

SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE
AND THE SANCTUARY OF JESÚS
NAZARENO DE ATOTONILCO
MEXICO



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PRESENTATION
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TEXT
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PRESIDENCY OF THE UNITED MEXICAN STATES

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As president of Mexico I am very proud and satisfied that a group of citizens —with local, state and federal authorities— are striving to obtain the recognition as World Heritage granted by the UNESCO for the city of San Miguel de Allende and the Sanctuary of Jesús Nazareno of Atotonilco, in the state of Guanajuato.

I praise this initiative as I know that the citizens of these two communities have always worked with great enthusiasm for the preservation of their archeological, historic and artistic heritage. These people are Mexicans proud of their heritage, result of the historic process that turns that outstanding city and its spiritual retreat sanctuary not only into the cradle of a cultural miscegenation but also an indisputable bulwark of the independent Mexico.

The publicity that this project has had and the consolidation thereof, will allow Mexico to be positioned as a leader nation in the privileged map of outstanding universal value sites. Furthermore it will invite more tourism to our country which inevitably will mean more and better employment for Mexicans.

My administration acknowledges that cultural heritage is an indispensable element in the quality of life and it is as well an essential resource for the development of the country. As

stated in the principles of the Conference of Stockholm, when referring to Cultural Policies for the Development, we know that access and enjoyment of heritage is an inherent right of all citizens. The above is the reason for our decision to create the necessary conditions for the full enjoyment of those rights, with the aim that every day more Mexicans and foreign visitors have the opportunity of knowing the historic and cultural assets of our country.

In this same line of thought, the Ministry of Tourism is currently fostering the *Program for the Extension of Niches and Markets, Cultural Tourism 2007-2012*. The purpose of this program is the tourist consolidation of our cultural sites, specially the 27 sites that have already been declared as World Heritage by the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization, UNESCO. We hope that in the very near future the city of San Miguel de Allende and the Sanctuary are also part of that list.

I congratulate all of the residents of San Miguel for this great effort to make their city and sanctuary known throughout the world and valued as it is an important part of our heritage. You have all the support of the federal government, as San Miguel de Allende is always present in the spirit and heart of all Mexicans.

Felipe Calderón Hinojosa

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED MEXICAN STATES



PRESENTATION

Much has been written and discussed about the morphology and the social-historic dynamics of the town, either to underline the planetary importance of the phenomenon or to retrace the guidelines and to prove the variations of the investigation. It is the case of the famous essay of Max Weber about the peculiarity of the *original characters* of the western city in comparison with the others. And in this manner, it can be perfectly understood that we have not been capable of offering a distinctive and articulated answer leading us to a consensus, at the same time able with audacity to open new roads to new generalizations, or else to give way to reductive and systematic instances of an abstract character: a western town and an eastern town, and old town, a modern town, a productive town, a consumer town.

No plan takes into consideration a reality which reveals nuances and articulations which are closer to our daily world.

The study which based the file for the postulation of the *Protective town of San Miguel and the Sanctuary of Jesús Nazareno of Atotonilco* to be included in the list of World Heritage, implied an exhaustive, thorough and rigorous study of this historic complex, based on documentary local, regional and national historic sources of Mexico and Spain.

The study precisely attended to the peculiarity and original character of San Miguel el Grande, as a town protecting the Royal Inland



Road, first Cultural Itinerary opened by the Spaniards in the interior of the American Continent, and as a town located in the center of the complex web of the Mexican Bajío.

In medieval Spain and that of the Renaissance a town was that which did not have a Lord and was governed by the King. It had the privilege of sending procurators to the courts to negotiate the taxes to be paid in Exchange for benefits. This was independent of the size. Thus, Madrid, capital of Spain since 1561, was not a city but a town.

Originally this also applied to the Spanish viceroalties, but the way of government quickly changed. Therefore the mayoralty of San Miguel el Grande, which could only exercise justice, later acquired the government and administrative powers to collect taxes, as well as to be in charge of the army, the planning and conservation of public works and the control of other activities.

The changes and transformations of the concept of a European town were changed and enriched in the New World, not only because of the contributions of the large urban groups of Aztecs, Mayas and Incas, among others, but also because the initial mission taken on by Spain and Portugal in America during three centuries was incomparable. Between 1492 and 1809, the Spanish Crown founded approximately 970 human settlements between towns, villas and cities all along the continent.

Although it is true that the foundation of a town could not be done by just anyone and was regulated by the Royal Ordinances, who could suggest one only formal pattern in its design, the weight of the cultural factors and the immensity of the American territories as well as its territorial wealth modeled a great variety of towns that even today have not been fully studied.

It is precisely in the view of Weber that we feel it is necessary to reveal overtones and articulations in reference to the typological diversity of the American town, so as not to risk falling into generalizations

which are contrary to the values of authenticity and integrity of the urban whole.

San Miguel de Allende represents an extraordinary example of a New Hispanic settlement, where the “mestizo” soul of Mexico, which is a paradigm of cultural diversity, so current in the philosophy of UNESCO and implicit in the town and in the rest of the country was forged. One of the most important independence movements of Spanish America was planned in this town, which also allowed its urban evolution with its society, building a bridge of continuity between its historic heritage, daily life and its current use.

