THE CHURCH OF SAN CAYETANO DE LA VALENCIANA, GUANAJUATO, MEXICO: A STUDY OF ITS MEXICAN CHURRIGUERESQUE ARCHITECTURE AND DECORATION

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Pamela A. Quantz, B.F.A.

Denton, Texas

May, 1990

Quantz, Pamela A., The Church of San Cayetano de La Valenciana, Guanajuato, Mexico: A Study of Its Mexican Churrigueresque Architecture and Decoration. Master of Arts (Art History), May, 1990, 130 pp., 21 illustrations, bibliography, 58 titles.

This study is devoted to a critical examination of the architectural structure and sculpture of the church of San Cayetano de La Valenciana in Guanajuato, Mexico, concentrating on the ornamentation of the exterior portals and the interior altar retables. This paper traces the development of the Churrigueresque phase within the Baroque period of Mexican religous architecture and analyzes specific application of this style to the church of La Valenciana. Stylistic and iconographic components are discussed and a review of significant literature on this subject is included.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The appearance of the Baroque style in Mexican architecture has frequently been thought of as a mere transplantation of Spanish Baroque; however, the New World's interpretation of Baroque was a complex fusion of native and imported elements. European tastes and styles were carried to New Spain primarily by Spanish designers who traveled to the colonies with the viceregal representatives of the Spanish kings. By the eighteenth century, the Catholic Church was firmly established in Mexico and presented designers with the opportunity to construct and decorate churches in great quantity. As the European Baroque style was predominantly interpreted in religious architecture, the transference of this style to the newly constructed churches in Mexico was inevitable. Once in the New World, the essence of the Baroque was explored by Mexican artists and craftsmen with great inventiveness and creativity. The complexity of Baroque design and exuberance of decoration instantly appealed to the native love of pattern and imagery rich in shades of meaning--characteristics which were

analogous to the highly sculptural facades of the pre-Columbian civilizations.

The eighteenth century saw the culmination of the Baroque in New Spain in the effusive Churrigueresque phase. Named for the Spanish architect, José Churriguera (1650-1723), this style celebrated the love of lavish ornamentation and extensive use of decorative motifs. It was identified by the distinctive estípite, or inverted obelisk, used in place of a column or pilaster. Although Churriguera never traveled to the Americas himself, a derivation of his style was transported there by such notable Spanish designers as Jerónimo de Balbás (c.1670-c.1760). Scholars agree that the primary example of this style in the New World is the Altar of the Kings, which Balbás constructed from 1718 to 1737 in the Cathedral of Mexico City. From this central location, the Churrigueresque style spread throughout Mexico, with particularly extravagant examples in the mining regions north of Mexico City where the wealth of the silver mines supported this form of opulence.

Formal analysis of individual churches constructed in this style presents one of the greatest needs in the field of Latin American art and architecture. Research of this type provides the foundation for comparisons and information from which to draw conclusions of stylistic traits and interrelationships. One of the most misunderstood phases in

Mexican Baroque is the Churrigueresque. Clarification of this stylistic form and formal analysis of a Churrigueresque church will be presented in this paper.

The church selected for this study is San Cayetano de La Valenciana, located in the state of Guanajuato about 250 miles northwest of Mexico City and approximately three miles from the city of Guanajuato (Fig. 1). This church was constructed between 1765 and 1788, during the latter part of the Mexican Churrigueresque phase. Dedicated on August 7, 1788, the church of La Valenciana is still functioning as a parish church, although with a considerably smaller congregation, due to the reduction in population following the exhaustion of the silver mines in the nineteenth century. As in most colonial Mexican churches, the architect(s) and artists who worked here are unknown, possibly members of a workshop or guild, and probably from one of the larger cities in the state.[1]

Constructed of the local pinkish tezontle stone, La Valenciana bears the hallmarks of the Mexican Churrigueresque style: use of the estípite as the defining decorative element; the retable form of facade ornamentation; mudéjar, or Moorish-influenced, decorative motifs; and three massive gilt altar retables which are

---

[1]Armando Nicolau, Valenciana (México: Dirección de Monumentos Coloniales, Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, 1961), 13-14.

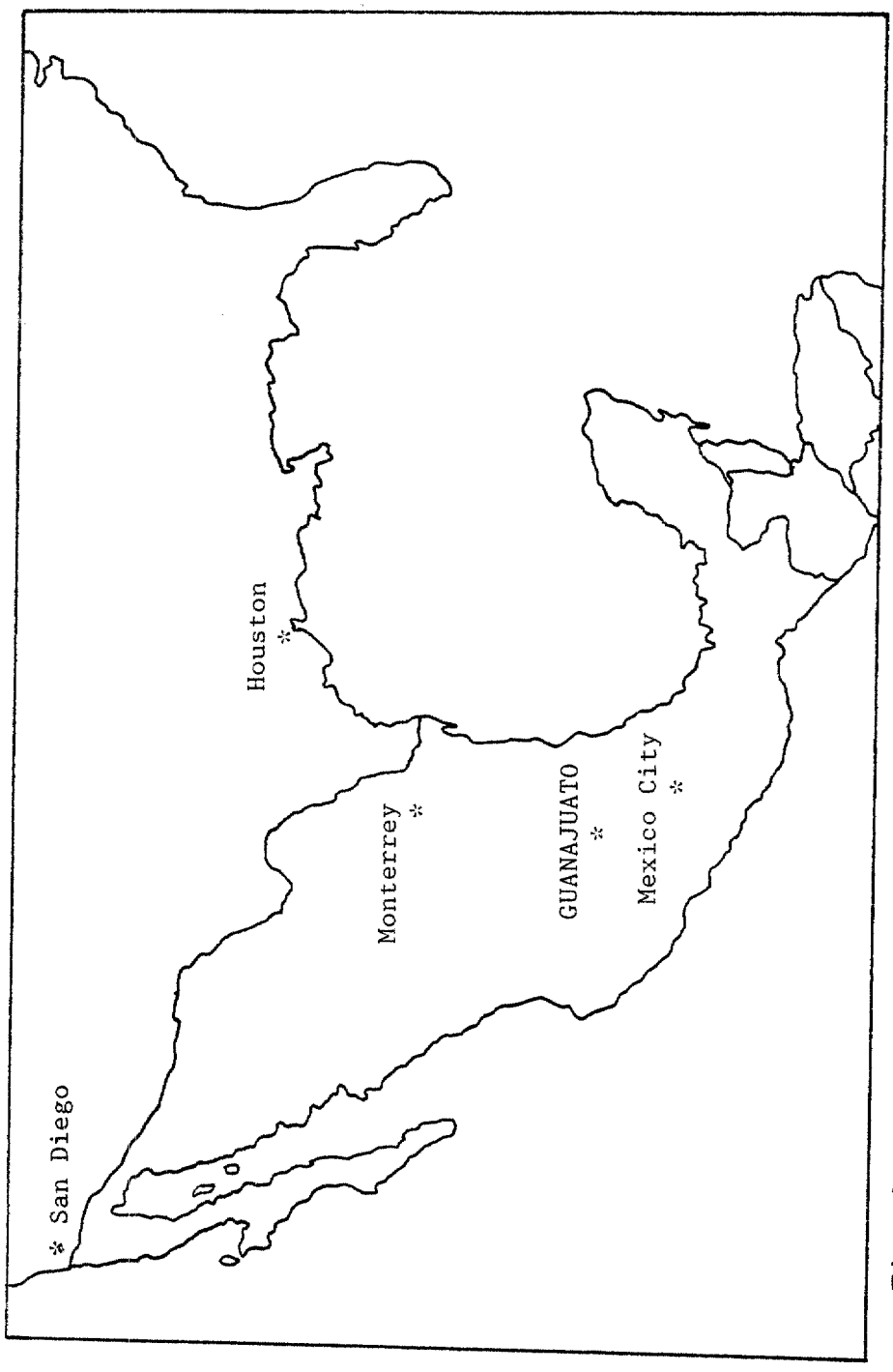

Fig. 1. Map of Mexico illustrating location of Guanajuato.

literally encased in polychromed figures of saints and angels.

Although several domed churches were constructed in the immediate area during the eighteenth century, La Valenciana displays some of the finest quality of workmanship and unity of design--truly a superb late-period example of the Mexican Churrigueresque style. While this structure does not carry the same importance as the great cathedrals of Mexico City, Taxco, or Puebla, it should not be overlooked, for it is a valuable illustration of a widespread style adapted to a specific region.

This paper was initiated by a broad interest in the interrelationship of structure and iconography in historical religious architecture. Living in the State of Texas and traveling into Mexico kindled a more specific interest in the Hispanic influence on architecture in the Americas. Selection of a building for intense study evolved over a period of about two years, which involved studying and photographing several structures during vacation trips.

Statement of the Problem

This study is devoted to a critical examination of the architectural structure and the sculpture of the church of San Cayetano de La Valenciana in Guanajuato, Mexico, concentrating on the exterior portal decoration and the interior altar retables. The primary objective is to

analyze the stylistic and iconographic components of this structure and attempt to place it in its historical context.

Review of the Literature

No thorough survey of the colonial period in Mexican architecture has been published to date. There remains a great need for basic documentation of many monuments (photographing, identifying, measuring, etc.) which is essential in light of the constant threat of vandalism, natural deterioration, and careless restoration before a structure can be studied.

The need for documentation of individual monuments in Mexico was recognized as early as the turn of the century when first attempts were made to collect and publish photographs of major architectural monuments. The scant text in these early works is insignificant, but the historic photographs can be quite useful. The following multi-volumed collections of plates are noteworthy: Spanish Colonial Architecture in Mexico by Sylvester Baxter, and Iglesias de México by Dr. Atl [Gerardo Murillo], Manuel Toussaint, and José R. Benitez. A photograph of La Valenciana is included in each of these collections.

Very little has been written specifically about the church of La Valenciana. Many scholars have included a brief description of this building in their general surveys of Mexican architecture. Typically, only a few paragraphs

of text and two or three black-and-white photographs are presented, with little or no structural analysis provided. No color photographs of this church are known to have been published. Important scholars who have included La Valenciana in their surveys of Mexican architecture include George Kubler and Martin S. Soria, Pál Kelemen, Joseph Baird, Jr., and Elizabeth Wilder Weismann.

In Mexico, two monographs of this church have been published, yet neither one addresses the aesthetic significance of the building nor provides a detailed formal analysis of structural or stylistic considerations. Of these two publications, Valenciana, by Antonio Cortés, is the more detailed. Cortés is an historian, but not an art historian; therefore, the book reflects this viewpoint. Published in 1933, his book includes historical information about the town of Guanajuato, the economy, the political situation, and the local mining industry, which made the construction of this church possible. The author has provided several black-and-white photographs (although most are too blurred and distant to provide details for study), an inaccurate floor plan, and descriptions of the church furniture, vestments, and altar implements.

Armando Nicolau's booklet, published in 1961 and also titled Valenciana, is a cursory overview of the building with blatantly plagarized passages from the earlier Cortés book. Nicolau's publication reproduces eighteen black-and-

white photographs and a slightly more detailed, although still inaccurate, floor plan.

Dealing with stylistic analysis presented one of the most challenging aspects of this study. Analytical approaches to Latin American architecture are still in a state of evolution, with various scholars vehemently contesting the choices of terminology, delimitations of stylistic eras, and stylistic components. Some of the most useful books for clarifying recent thinking in this field were Spanish Colonial Art and Architecture of Mexico and the U.S. Southwest by Mary Grizzard, Hispano-American Colonial Architecture by Sidney Markman, and several works by Joseph A. Baird, Jr.

There exists almost nothing on the topic of Mexican iconography. The only source book found was Gloria K. Gifford's Mexican Folk Retablos, which identifies popular saints and their attributes. Peripheral information on this subject was also gleaned from an exhibition catalog, Mexican Iconographic Art, with an essay by Reginald Fisher, and Juan Ferrando Roig's Iconografía de los santos, which identifies the Spanish saints. Two books dealing with the hispanic folk art of the New World also identify the Mexican iconography of the European Christian saints--Santos: The Religious Folk Art of New Mexico by Mitchell A. Wilder and Edgar Breitenbach, and Christian Images in Hispanic New Mexico by William Wroth. Standard hagiographical texts,

such as Alban Butler's Lives of the Saints, were also consulted.

Medium and technique are briefly discussed by Gloria Giffords in Mexican Folk Retablos, Pál Kelemen in Baroque and Rococo in Latin America, and Elizabeth Wilder Weismann in Mexico in Sculpture: 1521-1821, although this is another category of study which needs further research. Francisco Pacheco and Abelardo Carrillo y Gariel are the classic sources for detailed accounts of working methods of the artists in Spain and the Spanish colonies, respectively.

Methodology

Art historical research in the field of Latin American Baroque architecture remains a relatively new area when compared to the amount of published material which is available on European architecture of the same period. The lack of basic resource material available for study remains a serious obstruction to both the scholar and the student. Scarcity of archival material, difficulty of locating documents in the public domain, and the relatively small amount of published materials make research both restrictive and exhausting.

Several factors have contributed to the diminutive quantity of scholarly writing on this topic. First, and most unfortunate, is the lingering notion that non-European art and architecture is somehow inferior to that of

continental Europe. Standards of appraising art must be relevant to the work itself as well as the culture which produced it. Therefore, researchers in Latin American architecture have struggled to develop a new set of criteria for studying work which is a derivative of, but not a copy of, European models. Applying European standards to the New World is unreasonable, as it attempts to force an artistic canon on a society completely removed from the criterion's origins. Second, the difficulties involved in traveling to remote regions for firsthand observations and study are often prohibitive. Many areas still do not have either air or rail service. As in any Third World country, certain dangers and restrictions also apply to foreign travelers, especially as the political climate changes. And third, inconsistencies in stylistic terminology and analysis continue to plague this field, to the detriment of all who attempt to communicate their findings to others. Most published articles devote a major portion of the text to definition of terms. Some scholars are approaching the field with an eye toward sociological relationships and avoiding the whole topic of stylistic analysis. However, discussing architecture as a cultural phenomenon without being able to place it in its historical context is an incomplete analysis at best. Until a common acceptance of terminology and definitions occurs, writing in this field will remain relatively static.

Fortunately, progress is being made as recent studies are being published and newly discovered original documents are coming to light. Increased funding is being made available to serious scholars, and new legislation in Mexico for saving monuments is beginning to halt the destruction of important works. The acceptance of foreign scholars working within the country is also becoming more common.

Research on the church of San Cayetano de La Valenciana involved a variety of resources, the most important being the field work or on-site study of the structure. Thorough independent exploration of the church was conducted as well as interviews with tour guides, priests, and local educators. Research was conducted at the library of the Universidad de Guanajuato and several libraries in the United States. Three separate trips to the site were made in 1987 and 1988 to photograph the church and to collect data. Comparison of these recent photographs to historic photographs was helpful in revealing previous states of the structure. The importance of this primary research cannot be overstated, for the foremost directive of this paper was to present a critical report based on intense visual examination.

This paper is organized into five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the topic, a statement of the problem, an explanation of the method of procedure, and a review of the pertinent literature. The second

chapter presents the development of the Churrigueresque style of architectural ornamentation in Spain, its transportation to the New World, and the subsequent changes it underwent in Mexico. Chapter three is an analysis of the exterior structural and sculptural elements on the main and lateral portals. Chapter four discusses the interior elements, focusing primarily on the sculpture and ornamentation of the three altar retables. Both chapter three and chapter four include information on technique, symbolism, and iconography, in addition to the analysis of stylistic components. The final chapter summarizes the assessments made and presents the conclusions of the research. A glossary is also provided which includes both Spanish and English translation of terms, and two appendices provide supplemental material. Appendix A is an historical chronology of the city of Guanajuato and the construction of the church of San Cayetano de La Valenciana. Appendix B presents an hagiographical study of the patron saint of this church, St. Cajetan [San Cayetano].

CHAPTER 2

THE BAROQUE IN MEXICAN RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHURRIGUERESQUE PHASE

In order to analyze a specific phase of the Baroque, a basic understanding of the overall characteristics of Baroque architecture is necessary. Since Spain provided the impetus for the Mexican[1] exploration of the Baroque, the following discussion provides comparison and contrast of both countries' interpretations of this style. The latter part of this chapter focuses on the Churrigueresque phase--its origin in Spain, its transference to the New World, and the subsequent changes it underwent in the hands of the Mexican designers.

The Baroque in Mexico

The religious architecture of Mexico during the Baroque period was a unique blend of the tastes and traditions of several cultures, with Spanish being the most prominent. However, the Baroque in Latin America developed a great

[1]The terms Mexico and Mexican are not historically accurate when referring to the Baroque period, as the country of Mexico did not emerge until the nineteenth century. These terms are used throughout this paper for convenience and with the understanding that they refer to the territory of New Spain which eventually became the modern independent country of Mexico.

variety of regional phases and distinctive styles which were unknown in any other part of the world. The imagination of native craftsmen was sparked by the compositional and ornamental complexity of Hispanic designs. These same features held great appeal for the viceroyalty who viewed this grandiose architecture as a familiar link to the Mother Country, as well as a vehicle to exhibit their riches and gain lasting personal recognition at the same time. The patron of art who financed construction of a church or altar was not only making a benevolent donation to the church, but assuring his social status and spiritual immortality as well. In fact, the importance of the financial patron often far outweighed that of the architect, the designer, or the sculptors who worked on a building. Frequently, archival records did not reveal the name of the architect, but the patron's name was prominently recorded.[2] This helped account for the overbuilding of this period, when many more churches were built than were needed to serve the population.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Spanish conquest was complete and thorough in transposing the Hispanic culture on the new territories. At that time, Mexico was introduced to Christianity and its trappings as

---

[2]Mary Faith Mitchell Grizzard, Spanish Colonial Art and Architecture of Mexico and the U.S. Southwest (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1986), viii.

well as the tastes of the Spanish court. This involved imposing new ideas, morals, and images on the indigenous population. Architecturally, it also meant the complete transformation of construction methods and spatial concepts, the most important being the European method of enclosing space with masonry vaults. Architecture of this period tended to be imitative of the European models, rather than innovative.[3]

With the beginnings of political independence in the eighteenth century, artistic styles in Mexico became more individual. Mexico City remained the center of political, religious, and economic power. It was also the first to receive the trends from overseas, thus making it the unofficial center of fashion for art and architecture. However, architectural styles were not tightly dictated, especially in remote regions, as a central academy of arts did not exist in Mexico until late in the eighteenth century.[4] Every major city had a distinct local character

---

[3]Sidney D. Markman, Hispano-American Colonial Architecture: Social, Historical Stylistic Determinants with Especial Reference to Mexico and Guatemala (Louisville: University of Louisville, 1984), 7.

