

The *Tulay Na Bato* Chapel: Its History and Significance

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between religion and culture is strong in Filipino communities, and local chapels, in addition to being places of worship, are also spaces of identity, memory, and community life. Despite their significance, many community-based chapels remain undocumented and vulnerable to the gradual loss of historical and cultural memory. The present study examined the historical evolution, devotional activities and its role in the sense of community belonging of the Tulay na Bato Chapel in Basud, Camarines Norte, and proposed the heritage material for its preservation. The study used a historical qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews conducted with seven purposely selected participants:

chapel caretakers, devotees, churchgoers, vendors, and local elders. Themes were identified from the collected narratives and oral histories and analysed using thematic analysis to identify the historical, devotional, cultural and communal significance of the chapel. The results showed that the Tulay na Bato Chapel was established in 1938 after the discovery of Poong Nazareno and a visionary dream to build the chapel on the ancestral land of the Rosalinas family. The chapel evolved from a nipa framework to a concrete devotional space, with the support of the community, donations and the volunteer work of members. The chapel was associated over time with healing, miracles, answered prayers, spiritual intervention and drew more and more visitors to the local community, thus enriching the faith of the people and deepening their participation in devotional activities like the Friday Masses, novenas, *panata*, healing prayers, and thanksgiving offerings. The study also found that the chapel is not just a place of worship but also a socio-religious and cultural hub that fosters social engagement, local business, a sense of community, and a sense of belongingness for the faithful, both in and outside of Basud. The findings also revealed that the cultural memory of the chapel is largely oral and inter-generational, and subject to gradual loss. This study concludes that the Tulay na Bato Chapel is not just a place of worship, but a living cultural heritage, which is a symbol of faith, unity, collective memory, and community identity. The study recommended the development of an Aklat-Pamana, entitled: *Ang Tulay na Bato Chapel: Kasaysayan, Debosyon, at Pamayanan* to preserve and promote the historical and cultural importance for future generations.

Keywords: *The Tulay na Bato Chapel, devotional practices, community belonging, local history, cultural heritage, Basud, Camarines Norte*

INTRODUCTION

Religion in the Philippines has long been intertwined with everyday life, community memory, and local culture. The presence of religion in the Philippines has always been a part of everyday life, community memory, and culture. However, in Filipino communities, faith is not limited to institutional churches or formal religious practices, but is lived, experienced, shared, and celebrated through rituals, devotional traditions, and sacred spaces that become a part of everyday life. This phenomenon is called Filipino folk

religiosity by Macaranas (2021): Religion is not only transmitted through teaching and learning, but also through expressions of devotion in the community, which are influenced by culture, memory, and experience. The chapels, roadside shrines, and local devotional spaces are more than spaces in this context. They are sites where identities, spirituality, and community live together.

In the Bicol Region, Catholicism has played a significant role in the historical and cultural development of local communities. Religious practices are deeply ingrained in the lives of people in Basud and surrounding municipalities, especially those engaged in agriculture and fishing; where religion is a way of life, it can also be a source of strength when living in a time of economic insecurity and social distress. Past research on religious buildings in Camarines Norte has tended to be on the major colonial churches and parish institutions, due to their architectural and historical value (Quinito & Tino, 2024). These studies have been very significant in documenting formal religious heritage in the province. Nonetheless, smaller devotional places and community chapels, which remain very relevant to local spiritual life, have been comparatively understudied.

One example is the Tulay na Bato Chapel located in Basud, Camarines Norte. Private and modest, the chapel has slowly emerged as a significant religious hub for the people of Basud and other surrounding towns. Prayers are regularly made at the site, *panata* is performed, masses are held on Fridays in honor of the Black Nazarene, and spiritual healing is sought. Antecedent to this, there have been numerous oral testimonies and stories about answered prayers, healing, and miracles over the years that have been shared with the community. These stories are passed down and retold among the devout and caretakers, reinforcing the chapel's significance as a sacred and meaningful space in the community.