Francisco Javier López Morales

DIRECTOR DE PATRIMONIO MUNDIAL/INAH (MÉXICO)



MAP OF THE TOWN OF SAN MIGUEL AND ITS JURISDICTION (1580)
ARCHIVES OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF HISTORY, MADRID



CHURCH OF LA SALUD, CA. 1920

SAN MIGUEL EL GRANDE, ILLUSTRATED CREOLE TOWN

I

SAN MIGUEL, CREOLE TOWN

The Bajío was a zone where the creation and accumulation of wealth stimulated the urban development with special characteristics, different from those of the New Spain. The regional urbanization of the 18th Century was different from the rest of the territory of the New Spain; while in the first ones cities, villas and towns were built, in other parts the increase in population was due to ranching communities.¹

The urban lowland features, based strictly on plans, drawings, rectilinear and rectangular sketches, much like a chess board, were made up of

wide, straight, clean, sunny and happy streets, the majority of the buildings are low, with exterior walls neatly limed, with wide interior Spanish style patios, and corridors with fine columns and flower pots...²

¹ Luis González, "Ciudades y villas del Bajío" in *Relaciones* No. 4, vol. I, Zamora, El Colegio de Michoacán, autumn 1980, p. 103.

² *Ibid.*, p. 104.

The main plazas were also large and surrounded by

*many temples standing out from the whole because of their fresh and high walls and roofs, their enormous domes and high, thin towers; there were convents and good homes towards the centre of the town and adobe huts with sad faces towards the outskirts.*³

Therefore, the urban type of the towns had the following characteristics:

1. The foundation of most of them was not merely juxtaposition over previous urban settlements like it happened in the Mexican Mesoamerica.
2. Different from most of Mexico which used Pre Hispanic names, its toponymy was of Hispanic origin.
3. It was an outstanding experimental camp for political, administrative and economic readjustment of the policies undertaken by Charles III.
4. It was an example of the convent life which followed the apostolic or missionary life of the first vice royal century.
5. In the 18th Century this region promoted the pragmatism and rationalism of the illustrated current.
6. It formed a leadership which fought baroque art and, searching for a regional identity, it firmly established the neo classic style in architecture and applied arts.⁴

³ *Ibidem.*

⁴ Luis González, *ibid.*, pp. 110 and 111.

As to its academic development, while most of the country remained distant, the Bajío showed a strong educational impulse, product of the wealth generated from the 16th Century: the rich land owners gave their support, under the rectorship of the Franciscan order, to the creation of schools in the most important towns along the roads from Mexico City to Guadalajara; on their part the Jesuits opened several higher education institutions in Guadalajara, Guanajuato, León, Celaya, Valladolid and Querétaro; the Augustinians opened one in Salamanca and a school for girls in Irapuato, as well as the seminaries in Guadalajara, Valladolid and Querétaro, and what is today the University of Guadalajara (1791).⁵

Between 1767 and 1821 this vast region was the stage and heart of a cultural change which led to the formation of new illustrated socio cultural groups, product of the avant garde education of institutions such as the School of San Francisco de Sales in San Miguel el Grande, opened by the Congregation of the Oratory of San Felipe Neri.

The document which approved the foundation of the Congregation was granted by the Spanish Crown in 1720, as well as the papal approval in 1727 by Pope Benedict XIII. With the permission, the priests could give classes to children and adults in different subjects, with the privilege that those who studied there could graduate from the University of Mexico.

An excellent body of scholarly priests placed the School of San Francisco de Sales, during the first half of the 18th Century, along with similar institutions such as the Jesuits, offering a wide range of knowledge through notes, text and anthologies of the Latin classics: Cicero, Ovid and Virgil as well as the Fathers of the Church. The studies in Philosophy and the courses in Arts, Logic, Physics and Metaphysics were also of great importance. The masters explained their subjects by the syllogistic method and later the students

⁵ Luis González, *ibid.*, p. 107.

answered the questionnaires either orally or in writing, and the subjects were discussed in free repetitions and public examinations at the end of the courses.

The fame of “observance and literature” displayed by the Oratory and the School of San Francisco de Sales attracted the attention of the priest from Zamora, Michoacán, Father Juan Benito Díaz de Gamarra y Dávalos, who began giving philosophy classes in this institution in 1764, elevating its academic level through the publication of his work *Elementa Recentiores Philosophiae* in 1774, a compulsory text in the University of Mexico as well as in the School of San Francisco de Sales. This course in philosophy for university students which defended the principles of Cartesian rationalism,⁶ kept the students updated in the newest tendencies of European philosophy, banishing Aristotle from the classrooms.

As the main figure in the first Mexican Illustration, Díaz de Gamarra should be recognized as “the first Mexican intellectual who studied abroad to later reform the education of his native country”.⁷ His writings, baroque and illustrated, were the result of an extraordinary intellectual and spiritual vitality found in San Miguel el Grande during the 18th Century, unique in the Bajío, therefore it can well be considered as an *experimental illustrated laboratory* within the wide organization of settlements, as a base for new towns.

⁶ Elías Trabulse, *Ciencia Mexicana, estudios históricos*, Mexico, Textos Dispersos Ediciones, 1993, p. 89; cf. David A. Brading, *Espiritualidad barroca, política eclesiástica y renovación filosófica. Juan Benito Díaz de Gamarra (1745-1783)*, Mexico, Centro de Estudios de Historia de México (Condumex), 1993; Benito Díaz de Gamarra, *Descripción de la villa de San Miguel el Grande y su alcaldía mayor*, Mexico, Amigos del Museo de San Miguel de Allende, A.C., 1994.

⁷ David A. Brading, *op. cit.*, 1993.



Urban Development

After the initial intents during the 16th Century to contain the attacks of the groups which originated in the Bajío (zacatecos, guachichiles and guamares) Spanish policy concentrated more on the protection of the main transportation artery of the silver, the Royal Inland Road, and the formation of new settlements which would fulfill a triple mission:

- a) To establish potential defense centres.
- a) To colonize “desolated” spaces.
- a) To provide resources and services (manpower) for the new mining centres.⁸

It is within this foundational logic during the 17th and 18th Centuries that the origins of the towns of San Miguel el Grande, San Felipe, Celaya, Lagos and León should be situated. And it is exactly in the Illustration Century in which the lowland towns and cities acquire the definite features which characterize them.