[4]The Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City was not dedicated until 1785. Patterned after the Academy of San Fernando in Madrid, the Mexican school established the standards for painting and drawing, as well as the plastic arts and architecture. Both academies were strong proponents of Neoclassicism. See Jean Charlot, Mexican Art and the Academy of San Carlos 1785-1915 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962).

shaped by the availability and type of local building materials, funds, patronage, and the personalities of the artistic directors.[5] European designers were responsible for bringing the new tastes and fashions to the viceroyalty, but the Mexican designers were responsible for the provincial interpretations of those styles. It was in these buildings, created some distance from the capital, that the Mexican Baroque became apparent as an independent creation--distinct and separate from Iberian and all European counterparts.[6]

European Baroque architecture explored the creation of complex interior space through interlocking structural parts, curvilinear shapes, or the illusionistic principles of perspective. In Mexican designs this was never a prime concern--the Latin cross floor plan was used almost exclusively, and formal balance was strictly observed. The building itself was considered background for the ornamental enrichment, with emphasis on manipulation of the surfaces rather than manipulation of space. Emphasis was confined to a few areas, most notably the exterior facades and the interior retables and doorframes, contrasted with bare

---

[5]Joseph A Baird, Jr., The Churches of Mexico: 1530-1810 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 5-6.

[6]Markman, Hispano-American Colonial Architecture, 12.

expanses of wall. Sculpture, rather than painting, was the preferred art form, and as such, developed to a finer degree and was utilized much more profusely than painting as an ornamental device.[7]

These basic traits carried through several phases of the Mexican Baroque, with facades and retables reflecting the major changes of fashion. Mexican architecture of this time was so closely associated with decorative motifs that the various phases are usually recognized by a particular identifying element. For example, the Churrigueresque phase is identified by the distinctive inverted obelisk shape of the estípite, which was used in place of a column or pilaster.[8]

While the contributions of Spanish architects in the New World cannot be overlooked, the number of European artists of rank who worked in the colonies was too small to have directed the entire artistic orientation of the vast territory of the New World. But the guidance and impetus provided by these experts brought about a strong and rapid synthesis of stylistic traits in the mid-eighteenth century. In the following decades, Mexico saw great inventiveness and a correspondingly high level of execution in architectural

---

[7]Elizabeth Wilder Weismann and Judith Hancock Sandoval, Art and Time in Mexico From the Conquest to the Revolution (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 16.

[8]Grizzard, Spanish Colonial Art, 45.

designs.[9] At this time, the ideas flowing from Spain were accepted or rejected as they suited individual artistic tastes. Lack of formal training and knowledge of European traditions in architectural forms allowed Mexican designers the freedom to mix and match elements unrestrictedly.[10]

In Europe, artists and architects were surrounded by masterpieces in every branch of the arts. It was very common for an artist to travel throughout Europe solely for the purpose of studying and learning by firsthand observation of important artistic and architectural works. This was not the case in Mexico, where the only historic designs available to the Mexican architectures were those of their pre-Columbian ancestors. European designs were transported via style books, prints, and drawings; but these two-dimensional illustrations were no substitute for viewing a three-dimensional structure. Not having the opportunity to study European architecture firsthand, the Mexican architects solved structural and decorative problems as the work progressed, incorporating their native sense of form and color.[11]

---

[9]Joseph A.Baird, Jr., "Eighteenth-Century Retables of the Bajio: The Querétaro Style," Art Bulletin, September 1953, 198.

[10]Leopoldo Castedo, A History of Latin American Art and Architecture, ed. Phyllis Freeman (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 100.

[11]Pál Kelemen, Baroque and Rococo in Latin America (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 20-22.

This unique blend of European and native elements produced a form of architectural expression that was neither absolutely original nor a total reproduction. Perhaps this is best illustrated in the vernacular architecture of the more rural locations, rather than in the cathedrals of the capital cities. Roberto Segre noted that independent creativity was revealed to a greater extent in the popular work of outlying regions:

> It is obvious that transmitted architectural types are better understood in important urban centers where one finds the most expert craftsmen and skilled labor; on the other hand, in their successive irradiations out toward the peripheral zone these models pass through dissimilar processes of transformations: simplifications, exaggeration, lack of formal understanding, local additions mixed with deformations due to faulty interpretations, and amateurish crude execution.[12]

While dealing with the native synthesis of European influences, it is important to consider yet another source--that of the inclusion of mudéjar features. One of the most striking determinants of Spanish history is its Islamic past. The Spanish territories were acquired gradually from the Moors over the course of hundreds of years; therefore, Islamic architecture has deep and ancient roots in Spain, much more so than the imported styles of Gothic and Romanesque from Christianized Europe. These imported styles were superimposed on the Islamic tradition, from which

---

[12]Roberto Segre, ed., Latin America in Its Architecture, trans. Edith Grossman (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishing, Inc., 1981), 83.

evolved the peculiar styles of Spanish architecture. This blend of Spanish Christian and Moorish elements is known as the mudéjar. Submerged in the architectural styles of Spain, these traits were carried to the colonies where additional transformations emerged in the popular interpretations of the Baroque in Mexico. Just as the history of Spanish architecture was that of adopting and altering imported styles, so it was in Mexico. It is significant to note that the discovery of the New World and the eviction of the Moors from Spain took place in the same year--1492.[13]

Moorish-influenced architecture flourished in Spain primarily from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. In Mexico, mudéjar features were especially prominent in the sixteenth century, but they continued to be important through the nineteenth century. The mudéjar is easily recognized in features such as octagonal domes, decorative tile, strong geometric patterns, mixtilinear moldings and frames, down-turned spirals, gilt and polychrome work, and certain rocaille motifs. These were absorbed directly into the Mexican Baroque, where they were utilized to a far greater extent than they had ever been used in Spanish architectural designs.[14]

---

[13]Markman, Hispano-American Colonial Architecture, 5-21.

[14]Grizzard, Spanish Colonial Art, 21-22.

While some of these motifs appear to be lifted from the Rococo forms of Europe it is inaccurate to apply this term, as Rococo never really became an autonomous style in either Mexico or Spain. Ornamental elements from the Rococo were used in Mexico merely as additions to the decorator's art.[15]

In defining the various phases of the Baroque manifestation in Mexico, the direction of modern scholars has been to select the articulating element in an architectural framework and determine the time period when it was dominant. This is not a simple task, due to the extreme amount of overlapping of characteristics and their time of popularity. Frequently, several phases are present concurrently in a single building, making classification difficult. The controversy over terminology, labeling of each phase, and setting dates to establish parameters continues to be a source of dispute.

Recent scholars have divided the Baroque in eighteenth-century Mexico into four major categories: (1) the Salomonic phase (1650-1725), marked by the twisted Salomonic column as the dominant element on facades and retables; (2) the Churrigueresque phase (1730-80), in which the estípite was the dominant element; (3) the Dissolving Baroque phase (1755-1800), in which the estípite was gradually replaced by the ornamental niche-pilaster as the defining feature; and

---

[15]R. C. Taylor, "Rococo in Spain," Architectural Review, July 1952, 9.

(4) the Neóstilo phase (1785-98) with its dominance of the classical column.[16] Several regional styles also developed, which may be recognized by a certain combination of elements which were always used together, such as inlaid wood in complex geometric designs and the intricate use of tiles, as at Puebla. Other regions used distinctive local materials, such as a colored type of stone or clay, as building materials. The Salomonic column, the estípite, and the pilastra-nicho were all used in varying combinations throughout the eighteenth century, often causing difficulty in determining the style of a particular building.[17]

The Churrigueresque phase is of particular importance in the history and development of Mexican Baroque architecture, as it exemplifies the successful synthesis of imported and native decorative features. For a complete understanding of the development of this style it is necessary to trace its roots to the Spanish Baroque styles of the late seventeenth century.

Spanish Churrigueresque

The true origins of the Churrigueresque style could probably be traced back as early as 1650 when elaborate decorative elements began to be more widely used in Spain.

---

[16]Dates are approximate and represent the height of popularity of each phase.

[17]Grizzard, Spanish Colonial Art, 45-50.

Several designers of church interiors and retables were working in this effusive ornamental style, but the term itself is most closely associated with the work of the Churriguera family, particularly José Benito de Churriguera (1665-1723). However, Churriguera did not actually create or introduce this form, but did express it clearly in his designs.[18]

Churriguera family members often worked in collaboration, which accounts for the frequent blurring of style and difficulty in attributing some works. José Churriguera's father, brothers, sons, grandson, and nephew all worked as architects and designers, indicating that the family name covered a considerable body of work and a greater span of time than a single generation; yet, their influence was limited almost exclusively to the regions of Barcelona and Salamanca.[19]

José Churriguera first came to recognition in 1689 when he won a competition to design a funerary platform for Queen Maria Louisa, first wife of Carlos II. Churriguera's entry was an extremely theatrical design covered with wreaths, garlands, columns, carved drapery, and vases. While critics were appalled at the excesses of this design, Churriguera's

---

[18]For critical analysis of the works and style of the Churriguera family see George Kubler, "Arquitectura española 1600-1800" Ars Hispaniae (Madrid, 1957), 138-148.

[19]J. Lees-Milne, Baroque in Spain and Portugal and its Antecedents (London, 1960), 92.

victory over the greatest of Spain's artists and architects is an indication that his design expressed the tastes of the time. Spanish Churrigueresque was in fashion from about 1700 to 1746, although as early as 1715 there was already a return to other more classical styles. Felipe V was perhaps the most important patron of the Spanish Churrigueresque style. His reign coincided with the last twenty-five years of Churriguera's life and comprised the height of popularity of the Churrigueresque in Spanish art. Indeed, the patronage of the Spanish Royal Court contributed to Churriguera's position as unofficial leader of this style.[20]

Churriguera primarily worked on altar retables and chapel interiors, although he did construct complete buildings. His designs, which reduced architecture to a secondary role, granted supremacy to decoration and ornamentation. However, he never went so far as to conceal completely the organizational framework--a unified effect was achieved by emphasizing a single dominant item, usually a painting or an elaborate tabernacle. He actually exhibited considerable restraint, which is evident when his designs are compared to the work of his Spanish successors and the later Mexican derivations of this style. Perhaps Churriguera's greatest accomplishment was his ability to

---

[20]Encyclopedia of World Art, 1960 ed., s.v. "Churrigueresque Style," by Manuel Lorente Junquera.

adapt the Italian styles to Spanish taste.[21] Motifs from the Italian Renaissance--such as putti, medallions, swags and garlands of flowers or fruit--were borrowed with little sense of Italian architectural principles but with a remarkable feeling for their decorative value.[22] Churriguera also introduced a single giant order of columns in place of the traditional superimposed tiers of columns, and was the first to paint retables in a variety of colors as opposed to the Herreran[23] retables which were gilded only. The most characteristic element used by Churriguera was the twisted, or Salomonic, column. The element that has come to be associated with his style, the estípite, was actually used to a much greater extent by his successors and contemporaries--Pedro de Rivera (c. 1683-1742), Jerónimo de Balbás (c. 1670-c.1760), Francisco Hurtado (1669-1725), and Lorenzo Rodriguez (1704-74). Some of these designers also carried the seeds of this style to the New World.[24]

---

[21]Ibid.

[22]Kelemen, Baroque and Rococo, 14.

[23]Spanish architecture during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had been overwhelming dominated by the work of Juan de Herrera, who advocated a majestic but conservative style of extreme simplicity with heavy borrowings from the Italian Mannerist principles. The new decorative forms such as the Churrigueresque were a complete break from this longstanding tradition. Harold Osborne, ed. The Oxford Companion to Art (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), s.v. "Herrera, Juan De."

[24]Lees-Milne, Baroque in Spain and Portugal, 94.

Neoclassical advocates coined the term Churrigueresque to stigmatize the style which they so heartily detested. Thus, the entire style bears the name of this one designer. Over time, the term has come to be applied indiscriminately and inaccurately to any effusive Baroque manifestation in both Spain and Mexico.

R. C. Taylor suggested that the term Churrigueran be applied to work directly designed by the Churriguera family to avoid the confusing double use of the term Churrigueresque; however, his suggestion has not found favor among scholars and remains widely unacknowledged.[25] Authors continue to suggest alternatives which more accurately describe this phase, especially its Mexican counterpart, but no one term has gained universal acceptance from the scholarly community. Mexican scholars continue to prefer the term Churrigueresco; therefore, this author defers to that tradition.

Mexican Churrigueresque

Mexican Churrigueresque was the phase of the Baroque which used the estípite as the dominant element. The popularity of the estípite as a formal device and the widespread use of the effusive ornamental motifs which

---

[25]R. C. Taylor, "Francisco Hurtado and His School," Art Bulletin, March 1950, 28.

accompany it caused the Mexican Churrigueresque to be recognized as the unofficial national style of Mexico.

The influence of the estípite in shaping Mexican architecture was truly astonishing. No other single element reshaped the appearance of a country's architecture in the manner of this feature. The estípite instituted a major transformation in the look of Mexican religious architecture of the eighteenth century. The advent of this unique element brought total stylistic reform to Mexico.[26]

The estípite was composed of a base similar to that used for traditional columns or pilasters, a central shaft in the form of an inverted, four-sided obelisk, and a rather freely interpreted Corinthian capital. Derived from the sixteenth-century herm forms of the Italian Mannerist movement, the estípite was included in Sebastiano Serlio's architectural treatise of the time. According to the Mexican art historian Francisco de la Maza, the proportions of the estípite, as interpreted in eighteenth-century Mexico, remained based on the human body, despite the myriad of decorative variations of this feature.[27] It is unknown who first revived its use, but it began to appear with the

---

[26]George Kubler and Martin S. Soria, Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and Their American Dominions, 1500-1800 (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1959), 79.

[27]Francisco de la Maza, El churrigueresco en la ciudad de México (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1969), 8.

other trappings of the Spanish Churrigueresque and was transported to Mexico, along with other Spanish architectural designs, where it immediately caught the attention of designers throughout the country. In Mexico, the estípite was utilized to a far greater extent than it had ever been in Spain, and found special favor in the mining regions of central Mexico.[28] At the peak of its mining activity, the city of Guanajuato was second only to Mexico City in wealth[29] and, as might be expected, there are several rich examples of Mexican Churrigueresque architecture there. The church of San Cayetano de La Valenciana is a fine example of this.

The estípite was more popular among the Mexican designers probably because, unlike the uniform spiralling of the Salomonic column, it could be broken up into many more component parts, thus increasing its complexity. Weismann explains that the estípite "releases the column from its role of clarity and support,"[30] allowing it to function purely as a decorative device and permitting it to be manipulated as such. Lack of knowledge of its Italian origin or the history of traditional European use freed the

---

[28]Weismann and Sandoval, Art and Time in Mexico, 17.

[29]Pál Kelemen, Art of the Americas, Ancient and Hispanic, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), 256.

[30]Elizabeth Wilder Weismann and Judith Hancock Sandoval, "The Astonishing Baroque," Americas, November-December 1985, 10.

Mexican designers to view it as simply another motif to be used at their discretion.

The first important work in Mexico to utilize the estípite was the Altar of the Kings by Jerónimo de Balbás, constructed between 1718 and 1737 in the Cathedral of Mexico City. Even if this retable did not actually introduce the estípite, it was the primary source for its widespread proliferation.[31] This retable was copied in all areas of the colonies and is widely considered to be the cornerstone of the Baroque, and specifically the Churrigueresque, in Mexico. Weismann goes so far as to describe the construction of this altar retable as "the clearest date in the history of viceregal art, and one of the most dramatic events."[32] Although not all retables and facades that followed were specifically derived from the Altar of the Kings, this retablo did inspire Mexican designers so that great variety followed.[33]

Another Spaniard, Lorenzo Rodriguez, assisted Balbás on the Altar of the Kings retablo. Rodriguez added his own ideas to those present in this retable and applied the estípite to the exteriors of churches in the capital city,

---

[31]Castedo, A History of Latin American Art and Architecture, 33.

[32]Weismann and Sandoval, "The Astonishing Baroque," 10.

