



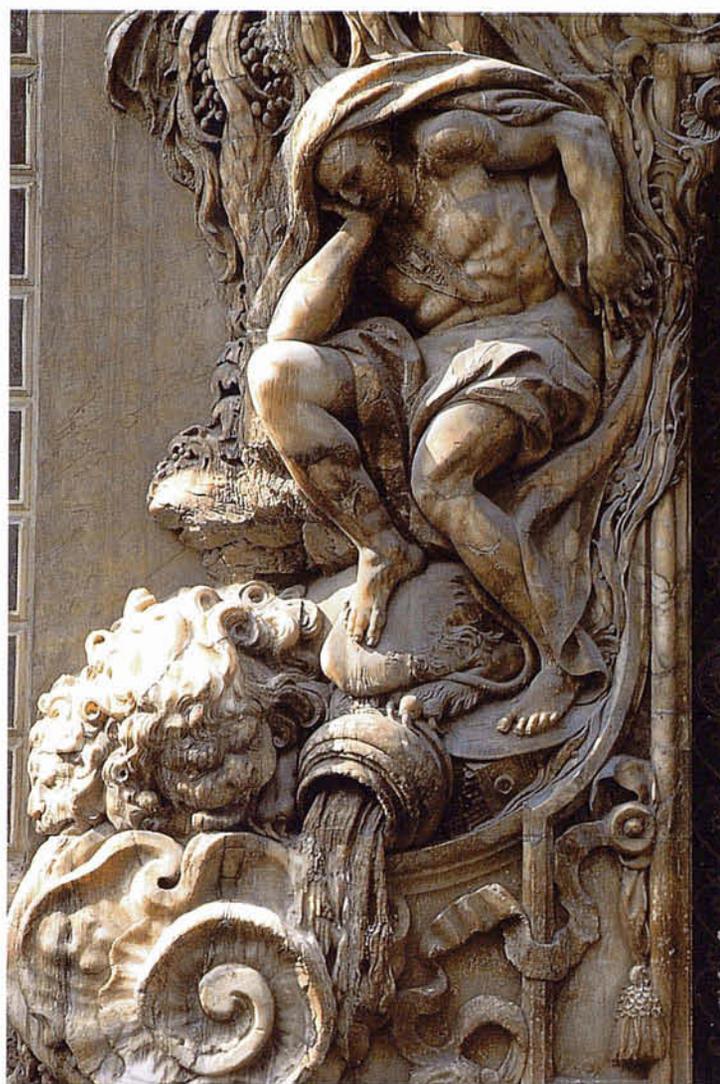
# BAROQUE ARCHITECTURE IN THE PAÍS VALENCIÀ

THE CONSTRUCTION WHICH IN VALENCIA SUMS UP THE WHOLE ESSENCE OF THE BAROQUE IS THE PALAU DEL MARQUÈS DE DOSAIGÜES, A BUILDING WHICH TODAY HOUSES THE NATIONAL CERAMICS MUSEUM.

JOAN E. PELLICER LECTURER. UNIVERSITY OF VALENCIA



PALACE OF MARQUÈS DE DOSAIGÜES



© ELOI BONIOLCH

**T**here is no doubt that in the art scene of the País Valencià the manifestations that belong under the heading of baroque are of great prestige. Not for nothing, leaving aside the Gothic constructions, does the Valencian cultural heritage contain such a wealth of, above all, architectural and pictorial works dating from the second half of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth and giving support to the notion of the baroque as one of the artistic trends that exists in most profusion in our country. However, in spite of the widespread presence of baroque architecture in the País Valencià, it is worth pointing out that relatively few buildings were started from scratch during this period.

Much more frequently, the baroque air

presented by many of our buildings, both inside and out, is a result of restorations, conversions or redecoration of earlier, basically Gothic buildings which, under the pressure of the new aesthetic taste irradiating mainly from Italy, were hidden under the superimposed additions that concealed their identity and their original lines.

This lack of new artistic buildings must be directly related to the economic collapse suffered by the then Kingdom of Valencia, especially after the expulsion of the *moriscos* decreed in 1609. And although the construction of new buildings was in large measure paid for by the Church –which was relatively immune to the general economic crisis of the Kingdom–, the works carried out in them, such as the *Basilica de la Mare de Déu dels Desemparats* in Valencia, the

*Cathedral in Xàtiva*, the *Archpriest's Church in Elx* or the *Collegiate Church of Sant Nicolau in Alacant*, suffered quite a few delays and postponements in their construction.

Architecture of an exclusively civil nature was even scarcer during this period, though by virtue of their size it is worth mentioning the *Customs Building in Valencia* and the *City Hall in Alacant*.