The town of San Miguel, founded and situated strategically to protect the Road of Silver, soon became the spinal column of the New Hispanic economy, because gold and silver were transported through this road; as well as the necessary provisions for the metallurgical production of the precious metals; the equipment, rations and clothing which made it possible to sustain the main mining cities such as Zacatecas, Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí; as well as the distribution of the munitions to defend the towns and roads.

Also, as a close “wet nurse” city on the route to the large mining centres, San Miguel el Grande served as a purveyance or agricultural and cattle feeding location for these (aside from Mexico City), there-

⁸ Luis González, *op. cit.*, p 108.

fore its urban development took place, thanks to the economic opulence, with large spaces and an “hacienda” type architecture rich in distinction and dignity.

*

Both in the spontaneous settlements as in the later “congregations”, the indian towns gave priority to the access and application of irrigation systems that were incorporated as a base for production and sustenance.⁹ It is in this criteria that the two settlements of the town of San Miguel of Chichimecas, first in 1542 close to the river San Miguel and later in 1548-1549, when it was moved to the place known as *Izcuinapan*, which occupied one of the slopes of the hill of Moctezuma, a privileged spot because it was the source of the spring of “El Chorro” should be considered.¹⁰

Its existence represents one of the first achievements in the tenacious missionary work carried out by the Franciscans in the northern part of the New Spain, congregating pacified groups of indians around a small complex made up of a modest mission, a hospital, a school and a store.¹¹ However, threatened by the dangers of the border and constantly attacked by hostile groups during the first confrontations of the Chichimeca War, it was temporarily abandoned between 1551 and 1554.

Some time afterwards the Spanish occupation took place, by an order given by Luis de Velasco I (18th of December, 1555), which gave instructions in reference to the foundation of a town of Spaniards

⁹ José Ignacio Urquiola, “Fundaciones de pueblos y villas en el Bajío y formación de sistemas de usos de aguas” en *Memoria del Congreso Internacional de Historiografía Guanajuatense* Guanajuato, Universidad de Guanajuato, 2005, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰ David Charles Wright Carr, *La conquista del bajío y los orígenes de San Miguel de Allende*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999, pp. 42-43; Graciela Cruz López, *San Miguel el Grande: el espíritu de la Tierra Adentro* (unpublished), 2006.

¹¹ *Ibid.*



TEMPLE OF SAN FRANCISCO DE ASIS

in the site known as San Miguel, in the Province of Xilotepec, to protect the “road of the Zacatecas”, encouraging the population growth at the northern border and safeguarding other foundations. According to its “protector” origin, the town was an emblematic site for the Spanish outpost through the inhospitable inland country, providing safety and peace for the traffic of persons and merchandise, as well as to the towns founded previously in the same zone.¹²

The town hall of San Miguel, also founded in 1555,¹³ was part of a territory administered by the Royal Audiency of Mexico, while in the ecclesiastic terrain it formed a part of the government and administration of the Diocese of Michoacán, with its seat in the old Valladolid.¹⁴

The town had a first parish church (with serious construction problems), administered by a secular priest, vicar and chaplain; plus three or four clergymen who lived in the town and its haciendas; a hospital and convent of San Francisco, aside from the hospital and chapel for indians of the “Limpia Concepción” (Clean Conception). It was administered by a principal mayor, two ordinary mayors elected every year, a mayor of the Holy Brotherhood who worked in police matters, four aldermen, a second lieutenant, a general depositary and a court clerk of the chapter.¹⁵

At the end of the 17th Century the population grew, along with

¹² Cf. *Reales Ordenanzas para la dirección régimen y gobierno del importante cuerpo de la mine-ría de Nueva España y de su Real Tribunal General de orden de su majestad*, Mexico, Sociedad de Ex-alumnos de la Facultad de Ingeniería/UNAM, 1976.

¹³ Peter Gerhard, *Geografía Histórica de la Nueva España 1519 -1821*, Mexico, UNAM, 1986, pp.243-245.

¹⁴ Cf. David A. Brading, *Una Iglesia asediada: el Obispado de Michoacán*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994; Óscar Mazín Gómez, *El Gran Michoacán*, Zamora, El Colegio de Michoacán, 1986.

¹⁵ Newberry Library, Chicago, Ayer Collection, Manuscript 1106 A., 3, F. 44 v.; y Manuscript 1106 C., 3, F. 131f -132 v. (cited by Graciela Cruz López, *ibid.*); David Charles Wright Carr, *ibid.*

its resources and the implementation of the needs of supplies, public works and embellishment of the religious and civil buildings, among them the residences of the main Spanish families which were concentrated around the barracks square, the parish square and at the accesses or exits of the town.

Its urban environment was not only organized according to what was proposed in the legislation for the foundation of Spanish cities and towns, but also because of topographical conditions, the access to natural resources (land and water), the geographical distribution of its civil and religious powers, the kind of economic activities and the hierarchical structure of the town.

Between 1730 and 1760, just before the “first scientific Mexican illustration”,¹⁶ the spaces of power and control of the town (the royal or consistorial homes, the jail and the corn exchange house) were moved from the old location of La Soledad,¹⁷ to a site where a new barracks square was designed, where the parish church had been since the 16th Century, and which by the second half of the 18th Century had already passed through several construction stages.

At the same time as the public buildings were built, the families who had acquired neighboring land built their new residences, living there from the mid 18th Century well into the 19th Century.