[33]Ibid., 11.

most notably the Sagrario Metropolitano, adjacent to the Cathedral of Mexico City. Rodriguez was instrumental in making the estípite style introduced by Balbás widely accepted in Mexico. This form was then constantly enriched for the next several decades by the impact of strong, new personalities in the architectural field. It was the Mexican designers and craftsmen who ultimately brought to fruition the most significant ideas of the important Spanish designers, such as Balbas and Hurtado.[34]

Spanish Churrigueresque kept a traditional system of organization in mind even in the most complex designs. In contrast, Mexican Churrigueresque relied on the impact of the total impression, rather than a single planned focal point, to convey the grandeur and sense of wonder associated with Baroque designs. This is the concept which the Mexicans refer to as conjunto, or the cumulative effect of the entire ensemble. In this interpretation, it is not that a whole retable or a whole facade must be viewed as a unit, but that the entire church must be seen as a single expression. Conducting a formal analysis of a building requires that the individual components be considered separately, yet, in keeping with the original intent of the designer, the idea of conjunto must be retained in any conclusions drawn. While the concept of a complete ensemble

[34]Baird, "Style in Eighteenth-Century Mexico," 262.

is common to all countries touched by the Baroque, the Mexican interpretation was carried to the extreme.[35]

Assignment of dates to the Mexican Churrigueresque period can vary from one author to another, but gradually a concensus is forming. Two scholars whose work seems to typify current thinking are Joseph Baird and Mary Grizzard. Baird states that he frames the Churrigueresque phase with the dates 1737 (the completion of the Altar of the Kings) and 1788 (the dedication of La Valenciana).[36] Grizzard refers to the Churrigueresque as being in vogue between 1730 and about 1780.[37]

In Mexico City, a reaction against the Baroque began as early as the 1770's and was decidedly replaced by the European Neoclassical style after the opening of the Royal Academy of San Carlos. At this time, some Churrigueresque altars were deliberately destroyed and replaced with designs in the new style.[38]

Specific application of the Mexican Churrigueresque style to the church of San Cayetano de La Valenciana will be examined in the following two chapters. Analysis will

---

[35]Weismann and Sandoval, "The Astonishing Baroque," 61-2.

[36]Ibid., 264.

[37]Grizzard prefers to use the term barroco estípite, but she concurs that the term Churrigueresco is often used. Grizzard, Spanish Colonial Art, 47.

[38]Weismann and Sandoval, Art and Time in Mexico, 18.

reveal the use and variations of the estípite as applied to the exterior facades and the interior retables, and the inclusion of other techniques and ornamental motifs which were closely associated with this style. Iconographic interpretations will also be presented to aid in understanding the religious symbolism and the total meaning of this building, both as a church and as an architectural structure with historical significance.

CHAPTER 3

EXTERIOR ORNAMENTATION OF THE CHURCH OF LA VALENCIANA

The mining of precious metals, especially silver, was of primary importance to the growth of the arts and architectural styles in central Mexico. Great artistic centers developed around the mining towns of Zacatecas, Taxco, and Guanajuato. While a considerable amount of this mineral wealth was shipped directly to Spain, the Roman Catholic Church wielded great power in the Mexican colonies and received as much as one-tenth of the wealth from the mines.[1] Much of this wealth can be traced directly to the construction and decoration of churches in the mining towns, as in the case of the church of La Valenciana in the town of Guanajuato. It is not clear why the Churrigueresque form of architecture was favored so highly in this region, but numerous examples of this style survive in the central mountain towns of the country.

In the year 1760, Don Pedro Antonio Obregon y Alcocer, Count of Valenciana, discovered a vein of silver ore a short distance from the town of Guanajuato. Part of the wealth

---

[1]Trent Elwood Sanford, The Story of Architecture in Mexico (New York: Norton, 1947), 243.

produced by this mine was channelled into the creation of a church in the Mexican Churrigueresque style--San Cayetano de La Valenciana. Probable derivation of the name "La Valenciana" is from Fray Martin de Valencia, one of the first friars to come to Mexico after the conquest. He was active through the Franciscan Order, and was extremely popular in Mexico.[2]

Obregon began construction on the church of La Valenciana in 1765 on a plot of land across from the entrance to his mining operation. Although Obregon initiated this project he was not the sole financier, insisting that it be a co-operative project. Construction expenses and the cost of the elaborate services once the church was completed were partially covered by the miners, who were required to give a part of their weekly wage toward defraying costs as well as spending their holidays working on it without pay. Each of the thousands of mine workers contributed a piece of ore the size of a man's fist each week as his contribution. It is apparent that no expense was spared in construction of this church. Popular accounts state that silver dust and fine Spanish wines were actually mixed with the mortar.[3]

---

[2]Ibid., 118.

[3]Armando Nicolau, Valenciana (México: Dirección de Monumentos Coloniales, Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, 1961), 13-14.

Surrounding the church are battlements of thick walls supported by massive pier buttresses, a carryover from the sixteenth-century fortress churches. Widely-spaced decorative obelisks, probably derived from the crenelations used on the fortress churches, have been set atop the walls. A carved stone plaque is set into each obelisk, depicting a single cross, with the exception of one plaque near the main entrance which bears a group of three crosses. There are no inscriptions or dates to identify the plaques but it is most likely that they mark the fourteen stations of the cross.

Construction of La Valenciana was completed in the relatively short period of twenty-three years and, therefore, does not show the wide variety of styles seen in the larger cathedrals of the major cities, whose construction spanned considerable periods of time. The two facades of La Valenciana are typical of the latter half of the Baroque period in that they do not represent a pure style, that is, more than one articulating element is present in these facade designs. Maintaining strict adherence to a single style was not an important consideration of the architectural decorators. La Valenciana incorporates both the estípite and the pilastra-nicho as important elements, yet the entire building can generally be classified as Churrigueresque, due to the particular combination of motifs and the strong use of the estípite, particularly in the interior.

Due to the loss of the archival records during the War of Independence, little is known about the actual construction or the team of sculptors and craftsmen who worked on La Valenciana. This church was most likely modeled after the church of San Sebastian y Santa Prisca in Taxco (c. 1751-8), which was also constructed under the direction of a mine owner. Santa Prisca served as a model for several other churches in terms of the combination of Mexican and Spanish elements into a harmonious resolution and is considered one of the outstanding Churrigueresque buildings in Mexico, containing twelve gilded altar retables.[4]

It was thought at one time that La Valenciana stood over a rich mineral deposit. Offered a considerable price for the property, Obregon was presented with a plan to remove the church stone by stone and reconstruct it at another site. However, the offer was rejected and the church remains _in situ_.[5]

Once construction was complete, a veritable army of workers must have assembled to produce the sculptural ornamentation. Since craftsmen specialized in their area of expertise, separate artists undoubtedly worked on each portion of the church: stone carvers, wood carvers,

---

[4]George Kubler and Martin S. Soria, _Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and their American Dominions, 1500-1800_ (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1959), 80.

[5]Sanford, _The Story of Architecture_, 226.

craftsmen for application of the gilt and the polychrome, etc. The presence of many different hands is readily apparent when comparing design and craftsmanship of the different decorative features.

During the late eighteenth century, several other churches were constructed in the city of Guanajuato--most notably the church of La Compañia and the rebuilding of the church of San Diego, which had been destroyed earlier by flood. A Basilica dedicated to Our Lady of Guanajuato and a Jesuit college were already completed. The surge of growth and building was at its height as the riches from the mines multiplied. An historical chronology of the city of Guanajuato and the construction of the church of La Valenciana is provided in Appendix A.

The South Portal and Main Facade

As with all Mexican Baroque churches constructed in the eighteenth century, there is some conventionalization in the general design, particularly in the arrangement of the facade and the placement of sculpture. A church entrance was usually flanked by statues placed in niches or ornamental niche-pilasters. This same arrangement was often repeated for the upper stories as well. Frequently, a window was centered over the main door, and the central finial was almost always a statue of the saint to whom the church was dedicated. Flanking campanerio, or bell towers, completed

the symmetrical arrangement of the main facade.[6] La Valenciana follows this basic formula, but within these limitations of organization is a great richness of variation. (Fig. 2) The main portal is framed by ornamental niche-pilasters which extend to the second story. On the first story, each of these pilasters is in turn flanked by thin estípites. By the late 1780s, when this facade was completed, the ornamental niche-pilaster was beginning to move ahead of the estípite in popularity as a decorative device and, as seen in this facade, the two elements were used concurrently.

The arched doorway is crested with an elaborately carved floral keystone. (Fig. 3) Above this, an ornate quatrefoil encloses three seated relief figures. A projecting multi-segmented molding creates a horizontal division of the two stories, forming a capital for both the niche-pilasters and the estípites. The central portion of this molding has shallower carving so as not to cast a deep shadow on the carved relief figures beneath it.

The second story is centered around a rectangular window which opens into the interior choir loft. The window has paired estípites on either side. The outer pair is slightly shorter than the inner pair due to a curved pediment above

---

[6]Ibid., 208.

Fig. 2. Front Elevation of San Cayetano de La Valenciana.

the window. This broken pediment meets at the apex with centered, opposed spirals.

The uppermost portion of the facade is composed of a statuary niche guarded by two angels on each side. An extremely elaborate pinjante appears to drip down the wall below the niche. A mixtilinear espadaña crests the central facade where a statue of St. Cajetan, the patron saint of the church, stands at the apex. (Fig. 4A) Cajetan appears as a middle-aged man, brows furrowed in an expression of deep compassion. He stands in a contrapposto pose with his cloak appearing to swirl in the wind about him. No attributes appear with him but his role as patron saint of this church and the similarity of likeness to the figure of Cajetan on the main altar retablo leave no doubt as to his identity. The iconographic background of St. Cajetan and typical representations of him in art are provided in Appendix B.

This entire imafronte (Fig. 3) is slightly recessed from the two towers which serve to frame the facade as well as buttress the structure. On Mexican Baroque churches, the ornamentation was generally concentrated on the upper part of the towers, which rose from plain bases. The towers of La Valenciana have more ornamentation than is usually associated with the church facades of this time; however, they are not so ornate as to be completely outside the variations explored during this period. When contrasted with the densely carved

Fig. 3. Main Facade.

imafronte, the tower embellishments actually appear quite sparse.

Three different window treatments are used on the tower windows. (Fig. 4) The lowest level window is glazed and has a fairly modest framing treatment of shallow relief. The second story windows receive the most ornate treatment, having deeper carving and the addition of a figural relief in a quatrefoil. A deeply projecting ledge forms the bottom of the window, while a small crest above the glass is supported by two pilasters which form the sides of the window frame. Urn-shaped finials and a Latin cross are placed at the top of the crest. The uppermost window on each tower is covered with an iron grate, or rejas, which partially screens the opening and defines the decorative star-like shape of the window itself.

Level with the roof line on each tower is a large Baroque clock. The west tower clock is intact but the clock in the east tower was dismantled in the twentieth century. A carved circle around the clock has cherub faces and decorative foliate forms to mark the positions of the hours. Above the clock on each side double brackets support a projecting ledge of molding. This molding marks the base of the bell tower proper which extends above the roof. An engaged figure of an angel looks outward from each of the four corners of the tower.

A

B

Fig. 4. A. West Tower B. East Tower.

The west tower culminates in a black metal double-armed cross. A practical as well as symbolic finial, this cross also acts as a lightening rod. The left and right towers stand approximately one hundred twenty-three feet [thirty-eight meters] and eight-two feet [twenty-five meters] in height respectively.[7]

Only the west tower (Fig. 4A) functions as a campanario, with three bells remaining in place. The east tower (Fig. 4B) was never completed above the roof line due to a dispute with the parish priest of Guanajuato who claimed that license had been given for a chapel to be built, not a basilica. The controversy delayed construction for some time but a compromise was finally reached when Obregon agreed to complete only one tower, thus lowering the rank of the church.[8]

The south portal is an excellent example of a facade treated as an exterior retable. (Fig. 3) Relief carving is quite shallow and tightly organized into a central mass, giving the appearance of a thin screen applied to the front wall of the building. Estípites and niche-pilasters are purely decorative, having no structurally supportive role nor being incorporated into the architectonic construction.

---

[7]Antonio Cortés, Valenciana; Guanajuato, México (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1933), 3.

[8]Sanford, The Story of Architecture, 226.

The church itself is constructed of tezontle stone, which is quarried locally. Some of the rich variations of color in this material are evident in the pastel tints of rose, chalk, and blue masonry blocks. These sculpted stone exteriors have a more restrained feel than the polychromed interiors, where the introduction of color creates a vastly different appearance.

Several mudéjar features are evident at La Valenciana. The most obvious is the irregular geometric panelling used in the double wooden doors of the south and west entrances. (Figs. 3 & 8). Each of the three sets of doors are identical in overall shape and size, but variety is achieved by altering the shape of the panels within each door. Smaller hinged doors within the large doors allow access for daily functions. The larger doors are only opened for processions and special services with large attendance.

Another mudéjar element evident on this facade is the use of an alfiz--a rectangular molding which encloses the arch-shaped main portal. This molding serves as a frame to set off a separate area for decorative relief carving and creates the appearance of a grand, ceremonial entrance.

Progressively-advanced layered patterns of geometricized moldings are also typically mudéjar and are used profusely on both facades. Combined with rocaille motifs, these moldings create a visually complex, richly textured background for the statuary.

The depiction of saints and other holy figures on the facade does not appear to create a comprehensive narrative or iconographic story, although it is difficult to assess the full meaning due to the absence of statuary from the niches. Facades of this time were generally filled with figures of favorite saints of the patron, or of saints that held positions of prominence for the Brotherhood or local priest of the region.

Above the main doors a large quatrefoil encloses the relief figures of three seated men, all identical in appearance. This is the popular image of La Trinidad, the Trinity. (Fig. 5) Originally derived from Byzantine art, depiction of the Trinity as three identical persons was banned in 1623 by Pope Urban VIII and again by Pope Benedict XIV in 1745; nevertheless, it remained quite popular in Mexican art, especially painting.[9] Despite the vigilance of the Spanish Inquisition to insure that only orthodox representations of religious subjects reached the colonies, there is abundant proof of the influence of artistic material which does not conform to the Council of Trent standards.[10] The Trinity relief of La Valenciana is clear evidence of that fact.

---

[9]Gloria K. Giffords, Mexican Folk Retablos: Masterpieces on Tin (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 40.

[10]Pál Kelemen, Baroque and Rococo, 210.

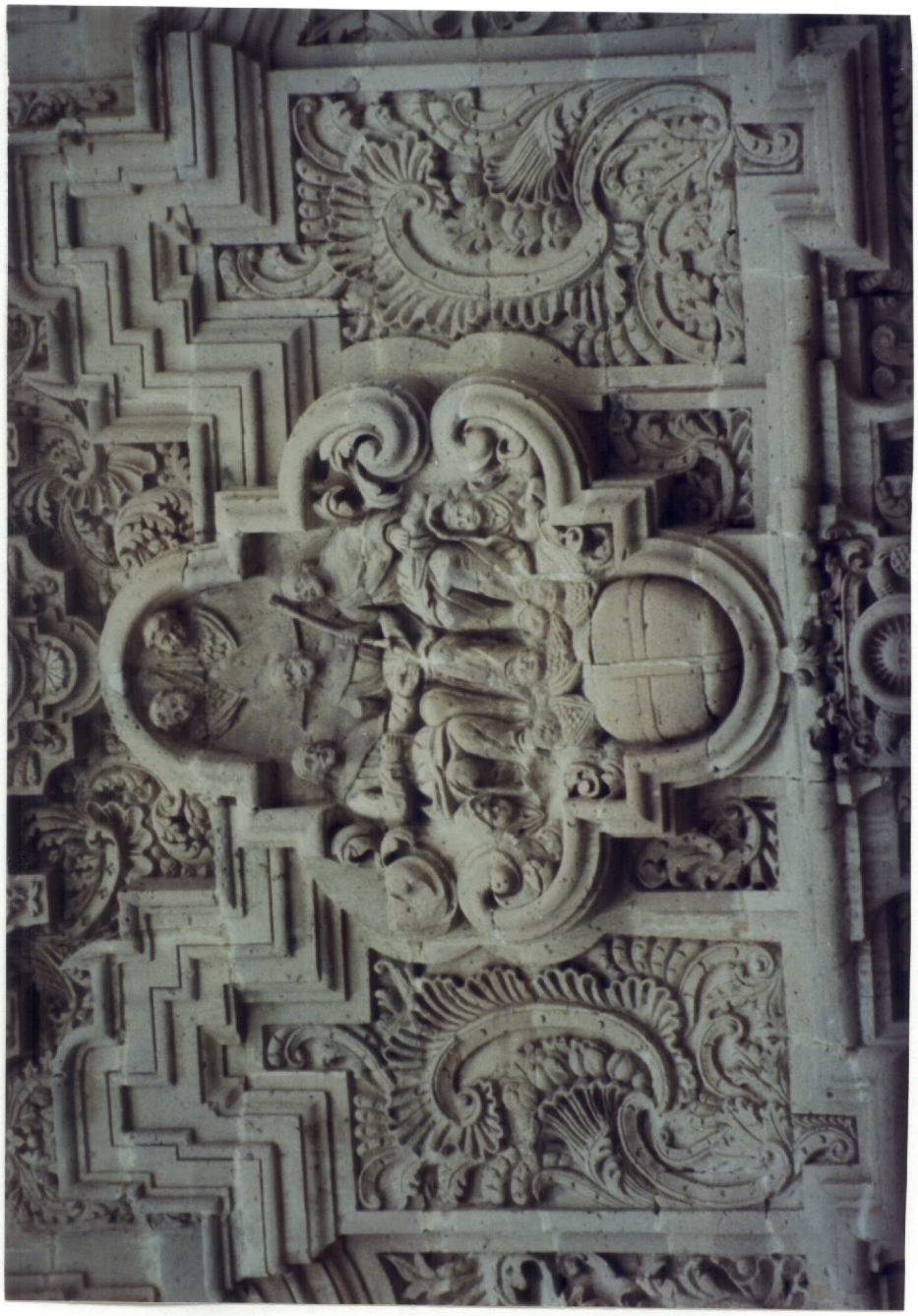

Fig. 5. Main Facade (detail), The Trinity.

The Trinity group at La Valenciana depicts God the Father in the center. He holds a staff, and an equilateral triangle is placed behind his head. The figure of Christ is seated on the left and the Holy Spirit sits to the right. A large orb with a cross rests below their feet, symbolizing power and the creation of the world. Below the quatrefoil enclosed in rich rocaille are symbols which identify the three figures--a blazing sun with a human face in the center (symbolizing the Father), a lamb to the left (representing the Son), and a dove to the right (symbol of the Holy Spirit). Cherubs, composed only of head and wings, hover above and below the three seated figures. Two mysterious hooded heads are located on either side, next to the feet of the Son and the Holy Spirit. There are no clues provided as to the identity of these figures.