But in spite of these considerations, the baroque triumphed here. We mustn't forget that, as Miquel A. Català has said, "The spirit of the baroque, opulent and contradictory, superficial and alienating, found fertile ground in the disturbed and disorientated Valencia of those years, incapable of either accepting the failure of its institutions or of putting up resistance".



© ARCHIVES MAS

VALENCIA. CHURCH OF ST. ANDREU

Starting in the last decades of the seventeenth century, under the rule of Charles II, economic recovery got under way and it is from that moment on that the first examples of baroque architecture appear in the País Valencià, amongst them the already mentioned *Basilica de la Mare de Déu* in Valencia (completed in 1690), the *College of Saint Pius V*, also in the capital of the Kingdom, the *Archpriest's Church* in Elx, the church of the monastery of *Valldigna* or the magnificent decoration of the gilded gallery of the *Duke's Palace* in Gandia.

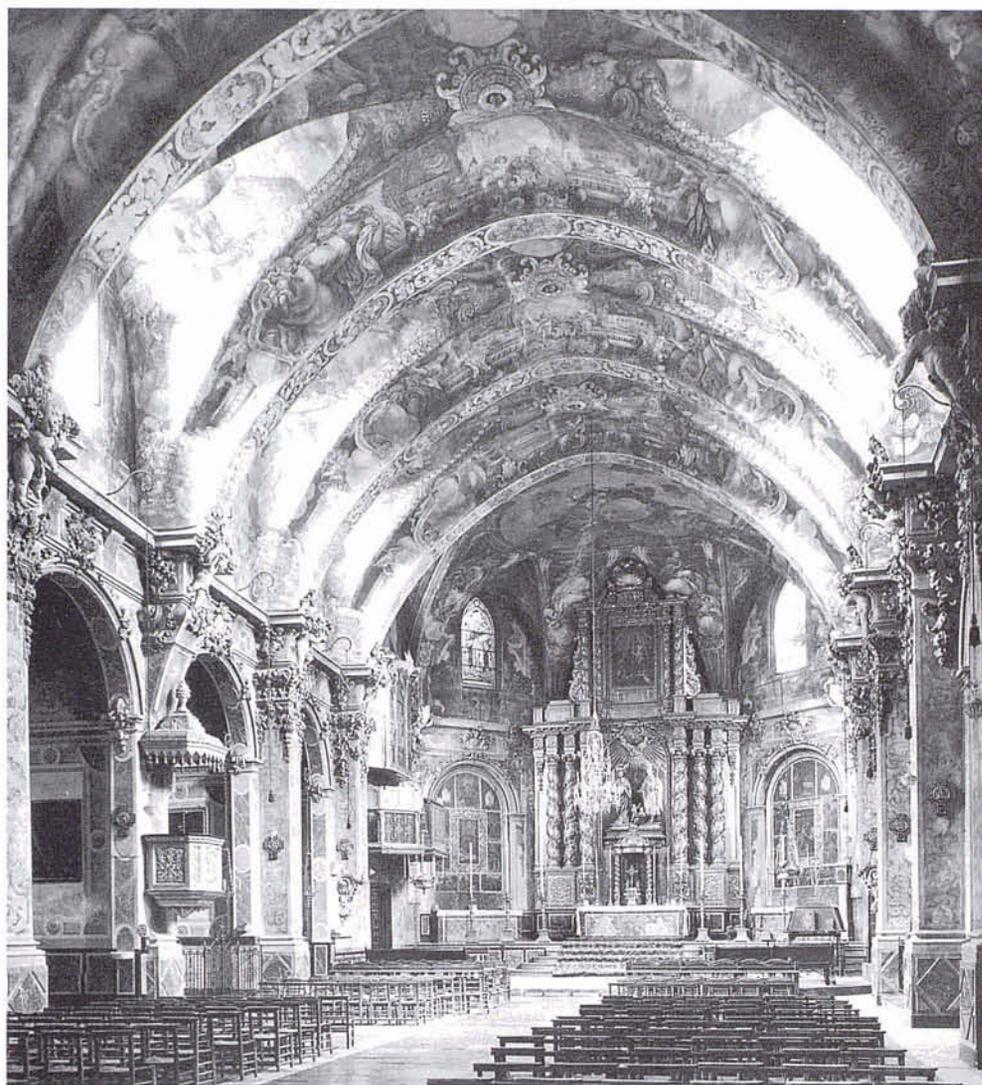
The *Basilica de la Mare de Déu dels Desemparats*, in Valencia, is the first entirely baroque work in the País Valencià. Here, for the first time, we find a new approach that breaks with the church structure typical until that mo-

ment. The church-chapel had a number of entrances that were undoubtedly intended to provide access for the increasing number of worshippers being attracted by the presiding image. Its theatrical and effectist structure focuses on the high altar, where the eyes of the congregation converged. As well as the high altar, the church has other chapels, amongst which the *sanctum* stands out for its structure and decoration.