The characteristics of the urban development of the town of San Miguel el Grande during the second half of the 18th Century cannot be conceived without making note of the layout of its streets and

¹⁶ Elías Trabulse, *Historia de la ciencia en México*, volume I, Mexico, Conacyt/Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983, p. 72.

¹⁷ Area which seems to have been occupied from the moment of its foundation between 1555 and 1560, until the decades of 1730 and 1760, when the construction project of the new buildings which currently form City Hall was carried out. Luis Felipe Nieto Gamiño, “Palacio municipal de San Miguel de Allende” in Arturo Miranda Montero (cordinator), *La Ruta de la plata*, Guanajuato, Presidencia Municipal, 2000, p. 341.

buildings, linked to the operation of the piping system which supplied the town with potable water; the presence of the districts is also important, some of them founded since the 16th Century in places close to downtown or on the outskirts, strategically located near springs, lanes, roads, bridges, markets, hospitals, textile factories or religious buildings.¹⁸

The Bajío was also known because nowhere else in the New Spain did the “racial wall fall so fast”¹⁹, therefore in San Miguel all the different social, cultural and ethnic groups “mixed and became a relatively homogeneous population: the “mestizo” by excellence of the New Spain”.²⁰

The cultural miscegenation did not limit itself only to the biological “mestizos”, but included “forms of integration of thoughts and cultures which were a genuine expression of an American synthesis”.²¹ It wasn't just a “plain accumulation of strange manifestations, “(but in fact a real and conscious) integration of proposals along with the process of thoughts and sensitivities”,²² which resulted in innovative art and architecture.

It is thus that in only one town one can find art, culture, economy, and society, everything in a melting pot which generates not only an outstanding town but also political restlessness. The inhabi-

¹⁸ In the case of the districts of El Chorro, Guadiana, San Juan de Dios, Calvario, Ladrillera, Palo del Cuarto, Carnicería, Sal si puedes, Tecolote, San Nicolás, Ojo de Agua, El Palmar, Mezquital, Pueblito, Nuestra Señora de Loreto, Valle del Maíz, Cerrito, San Antonio de la Casa Colorada, El Carrocero, Obraje, and Tenería, among others.

¹⁹ Luis González, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

²⁰ Rosalía Aguilar, “De la Colonia al siglo XIX” in Luis Felipe Nieto (*et. al.*), *San Miguel de Allende. Guía del visitante*, Mexico, PC Editorial, 1993, p. 36.

²¹ Ramón Gutiérrez, “Arquitectura y urbanismo, siglos XVI-XVIII” in Ramón Gutiérrez and Rodrigo Gutiérrez Viñuales, *Historia del arte iberoamericano*, Barcelona, Lunewerg Editores, 2000, p. 33.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

tants of San Miguel are different “from those of other creole towns and cities.”²³

To this panorama one must add the rich civil and ecclesiastic architectural universe, formed by hospitals, cemeteries, inns, public plazas and markets, as well as the parish church, the houses pertaining to the church, the Royal Customs House, the Hospital of Indians of the “Limpia Concepción”, the convent of San Antonio and church of San Francisco, the Congregation and temple of the Oratory of San Felipe Neri, the “Santa Casa de Loreto”, “Nuestra Señora de la Salud”, the convent of Santa Ana, the convent of Santa Rosa de Lima, and the “Santa Escuela de Cristo”, among others.

In a unique painting kept in the sacristy of the Sanctuary of Jesus Nazarene of Atotonilco, painted by Miguel Antonio Martínez de Pocasangre, we can see a landscape of San Miguel of the second half of the 18th Century, where one can see in detail some of the main streets and lanes. These last connected to larger roads, which allowed communication with the neighboring jurisdictions, the routes of commercial exchange, as well as those spiritual sites such as the Sanctuary itself.

The truth is that the design and the constant use of the roads, as well as of the seven main entrances and exits of the town of San Miguel el Grande were not only because of political and economic strategies, but also due to the spiritual needs of the town:²⁴

- 1.- The first to the East next to the Chapel of Loreto (today the church of La Ermita), entrance or exit to the Royal Road to Mexico City.

²³ Cf. Hernán Ferro de la Sota, *Cultura y ciudades medias atípicas: invitación al estudio de San Miguel de Allende, Gto.*, Guanajuato, Universidad de Guanajuato/SEP/FOMES, 2000.

²⁴ The main entrances and exits of the town of San Miguel el Grande are listed, according to the text and original names which are noted in the canvas of Pocasangre.



MIGUEL ANTONIO MARTÍNEZ DE POCASANGRE,
SAN MIGUEL EL GRANDE AND THE SANCTUARY OF ATOTONILCO

- 2.- The road from Alcocer to Mexico City.
- 3.- The Road of the Tecolote, which connected with the road to San Luis de la Paz and Xichú.
- 4.- The road from the Obraje to Agua de Espinosa.
- 5.- The road to Atotonilco, facing West.
- 6.- Road of the “cars and coaches”, to the city of Santa Fe and Real de Minas of Guanajuato.
- 7.- Road from the Obraje to Chamacuero, arriving to the city of the Holy Conception of Celaya.

Martín de Elizacochea, bishop of the diocese of Valladolid, in a deposition of the middle of the 18th Century, shows the importance of the geographic situation of the town, immersed in the commercial, social and political dynamics of the region:

...the town of San Miguel el Grande is in the heart of the diocese known as Chichimecas... it is the most populated, with many Spaniards and an accredited and good sized commerce. . .it is the throat through which the fruits transit on their way to the inland...²⁵

II

ILLUSTRATED TOWN

What makes up the axis of the historic body of the town, inheritance of its original design, has a longitudinal appearance with a tendency towards a regular and orthogonal plan marked by the road itself to be protected when it becomes the main street (Mesones), arriving at the

²⁵ AGI, Mexico, Exp. 1061, f. 223, f – 226 v. (document located by Graciela Cruz López).