The significance of small devotional areas like the Tulay na Bato Chapel is indicative of an overall development of devotionalism in the Philippines. Llana (2021) pointed out that the vernacular religious practices in the Philippines are not merely institutional religious practices but are also grounded in local experiences of religion. Likewise, Reyes (2022) contended that popular devotions, especially those surrounding the Black Nazarene, are expressions of both individual and community culture. This work illustrates how common Filipinos create meaning and a sense of belonging through joint religious involvement. In many instances, however, devotion is maintained beyond the formal structures of the church through the daily life of communities, families, and individuals.

Religious spaces can also be related symbolically to memory and emotional connection. Halbwachs (1950) described collective memory as a socially constructed and socially maintained memory, made possible by collective experiences, rituals, and narratives. Miracles, sacrifice, and communal worship are etched into the physical location itself in local religious contexts. As time goes on, these common experiences further cement the emotional connection between people and place. Additionally, meaningful places can be extensions of personal or group identity when used frequently and/or emotionally invested in by the user (Scannell and Gifford 2010). Devotional activities like the novenas, the lighting of candles and the observance of Fridays within the context of the Tulay na Bato Chapel have an impact not only in the devout practice of the faithful but also in preserving the sense of community identity and belongingness.

Existing literature further suggests that religious structures evolve not solely through institutional planning but through continuous community participation and shared stewardship. According to Evangelista (2021), the village chapels in the Philippines grew organically from simple structures to permanent buildings by a shared effort of collective labor, contributions and consistent acts of devotion. Community involvement is another key element in the preservation of heritage value, especially in religious institutions like temples and churches where formal records are not extensive, particularly for those in remote areas (Ravina et al., 2018). In many rural areas, oral history and personal accounts are the most prevalent way of passing down information about a community's past from one generation to the next. Dulay et al. (2022) noted that Filipinos maintain historical memory not just through historical archives written in books but also through the process of storytelling, commemorative practices and communal memory.

While the study of Filipino religiosity, the study of heritage conservation, and religious tourism have been gaining momentum in recent years, existing research still has an exclusive focus on large churches, institutional religious history, and nationally recognized heritage sites for religious tourism. There has been far less study of small devotional centers that come into being within the community and that play an important part in the daily worship life of a congregation. Past research has dealt with the topics of religious identity, place attachment, and collective memory in isolation, but there is not much research that has investigated the interplay of these concepts in specific devotional contexts that are sustained by community involvement and the voice of the past. In case of the chapel of Tulay na Bato, there is little formal documentation on its origin, historical development, devotions and the formation of a community of believing worshippers.

This gap becomes more significant in light of ongoing modernization and cultural change. Local customs and culture change over time, and oral history is at risk when it is not documented; thus, traditions of the local community may vanish with the generations that remember them. The National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 (RA 10066) considers tangible and intangible heritage as integral parts of the nation's identity. Similarly, the Department of Education (2022) highlighted the need for the incorporation of local history and culture in educational settings so learners could have a historical awareness and cultural rootedness. These efforts serve to remind us that it is important to preserve local religious history not only for historic preservation, but for educational and cultural continuity as well.

In light of these, the present study involved a historical analysis of the development and evolution of the Tulay na Bato Chapel, Basud, Camarines Norte from the perspective of the community stories, devotional practices, and experiences that influenced the development of the Chapel. It also examined the contemporary role of the chapel in the devotional life of religious congregants and those who routinely engage in their religious life, and its role in establishing a sense of community belonging. In addition to creating documentation of experiences lived in the chapel, the study also attempted to produce documented resource material based on the study results that could help preserve local history, religious heritage and cultural memory within the community.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a historical research design to examine the Tulay na Bato Chapel in Basud and understand its origin, development, and continuing significance within the community. The design was deemed suitable because the study was not just to recreate the past events that took place around the chapel but to investigate how these events continue to influence the present religious experiences, devotional practices and collective memory of the people associated with the chapel. Historical research is frequently employed in research that aims to piece together and explain past events by drawing on records, oral history, and artifacts. This emphasizes the dynamic nature of historical events, rather than presenting history as it is, and invites historians to explore the ways in which experience is remembered, preserved, and given meaning over time. This became especially relevant in the present study as it is the case that the history of the chapel has been poorly recorded in any institutional archives, and is more commonly recorded informally within oral tradition, family stories, and devotional storytelling.