While church portal designs of this period were rigidly symmetrical in appearance, the decorative background carving allowed a great amount of originality and experimentation. Rocaille carving developed a particularly rich flowering in Mexico after 1770.[11] The dense rocaille work on this church illustrates the intense interest in this technique and the textural quality it brought to the facades.

Close examination of the rocaille patterns around the central quatrefoil and over the keystone reveal that the left

---

[11]Joseph A.Baird, Jr., The Churches of Mexico: 1530-1810 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 274.

and right sides are not exact mirror images. For example, a scalloped shell with foliage on the left spandrel is given a slightly different angle and treatment than the shell pattern on the right spandrel. The difference is slight, so as not to detract from the symmetry of the overall design, yet it is clear that the artists were given some room for personal flourishes. Differences such as these can be found throughout the rocaille work on both portals as well as on the interior features.

A pattern of variation between the left and right sides of each feature on the main portal became apparent upon close examination. The right side always appears to be more richly worked with a higher level of craftsmanship, suggesting that two sculptors of differing skill levels worked side by side--possibly a master sculptor on the right, with an apprentice working to his left.

An inscription on the base of the ornamental niche-pilasters marks the dedication date of 1788. Immediately above the inscription is a niche for statuary with a semi-circular shell forming the upper arch of the niche. A projecting faldoncito forms an abbreviated canopy above. The pilaster continues upward, decorated with inward opposing spirals and a quatrefoil enframing the three-quarter figure of a saint. The multilinear molding marks the division of the first and second floors and serves as a capital for the pilaster.

At the second story level, another statuary niche stands level with the window to the coro. Above this niche, the pilaster narrows and is divided into square decorative segments, similar to those on the adjacent estípite. A square-shaped urn serves as the floron. Here again it seems apparent that two sculptors worked side-by-side, with the right side being more finely crafted.

The saints portrayed on this facade are not easily identified. Symbols and attributes depicted with them either do not fit into standard iconography, or tend to be so general as to defy a specific identification.

Gloria Giffords has addressed the problem of Mexican iconography in some detail. She states that identification of figures can be difficult:

> . . . frequently the conventional attribute is familiarized or Mexicanized, as when the skull of San Jeronimo appears as the skull on an Aztec temple. In most cases such transformation of attributes poses few problems in identification of the saint portrayed. But when attributes have been omitted through error, or added in order to individualize or describe additional powers that a particular religious personage had in a certain area, identification can be greatly hampered.[12]

> Valid conclusions about the functions of holy personages in Mexico may be drawn by analogy with European usage, but the possibility of local Mexican variations and different saintly functions must always be kept in mind. The conversion of the Indians to Christianity brought additional powers to Christ, the Virgin Mary, and certain saints. Similiarities between the attributes of the Indian gods and those of the Christian hierarchy

---

[12]Giffords, Mexican Folk Retablos, 66.

helped ease the transition from the old faith to the new.[13]

Fragments of pre-Columbian iconography did occasionally survive within a Christian context. It is quite surprising, in fact, that they are not more numerous.[14] This is strong testament to the success of the Spaniards in creating a Spanish-dominated culture. A close look at the attributes which appear with the figures on this building reveals some of these very problems of identification and incorporation of indigenous elements.

The niche-pilaster on the west side (Fig. 6A) depicts a youthful, bearded man dressed in a monk's habit. He holds a book in his left hand and a cross in his right. Attributes at his right side depict an orb with a cross and a lamb. The lamb appears to have an Aztec speech glyph extending from its mouth.[15] Generally, the lamb is associated with Christ or St. John the Baptist. The orb of power is almost exclusively assigned to God the Father, and a book is commonly a symbol

---

[13]Ibid., 71.

[14]See discussion of this topic in George Kubler, "On The Colonial Extinction of the Motifs of pre-Columbian Art," in Anthropology and Art (New York: The National History Press, 1971), 212-226.

[15]See the baptismal font at Cuilapan, Oaxaca, and the town fountain in Tochimilco, Puebla, for other examples of speech glyphs incorporated into Spanish or Christian subjects. Mary Faith Mitchell Grizzard, Spanish Colonial Art and Architecture of Mexico and the U.S. Southwest (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), 58.

A

B

Fig. 6. Main Facade Niche-Pilasters (detail): A. West B. East.

of a writer of some importance, such as a Gospel writer or the founder of an order.

The east niche-pilaster (Fig. 6B) also depicts a young bearded man in monk's dress holding a crucifix in his right hand. To the left side rests a skull of decidedly Aztec modeling. Again, these clues are not enough to provide a positive identification, since several saints are associated with these items. These elements usually represent penance or contemplation.

The west tower quatrefoil (Fig. 7A) holds a figure that is perhaps the most puzzling on the entire facade. The right hand is raised, palm outward, to shoulder height and a cross is clasped in the left hand. This figure has a scalloped shell behind the head in place of a halo. All other figures on this portal are shown with halos behind their heads, indicating their sainthood. Close examination also reveals that this figure is winged, most likely representing an angel.

The east tower quatrefoil (Fig. 7B) has a figure of a saint holding a quill and an open book--attributes which indicate he wrote something of importance, such as a book of theology or Scripture. The book and quill alone do not provide conclusive information as to the identity of this saint.

Some of these figures may refer to scenes in the life of Cajetan. He was an important writer as well as founder of an

A

B

Fig. 7. Tower Window Frames: A. West B. East.

order, the Theatines, and the skull was associated with him at times; however, the lamb and orb do not seem to fit his standard attributes, nor does the angel. These may depict localized stories or powers associated with him. It is also possible that these figures portray other locally important saints.

The West Portal

The stylistic difference between the two portals is instantly apparent, with the west portal (Fig. 8) being obviously the work of a different hand than the south portal. It displays a finer degree of sculptural control and careful attention to the relationship of statuary and architectural elements. Overall, the west portal has survived almost intact, with only slight damage to the statuary. As seen on the main facade, the background rocaille carving on this portal appears symmetrical but when examined closely, subtle differences emerge. If more than one sculptor worked on this portal, it is not readily perceptible. The relief carving is slightly deeper than that of the main portal. A more refined hand is obvious in the modeling of figures and geometric shapes which is not seen on other parts of this structure. Furthermore, the figures of the saints on the west portal are depicted without halos, unlike the south portal figures.

This portal also reflects the trend toward the niche-pilaster as the dominant element and should actually be

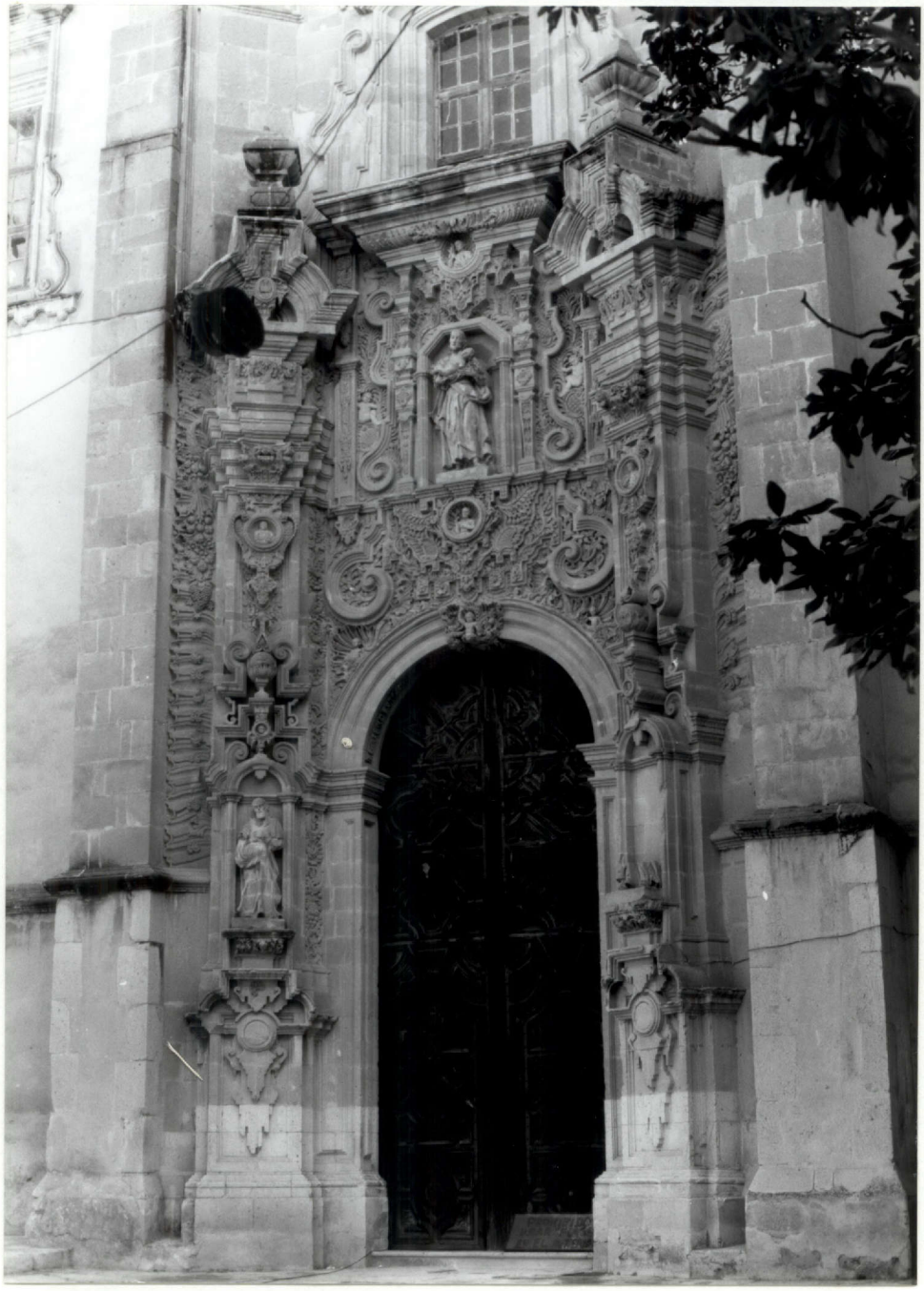

Fig. 8. West Portal.

classified as belonging to the Dissolving Baroque phase.[16] The style of this portal certainly indicates that it was constructed later than the main portal. The estípite has become smaller and secondary on this facade, relegated to one small area in the center above the door. Bulky ornamental niche-pilasters form the major defining members of this doorway. Rising approximately sixty-two feet [nineteen meters] to the roof line,[17] this portal has an extremely strong vertical emphasis, mostly due to the lack of any major horizontal elements to counteract the niche-pilsters.

In contrast with the recessed south portal imafronte, this portal projects outward from the wall of the church. The outer sides are covered with bands of lavish scallops and cascades of grape clusters, pomegranates, and leaves. The ornamental niche-pilasters on either side of the portal itself are turned inward at a 45-degree angle, accentuating the doorway as a separate architectural unit and creating an "environment" for the sacred portal sculpture. The niche-pilasters have a progression of decorative devices running upward on the front panel: pinjantes, medallions, and a deeply projecting molding. Above this molding is a statuary

[16]The Dissolving Baroque phase existed concurrently with the Churrigueresque in Mexico. It was popular from about 1755 to the end of the century and was abandoned when the Neoclassical movement appeared. The ornamental niche-pilaster was the articulating element in this phase. Grizzard, Spanish Colonial Art, 48.

[17]Cortés, Valenciana, 4.

niche capped with inward curling spirals. The niche to the left of the portal contains a statue of an old, bearded man in flowing robes. His left hand rests on his heart but no attributes are placed with him. All that remains of the statue in the right pilaster are the feet and hem of the robe. Nicolau relates that this figure mysteriously disappeared one night during a storm but was later found in the garden of a woman who was friendly with an influential political figure of the time.[18] The actual location or existence of this statue is unknown and Nicolau's story cannot be proved nor disproved by this author.

The pilasters extend through the second floor level with additional scrolls, medallions, and decorative moldings, a fanciful Corinthian capital attached to the front at one point, and squared urns as finials. Wingless cherubs seem to fill every corner on this facade--two are encased in ruffled shells in the spandrels above the arch and four more cherubs surround the central statuary niche, appearing to wrestle with a leafy vine form writhing upward on the facade.

This portal is dedicated to St. Joseph, husband of the Virgin Mary and father of Christ. Joseph stands in the central niche, holding the Christ Child in his arms. (Fig. 9) He appears as a young man in the prime of life, rather than as the aged figure as seen in the Middle Ages. As the

---

[18]Nicolau, Valenciana, 39.

Fig. 9. West Portal (detail), St. Joseph.

Counter Reformation looked for new heroes, Joseph was rejuvenated and made to appear youthful in order to provide proper care and protection for the Virgin and Child.

Above and below the saint are medallions encircling half figures. As noted with the medallions below the Trinity figures on the main facade, these medallions appear to serve a similar function of offering clues to the identity of the two figures depicted in the niche. Below the niche, the medallion encloses the figure of an elderly man holding a flowering rod--an attribute of St. Joseph, which identified him as God's chosen husband for Mary. The medallion above the niche portrays a young man contemplating a large cross which he holds diagonally across his chest--identifying Christ, who suffered death by crucifixion on a cross.

The only place the estípite is present on this portal is on either side of the central statuary niche. They are paired with a rather rare use of vertical mixtilinear molding which terminates in scrolls at each end. Decoration is kept small and fairly simple in proportion with the small size of the estípites. Shallow pilasters with pinjantes stand at the outer edges of this composition.

Two figures of great interest are in opposing medallions on the niche-pilasters. (Fig. 9) It seems likely that these figures represent the Count and Countess of Valenciana, Antonio Obregon and his wife, Dona Maria Barrera de Torres Cano. They appear in contemporary Baroque dress. The man is

clean-shaven but has long hair and wears a fitted jacket with a large lace collar. The woman is dressed in a tight bodice and long-sleeved gown and wears her hair in a style smoothly pulled back from her face. She holds a cross in her hands. Obregon is shown with a skull, indicative of his death which occured in 1786--two years before this church was dedicated. St. Joseph, the prominent saint on this portal, was also invoked for protection at death. This portal may actually be a monument or shrine to Obregon, with St. Joseph present to ensure safe passage into heaven for the Count's soul.

This portal is topped with an incised arch over the window, enclosing a cross and four pinjante forms in relief above a glazed window. Carving at this second story level is so minimal as to suggest that this upper portion was never completed. Overhanging tree limbs presently obscure the view of the second floor.

CHAPTER 4

INTERIOR ORNAMENTATION OF THE CHURCH OF LA VALENCIANA

One reason why Baroque elements were so quickly adopted in Mexico was that they easily lent themselves to modification. The European Baroque styles were decidedly aristocratic and attuned to the tastes and standards of the courts, but the art of the New World became more popularly based as the Church succeeded in adding parishioners without distinguishing between races or social conditions.[1] Mexican Churrigueresque is, therefore, often grouped into the category of popular or vernacular Baroque. Consequently, it is no surprise that the general population as well as the wealthy classes embraced the construction of these elaborate churches with enthusiasm. Among the Mexican designers there existed a constant quest for new sources of inspiration and design as well as great experimentation with forms that were introduced from foreign influences, most notably the mudéjar. Mixing stylistic elements was not treated with reserve, as in Europe, but encouraged. Interior ornamentations, the retablo compositions in particular, were approached with the same

[1]Leopoldo Castedo, A History of Latin American Art and Architecture ed. Phyllis Freeman, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 101.

concept as the exterior, that is, that the totality of the design was paramount. The conjunto, or effect of the total composition, was at its strongest in the Mexican Churrigueresque retablos. The overwhelming impact one feels when viewing these complex retables, especially for the first time, was precisely what the designer intended. Individual elements are submerged in intense decoration, making visual analysis difficult. Only after careful prolonged examination can the eye begin to isolate the separate features which form these massive works.

In spite of the rich conjunto which exists in this church, La Valenciana presents a very homogeneous interior treatment. Joseph Baird refers to this church as having "perhaps the most unified interior of the eighteenth century."[2] Pál Kelemen states that "La Valenciana has a pictorial quality and greater clarity than other churrigueresque retablos."[3] Unity is achieved by limiting the use of brilliant colors and highly decorative treatments to specific areas, the altar retablos being of primary importance. Large, plain expanses of white walls are divided into geometric compartments by neutral-toned pilasters and

---

[2]Joseph A. Baird, Jr., "Mexican Architecture and the Baroque," in Latin American Art and the Baroque Period in Europe: International Congress of the History of Art, XX, New York, 1961 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 200.

[3]Pál Kelemen, Art of the Americas, Ancient and Hispanic (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969), 93.

arches. The small areas of rich color and intense textural treatment are then balanced by large areas of neutral color and plain texture. The three retables (Figs. 10, 14, 17, 18) are united by several shared features. Each of the retablos measures approximately twenty-seven feet wide by thirty-six feet high [eight meters by eleven meters], and are elevated four steps above the nave floor. A wooden railing partitions off the presbytery surrounding each altar table. (See Fig. 10) The three retables share the design of a glazed vitrine at the lower center, a semicircular arched top, and polychromed statuary set against a gilt background. Combinations of high relief spirals and scrolls with leaf and rocaille motifs in low relief, typical motifs of this style, are repeated on the three retables.[4]

The retablos themselves are carved of wood, covered with a thin coat of plaster, then gilded. This technique allowed great intricacy of carving, much more so than was possible on the stone exteriors. The addition of gold leaf and polychrome finishes introduced the dimension of color and made the retables more visually complex than the monotonal facades. Inscriptions date the retables to November, 1778.[5]

---

[4]Joseph A. Baird, Jr., "Eighteenth-Century Retables of the Bajio: The Querétaro Style," Art Bulletin, September 1953, 213.