Plaza de la Soledad, which during the 16th and 17th Centuries was the most important public space of the town, as it was formed by the royal or consistorial homes, the jail, the corn exchange house, as well as the religious buildings such as the architectural whole of the Congregation of the School de San Francisco de Sales and last, the imposing Royal Convent of the Immaculate Conception, a San Miguel foundation.²⁶

Thus, the road entered between the streams of the Atascadero and the Cañada (passing relatively close to the Laja River) making a slight turn over the two slopes of the hills, following the natural geography. Four streets were created later which went from East to West: Mesones, San Francisco-De la Canal, Correo-Umarán and Cuadrante-Hospicio-Pila Seca, streets which used the river bank constructions.

With time, the urban framework began taking form with the diversity of merchandise and the religious and civil typologies. This was complemented by the open spaces, basically streets and public plazas, sites to which the society of San Miguel gave life with their religious commemorations, processions and every day life which took place around the springs, fountains, plazas and gardens.

Thus, all along the 18th Century “which is the Mexican Colonial Golden Age”, the architectural landscape of San Miguel, “always harmonious and noble, (acquires) a touch of aristocracy and a great elegance, which other larger and more famous cities would like to have”.²⁷

²⁶ Cf. María Concepción Amerlinck de Corsi and Manuel Ramos Medina, *Conventos de Monjas. Fundaciones en el México virreinal*, Mexico, Grupo Condumex, 1995.

²⁷ Francisco de la Maza, *San Miguel de Allende, su historia, sus monumentos*, with Pre-Hispanic appendix by Miguel J. Malo Zozaya, Mexico, Frente de Afirmación Hispanista, A.C., 1972, p. 79.



Religious architecture

In general, the formal architectural developments which marked the most important religious constructions of San Miguel were: the undulant baroque, inspired in the New Spain by senior masters such as Miguel Custodio Durán, Diego de la Sierra and Pedro de Arrieta, clearly shown in the rich flat and geometric decoration of the facade of the church of the Oratory of San Felipe Neri, along with the concave facade of the chapel of La Salud, with a one fourth of a circle vault, with rifles, forming the upper part of the niche.²⁸

The estipite baroque as seen in the Bajío, is “delirious in the decoration”²⁹ of the impressive main facade of the temple of San Francisco, which has an artistic affiliation with works of Francisco de Ureña, with innovative supports—extremely long and thing—accompanied by important interestipites which can also be seen in la Valenciana, Cata and Rayas in Guanajuato, as well as in the Parish Church of Lagos de Moreno, in Jalisco.³⁰

In these buildings, as well as in the Sanctuary of Atotonilco, the rigidity of its floors is its main characteristic: front facades with rectilinear shafts-axis which continue in the interiors, until reaching the altarpieces of the far end of the main altars. The lateral walls mark off a mass of space, defining dimensions and planimetric limits as it all was one sole unit in itself. Surrounding these floors there are chapels which do not affect the axis, but enrich them.

In the case of San Miguel, the large convents (Franciscan, Oratorian and Conceptionist), did not only respond to the spiritual

²⁸ Cf. Alberto González Pozo (general coordinator), *Estado de Guanajuato. Cuatro monumentos del patrimonio cultural. I monografía*, Mexico, Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Ecología, 1985.

²⁹ Jorge Alberto Manrique, “Del barroco a la ilustración” en *Historia General de México*, volume 1, third edition, Mexico, El Colegio de México, 1981, p. 707.

³⁰ Elisa Vargaslugo, *México Barroco, vida y arte*, Mexico, Salvat, 1993, p. 101.

ideals, but also to economic, social and cultural requirements, at the same time inspiring the urban development of the old town. In these large buildings with little variation in the proportion of the spaces in relation to other examples in the country, the architectural and decorative elements, concentrated in facades, towers, domes, altarpieces and other interior elements, are what enrich the religious architecture of the town.

The Royal Convent of the Holy Conception, original work of the master in architecture Francisco Martínez Gudiño, was projected with a temple with a Latin cross, but several vicissitudes prevented the full completion of the original project. The outstanding dome was built by the master quarry stone builder, Ceferino Gutiérrez in 1891. Its access has always been through its double doors and it used to proudly show many gilded altarpieces in its interior—now there is only the collateral from 1805 which is kept in the lower chorus, placed in the interior of the drum of one of the arches which supports the dome, substituted in the 19th Century by stone altars as artistic works of the painters of the New Spain, Juan Rodríguez Juárez and Miguel Cabrera. Its regal cloister has been occupied since 1962 by the cultural centre Ignacio Ramírez, El Nigromante, of the National Institute of Fine Arts, keeping in its interior as an artistic monument of the 20th Century, the mural

Vida y Obra del Generalísimo Ignacio de Allende (The Life and works of the General Ignacio de Allende, 1949) of David Alfaro Siqueiros.