There were also aspects of ethnographic and narrative qualitative research that were evident in the research, particularly in the way that participants described their experiences and memories of the chapel. The narratives that devotees, caretakers and elders shared were often deeply personal and emotionally powerful, and frequently intertwined memory, faith and local lore. The study did not separate these stories from a social context but, rather, regarded them as part of the living history of the chapel. This enabled the research to not only obtain factually accurate memories of the origins and physical growth of the chapel,

but it also enabled the study to gain insight into the significance given to the chapel by the community over time. The study treated history as an ongoing product of participation in the Tulay na Bato Chapel, that it is still a devotional site. The dates, structures and history alone did not explain the significance of the chapel. It was through repeated acts of devotion, stories of healing, Friday observances and the ongoing engagement of those who thought of the chapel as part of their spiritual and communal life that its meaning came into being. In this context, the historical method allowed for freedom of interpretation in linking historical events to experiences in the present, without sacrificing the historical perspective.

Furthermore, the qualitative nature of this study enabled the participants to share their experiences in their own words and according to their personal perceptions of the chapel. The study used interviews and narrative accounts to examine the role of the chapel in the lives of the ordinary churchgoers, the devotees, the caretakers and the local elders and their understanding of the same. The study therefore did not just focus on the physical religious building, the Tulay na Bato Chapel, but also on a devotional space, remembering, participation, and collective faith. The use of historical qualitative inquiry allowed the historian to consider how the chapel developed over the years, and to consider why it continues to hold meaning for those who continue to support it.

Research Locale

This study was conducted at the Tulay na Bato Chapel located in the municipality of Basud, Province of Camarines Norte, Philippines. The chapel is located inside a private property but it is open to devotees, churchgoers, and guests from the Municipality and neighboring towns. The chapel's devotional atmosphere and the many testimonials of healing, answered prayers, and faith in the Poong Nazareno have made it popular among the local population, even though it is relatively small in size compared to other parish churches in the province. Basud is a coastal and agricultural Municipality in the First District of Camarines Norte. The agriculture, fishing, and transportation services are the primary means of livelihood of most residents and small-scale trading as well. This socio-cultural context has continued to make religion an important feature of many Basudeño lives, particularly in providing them with hope, comfort, and community in the face of the daily challenges.

The Tulay na Bato Chapel was selected because it is historically and culturally significant to the community. The chapel has slowly been transformed in the course of the years into a spiritual landmark that is visited by devout people of several municipalities. The monthly Friday Masses, novenas, candle offerings, and other devotional activities are always filling the church, and the very people who attend are also vendors and pilgrims, practicing their faith and engaging in various communal activities around the chapel. The locality is also important as a number of its stories are not recorded and are largely told through family memories, shared experiences and oral accounts. The chapel is therefore a suitable venue for an in-depth historical study, especially to gain insight into the processes of the development and maintenance of local faith communities, collective memory and community identity over time. In addition, the location of the site and the openness of the custodians and pilgrims to the study allowed the researcher to collect rich stories and first-hand accounts pertinent to the research objectives.

Sampling Technique

In the selection of the participants, this study used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is widely employed in qualitative research, where the researcher actively seeks out participants with knowledge, experiences, and involvement in the phenomenon being explored. This approach was deemed appropriate in the current study as the study aimed to explore the history and meaning of the Tulay na Bato Chapel based on the lived experience, memory, and narrative of people with close ties to the chapel. The participants were chosen according to the different specific conditions set by the researcher. These comprised churchgoers, and people who had long-standing commitments to the religious and communal activities of the chapel, such as devotees, vendors, local elders, and caretakers. Those who participated

regularly in the Friday Masses, novenas, devotional meetings and who had a significant understanding of the history, growth, tradition and function of the chapel were favored.

The use of purposive sampling allowed the researcher to collect in-depth and meaningful narratives from the participants who had first-hand experiences with the Tulay na Bato Chapel. Given the focus of the study on oral history, devotional practices and community feeling and belongingness, it was critical to select individuals who had primary knowledge of the historical, cultural and spiritual life of the chapel so that in-depth accounts could be obtained to contribute to an understanding of these aspects. Seven (7) participants were involved in the study. While there were relatively few participants, the number was deemed adequate as qualitative historical research aims to obtain depth and richness of information rather than quantity of respondents. The narratives and experiences of the participants brought insight into the origins and development of the chapel, devotional practices, and the ongoing importance of the chapel to the people of Basud and its devotees in the neighboring municipalities.

