sides of the main painting, as well as Our Lady of the Pillar on the marble base, is from the 1940's. It is stated that there was a figure of Our Lady of the Pillar in the old parish of Saint Benedict. This parish, located in the Lugar Alto, was demolished in the middle of the 19th century. The devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help dates back to the priest don José Vives, the parish priest from 1689 to 1728.

11. BLESSED SOULS OF THE PURGATORY CHAPEL.

Its existence dates from 1719. The Soul Brotherhood was established in this parish in 1729. In 1776 the first altarpiece was placed. It was the work of the sculptor Francisco Ganga and it contained the painting of the Souls. In 1936 the altarpiece was destroyed, but the painting was recovered and then restored by Salvador Riquelme Sánchez in 1939 and in 1981. The current altarpiece and Our Lady of Mount Carmel are from the 1940's.

12. SAINT CROSS ALTAR.

Since the middle of the 18th century there has been evidence of its existence. The current altar, made by Anastasio Martínez, is from the 1950's. Our Lady of Solitude and Christ the Nazarene are works of the sculptor José Sánchez Lozano. Saint John the Baptist is a work of José Lozano Roca. The reliquary of the Saint Cross, made in 1994, is kept in the tabernacle. The previous reliquary was confiscated and its location is unknown. The tabernacle and the reliquary are works made by the goldsmith workshop "Plata Meneses".

13. SAINTLY CROSS CHAPEL.

This chapel was previously the chapel of the Holy Sacrament, but in 1966 it was prepared for the Saintly Cross. The grille door (1886) was enlarged and restored in 1979 in the workshop of Vicente Riquelme Sánchez, "El Conde". Thanks to a permanent showcase, placed here in 1996 and made by the sculptor José Félez Bernad, the reliquary can be constantly venerated. This reliquary in a Latin cross and fleur-de-lis shape has got gems and enamels referring to the festivity. The reliquary contains in its centre a capsule, called monstrance, closed by a transparent glass. In its interior, the reliquary contains two little crossed splinters- "Lignum Crucis"- of the Saintly Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ. These splinters were taken out from a piece kept in Rome, in the Saint Cross of Jerusalem Church. The "Lignum Crucis" was sent by the Vatican to the bishopric in July 1939. It arrived in Abanilla on the 24th of September in the same year, with its certificate of authenticity, shown in this chapel. In 2001 the town council gave it the honorary appointment of life mayoress, "Alcaldesa Perpetua".

14. SACRISTY

The painting of the Crucified Christ and Saint John might be a work of the painter Lorenzo Villa, from the 18th century. Don Antonio Rocamora Atienza, from Abanilla, owned this painting, which was donated by his heirs. The figure of the Sacred Heart is a work by José Sánchez Lozano. The throne of the Saint Cross, whose style is Neo- Gothic, was made by the goldsmith workshop "Plata Meneses" in 1943.

15. BURIAL CRYPTS.

There are three burial crypts below the surface, covered in 1974 when the original stone floor was replaced by the current floor, made of marble. There is a burial crypt in the central nave and two more in the sides of the transept. Clergymen and some benefactors of the temple, whose stones and blazons are located on the baptistery floor, were buried in these crypts. The priest don José Vives Ruiz was the first priest to be buried here (1728) and the last one was Francisco Bernal Yagües (1914). The rest of the clergymen and other people buried in the old church of Saint

Benedict were moved here, after the demolition of this parish, which happened in the middle of the 19th century.

ANNIVERSARIES OF MAJOR EVENTS

- Fray Andrew Ferrer de Baldecebro, from the Order of Preachers, points out that in the year 1411 Saint Vincent Ferrer preached in the towns of Abanilla and Fortuna, when they belonged to the Moors. All who heard him were converted.
- In 1504, the first parish church dedicated to Saint Benedict was opened in the Lugar Alto. Now, the monument to the Sacred Heart, which was erected in 1946, is placed there.
- In this town, the festivities of Moors and Christians were already held in 1598, in honour of Saint Roch, whose hermitage was blessed by the bishop don Esteban Almeida in 1561. In this hermitage, devoted to Saint Sebastian and Saint Roch, there was also an altar to San Anthony the Great. However, the hermitage, located in the place currently known as “el Paseo de la Ermita”, was dismantled and demolished in 1967.
- In the year 1566, the council and private individuals of the town agreed to celebrate the festivity of Saint Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary, whose hermitage is still preserved.
- The festivity in honour of the Saint Cross of May is documented since the 18th century. This celebration is accompanied by a procession, the rite of the Cross bath in the water of the dyke in Mahoya, music and soldiery (salutes of the harquebuses and the flag rolling: captains, pages and harquebusiers). In the 19th century, according to Pascual Madoz’s dictionary, this is the most solemn festivity celebrated in this town. People of neighboring towns came “with the clamour of blunderbusses”.
- The holy cards of “The Saintly and Miraculous Cross”, which is venerated in the parish church of Saint Joseph in the town of Abanilla, are preserved since the 19th century. It is stated that granting of indulgence is given to the faithful who devoutly pray a Lord’s Prayer, Hail Mary, Gloria Patri, in front of this Saintly Cross.

FOOTNOTE: In the sacristy there are copies of the book “ABANILLA, HISTORIA DE SU PARROQUIA” (“ABANILLA, HISTORY OF ITS PARISH”), published in 2003, written by Manuel Gil Martínez; Pedro L. Gaona Rocamora; Eugenio Marco Tristán; Antonio Martínez Ramírez; Salvador Riquelme Sánchez and Juan M. San Nicolás Sánchez. ISBN-84-607-7349-3. Legal deposit MU-1634-2003.

The summary of the data and references have been made by E. Marco.
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