[5]For complete notation of the retable inscription plaques see Antonio Cortés, Valenciana: Guanajuato, México (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1933), 13-14.

Fig. 10. North Retablo (Main or High Altar).

The sculpted figures on the retables placed special emphasis on the head and hands--melodramatic facial expressions and realistic skin texture were of primary importance to the artist. (See especially Figs. 17, 18, 19) Two finishing techniques for wood sculpture were used extensively at this time to create a more lifelike appearance for these figures: encarnación, which duplicated the appearance of human flesh on the head and hands, and estofado, a finish used as a garment treatment in which colored pigment was applied over gold or silver leaf and designs were then scratched into the pigment to reveal the metallic base. Extremely elaborate patterns were possible with estofado, which produced the appearance of brocade fabric. The statuary incorporated into the La Valenciana retables is composed of two types: (a) carved wood figures finished with encarnación on the head and hands, dressed in actual cloth garments to create a more "real" appearance; and (b) carved wood figures completely finished with encarnación and estofado. Each retable incorporates one encarnación figure with cloth garments in the central vitrine. The remaining figures are finished with both estofado and encarnación. Some of the variety possible with the estofado technique is evident in the many statues displayed in this church. (See Figs. 14, 15, and 19) Use of these techniques completely died out at the end of the eighteenth century,

making the surviving examples particularly valuable and noteworthy.[6]

Modeling and carved drapery appear somewhat stiff and conventionalized, giving the figures their doll-like appearance. Expressions of grief or ecstasy, while not always realistic, do hold a strongly appealling character. The figures are seldom grouped or placed in a way to create an interrelated narrative or scene. Even those saints that are shown holding the Christ Child in their arms seem to be a separate unit from the infant--they do not look at the child or hold him in a natural manner. The emphasis is always outward, toward the spectator, with many of the saints extending their hands in communicating gestures. Each of the major figures on the three retables stands about three-quarters life size, approximately four and a half feet tall. Notable exceptions are the angels on either side of St. Cajetan, and the Virgin of Light on the main retablo, (Fig. 10) all of which are slightly smaller. It is interesting to note that none of the figures is depicted as Mexican--all are light skinned.

Upon stepping into the interior of La Valenciana, one discovers that the Latin cross floor plan is not readily visible--evidence that spatial organization was indeed

---

[6]Reginald Fisher, "Santos-Bultos-Retablos," Mexican Iconographic Art (El Paso, Texas: El Paso Museum of Art, 1966), 3.

secondary to the ornamentation. (Fig. 11) The long single nave draws the worshiper forward toward the enormous mass of color, gilt, and movement that composes the high altar retablo. Only when one steps into the crossing of the transept and nave are the transept arms and side retables visible. Standing in this central position, one is surrounded by an environment of which the sole purpose is to inspire and involve the viewer in a devotional setting. Three massive gilt retables stretch from floor to ceiling, and an octagonal dome rises immediately overhead. Every doorway, pilaster, and pendentive is filled with some form of decorative mass. Canopies and domes merge with painted and stuccoed ceiling decoration. There can be no doubt that this style of architectural embellishment was intended to enhance the religious experience of the worshiper and completely involve the spectator in the divine pageant. This intent also partially accounts for the acceptance of stylistic intermixing. As long as the ultimate goal of the creation of a majestic religious environment was met, the means to achieve that end were of minor significance. Intermingling styles were accepted if the resulting design fulfilled the aim of composing a complete devotional setting.[7]

---

[7]Mary Faith Mitchell Grizzard, Spanish Colonial Art and Architecture of Mexico and the U.S. Southwest (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1974), viii.

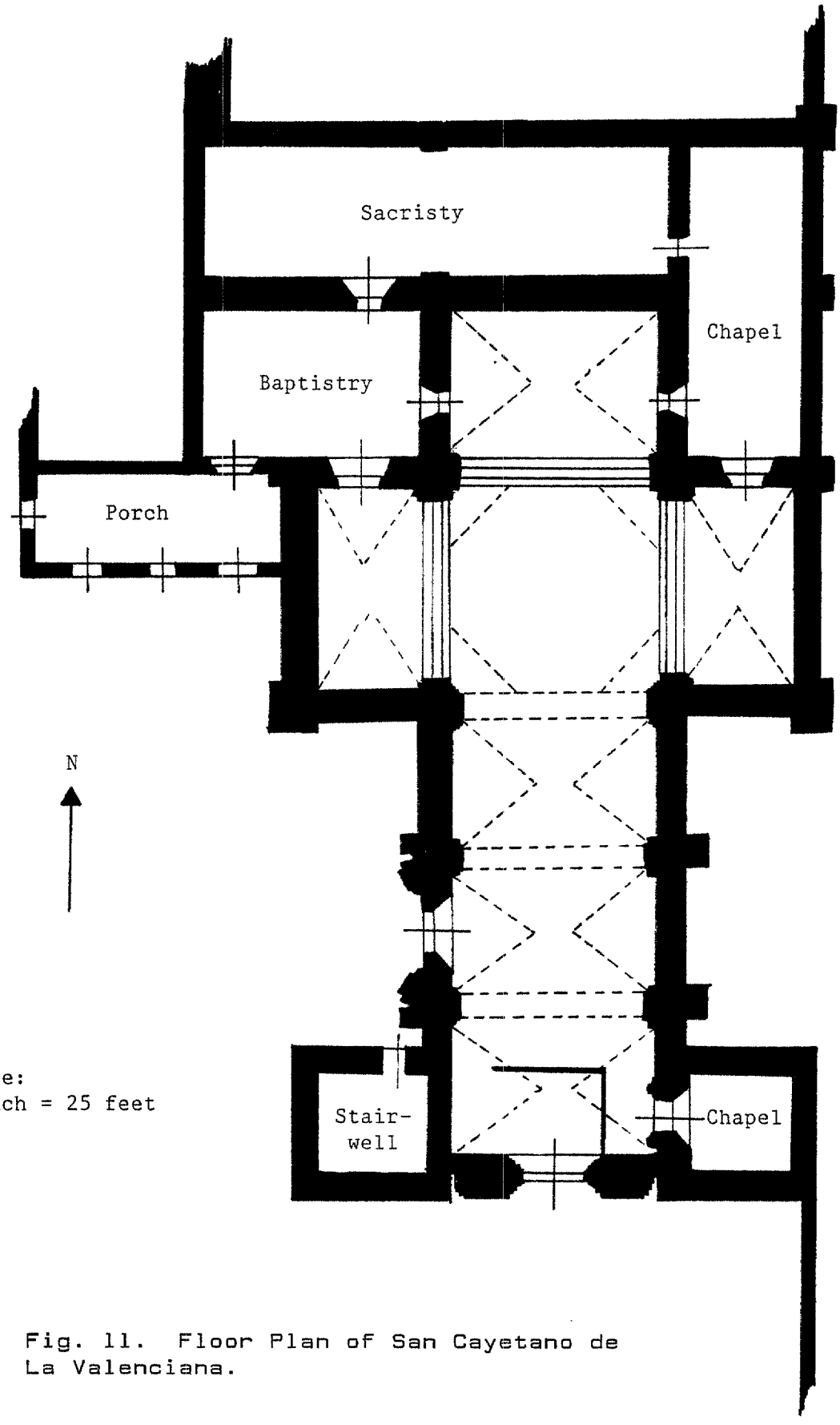

Fig. 11. Floor Plan of San Cayetano de La Valenciana.

The care of churches today illustrates that religion was, and is, a part of the lives of most Mexicans. Without government assistance or other funding, local parishioners often tend these churches themselves with devotion and care. This also aids in accounting for the large number of churches which remain in use and retain much of their original artwork and decoration.[8] However, there remains a great need for professional cleaning and restoration in many churches. For example, the gilt altar screens at La Valenciana have been retouched with gold-colored paint, rather than professionally restored with gold leaf.

In Mexico, collaboration of designers was essential on large and costly retable compositions, which added to the eclecticism of the designs. Collaborations of this type were rare in Spain, where the name of an individual artist or designer was often more prestigious than the actual work produced.[9]

The Baroque concept of Divine Light and the theatrical use of light within a composition was also present in Churrigueresque compositions, although usually through the simple addition of windows. Complex and unexpected light sources as developed in European Baroque designs are rarely

---

[8]Elizabeth Wilder Weismann and Judith Hancock Sandoval, Art and Time in Mexico From the Conquest to the Revolution (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 20.

[9]Baird, "Style in Eighteenth-Century Mexico," Journal of Inter-American Studies 1 (July 1959), 272.

found in Mexico. One of the most obvious uses of light in the Mexican Baroque architecture was evident in the importance of the dome. No church was considered complete without a dome, nor was there a limit to the number of domes that could be present in a single building. The designer of La Valenciana incorporated only one dome over the crossing (Fig. 12); however, some churches incorporate as many as fifty domes--one over every camarine, chapel, and crossing. Another frequently used luminary effect was that of silhouetting a figure against a window within a retablo composition. (See Fig. 18 as an example.) In both of these instances, sunlight is used to represent Divine Light from heaven, sanctifying the objects and persons it strikes. Gold was used here as more than just a means of producing an effect of splendor--it too was a symbol of Divine Light, previously used by the Incas. Gold was also considered an offering to God, the same as the fruits and flowers in the rocaille patterns.[10]

At La Valenciana, the changing light throughout the day illuminates different parts of the retables. The light is at its brightest at midmorning, when brilliant reflections from the gilt retables and white walls bring everything to vivid life. Late in the day when the light is diffused and subtle,

---

[10]Yves Bottineau, Living Architecture: Iberian-American Baroque trans. Kenneth Martin Leake (London: Macdonald, 1971), 131.

Fig. 12. Dome Interior.

the mood is mystical--emphasizing a spiritual, meditative tone. Dramatic light and dark patterns emerge from the projecting and receding elements which overlap and intersect on the surface of the retables. Each retablo is flanked by clerestory-level windows to illuminate further the uppermost portions and flood the central nave with sunlight.

The North Retablo

The high altar is backed by a truly magnificent screen of sculptural complexity. (Fig. 10) Immediately above the altar table is a stone tabernacle containing the Eucharistic Host and framed with carved drapery. This tabernacle serves also as the base of a glazed vitrine (Fig. 13), made to contain a processional figure of Christ depicted as the Man of Sorrows. In recent years the figures in this vitrine have been stolen and replaced repeatedly. The physical appearance of the original figure is unknown, but it presumably followed the typical representation of Christ in a red robe, wearing a crown of thorns. The vitrine is flanked by a free-standing gilt estípite on each side. These estípites have been rotated 45 degrees, placing the joining edge of two sides toward the nave, rather than the flat side. The estípites and the vitrine support a miniature dome with seated polychromed angels on each side. This entire structure is not engaged but is free-standing, and is illuminated from behind by a lead paneled, clear glass rose window which opens

Fig. 13. North Retablo (detail), Vitrine and Window.

into the sacristy. Light from this window silhouettes the figure within the vitrine, creating a halo of light around it.

A statuary niche in the center of the retable (Fig. 10) holds a sculpture of the patron saint of this church, St. Cajetan [San Cayetano]. Founder of his own order, the Theatines, which was dedicated to the service of the poor and the sick, Cajetan is depicted here with his brows knitted in an expression of great compassion. He holds a silver chalice, a common attribute for this saint as he was closely associated with the frequent celebration of the Mass. (See Appendix B) This encarnación figure is dressed in a cloth dalmatic and gold brocade cope. He is accompanied by two doll-like angels dressed in polychromed robes and standing to either side. The recessed niche behind the figure of Cajetan is painted with a delicate red and green floral motif on a cream-colored background. Several of the statuary niches on all three retablos repeat this treatment.

Above the figure of Cajetan at the uppermost portion of the retable is the figure of Mary, the mother of Christ, depicted as the Virgin of Light [La Madre Santisima de la Luz], a popular Mexican theme. Revered as the reliever of all ills, the Virgin of Light is consistently illustrated as calm and serene and having an elegant reverse S-curve in her stance. Mary is dressed in a gold brocade gown of brilliant estofado and wears a blue polychromed mantle draped over her

shoulders. With her right hand, she effortlessly pulls a man from the mouth of a demon, depicted as a black, horned entity with a gaping, teeth-lined mouth. In her left hand, Mary holds the Infant Christ, to whom an angel offers a basket containing the souls of men. Two small cherubs over Mary's head appear to have once held a crown, which is now missing. The archangels Rafael and Gabriel stand at her sides, robed in estofado garments and displaying imaginatively colored wings of white, pink, and blue.[11] The encarnación treatment on the statue of Mary is particularly delicate and life-like.

At the outer edges of this retable stand large, bulky estípites composed of solid, blocky components, medallions with small figures of saints, projecting figures of angels, and a freely interpreted Corinthian capital. On either side of the altar table and attached to the retablo wall are gilded and painted wooden panels decorated with several elongated medallions. These panels are actually small doors opening into a narrow crawlspace behind the retable screen. A stairway within leads upward to a small opening in the back of each statuary niche, permitting access to the statues for removal and use in processionals. A similar treatment of decorated wooden doors at the base of each retable conceals a crawlspace behind all three altar screens.

---

[11]Gloria K. Giffords, Mexican Folk Retablos: Masterpieces on Tin (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 54.

The statuary niche above each door is framed with heavy projecting ornamentation on all four sides. A faldoncito, or skirt of scalloped ornamentation, hangs below the statuary ledge. A small estípite on either side of the niche forms the supporting columns for a small projecting canopy above. Two opposing C-spirals curl away from a small central pilaster extending upwards from the top of the canopy. A Corinthian-like capital echoes the capitals of the outer large estípites.

The figures standing in the outer niches of this retablo are St. Joseph [San José] holding the Christ Child on the lower left, St. Nicolas of Tolentino [San Nicolas Tolentino] on the lower right, St. Francis [San Francisco] on the upper left, and St. John Nepomuceno [San Juan Nepomuceno] on the upper right. While there are no identifying attributes with these figures, Cortés provides the names of the saints who appear on the retables in this church.[12] The reason for combining these four saints is unknown; possibly they held particular significance for this region or the local priest, or they may possibly have been favorite saints of the patron.

Two carved stone doorways flank the main altar, one opening into a small chapel decorated in the Neoclassical style and dedicated to the Immaculate Conception; the other door opens into a baptistry, in which stands a very elaborate

---

[12]Cortés, Valenciana, 13-15.

sculpted baptismal font. These doorframes are carved of the same tezontle stone as the exterior facades and illustrate scenes from the life of St. Cajetan.

Strict formal balance is observed in the design of this retable, which helps to stabilize the feeling of movement created by the multi-textured ornamentation. The retable is organized into thirds both vertically and horizontally. Vertically, the central portion is emphasized by projecting slightly from the wall. This central portion also holds the three most important features of the retable: the vitrine, the statue of the patron saint of the church, and the figure of Mary, the patron saint of the country. Repetition of a rounded arch is used as an organizational device on each of the three retable screens, above the vitrine and in the shape of the top edge of the retable itself. As seen on the exterior portals, molding is used to create an alfiz above the arch in the center of the composition.

The intense rocaille and decorative elements entirely covered in gilt serve as background for the colored sculpted figures. The colors red and gold predominate, creating an air of regal magnificence. The metallic luster of the gilt also gives a feeling of great weight and emphasizes the massive size of the total composition. While the statuary figures are static, the undulating ornamentation and overlapping features constitute the primary source of Baroque movement and depth in this interior.

Paired estípites are used in three places on this retable: framing the outside edge of the retable, flanking the statuary niches on the lower portion of the retable, and as supporting columns for the projecting dome above the glass vitrine. Size and decorative treatment of each of these estípites is slightly varied.

The East Retablo

Dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua [San Antonio de Padua], the retablo in the east transept arm (Fig. 14) retains some of the same elements as the main altar screen with slight modifications in scale and detail. A curved wooden balustrade encloses the altar table and the presbytery yet allows access directly up to the altar screen, permitting very close inspection of the lower surface of the retable.

The tabernacle above this altar has a small relief carving of St. John the Baptist [San Juan Bautista], which parallels the statue of St. John which originally stood in front of the retable window.[13] This statue has been missing, presumably stolen, for many years.

A smaller and less elaborate vitrine above this altar contains the encarnación figures of St. Anthony holding the Infant Christ, dressed in cloth garments. Dressed in a deep blue habit with cord belt, St. Anthony holds his familiar

---

[13]For a photograph showing the statue of St. John in place see Cortés, Valenciana, 15.