An outstanding chapel is the one of Loreto in the Oratory Church, of 1735, founded by the patron Don Tomás de la Canal. A similar replica of the one of San Francisco Javier in Tepetzotlán, it is unique because of its four large salomonic columns in the front; the

³¹ Joaquín Bérchez, *Arquitectura mexicana de los siglos XVII y XVIII*, foreword by Rene Taylor, Mexico, Grupo Azabache, 1992, p. 172.

pictoric ornamentation alluding to the virgin who is the titleholder in the interior faces of the domes; the four splendid altarpieces dedicated to Saint Joachim, Saint Ann, Saint John Nepomucemo and Saint Catherine of Alexandria; and in the tiered volume of the domes and lanterns, according to the illustrations of the *Disegni d'Architettura Civile* of Guarino Guarini, printed in 1686 and put in practice by Custodio Durán and De la Sierra at the beginning of the 18th Century.³¹

The current main plaza was first planned from East to West, as the old Parish Church (today chapel of San Rafael or Santa Escuela de Cristo) was oriented this way. The second, built by the architect Marcos Antonio Sobrarias in the 17th Century, was oriented from North to South therefore the main part of the town was substantially modified.³² As in all the Viceroyalty, the rule that says that all the religious spaces were the most important in the urban history of the country was confirmed. Its qualities of space always “determined a social and cultural behavior and, therefore, that of a peculiar civil architecture of the cities (themselves)”.³³

Civil architecture

As to the large lordly mansions, these emerged in San Miguel, as in a great part of the country, during the last third part of the 18th Century, as a result of the desire on the part of the creoles to “live in better conditions and to stand out within the social and economic elite”. Those creoles who were able to occupy important places in the Mexican aristocracy enriched the urban image of San Miguel with

³² Luis Felipe Nieto Gamiño, *Historia de cuatro monumentos relevantes de la plaza principal de San Miguel de Allende* (unpublished), 1992.

³³ Carlos Chanfón Olmos (ordinator), *Historia de la arquitectura y el urbanismo mexicanos. Volumen II, el periodo virreinal. Tomo II, la consolidación de la vida virreinal*, Mexico, UNAM, 2001, p. 371.

palatial residences, of an architecture corresponding to the last baroque stage, of “great formal wealth”, coinciding in the last years of the century “with the implantation of a new neo classic style.”³⁴

Following the urban laws of the 18th Century, the houses with two stories (and an entresol) are mostly found around the main plaza, some with portals in the first floor, the rest have only one floor with patios with porticos only leading to the street, outstanding because of the sobriety of its architecture with flat terraced roof over beams.³⁵

Different from the religious buildings of the town, the civil structures have a predominant process during the second half of the 18th Century, which is the dissolution of the decorative basic architectural structures (dissolving baroque), accompanied by a new search for styles, returning to the use of traditional supports such as the neoclassic, “the last card of the Mexican baroque (and) and the New Hispanic project of life”.³⁶

The conjugation of the mathematical thinking with the creole conscience produced peculiar accidents in the architectural geometry, in which the modern image and a reclaiming tendency of the cultural and artistic past were reconciled.³⁷

Important examples can be found in the houses of the town, with special emphasis in elements of the facades such as the balconies. The most outstanding work is that of the home of Don Tomás de la Canal, attributed by some investigators to a foreign architect, and that in part is more outstanding than some models of the capital of the New Spain.

³⁴ Vicente Medel, “México 1750/1850” in Francisco de Solano (scientific director) y María Luisa Cerrillos (general coordinator), *Historia urbana de Iberoamérica. Tomo III-2. La ciudad ilustrada, análisis regionales 1750/1850*, Madrid, Testimonio, 1992, p. 360.

³⁵ Jorge Alberto Manrique, “Virreinato de la Nueva España” in Francisco de Solano, *ibid. Tomo II 2. La ciudad barroca, análisis regionales 1573/1750*, Madrid, Testimonio, 1990, p. 202.

³⁶ Jorge Alberto Manrique, *ibid.*, 1981, p. 710.

³⁷ Joaquín Bérchez, *ibid.*, 1992, p. 113.



HOME OF DON FRANCISCO DE LANZAGORTA,
TEMPLE OF SAN RAFAEL AND PARISH CHURCH OF SAN MIGUEL ARCHANGEL

A transition between the baroque and the neo classic (French classism), its construction takes place after 1800. It has several decorative and architectural elements which alternate internally and externally, converting it into a unique example in the region: spandrels of the arches of the eastern side; unique spalls which deck the window frames; the ornaments of the frieze and the spandrels of the main facade; the richly decorated niche which shelters the Virgin of Loreto and the spandrels of its niche, monumental columns; denticular cornices; curved pediments and large glasses integrated to the window frames; as well as simple pilasters of a colossal size.

But among the artistic languages that were used we must point out the unique one of San Miguel; its formal repertoire can be seen in the unique way of closing the spaces of the lower floor, with segmental arches, both in the interior and exterior of the building.³⁸

These are unique in the constructions of the city and are to be found in the home of don Juan Antonio de Umarán, known as “La Casa de los Perros” (The House of the Dogs); as well as in the two story home of don Juan de Lanzagorta, with its great patio and staircase; in the home of doña María Antonia Petra de Sautto y Jáuregui, with its magnificent patio and sober façade (13, San Francisco street).

As well the so called “Casa del Inquisidor”, in the third street of Cuadrante, with a unique baroque decoration, built during the 18th Century, and finished towards 1780, when it acquired those transitory characteristics between baroque and illustration, and which can be recognized both outside and inside; a richly ornamented facade with a magnificent work in carved quarry stone, crowning one by one the balconies, window and entrance with elaborate crests; the work in forged iron which covers the windows, balconies and gives form to the

beautiful knocker of the door; and two stories built in small dimensions, harmonized by a patio in the centre, with a decoration which gives elegance and beauty to the whole.

Let us not forget the imposing house of don Juan de Moncada, marquis of Jaral de Berrio, which closes Corregidora street; that of the count of Casa de Loja with a coat of arms in its front; and finally the sober house of don Domingo de Allende (1760), also in two levels (today the historic museum of the National Institute of History and Anthropology).