The work was entrusted to the architect *Diego Martínez Ponce de Urrana* of Requena, in 1647. The temple, with its oval floorplan inscribed in a cube, has an architectural solution that is interesting, harmonious and functional. The ceiling is crowned by a cupula of ellipsoidal section with a vault painted by the baroque artist *Palomino*, a painter from Cordova who left not a little work

in the País Valencià. Externally, his most outspoken architectural interest is offered by the facade that gives on to the square: its basically horizontal structure is fully compensated by the four columns which, from socle to capital, frame the doors of the church as well as the balconies. The oblong effect that can be made out from the square is compensated by the graceful figure of the dome of blue-varnished Valencian tile, which, like a floating mass, neutralizes the church's double cube arrangement.

I have already mentioned that much of the Valencian baroque consists of conversions and reforms on churches of Gothic design and line, which were adapted from a decorative point of view to the new artistic trends in vogue.



VALENCIA. CHURCH OF ST. NICOLAU

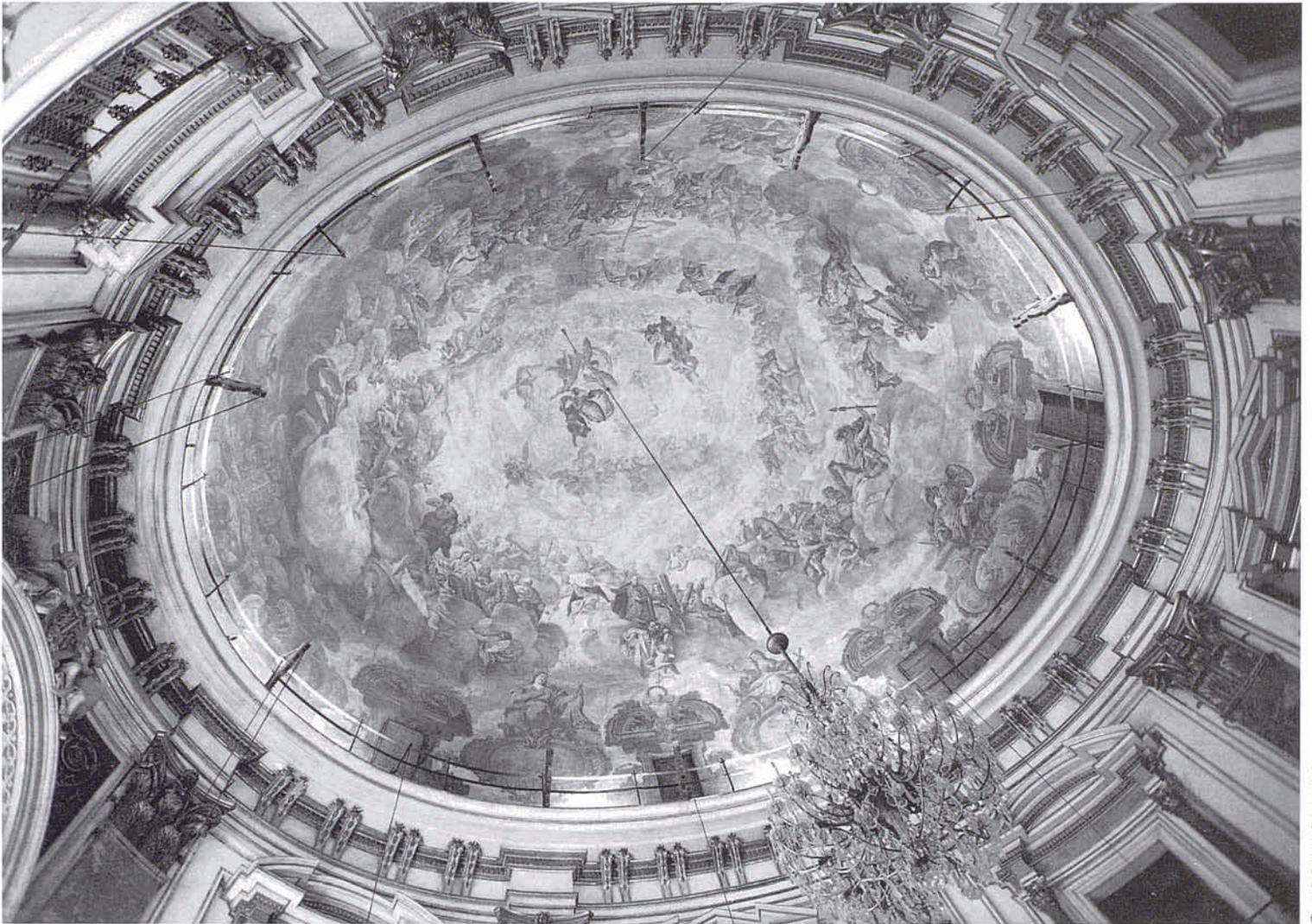
© ARCHIVES MAS

In this sense, amongst many others, it is worth emphasizing the work carried out on the church of the Sants Joans in the city of Valencia. In this case, architecture, sculpture and the paintings of the vaulted ceiling converge fully in a unitary and harmonic conception of reform. We can not be sure of the person responsible for this reform, though there is written evidence for the presence of both the Italian sculptor Bertesi and the Italian-trained German Aliprandi, who almost certainly collaborated as decorators. The transformation of the original Gothic was well resolved by covering the ribbed vault with a barrel vault with frescoes by Palomino showing a profound sense of perspective and a unitary composition with a splendid sense of rhythm. Unfortunately though, many of Palomino's contribu-

tions were damaged in the Spanish Civil War of 1936. As regards the church exterior, it is worth mentioning the extraordinary restoration of the main facade, in which the arrangement of the columns alters the straight line of the plane of the walls. Amongst the architectural and decorative motifs there is an airy open canopy which contains a sculptural composition representing Our Lady of the Rosary, the work of Bertesi.

The restoration of the main doorway of the Cathedral of Valencia is undoubtedly another of the baroque's most original contributions in Valencia, since it introduced architectural and compositional solutions that were beginning to triumph in contemporary Europe. The space of the door breaks the straight line to achieve a structure dominated by