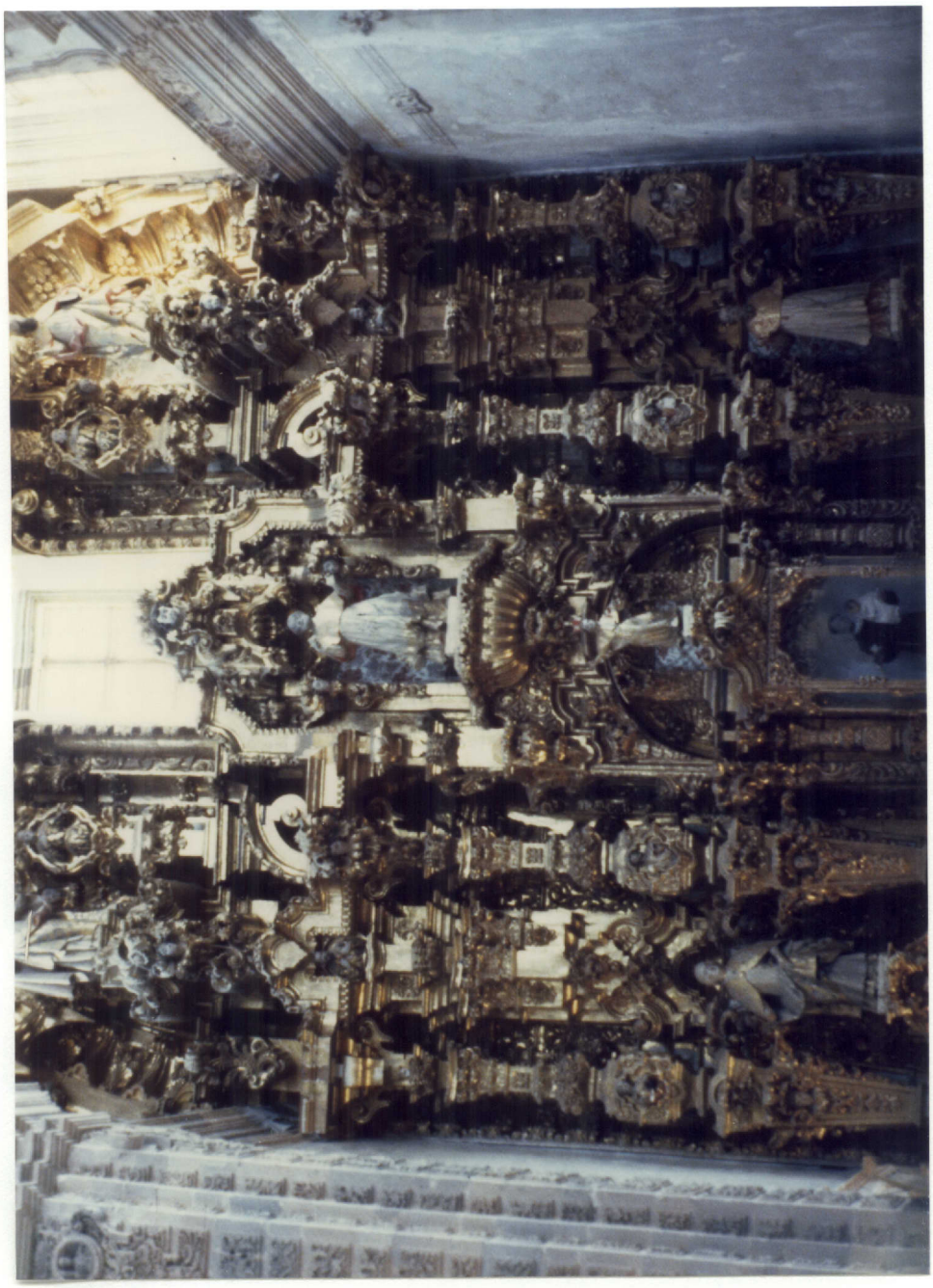

Fig. 14. East Retablo.

attribute of a white lily, symbolizing purity. He is best known for his inspiring preaching and performance of miracles which would perhaps explain his inclusion with the other very important figures depicted on this retablo. The Christ Child is dressed in a contemporary infant christening gown and cap. It is considered a great honor to provide clothing for these religious figures, and, therefore, not at all unusual to see modern clothing on these bulto figures.

Above the vitrine stands the figure of St. Peter [San Pedro], the first pope of the Catholic church. His arms are extended in a gesture of blessing and he wears an ornate estofado liturgical gown. The golden papal triple crown originally on his head is no longer in place.[14]

The four Latin Fathers stand in the niches along the sides of the retablo. St. Jerome [San Jerónimo] (Fig. 15A) on the lower right, easily recognized by his balding head and flowing grey beard, is dressed in a red and gold brocade estofado robe covered by a white polychrome dalmatic. Above him, St. Augustine [San Augustin] holds a book tucked under his left arm, as he gathers the fabric of his cape in his left hand. Deep folds of fabric appear to swirl around his feet, creating a dramatic sense of movement and realism. His long dark beard falls over his chest in thick curls and he raises his right hand to the worshiper in a compelling

---

[14]Ibid.

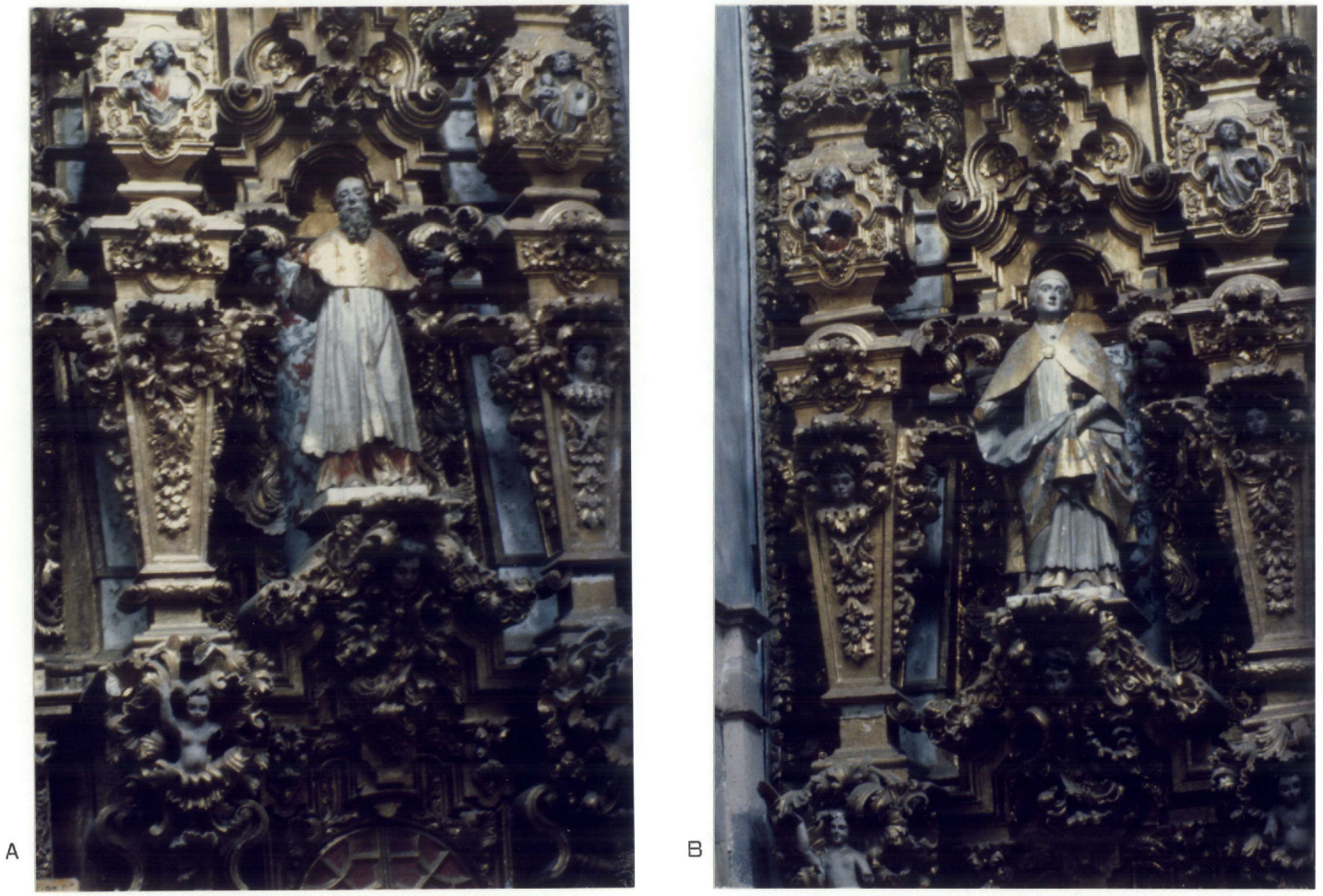

Fig. 15. East Retablo (detail): A. St. Jerome B. St. Gregory.

gesture. St. Gregory [San Gregorio] (Fig. 15B), located in the lower left niche, is clothed in the same elegant liturgical dress as the St. Augustine figure, but this statue has a more Baroque presence due to the manner in which the hair is styled--it appears in the style of contemporary eighteenth-century powdered wigs. St. Leon [San Leon] occupies the upper left niche. The inclusion of St. Leon as one of the Doctors of the Church is an example of the freedom of interpretation and regional variety in selecting the saints which were to decorate a church. In the traditional European listing of the Four Latin Fathers, Ambrose would occupy the fourth position. However, in New Spain, St. Leon was an extremely popular figure and of great importance since he was regarded as the Father of the Church in Mexico. This substitution must have seemed natural and obvious to the designer as well as to the patron and church administrators.

The statue of St. John the Baptist which originally stood silhouetted against the window in this retable would add to the iconographic meaning of this retable. The mission of St. John was to prepare the way for the coming of Christ. He, therefore, represents the history and founding of the church on earth.

At the very apex of this reredo is the figure of the Father Eternal [Padre Eterno] rising out of swirling clouds. (Fig. 16) Holding the orb of power in his left hand, he raises his right hand in blessing and casts his eyes downward

Fig. 16. East Retablo (detail), Father Eternal.

on the worshiper standing far below. While this is a rather neglected subject in European Baroque art, it was quite popular in Latin America.[15]

Quatrefoil-shaped medallions on the estípites form a horizontal row across the retable just below the middle of the composition. (Fig. 14) The four figures depicted in these medallions are unmistakably the four Gospel writers--Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Although their typical identifying symbols of the winged beasts are not depicted with them, their general appearance and the open books in their hands allow easy identification.

A very troublesome figure is located just above the vitrine. (Fig. 14) Smaller in size than the major statues on this screen, it appears to be a very young, almost childlike figure clad in a gold estofado liturgal gown and crowned with a red and gold biretta. The youth is in a graceful contrapposto pose--appearing to step forward in a dance-like motion. The arms are outstretched in a manner which accentuates the dancing movement. There are no attributes or other clues as to the identity of this figure.

Since the traditional meanings and groupings were of little importance in the Mexican designs, figures of saints were often selected purely for their decorative or individual appeal. Unconventional groupings of saints from different

---

[15]Pál Kelemen, Baroque and Rococo in Latin America (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 107.

countries, time periods, and religious orders were not unusual. However, this retablo presents one of the most comprehensive iconographic groupings seen in Mexican churches of this time. The four Fathers of the Church are grouped around the central figure of St. Peter. St. John the Baptist, crucial to the founding of the Church on earth, occupied the uppermost ledge, and the four Gospel writers are also placed in positions of prominence. God the Father surveys this entire group from his position at the uppermost point of the retable. St. Anthony of Padua was important for his inspiring preaching, which brought many souls into the church. Overall, this retable groups together some of the most important writers and theologians of the Catholic Church and presents a strong image of the founding and growth of Catholicism.

The design of this altar screen is the purest of the three retablos in that the articulating elements are clearly assembled in an orderly composition. Three sets of double estípites and two ornamental niche-pilasters are the major structural elements on this screen. This manner of combining these two design elements with the niche-pilaster flanked by the estípite on either side of a symmetrical composition is extremely typical of the time period and the region. It can be viewed as a classic design of the Churrigueresque style and an often repeated one. The immense size of these elements provide great clarity and stability to the design.

These estípites are extremely imposing, giving a strong sense of massive vertical support, although they are purely decorative elements. On this retable the estípites also act as the background for large, decorative medallions containing figures of saints.

The West Retablo

The west retablo (Figs. 17 & 18) presents another variation of ornamentation while still retaining similarities to the other altar screens in this church. It incorporates elements seen on the north and east retablos as well as introducing completely new elements.

The most obvious difference is the substitution of painted canvases for the niches with statuary. Five canvases mounted directly on the retable screen depict scenes from the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe [Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe], the patroness of Mexico.

The story of the Virgin tells of her appearance to Juan Diego, an Indian neophyte, in December 1531. Through a series of appearances to him, she made her desire known that she wished a church constructed upon the site of her appearance. The bishop doubted the authenticity of these visions but was convinced when Diego presented him with a cloak full of roses which the Virgin had provided. When the roses fell out of the cloak, her image was miraculously imprinted on the fabric. This original image on Diego's

Fig. 17. West Retablo (lower half).

cloak is preserved in the basilica dedicated to her in Mexico City. All depictions of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico imitate this original image very closely, and the Valenciana painting is no exception.[16]

This story and many other accounts of interaction between holy figures and common man comprise an essential part of Mexican Catholicism. The special signifiance of the Virgin of Guadalupe lies in the fact that she appeared to a native Mexican, rather than a Spaniard. For this reason, there is a very strong emotional tie to this particular image, as well as to the Virgin in general. The natives also participated actively in processions and other religious ceremonies as well as expressing themselves with art, such as painted personal devotional images to be carried with a person. This was very different from Catholic traditions in Europe but was crucial to the success of the Church in Latin America.[17]

The canvas depicting the Virgin of Guadalupe in La Valenciana (Fig. 18) occupies the central position and is slightly larger than the other four canvases on this retablo. The Virgin stands on a black crescent moon supported by two cherubs. Her red robe is covered by a blue mantle trimmed with gold bands and sprinkled with gold stars. With her

---

[16]Giffords, Mexican Folk Retablos, 52.

[17]Kelemen, Baroque and Rococo, 19.

Fig. 18. West Retablo (upper half).

palms pressed together and her head tilted downward in a prayerful attitude, she is the image of quiet calm. A large crown rests atop her head and her entire figure is encircled by an aureole of pointed rays of light.

The four smaller canvases depict scenes from the story of the Virgin's appearance to Diego and his visits to the Bishop. These paintings are not of the same quality as the sculptural ornamentation on the retablo; however, they do create a narrative which was readily decipherable by an audience of various educational levels. The painted canvases also served the same function as the sculpted figures, that is, the presentation of a sacred image for meditation.

The central glazed vitrine on this retable encloses a figure of St. Joseph holding the Infant Christ. (Fig. 17) These two sculptures are finished with encarnación and dressed in cloth garments. Joseph appears as a young man, clothed in robes of traditional green and yellow--colors which represent marriage, fertility and new life. He holds his attribute of a flowering rod in his right hand while supporting the child with his left. Similar to the figure of the Infant Christ on the east retable, the infant here is clothed in modern christening robes, including a lace-trimmed cap.

To the viewer's left are the statues of St. Ignatious Loyola [San Ignacio de Loyola], the founder of the Jesuit Order holding his banner of victory, and above him St.

Joachim [San Joaquin], father of the Virgin Mary, seen here as a stately old man with a long, grey beard. To the right side stand sculptures of St. Augustine [San Augustin], also the founder of an order, dressed in the dark habit and plain rope belt of the Augustinians, and above him, St. Anne [Santa Anna], mother of the Virgin Mary (Fig. 19). St. Anne is the only female saint depicted anywhere on this church, other than the Virgin Mary. The figures of Joachim and Anne stand in niches, while the two lower figures stand on projecting ledges accessible from the ground floor.

A window at the upper portion of the retable (Fig. 18) is framed by sculpted drapery. The sunlight entering through the window creates an aureole around the figure of the archangel, St. Michael [San Miguel]. While Michael technically is not a saint, the title is given to archangels as a form of reverence. The figure of Michael originally held a staff, as seen in earlier published photographs.[18] His position of honor in the center of the composition also designates him as Captain of the Celestial Court and, together with the three angels on either side of him, this grouping comprises the Seven Princes of the Celestial Court. They are dressed in sweeping gowns with legs exposed to reveal high laced sandals. All seven of the angels stand on projecting corbels. Two exuberant cherubs with drapery

---

[18]Ibid., no page number.

Fig. 19. West Retablo (detail), St. Anne (above) and St. Augustine.

swirling about them burst out from the screen below the angels' feet. Putti and cherub heads project from several locations on this screen.

At the very apex of this retable is a rather rare depiction of the Madonna of Charity (Fig 20). In this scene, the Virgin holds her Infant Christ in her left arm, while enfolding another child under her cloak to her right. Two small angels beneath her must have originally held a lute and harp judging by the position of their hands, which are now empty.

The statuary and canvases on this retablo combine to present a type of extended Holy Family. Joseph and the Infant Christ occupy the vitrine below the Virgin of Guadalupe and are flanked by the parents of the Virgin. The angels in the upper portion seem to be present as defenders of the faith and to pay respect to the Holy Family. The only other figures on this retablo, St. Ignatius and St. Augustine, are founders of monastic orders and certainly strong defenders of the faith as well. These figures may be present as witnesses and worshipers at the gathering of the Holy Family.

Other distinctive features on this retablo are the strong use of geometrically abstracted elements and Baroque depth. The large estípites standing at the outer edges are quite unusual and unlike any others seen on or in this building. The obelisk portion of the estípite has been cut

Fig. 20. West Retablo (detail), Madonna of Charity.

open, so the screen behind the estípite is visible through the open areas. (Fig. 19) These portions are connected only at the top and bottom of the mid-section of the estípite and add a new dimension of layering and shadow to the composition. Greater use of depth is evident on this retable in the combination of two-dimensional canvases, three-dimensional statues, and greater use of projecting and overlapping elements, as with the estípites. Ornamental relief work is also very geometric on this retablo. The spandrels formed between the arch above the vitrine and the alfiz are filled with geometric low-relief molding in mixtilinear patterns rather than curving rocaille and floral forms as seen on the north retable. Shell and vine motifs remain prominent on other surface areas of this retable.

More so than the previous two retables studied, this retable is massed with curling leafy foliage, which forms canopies over the heads of the two saints on the outer sides and appears to grow along the entire surface of the screen. The estípites are also encased in flower and fruit forms, ruffled shells and curling leaves. The designer of this retable was very skilled in his manipulation of these decorative devices, incorporating all features seen on the previous two retables and infusing new and creative touches in his design.