Property of one of the richest Spanish families of the town—cradle of a vast generation of creoles, among them Captain Ignacio de Allende y Unzaga, initiator of the movement of Independence of Mexico—it was founded in a strategic location, at the beginning of the old street of the Hospital of Indians of the Clean Conception.

As corresponded to the opulence of its inhabitants and the artistic style of the time, a two story quarry stone mansion was built which gives elegance to the architectural whole; the interior patio is formed by two imposing dances of arches; its façade is asymmetric; with an entrance framed by neo classic elements, which adorn windows and balconies, guarded by the sober forges of the 18th Century.

All these elements, including the diversity of tendencies of styles and architectural solutions with baroque and illustrated languages, make the architecture of San Miguel *unique* compared to other town of the Royal Inland Road, such as those close to Queretaro, Guanajuato and Zacatecas.

³⁸ Cf. Gustavo Curiel, “El Palacio del Mayorazgo De La Canal” in Clara Bargellini (*et. al.*), *Casas señoriales del Banco Nacional de México*, Mexico, Fomento Cultural Banamex, A.C., 1999.

³⁹ Luis Phelipe Neri de Alfaro, “Descripción del Santuario de Atotonilco, cercano a la Villa de San Miguel el Grande, 1766” (ACM, 18th Century, box 113, exp. 66), in José de Santiago Silva, *Atotonilco, Alfaro y Pocasangre. Apéndice documental*, Guanajuato, Ediciones La Rana, 2004, p. 79.

III

SANCTUARY OF JESÚS NAZARENO OF ATOTONILCO

The Sanctuary, founded by the venerable Father Luis Felipe Neri de Alfaro, was begun on “the 3rd of May of the year 1740. It was completed, blessed and dedicated, with license from the Illustrious Doctor Don Martín de Elizacochea on the 19th of July, 1748.”³⁹ It’s located fourteen kilometers from San Miguel de Allende, on the way to Dolores Hidalgo, and it is a notable and enigmatic example of the baroque architecture of the 18th Century in the New Spain, because of its “singular and intense passionist mysticism, as well as its pictoric baroque decoration and the mystic poetry mixed with the plastic figures”.⁴⁰

In a *Historic Description* close to 1860, an anonymous author points out that of all the religious buildings which piety known with the

*name of sanctuaries, located in the diocese of Michoacán, none has called the attention of the Christian traveler like this one of Jesus Nazarene of Atotonilco, two and a half leagues from the town of San Miguel de Allende.[...] the worshipper will of course find inside its not very regulated fabrication, and in the field where it is situated, many places similar to those in the Holy City of Jerusalem.*⁴¹

This reference to the Holy City is not by chance, Father Alfaro himself had the intention in building the Sanctuary, infused not only with the precepts of the Council of Trent and the Counter-Reformation, but also with the works of the first evangelists of the New Spain, the most ambitious of utopias: to implant a perfect Christian society in

⁴⁰ Elisa Vargaslugo, “La obra de arte como móvil de la experiencia mística” in *Arte y Mística del barroco*, Mexico, UNAM/Conaculta/DDF, 1994, p. 123.

⁴¹ José de Santiago Silva, *ibid.*, 2004, pp. 148-149.





the new *City of God*, referred to by Saint John (in his apocalyptic vision) and Saint Augustine.

In the doctrine and construction programs of the Sanctuary—as happened in the 16th Century with the mendicant buildings (Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians)—the messianic concepts of the bible area were portrayed, with the idea of seeing in the landscapes of San Miguel the exact place to found the *new Jerusalem* and the *real Church* in lands of the New World.⁴²

The eagerness to find a similarity between Atotonilco and the celestial Jerusalem were revealed by Neri de Alfaro himself to the bishop Don Pedro Anselmo Sánchez de Tagle, in a letter of 1870:

... and I say that this Sanctuary of Jesus Nazarene came to be by divine benefit, without human industry, a living copy in the distribution of its Chapels, land and distance from the town, similar to that of the Town of Jerusalem, according to the Reverend Father Antonio del Castillo and Don Pedro Durán, in their books The devoted pilgrim and Pilgrimage of the son of God, from where were taken the large maps which are painted in oil in the sacristy of this Sanctuary, and only missing to complete these one in the Chapel of Calvary, and only a stone's throw away is a hill similar to Mount Calvary.⁴³

And last, in 1883, taking on the ideas of the friar from San Miguel, Jesús E. Aguirre does a plan of the temple and retreat house, in which he includes the following comment,

⁴² Cf. Miguel Ángel Fernández, *La Jerusalén Indiana. Los conventos-fortaleza mexicanos del siglo XVI*, Mexico, Smurfit Cartón y Papel de México, 1992, p. 20.

⁴³ ACM, 18th Century, box 55, exp. 154, in José de Santiago Silva, *ibid.*, p. 43; the “maps” are really the oil paintings of Martínez Pocasangre mentioned previously.

...this land and Sanctuary are very similar to the Holy Places of Jerusalem, where Christ Our Lord walked, such as Jericho, Cafarnaum, Nazareth and Bethlehem, specially the Hill of Ojo de Agua is very similar to Mount Calvary where Christ our life died...⁴⁴

The monumental whole is made up of the temple dedicated to Jesus Nazarene, which began its construction, as we saw before, on the 3rd of May, 1740; the Camarin of Jesus Nazarene and the old Sacristy (spaces finished in 1748); to the left are the chapels of Bethlehem and the Holy Sepulchre (concluded on the 18th of March, 1763); those of the Santa Casa de Loreto and its camarin, Our Lady of the Rosary and camarin (1766); as well as the Calvary (finished after the death of the friar in 1776); aside from the Retreat House.