Table 1. *Distribution of Key Informants*

Key Informants	Number of Participants
Caretakers	2
Vendor	1
Community Elders	2
Churchgoers and Devotees	2
TOTAL	7

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Origin and Evolution of the Tulay na Bato Chapel in Basud, Camarines Norte

The results showed that the development and history of the Tulay na Bato Chapel was very much an act of faith, oral history, and communal engagement. The participants linked the origin of the chapel with the discovery of a Poong Nazareno image and a visionary dream to build the chapel. One participant recalled that one of Nazareno's small works was to be found in the chapel, "*Nakapulot sya ng maliit na poong Nazareno*" and "*Nanaginip sya na maggawa ng chapel*" (P1). The narratives suggest that the chapel was built more through the collective religious experience and the shared belief of the community than through formal institutional structures.

The study also revealed that stories about healing, answered prayers, and miraculous experiences strengthened the devotion towards the chapel and helped in the slow growth of the chapel. The chapel itself was seen as a place of healing and spiritual intervention, and it was described as a place where people could go to seek solace and comfort. The results are consistent with the findings of Macaranas (2021) wherein he was able to describe how lived spirituality, miracle stories, and collective devotional activities influence the religiosity of the Filipino people. Similarly, the oral testimony and intergenerational transmission of the history of the chapel, as part of its preservation, are based on the idea of collective memory developed by Maurice Halbwachs (1950).

The results also showed the way that the chapel developed both physically and socially over time as a result of the ongoing stewardship by the family and support from the community. The chapel, which at first was a small *nipa* structure, slowly evolved into a concrete devotional space by means of donations, dedication and active involvement from the devotes. The status of the chapel as a local devotional centre was also growing with religious activities moving from the informal novena prayers to regular Friday Masses. Quinito and Tino (2024) also found that local religious centres in the Philippines tend to emerge when there are a long-term engagement of community members and the development of their devotions.

Furthermore, the chapel was slowly adopted by the local community and its identity, as well as its social life. The word '*tulay na bato*' was used because it was a name given to the community due to its physical environment and the shared experiences of the community. The chapel also became, over time, a space where worship and social interaction with small economic activities intertwined. As more and more devotees, visitors, and vendors came to the chapel, its character extended beyond its function as a devotional structure to become a recognized cultural and communal landmark in Basud and the wider region.

Overall, the results indicate that the Tulay na Bato Chapel is an active cultural and religious asset characterized by its religious significance, collective memory, and community involvement. Its ongoing growth highlights the ongoing importance of local devotional sites as focal points of worship, but also as manifestations of local identity, collective memory, and community.

Significant Contributions of the Tulay na Bato Chapel to the Community

Devotional Practices

The results indicated that the Tulay na Bato Chapel still serves as an effective means to maintain devotional activity among the devotees and those attending church services. The thematic analysis resulted in four themes: Sustained Devotional Practice and Commitment, Panata and Votive Devotion, Prayer for Healing and Life Intentions, and Reciprocity and Religious Offerings. These themes together illustrate how the chapel is a space for living devotions, a space in which people's faith beliefs, personal spirituality and community-based religious practices are manifested and sustained.

The results indicated that the regular attendance of devotees at Friday Masses and novena prayers were part of their religious practices in the long term. Devotion to the chapel was frequently initiated within the family and was continued in the following generations, as evident in P2's statement, "*Mga 5 years old ako, sama-sama na ako dyan sa nanay ko kasi magdadasal.*" Several participants also mentioned that they used to visit the chapel regularly, even though they lived outside the locality, highlighting the spiritual importance of the chapel beyond Basud. The findings were supported by the explications by Sto. Domingo et al. (2020) and Macaranas (2021) that Filipino devotional practices are maintained through habitual worship, communal participation, and intergenerational transmission of faith.