While heavy use of gilt and cold metallic finishes are evident on these retables, the figures of the saints convey a

feeling of warmth and compassion. It is easy to see the origin of these sculptures in the carved wooden figures of Spanish Baroque art, which share many of the same characteristics. The Mexican attempts at realism and expressions of pathos are not as successful as their Spanish counterparts, yet the expressions and gestures are compelling and accessible--something which must have greatly appealed to the worshipers here. Several saints are shown holding the image of Christ as a small infant, a gesture of nuturing and blessing. Family emphasis and strong father figures are abundant throughout the ornamentation of this church [Fathers of the Church, St. Joseph, St. Cajetan, St. Anthony], indicating that this must have been of special concern to this parish.

Other Interior Features

The walls and ceilings are composed of white and cream colored plaster with *argamassa* rocaille decoration. Plaster was a favorite medium with Mexican craftsmen as it was inexpensive and easy to work, allowing rich color work and intricate modeling. Pilasters, arches, and the *coro* spandrels are carved from *tezontle* and *chiluca* stone in richly massed decorative motifs of fruit, leaves, and fanciful human forms. The arched gilt frame of the *retablos* are so closely fitted to the ceiling that they almost appear

to flow directly into the argamassa ornamentation on the ceiling.

Massive piers and pilasters of the interior are carved with fruit and foliage designs. Three arches span the width of the nave with a sculpted angel at the apex of the intrados, appearing to descend to the worshiper below. The ceiling is divided into six main sections with painted argamassa rocaille motifs. Several large chandeliers originally were installed in the ceiling, but the plaster fittings are all that remain now. (Fig. 21)

Another example of Mexican interpretation of Baroque is evident in the ceiling decorations above the nave and the choir loft. Ribbed vaults, reminiscent of the European Gothic styles of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, spring from the pilasters to curve up the ceilings. (Fig. 21) An incorporation of elements from another time and place mixed into the Baroque styles is exemplary of the Mexican conjunto of the Churrigueresque phase.

A conch-headed niche forms a canopy over the interior doorway leading to the west portal and the enclosed garden. Ornate and fanciful relief carving covers the front of the coro loft. An exquisite suspended pulpit of inlaid wood is mounted on the east wall of the nave. The portavoz, also of carved and inlaid wood, is topped with a wooden figure of St. Augustine. An octagonal drum supports the dome (Fig. 12) which bears painted motifs similar to the painted scrollwork

Fig. 21. Ceiling Ornamentation.

on the ceiling of the nave. Eight windows in the dome and the cimborio allow passage of light into the interior.

The four pendentives are filled with painted canvases depicting the Four Church Fathers. The Fathers appear very similar to their sculptural counterparts on the east retablo. In the nineteenth century, three massive painted canvases were added to cover the plain walls of the nave. These canvases as well as those mounted in the pendentives are of far less skillful hands than the sculptural and architectural elements of this structure and constitute no significant artistic merit.

The entrance to the nave is closed off by a mampara, or entrance screen, composed of square coffers. To the immediate right of the entrance in the base of the east tower is a small chapel, which has sustained heavy damage and no longer contains original furniture or ornamentation. Several wooden confessional booths with the same irregular geometric paneling used on the exterior doors are situated throughout the church.

The incorporation of saints from several of the monastic orders is just one of the many indications of the all-embracing spirit of the Theatines. The Jesuits are also known to have been very strong in this area; therefore, it does not seem unusual to see St. Ignatious of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, depicted on the west retablo. St. Augustine, founder of the Augustinian Order, is depicted four times--on

the east retablo, the west retablo, a pendentive, and atop the pulpit canopy. St. Francis, also the founder of a monastic order, is present in several representations, as well. This mixture of images of saints from various orders with decorative devices from many diverse sources seems to reflect the variety incorporated into both the Theatine churches and the Churrigueresque style as a whole.

The gilded retablos are unquestionably the focal point of this interior although there can be no doubt that the impact of the entire ensemble was foremost in the designer's mind. The estípite is used in a variety of shapes, sizes and forms with great originality of design and execution. Architectural organization that is obviously secondary to the decorative format and a freer interpretation of iconography mark this interior as decidedly Churrigueresque.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Churrigueresque was predominantly a style of religious architectural ornamentation which confined itself mainly to the areas of the exterior portals and interior retables. To summarize briefly the two Churrigueresque styles, Spanish Churrigueresque was in full flower during the first third of the eighteenth century in a limited area of Spain. It was characterized by the emphasis of ornamentation over the architectonic structure, with the principle articulating element being the Salomonic column. The main proponents of this phase were the members of the Churriguera family, particularly José. Others who were involved in this school were Jerónimo de Balbás, Francisco Hurtado, Pedro de Rivera, and Lorenzo Rodriguez. Although marked by profuse ornamentation, the conservative nature of this school is evident when compared to the Mexican extremes. There remained a more mannered, classical restraint in these designs and attention was given to traditional iconography and Baroque scale, focus, and light effects. This phase was rather quickly quelled by other more traditional styles in Europe.

The term Churrigueresque originated with critics of the style who favored the return to order of the Neoclassical influences. It became a catchall term for the effusive styles of eighteenth-century Baroque.

Some of the proponents of this style journeyed to the New World and introduced elements of this style in their architectural designs. Most important are the Altar of the Kings by Balbás in the Cathedral of Mexico City and the exterior of the Sagrario Metropolitano by Rodriguez. The estípite was the primary element of definition for this style in Mexico. Once in Mexico, there was immense experimentation and greater originality in design and execution than ever seen in Spain. Inclusion of mudéjar motifs from Spain's Moorish past as well as incorporation of indigenous elements were instrumental in the personal interpretation of this style in Mexico. It was most popular from about 1730 to 1780. Once established, the Neoclassical movement effectually ended all aspects of the Baroque in Mexico, including the Churrigueresque, for it emphasized qualities which were in complete contrast--serenity, order, and simplicity.

Defining the Churrigueresque phase in Mexico is most elusive due to its eclecticism. Embracing variance and experimentation as other styles embrace order and rigidity, it truly can be called the national style of Mexico as it reflects the melting pot of nationalities, ideas, and

influences that were to make up modern Mexico. Nikolaus Pevsner succinctly sums up the three main items which distinguish Mexican Baroque from Spanish Baroque: (1) Mexican designs have more Moorish character in ornamentation, (2) Mexican designers adopted pre-Columbian elements into the Baroque styles, and (3) the Mexican styles take the Spanish traits to extremes, above all in the deliberate setting off of austerity against Churrigueresque profusion. Other factors which had significant influence on regional interpretation of the Churriguerresque churches were the isolation of some areas, traditions of the rural populace, and the influence of local friars.[1]

The church of La Valenciana benefited greatly from the time and place in which it was constructed. Resulting from the wealth amassed by the area silver mines, this church is resplendent in elaborate displays of not only wealth, but the complex trappings of Baroque Catholicism and the love of exuberant display itself. Due to its late construction date within the Churrigueresque phase, La Valenciana benefited from prior experimentation and development in other churches, most notably the Cathedral in Taxco. By the latter part of the eighteenth century, the Churrigueresque had acquired more graceful ornamentation characteristic of

---

[1]Nikolaus Pevsner, John Fleming and Hugh Honour, A Dictionary of Architecture (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1976), 343.

the Rococo--more delicacy and thinness of line.[2] This is evident at La Valenciana in the slender exterior estípites, thin moldings, and delicate rocaille work.

Due to the size and wealth of the city at the time, it is quite possible that Guanajuato supported its own population of designers, although some influx from other major cities was inevitable. The large number of Baroque and Churrigueresque structures in the city could have supported a sizable group of artisans and craftsmen living and working there in the eighteenth century.

La Valenciana is exemplary of the Churrigueresque style in that the defining element of the estípite is apparent on all of the important ornamented areas: both portal facades and the three retables. Other articulating motifs commonly identified with the estípite are also present in abundance, such as the decorative pinjante, the canopy-like faldoncito, scalloped shell patterns, rocaille bands, down-turned spirals, projecting geometric moldings, and the dense surface ornmentation to which some have applied the term horror vacuii.

To break down the separate influences which affected this style and, more specifically, this church, it is necessary to look at several different elements. A truly

---

[2]Mary Faith Mitchell Grizzard, Spanish Colonial Art and Architecture of Mexico and the U.S. Southwest (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), 48.

unique aspect is the mudéjar--the Moorish influence which came to Mexico via the Spanish Christian architects. At La Valenciana, mudéjar elements appear in the star-shaped windows on the bell towers, the strong use of multi-layered geometric protruding molding, the rectangular framing device over the arched doorways, known as an alfiz, geometric shapes in closely-fitted panels on the exterior doors and the interior confessional booths, and the incorporation of raised stucco patterns, argamassa, on the ceilings. An octagonal dome is also typically Moorish, as are the two decorative projecting devices, the pinjante and the faldoncito.

Gothic influences make a surprising appearance in such interior features as decorative ribbed ceiling vaulting and a rose-shaped window behind the main retablo. The Gothic is also readily apparent in the frontality and columnar quality of the sculpted figures, and in carry-overs from very early Christian iconographic depictions, such as the Trinity shown as three identical personages. The Mexican attempts at drama, realism, movement, and expression are often unsuccessful due to superficial understanding of the techniques they were working with. The final result often shares a visual quality with the European Gothic sculpture of several centuries earlier.

Pre-Columbian motifs are also present in combination with Christian motifs--a rather strange juxtaposition to the

eye unaccustomed to this, but an understandable mix of mystical and sacred images to the indigenous designer. The horror vacuii which seems so prevalent on the ancient Mexican temples is resurrected in a new form on the Churrigueresque facades and retables. At La Valenciana, specific elements of pre-Columbian themes appear on the exterior facades. The most obvious is the inclusion of a speech glyph within the attributes presented with the figure of a saint on the south portal. While the actual meaning of this symbol is unclear, the fact that the sculptor included it conveys the importance it must have held. The modeling of human skulls on both the south and west portals is also strikingly similar to the skulls seen in Aztec art. The inclusion of a western-facing facade has also been interpreted as a retention from the pre-Columbian temples, which were usually oriented with a facade facing west. However, since Christian churches were frequently oriented in this same manner, this may have been a natural conjunction of the two cultures. And finally, the use of gold as a symbol of divinity or an offering to a divine being can also be seen as originating with the native population. While use of precious metals in religious observances is universal, it must be interpreted here from the stance of the forces which are known to have been influential, that is, the ancient Aztec and the imported Spanish practices.

Elements which are derived from Italian sources are the estipite itself, and the individual decorative elements of spiraling garlands, carved fruits and drapery, ruffled shells, and painted nosegays of flowers on plaster statuary niches. Mexican artisans and craftsmen certainly took creative liberties with these elements, especially in the later Baroque manifestations, but the original forms are still very much recognizable.

Contributions from the Iberian architectural tradition are the Latin cross floor plan, symmetrical design and formal balance, the overall organization of the altar retables with statuary, and the retable form of facade design. Spain also imposed the Catholic faith and its trappings on the New World, which significantly impacted the style and function of religious architecture for centuries.

Originality in the Mexican Churrigueresque is most evident in the combination of all of these features into a style unseen anywhere else in the world. The eye trained in interpretation of European architectural styles must undergo a reorientation to accept this unique merger of stylistic features.

The variety of stylistic influences was paired with a variety of media and techniques incorporated into this church. Manipulation of surfaces included the use of such diverse substances as plaster, stone, wood, gilt, painted canvases, polychrome, and cloth.

The Mexican Churrigueresque style did not stand alone as a phase of the Baroque but was popular concurrently with other stylistic phases. The estípite was used during the same period as the Salomonic column and the niche-pilaster, and it is the overlapping usage of these elements which produced greater variety and complexity. At La Valenciana, the liberties taken by the designers are evident in the varied forms and usages of the estípite and the inclusion of the niche-pilaster. Use of the ornamental niche-pilaster is particularly notable on this church as it reflects the stylistic change from the Churrigueresque to the Dissolving Baroque style which was beginning to take precedence during the final stages of construction. The main facade displays a mixture of the two elements in a transitional arrangement and the lateral facade is entirely in the Dissolving Baroque style. These variances do not interfere with the harmony of design, as one style dominates the building and these different elements appear harmonious when used contiguously.

Foremost in any translation of this architectural style is the concept of conjunto. In dissecting the many motifs, techniques, symbols, and mediums which combine to create the Churrigueresque building, it is easy to lose sight of the designers' intent--that the entire church must be viewed as a single unit, an ensemble. Once again, a European-based idea was taken to the extreme by the Mexican architects and craftsmen. This principle is difficult to grasp for those

trained in the more traditional architecture of the European Baroque, but it is essential to understanding the Mexican styles. Individual elements are not viewed separately, nor are they given distinct meaning. The techniques used are combined to create a total visual effect, a single environment. Iconography, while undeniably a force in the design's impact, was relegated to a secondary role. The traditional European interpretations of the Christian saints are not completely adequate in this instance. While the Spanish Christian influences are present, rigid adherence to them is not observed. The appearance of sculpted figures and the overall visual impression is foremost. Massing of color and sculpted forms, regardless of their symbolic meaning, are used to convey the Mexican idea of elegance and religious ecstasy. Obviously, the absence of the sculpture on the front facade of La Valenciana is a significant loss to the iconographic study of that portal. Since iconography and symbolism are part of living, ongoing traditions in which conventions of representation are subject to change, the study of iconographic elements on these churches is particularly important in understanding regional influences and interpretations of a specific time period.

In terms of achieving a rich conjunto, this church is a success. It manages to overcome individual features which are somewhat weak, such as the unfinished tower and the doll-like sculpted figures. The interior is most effective

in capturing the emotional quality and physical presence of Baroque grandeur. Incorporation of intercessory figures and the accentuation of saints who held special significance for the family unit predominate on both the interior and exterior. Combined with the primary directive of the Theatine Order, which was dedicated to the service of the poor and the sick, the church of La Valenciana serves as a mystical place where man could seek relief from life's ills. The entire church forms a sanctuary for restoration and consolation.

In conducting research for this paper, primacy was given to direct experience of visual examination since the physical presence is very different from any reproduced image. Only after repeated prolonged study can one develop a visual sensitivity to this type of architectural ornamentation. This is particularly the case with the visually complex retablos.

Detailed photographs were included in this paper to aid in identification and analysis, but every attempt has been made to derive meaning from the composition as a whole, especially since this was known to be such an important concept to the designers of the time. While essential for study, detailed photographs reveal only a small portion of a larger composition which is intended to be viewed as a whole, and tend to fragment meaning by the absence of context. However, only through studying the separate

elements of form [technique, medium, and iconography] can one begin to understand an architectural style. It is hoped that the photographs and interpretations presented in this paper will aid in future clarifications and analysis of this topic.

While this paper has attempted to provide a close study of one building, the need for additional studies such as this is still great. Monographs on other churches are still needed to create a more comprehensive view of the Churrigueresque phase and the interpretation of Mexican Baroque as a whole. Mexican hagiography is another topic which requires additional study. Perhaps one of the most pressing needs is the study of regional interpretations in the depiction of specific saints and the mixture of Christian and Indian practices in Mexican Catholicism as it impacted the art of this time. The role of the various mendicant orders in the growth and spread of architectural styles remains to be researched in depth, as well.

Architecture must be viewed as a visual document of a particular time, place, and set of circumstances. This church reflects the prosperity of the local economy, the contemporary idea of elegance, architectural trends of the time, and the designers' abilities to select and combine decorative features into a single unit.

It is also crucial to recall that the Mexican War of Independence was not only a revolution against the Spanish

government, but also against the Church of Spain. The Catholic Church in Mexico wielded immense power and held vast areas of land. Following the revolution and continuing into modern times, all church lands and buildings have become the property of the Mexican government with the intent of preventing the church from ever again becoming a governing body over the Mexican people. La Valenciana is a monument to a time of foreign occupation, abundant wealth, and the unlimited power of the Catholic Church in a conquered land. But, more importantly, it is a monument to the creativity of the native people and their struggle to forge their own artistic statement in a world dominated by foreign powers.

GLOSSARY

Spanish terms are incorporated due to acceptance in the scholarly community as well as popular usage in the southwestern United States. Where an English equivalent exists, it is provided in parenthesis following the Spanish term.

Alfiz. Rectangular molding framing an arch, a mudéjar feature.

Argamassa. Bas-relief type of stuccowork.

Barroco estípite (Estípite Baroque). A term used by some scholars as an alternative to the term Mexican Churrigueresque. Refers to the extravagant Baroque style popular from the first third of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Its most distinguishing feature was the estípite.

Bulto. Three-dimensional statue of a saint or other holy figure used in the home or in a chapel as a devotional object.

Camarin. A separate room in a church, usually behind the altar, where garments and accessories are stored for dressing the religious images used on the altar retable.

Campanario (Campanile). Bell tower.

Chiluca. White limestone native to Mexico used in sculpture and architecture.

Cimborio (Lantern). Raised structure over a roof or dome which admits light into the interior through glazed sides.

Churrigueresco (Churrigueresque). A form of Baroque architectural decoration used on church facades and altar retables which used profuse surface ornamentation. 1. Mexican Churrigueresque, often referred to as the national style of Mexican architecture, is recognized by its distinctive use of the estípite as a decorative and/or support element. It was introduced to Mexico in the early eighteenth century and passed through a profusion of variations until it died out in the face of the Neoclassical

movement. 2. Spanish Churrigueresque refers to the work of the Churriguera family of architects and other designers who worked in a similar style, most easily recognized by the use of the twisted or Salomonic column. This style enjoyed limited popularity in the first half of the eighteenth century.

Conjunto. The Mexican term for a work of art or architecture which incorporates several techniques or types of art. This work is then meant to be viewed as a single unit or ensemble, not as an assemblage of parts.