In fact we are before the largest spiritual retreat house of the world, where even today they use the exercises written by Saint Ignacio de Loyola, with “alfaro” alterations, because we must reinforce that the Oratorian priest exaggerated the public demonstration of his virtues, and emphasized the penitence and severe punishments implied in the Spiritual Exercises.⁴⁵

The deepest and most vital reasons for the religious art found in the Sanctuary of Jesus Nazarene were to provoke in the faithful who went to the spiritual retreats the desire to feel the divine presence, according to what was established by the Catholic Reform of that time. Thus, the innumerable pictorial works found in the Sanctuary



⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁴⁵ Cf. Joaquín Bérchez, *ibid.*, 1992; Jorge F. Hernández, *La soledad del silencio. Microhistoria del santuario de Atotonilco*, Mexico, Universidad de Guanajuato/Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991; José de Santiago Silva, *op. cit.*, 2004.

were an important support for life in the faith through conversion, penitence, the Eucharist and mystical experience.⁴⁶

In accordance with the doctrinal plan, the interior of the architectural whole is richly decorated, combining the mural works of Martínez de Pocasangre with the mystic verses written by Father Neri himself, such as the following convincing one of the *Final Judgment*, located in one of the entrance doors of the temple

*This mouth, which threatens you horribly,
savagely and voraciously
even if it eats more and more,
it is never satisfied:
It takes advantage of your fear,
because if it could
it would submerge the whole world
and bury everyone in Heaven.*

In this extraordinary sacred enclosure, plethoric in scenes of the Passion, including sculptures and canvas paintings of recognized artists of the New Spain such as Nicolás Rodríguez Juárez, there are also two precious thematic cycles dedicated to the spiritual symbolism and cult of the Divine Heart of Jesus of Martínez de Pocasangre himself.

The pictorial series, located in the panels of the entrance, based on the engravings of Boecio de Bolswert, included in the book of Benedictus van Haeften Schola *Cordis sive aversi a Deo cordis ad eundem redutio, et instructio* (1663), is the tangible result of the allegoric and emblematic mentality of the 18th Century, established by the Jesuits in America; its spirituality is to be found with extraordinary intensity in San Miguel el Grande and its Retreat House.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Cf. Gilles Chazal, "Arte y mística del barroco" in *Arte y Mística del barroco*, 1994, pp. 26-27.

⁴⁷ José de Santiago Silva, *ibid.*, 2004, pp. 147-160 and 491.

The historic, social and artistic relation of the Sanctuary with the town of San Miguel is more than *evident and indissoluble* especially in the spiritual plane, thanks to the intense doctrinal labor of Father Neri de Alfaro, as his spiritual project

*was emblematically reached with the foundation of the Sanctuary of Atotonilco, its origins in San Miguel and its historic population.*⁴⁸

The rationality and dimensions of this spiritual undertaking can only be understood by analyzing

*the validity they have had through the years: the foundation of congregations, the religious practices and the processional circuits inherited by Luis Felipe Neri de Alfaro, which tightly and figuratively join the town of San Miguel de Allende with the Sanctuary of Atotonilco.*⁴⁹

IV

OLD FORMS WITH A NEW MEANING

Finally, we can say that the religious and civil architecture of San Miguel de Allende and the Sanctuary of Jesus Nazarene of Atotonilco, as well as their artistic elements, were basically conservative as to the placement of spaces and with very obvious common denominators. However, little by little they became unique in the environment of the New Spain by adding special European artistic and architectural concepts, ideas and modes, but with local characteristics based on their

⁴⁸ Graciela Cruz López, "San Miguel el Grande y el Santuario de Jesús Nazareno de Atotonilco" (unpublished), San Miguel de Allende, 2008.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*



ATOTONILCO. CHAPEL OF THE VIRGIN OF THE ROSARY, CAMARIN

own formal “conscious and rational” vocabulary”,⁵⁰ which allowed them freedom from worn out recourses and artifices.

Confusing works for those who wish to see them and restrict them to the European models and styles; during its formation period the aesthetic and urban language of San Miguel suffered a logical and “clear depuration process” and a singularity which allowed the rejection of old formulas and models, incorporating basic principles of its own identity.⁵¹

A delayed formation period in which the architectural and artistic guidelines of the Counter Reform and the Age of Enlightenment were put into practice, but mainly they were redone giving way also, as well as in the academic field, to a first Mexican artistic and architectural illustration which, in the town of San Miguel and in the Sanctuary had a fortunate experimentation field which gave a new and very special aesthetic language.

To conclude, we must make clear that San Miguel de Allende and the Sanctuary of Jesus Nazarene of Atotonilco are today two of the best preserved monumental and urban sites of this type of towns which formed through the years their own identity, product of the position which was historically conferred on them because of their strategic geographic point, and because they were made up of a population group which, as time went on, formed the thinking and credo of a unique creole society.

Unique population which even today has kept is vital cultural presence in ceremonial rites and festivities, as well as in the conservation of its rich and vast cultural, tangible and non tangible inheritance.

⁵⁰ Cf. Martha Fernández, “El neóstilo y las primeras manifestaciones de la Ilustración en Nueva España” in *Anales* 64, Mexico, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas/UNAM, 1993, pp. 31-46.

⁵¹ María Concepción García Sáiz, “Principios y proceso del arte colonial en México”, in *México colonial*, Madrid, Caja de Ahorros del Mediterráneo/Museo de América/Ministerio de Cultura, 1989, p. 29.



VIEW OF ATOTONILCO