The analysis also showed that the devotion by the *panata* or vows remained at the centre of devotional practices in the chapel. The fulfillment of prayers was connected with continuity, sacrifice, and devotion, especially for those who make their prayers for nine consecutive Fridays. Devotees highlighted commitment in the face of challenges, demonstrating deep emotional and spiritual connection to the chapel. The results corroborate the observations of Sto. It is found that Black Nazarene devotion in the Philippines is often manifested in perseverance, sacrifice, and repeated devotional practices that are grounded in personal spirituality and religious identity (Sto. Domingo et al. 2020; Reyes 2022).

The results also indicated that the chapel was a religious center for the believers to seek healing, means of livelihood, family-related issues, forgiveness, and guidance. Emotional comfort, healing, and divine intervention were linked to prayer in the chapel by the participants. "*Nag-ano din ako dyan para makapasa ako as teacher, nakapasa naman ako*" (P2) and "*Noong araw na yun mismo na operahan ako. Pero nagdasal ako dito*" (P6). The experiences show the way in which the chapel is used as a sanctuary and a source of spiritual comfort when people have problems and uncertainties in their lives. Capio and Reyes (2019) and Patwardhan and Ribeiro (2020) also discussed that emotional connection to sacred spaces is enhanced when there is the perception of healing, answered prayer, and spiritual experiences.

Further, the results showed that chapel devotions included reciprocity and offering of religious stuff. Devotees gave thanks for answered prayers by donating to the church, participating in prayer activities, volunteering their time and financial support for the maintenance of the chapel. The participants explained that the offerings were given to cover the cost of the electricity, water, candles, and other running costs of the chapel, reflecting a sense of responsibility among the members of the congregation. The results

corroborate the research of Macaranas (2021) and Besmonte (2020), both of which identified that in addition to praying, the expressions of religiousness among Filipinos can also be manifested in the expressions of giving and sharing, and actively maintaining sacred space.

Thus, the results indicated that the Tulay na Bato Chapel continues to play an important role in maintaining devotional practices and in nurturing the spiritual life of the devotees in general. The chapel remains a living, dynamic religious space, and continues to be a place for faith, tradition and community spirituality to be expressed and nurtured regularly through worship, panata, healing prayers and acts of gratitude.

Sense of Community Belonging

The results further demonstrated that the Tulay na Bato Chapel plays a significant role with regard to the sense of community belonging of the devotees and the residents. Themes emerged from the thematic analysis, including Shared Religious Space and Community Interaction, Sense of Belonging and Inclusivity, Chapel as Community Identity Marker, and Community Participation and Support. These themes show how the chapel is not just a house of prayer, but a socio-religious space that fosters community unity, sense of identity, and community engagement.

The findings exhibited that the chapel is a place for people to meet together for religious and social purposes and that it is a place for people to come together from different backgrounds to participate in a shared worship and living. Participants said that the chapel during Fridays was crowded, and that there is a rise in the number of devotees, visitors, and vendors in the area. The chapel promoted social and economic interaction, with vendors benefiting from the increasing crowds during devotional events. These findings indicate that the chapel has evolved into a socio-religious center where spiritual activities, social engagement, and livelihood intersect. Scannell and Gifford (2010), Besmonte (2020), and Macaranas (2021) had similarly noted that collective experiences and participation in shared religious spaces are factors that help to foster place attachment, social interaction, and community identity.

The study also found that the chapel is a place of emotional belonging and inclusivity for its members. For the participants the chapel was a place of comfort, peace and acceptance, irrespective of class and place of birth. One participant shared, "*Hindi ako taga-rito pero ito ang pinupuntahan ko*" (P6), the results indicate that one's attachment to the chapel is not only a function of physical location, but rather the nature of the spiritual experiences and the mutual participation in these experiences. The results are consistent with the studies of Obradović (2024) and Nguyen-Viet, and Nguyen (2023), who found that religious places enhance feelings of belonging and inclusiveness, offering emotional support, acceptance, and meaningful engagement.

The results also highlighted that the chapel is now a recognized symbol of community identity both within and outside the community of Basud. The participants noted that the Tulay na Bato Chapel is easily recognized in neighboring barangays and is related to the Black Nazarene's devotees. It became increasingly popular and served to strengthen the sense of community pride, memory, and local identity among the devoted and the inhabitants. The findings support the studies conducted by Scannell and Gifford (2010) and the SEAMEO SPAFA Conference Proceedings (2021), which emphasized the importance of religious heritage spaces as symbols of collective identity and shared cultural memory.