Coro (Choir). Area in a church reserved for singers. In Mexican Baroque architecture, this was usually an elevated area just inside the main entrance of a church.

Dissolving Baroque. A phase of the Baroque style in Mexico which was popular from about 1755 to the end of the century. It was identified primarily by the strong use of the ornamental niche-pilaster as the defining element.

Dorado (Gilt). A thin layer of gold leaf applied to carved wooden altar retables and statuary.

Espadaña. A section of wall extending above the roof line, usually crowning the facade of a building, sometimes with small arched openings for bells.

Estípite. A four-sided pillar tapering toward the base which may be engaged or free-standing. It is composed of a base; an inverted obelisk; squared and circular blocks, sometimes elaborately decorated with medallions, garlands, etc.; and a freely interpreted Corinthian capital. Referred to as the hallmark of the Baroque era in Mexican architecture and specifically of the Mexican Churrigueresque style. It is a Mannerist derivative originating from the herm figures of sixteenth-century Italy.

Estofado. A finish on wood sculpture used as a garment treatment in which colored pigment is painted over a gold or silver base. Decorative patterns are then scratched into the pigment, revealing the gold or silver base and giving the appearance of brocade fabric.

Encarnación. Finish on wood sculpture which gives the appearance of human flesh.

Faldoncito (Lambrequin). A band of scalloped ornament near the top of a wall or framing the edge of a cornice or molding, derived from the elaborate fringe of Baroque canopies.

Florón (Boss). A finial or projecting element placed at the top of a window frame, door frame, or other architectural feature.

Imafronte. Central section of a facade between flanking towers.

Interestípite. Space between estípites, which may have same components (that is, a base, central shaft-like area, and capital) as the estípite but does not have the obelisk shape.

Intrados. The inside curve of an arch.

Mampara. Entrance screen.

Mixtilinear. Usually refering to the upper edge of an opening, such as that of a window or door, which has a complex shape of curved and stepped lines.

Mudéjar. Architectural decorative motifs which blend Spanish Christian and Moorish elements. Emphasis is on geometric patterns and has many carryovers from the Gothic style as well as the Islamic.

Neóstilo. The last phase of the Baroque in Mexican architecture, identified by the return of the classical column as the articulating element. Emerging during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, it coincided with the beginnings of the Neoclassical style. The Neóstilo retained many Baroque elements, such as intense use of foliage and mixtilinear moldings, seen in earlier Baroque phases.

Pilastra-nicho (Niche-pilaster). Also referred to as the ornamental niche-pilaster, it is an engaged, flattened column with niches for statuary. Although it does not contain the same elements as the estípite, it may be flanked by estípites. See studies by Baird and Wilson.

Pinjante. A typical feature of Spanish as well as Mexican Baroque ornamentation, resembling a flattened and inverted stepped triangle, and often appear on or below estípites.

Portavoz. Sounding board above the pulpit, usually worked into a decorative canopy. Used with suspended pulpits which hang on the wall like a balcony.

Presbytery. Area within the communion railing of a church, especially reserved for the clergy.

Rejas. Iron grillwork, frequently placed over the exterior of windows.

Reredo (Retable). Ornate screen or wall behind a church altar. In Mexican architecture, this term is sometimes preferred over retablo, which is used more frequently to refer to the small paintings on tin used as votive offerings or as personal devotional objects.

Retablo (Retable). Large ornamental wall or screen behind the altar of a church. In Mexico, it also refers to small devotional paintings on tin or tin-plated metal.

Rocaille. Any of the ornamentation associated with the Rococo period, especially rock, plant, and shell forms combined with artificial forms such as C-shaped scrolls or spirals.

Santo. A saint or holy subject. When used to designate a specific character it becomes a title, as in Santo Domingo.

Soffit. Underneath portion of any architectural element.

Tabernacle. A recess or receptacle, usually above an altar, to contain the Eucharistic Host.

Tezontle. A porous, volcanic stone native to Mexico and much used in colonial architecture, which varies in color from pale pink to dark red, depending on the region where it is found.

Vitrine. A glass-paneled cabinet for art objects, used extensively on the altars of Mexican churches to contain a bulto or processional figure.

APPENDIX A

CHRONOLOGY OF GUANAJUATO, MEXICO WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCES TO THE CHURCH OF LA VALENCIANA

CHRONOLOGY OF GUANAJUATO, MEXICO WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCES TO THE CHURCH OF SAN CAYETANO DE LA VALENCIANA

1534 Village of Guanajuato was founded.

July 3, 1546 Guanajuato conquered by Spain.

1557 The image of the Virgin of Guanajuato was brought to the town of Guanajuato as a gift from King Felipe II of Spain.

1558 Discovery of mother vein of silver in the mountains surrounding Guanajuato.

1696 The Virgin of Guanajuato was placed in the newly dedicated building, Our Lady of Guanajuato's Basilica.

1718 Altar of the Kings, Cathedral of Mexico City, was begun by Jerónimo de Balbás, introducing the estípite to Mexico.

1732 The Jesuits formed a college in the town of Guanajuato, which eventually evolved into the modern Universidad de Guanajuato.

1737 Altar of the Kings was dedicated in Mexico City.

1741 King Felipe V of Spain confered the town of Guanajuato with the title "Muy Noble y Leal Ciudad de Santa Fe, Real de Mines de Guanajuato." At the same time, he granted the right to use his coat of arms.

1747 The church of La Compañia, also in the Mexican Churrigueresque style, was begun in Guanajuato. Constructed by the Jesuits, it was dedicated to St. Felipe Neri.

1760 A flood in Guanajuato destroyed the Jesuit church of San Diego, which was later rebuilt.

1760	Don Pedro Antonio Obregon y Alcocer, Count of Valenciana, founded the Valenciana silver mine.
1765	Construction began on the church of San Cayetano de La Valenciana, under the direction of Obregon.
Nov. 12, 1778 Nov. 28, 1778	Altars were dedicated in La Valenciana with enscribed plaques to mark the dates.
1780	The church of La Valenciana received license from Pope Pious VI.
	Mining disaster at the La Valenciana mine, in which two hundred and fifty workers were killed.
1781	The Academy of San Carlos opened in Mexico City, stating strong opposition to the excesses of the Churrigueresque style and encouraging the more restrained Neoclassical style.
1786	Obregon died, without seeing the church he commissioned in its completed state.
Aug. 6-9, 1788	The church of La Valenciana was officially dedicated in four days of ceremonies and festivities.
1810	The four chaplains at La Valenciana were reduced to two.
1810-21	Mexico's War of Independence--Archival records of La Valenciana were lost when revolution swept the region.
1832	Sculpture of the Immaculate Conception was donated and placed in the sacristy of La Valenciana.
1845	Due to population decline and reduction of mining in the area, the church staff of La Valenciana was reduced to one minister.
1858	City of Guanajuato briefly enjoyed the title of capital of the Mexican Republic.

1873	The Juarez Theatre was constructed in Guanajuato.
Aug. 15, 1877	Small bapistry near main entry of La Valenciana was dedicated during the Festival of Ascension.
1885	Major flood in Guanajuato.
	Three large paintings were completed by Luis Monroy for interior of La Valenciana.
1905	Flood in Guanajuato.
1908	Railroad was built into Guanajuato.
1933	Valenciana, by Antonio Cortés, was published in Mexico City.
1961	Valenciana, written by Armando Nicolau, was published in Mexico City.
1988	Bicentennial of La Valenciana's dedication. The church was photographed for this paper.

APPENDIX B

A STUDY OF ST. CAJETAN

A STUDY OF ST. CAJETAN

1. NAME VARIATIONS

Italian:	Gaetano
Latin:	Cajetanus
Spanish:	Cayetano
English:	Cajetan

2. DATES AND NATIONALITY

Cajetan was born in Vicenza, Italy to a noble family in the year 1480. He died in 1547.

3. SYNOPSIS OF LIFE

As a young man, Cajetan had a vision of the Virgin Mary, who placed her infant son in his arms. After this, Cajetan took a vow of extreme poverty, joined a group of poor laborers and took charge of a hospital for the incurably ill. His travels took him to Venice, then Rome. During the sack of Rome in 1527, he was tortured by Spanish soldiers who thought he was hiding valuables--his fingers were crushed, he was suspended by his thumbs, and he was severely beaten.

Dismayed by the corruption in the church, he formed a religious order dedicated to high standards and devoted solely to the service of the poor and the sick. They founded several hospitals. The Theatines, also known as the Congregation of Regular Clerics, were also concerned with liturgical reform and contributed a great deal to new liturgical books of the time. Their coat of arms is a cross over a three-mountain group, and the motto: "Seek first the kingdom of God." Our Lady of Purity is the patroness of the Theatines.

Christians at this time, even the most devout, communed rarely--possibly 3 or 4 times a year. Cajetan encouraged increased use of the sacrament and, led by his example, many became monthly or weekly communicants. He earned the nickname "The Soul Hunter" due to his fervor in recruiting lost souls.

While meditating, he saw a vision of Christ carrying the cross, representing the evil in the church which bore Him down. Christ beckoned to Cajetan and laid the edge of the arm of the cross on his shoulder. The weight and pain bruised him to the heart.

Some say that Cajetan died of disappointment over the affairs of the church. He died lying on a hard board to emulate Christ dying on the cross.

4. CANONIZATION AND FEAST DATES

August 7 is celebrated as the Feast Day for St. Cajetan. He was canonized in 1671.

5. ATTRIBUTES

The most common attributes depicted with Cajetan are the chalice of Holy Communion and a white lily held in his hand. He is usually shown wearing the black robe of his order, but may appear dressed for the celebration of the Mass. A cross may stand behind him on which are crowns of roses and thorns, sometimes a gold crown. There may also be a triangle enclosing an eye, symbolizing God. Miscellaneous attributes associated with Cajetan are a skull, nails, book with pen or inkhorn identifying him as the founder of an order, or flames rising from his chest (heart) to depict fervor.

6. PATRON SAINT

Cajetan is recognized as the patron saint of the poor and the sick. In Mexico, he has also become the patron saint of gamblers, due to his wealthy family background.

7. TYPICAL DEPICTION

Most typical depictions of Cajetan show him holding the infant Christ in his arms or holding the chalice for celebrating communion. He is dressed in a black robe, may have a gold chain around his neck, which makes reference to his wealthy family. He may hold a cross or have one behind him, on which are crowns of roses, although he was not a martyr. More rarely, his vision of seeing Christ bearing the cross may be depicted.

8. RELICS

His body was laid in St. Paul's Cathedral in Naples, Italy, were it remains today.

9. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baring-Gould, Sabine. The Lives of the Saints. London: John Hodges, 1875.

Hallett, P. H. Catholic Reformer: A Life of St. Cajetan of Thiene. Westminster, MD, 1959.

Paschini, P. S. Gaetano Thiene, Gian Pietro Carafa e le origini dei Chierici Regolari Teatini. Tome, 1926.

Sagrera, A. "Theatines" in New Catholic Encyclopedia (Vol. 14) New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Atl, Dr. [Gerardo Murillo], Manuel Toussaint, and Jose R. Benetiz. Iglesias de México. 6 vols. México, D.F.: Publicaciones de la Secretaría de la Hacienda, 1925.

Attwater, Donald. A Dictionary of Saints. London: Burns, Oates, Washburne, 1948.

Baez Macias, Eduardo. El arcángel San Miguel. México, D.F., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1979.

Baird, Joseph A., Jr., The Churches of Mexico: 1530-1810. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962.

_____. "The Development of the Retable Dominated by the Ornamental Niche-Pilaster." In Retablo Barroco a la Memoria de Francisco de la Maza, México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Instituto de Investigacions Estéticas, 1974.

_____. "Eighteenth-Century Retables of the Bajio: The Querétaro Style," Art Bulletin, 35 (September 1953): 195-216.

_____. "Mexican Architecture and the Baroque." In Latin American Art and the Baroque Period in Europe: International Congress of the History of Art, XX, New York, 1961, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.

_____. "Style in Eighteenth-Century Mexico." Journal of Inter-American Studies 1 (July 1959): 261-276.

Bantel, Linda and Marcus Burke. Spain and New Spain. Mexican Colonial Arts in Their European Context. Corpus Christi: Art Museum of South Texas, 1979.

Baring-Gould, Sabine. The Lives of the Saints. London: John Hodges, 1875.

Baxter, Sylvester. Spanish Colonial Architecture in Mexico. 10 vols. Boston: J. B. Millet, 1901.

Benedictine Monks, Ramsgate (compilers). The Book of Saints. 4th ed. New York: Macmillan, 1947.

Bles, Arthur de. How to Distinguish the Saints in Art by Their Costumes, Symbols, and Attributes. New York: A. A. Culture Pub., 1925; reprint, Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1975.

Bottineau, Yves. Living Architecture: Iberian-American Baroque. Translated by Kenneth Martin Leake. London: Macdonald, 1971.

Butler, Alban. Lives of the Saints. New York: Kenedy & Sons, 1956.

Carrillo y Gariel, Abelardo. Técnica de la pintura de Nueva España. México, D.F., 1946.

Castedo, Leopoldo. A History of Latin American Art and Architecture. Edited by Phyllis Freeman. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969.

Charlot, Jean. Mexican Art and the Academy of San Carlos 1785-1915. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962.

Cortés, Antonio. Valenciana; Guanajuato, México. México, D.F.: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1933.

Drake, Maurice and Wilfred. Saints and Their Emblems. London: T.W. Laurie, 1916.

Encyclopedia of World Art. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960. S.v. "Churrigueresque Style," by Manuel Lorente Junquera.

Fisher, Reginald. "Santos-Bultos-Retablos" Mexican Iconographic Art. El Paso, Texas: El Paso Museum of Art, 1966.

Giffords, Gloria K. Mexican Folk Retablos: Masterpieces on Tin. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974.

Grizzard, Mary Faith Mitchell. Spanish Colonial Art and Architecture of Mexico and the U.S. Southwest. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1986.

Hallett, P. H. Catholic Reformer: A Life of St. Cajetan of Thiene. Westminster, MD, 1959.

Holweck, Frederick George. A Biographical Dictionary of the Saints. St. Louis: Herder, 1924; reprint, Detroit: Gale Research, 1969.

Kelemen, Pál. Art of the Americas, Ancient and Hispanic. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1969.

_____. Baroque and Rococo in Latin America. New York: Macmillan, 1951.

_____. Vanishing Art of the Americas. New York: Walker & Co., 1977.

Kilham, Walter H. Mexican Architecture of the Vice-Regal Period. New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1927.

Kubler, George. "Arquitectura española 1600-1800" Ars Hispaniae, 14, Madrid, Spain, 1957.

_____. Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948.

_____. "On the Colonial Extinction of the Motifs of pre-Columbian Art," reprinted in Charlotte M. Otten, Anthropology and Art. New York: The National History Press, 1971.

Kubler, George and Martin S. Soria. Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and Their American Dominions, 1500-1800. Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1959.

Lees-Milne, J. Baroque in Spain and Portugal and its Antecedents. London, 1960.

Marco Dorta, Enrique. Ars Hispaniae XXI, Arte en America y Filipinas. Madrid: Editorial Plus-Ultra, 1973.

Markman, Sidney D. Hispano-American Colonial Architecture: Social, Historical Stylistic Determinants with Especial Reference to Mexico and Guatemala. Louisville, KY: University of Louisville, 1984.

Maza, Francisco de la. El churrigueresco en la ciudad de México. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1969.

New Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967. S.v. "Theatines," by A. Sagrera.

Nicolau, Armando. Valenciana. México: Dirección de Monumentos Coloniales, Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, 1961.

Osborne, Harold, ed. The Oxford Companion to Art. London: Oxford University Press, 1970. S.v. "Churrigueresque" and "Herrera, Juan De."

Pacheco, Francisco. Arte de la pintura, su antigüedad y grandezas. Madrid, 1866.

Paschini, P. S. Gaetano thiene, Gian Pietro Carafa e le origini dei chierici Regolari Teatini. Tome, 1926.

Pevsner, Nikolaus, John Fleming and Hugh Honour. A Dictionary of Architecture. Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1976.

Roig, Juan Ferrando. Iconografía de los santos. Barcelona: Ediciones Omega, 1950.

Sanford, Trent Elwood. The Story of Architecture in Mexico. New York: Norton, 1947.

Segre, Roberto, editor. Latin America in Its Architecture. Kusnetzoff, Fernando, editor of English edition. Translated by Edith Grossman. New York: Holmes and Meier Publishing, Inc., 1981.

Taylor, R.C. "Francisco Hurtado and His School," Art Bulletin. 32 (March 1950): 25.

_____. "Rococo in Spain," Architectural Review. (July 1952):

Toussaint, Manuel. Colonial Art in Mexico. Translated and edited by Elizabeth Wilder Weismann. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967.

Vargas Lugo de Bosch, Elisa. Las portadas religiosas de México. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Instituto de Investigacions Estéticas, 1969.

Weismann, Elizabeth Wilder. "The History of Art in Latin America, 1500-1800; Some Trends and Challenges in the Last Decade," Latin American Research Review. 10 (Spring 1975): 7-50.

_____. Mexico in Sculpture: 1521-1821. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950.

Weismann, Elizabeth Wilder and Judith Hancock Sandoval. Art and Time in Mexico From the Conquest to the Revolution. New York: Harper and Row, 1985.

Weismann, Elizabeth Wilder and Judith Hancock Sandoval. "The Astonishing Baroque," Americas (November-December 1985): 9-11, 60-63.

Wilder, Mitchell A. and Edgar Breitenbach. Santos: The Religious Folk Art of New Mexico. New York: Hacker Art Books, 1976.

Wilson, Robert D. The Niche-Pilaster in the Facades and Portals of Eighteenth-Century Mexico. Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 1977.

Wroth, William. Christian Images in Hispanic New Mexico. Colorado Springs: The Taylor Museum, 1982.