Finally, the results showed that the community's involvement and support are still vital to the maintenance of the chapel's significance in the community. During devotional activities, individuals involved in maintaining peace, order and the overall management of the chapel included devotees, family caretakers, barangay officials and chapel volunteers. Collective gatherings for religious purposes were mentioned, highlighting unity and shared responsibility. These results are in line with Ravina et al. (2018) and Besmonte (2020), who emphasized the need for collective stewardship and active involvement in safeguarding religious and cultural heritage places. By and large, the findings suggest that the strengths of the Tulay na Bato Chapel are seen as it promotes community belonging through shared worship, inclusivity,

a sense of community and community participation. The chapel is also a place for social gatherings and community life, with many people coming together to pray and to celebrate the holidays and other events. The chapel continues to be a place of spiritual devotion and community unity, where people can gather to pray, celebrate, and share in the festivities.

Developed Documented Material

The developed research output of the study is the *Aklat-Pamana* entitled “*Ang Tulay na Bato Chapel: Kasaysayan, Debosyon, at Pamayanan.*” It was designed in a simple, organized, and reader-friendly format accessible to students, educators, community members, and the general public. The material serves as a localized heritage resource that documents the history, devotional practices, and the significance of the Tulay na Bato Chapel in the municipality of Basud, province of Camarines Norte.

The *Aklat-Pamana* was deemed appropriate as the final output of the present study because it provides a permanent and accessible means of preserving local history, oral narratives, and religious traditions. It contains the documented history of the chapel, its physical development, healing narratives, devotional practices, and contributions to community identity and social interaction. Participant quotations and photographs were also included to present authentic community experiences and strengthen the material’s cultural value.

As an educational and cultural heritage material, the *Aklat-Pamana* may be utilized in local history, culture, religion, and values education. It also addresses one of the major findings of the study, which is the limited documentation of the chapel’s early history. Through this material, the stories, traditions, and collective memories associated with the chapel may be preserved and passed on to future generations.

In general, the *Aklat-Pamana* serves as a practical and feasible research output that promotes heritage preservation, cultural awareness, and the strengthening of local identity within the community.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study showed that the Tulay na Bato Chapel started out as a humble devotional home and evolved into an important religious, cultural and socio-community space, which was built around the idea of faith, oral tradition, and involvement. Through its history, sacred space is not protected only by physical buildings and institutions, but by lived spirituality, shared memory, volunteerism and ongoing stewardship of the community. The progressive shift from a nipa building to a site of devotion also conveys a healing narrative, mutual supportiveness, and shared devotion, all of which helps to maintain local religious traditions. The study also revealed that the oral history is vulnerable, however, and it is important to document and preserve the narratives and traditions of the chapel and how they are transmitted by orality.

The study also established that Tulay na Bato Chapel remains very important to the devotional practices of its devotees. Filipinos’ religiosity is experiential and community-oriented, as evidenced by practices like novena prayers, Masses on Friday, *panata*, healing prayers, and thanksgiving activities. There is increased devotion in the chapel as a result of repeated attendance, personal experience of God and felt intervention from God. Prior to the private ownership and informal arrangements, the sustained support, generosity, and active participation of devotees helped sustain and make it relevant a devotional center in Basud.

More so, results showed the great role played by the chapel in terms of community belonging, social cohesion and collective identity. The chapel is not only a place of worship, but it is also a socio-religious forum for people from other barangays and municipalities to congregate and share religious practices and experiences. As it becomes increasingly known as a religious landmark in the area, it helps to reinforce the cultural identity and collective memory of the community. The involvement of the caretakers, devotees, volunteers and the local officials further reinforce the unity, cooperation and sense of responsibility among the members of the community that the chapel brings.

The study, in general, posits that the Tulay na Bato Chapel is a devotional place but more than that is a living cultural heritage that continuously influences the spiritual, social and cultural life of the community. The stories, traditions, and practices that have been passed down through the ages make it a significant part of history and a community of its own; thus, its stories, traditions, and practices need to be preserved and documented in the proposed *Aklat-Pamana* so that the community's heritage will be meaningful and accessible to future generations.

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