the curve, by means of the intersections of convex and concave lines, perfectly in tune with the work of Berromini or of Guarini. It was the German Konrad Rudolf—known as “the Roman” because of his Italian training—who designed it and started the work, which got under way in 1703 under his direction, with the collaboration, amongst others, of Francesc Vergara “the Elder” and another German, Frances Stolf. After K. Rudolf had left the city, the facade was completed by Vergara, with the help of Francesc Robles. Also taking part in the work were the sculptors Lluçia Esteve and Ignasi Vergara and the stonemasons Josep Miner, Josep Padilla and Domènec Laviesca. The new door of the cathedral, which must have been completed in about 1728, was the first example in Spain of a portal with



VALENCIA. DOME OF THE BASÍLICA DE LA MARE DE DÉU DELS DESEMPARATS

curved floorplan, at the same time as it was the forerunner of the facade made up of superimposed architectural orders.

The process of reforming or building the baroque churches and facades quickly spread all over the País Valencià. There are very many examples of churches that could be put forward in this sense: the facade of Santa Maria in Sagunt, that of Sant Andreu in Valencia, that of Santa Caterina in Alzira, of the Santuari de la Santa Faç, close to the city of Alacant, or of Santa Maria in Alacant itself, with three doors and very baroque lines, by Manuel Violat (1721-1724) and with sculptures by Joan Baptista Borja. We cannot leave out the baroque facade of Santa Maria d'Elx, with sculptures by Nicolau de Bussy of Strasbourg. Then there is the restora-

tion of the church of Sant Martí de València, which according to Joaquim Berchez "became one of the most genuine and singular of the Valencian baroque of the eighteenth century". Its main door, also a product of the baroque reformation under question (1739-1750) is the work of Francesc Vergara, while the porch that gives on to the Carrer de l'Abadia de Sant Martí was designed by his son, the sculptor Ignasi Vergara, in 1750.

In any discussion of Valencian baroque architecture, we have to remember the names of Joan Baptista Pérez and Joan Baptista Vinyes. The first of these, "the great figure of the baroque splendour of Valencia, a valiant architect and admirable decorator", according to Tormo, played a part in the construction of the church of Xelva, built the communion

chapel of the parish church of Biar, the brilliant and highly baroque chapel of the Eucharist in the church of Sant Joan de l'Hospital in Valencia and helped in the reform of the church of Sant Esteve in the same city. As regards Joan Baptista Vinyes, we can say that he was responsible for perhaps the most important baroque bell-tower of the whole country: that of the Gothic church of Santa Caterina de Valencia, built between 1688 and 1705. The tower, with a hexagonal floorplan, is made up of five sections. The first four have delicate, original decoration, and the fifth—that of the clock—has more robust decoration in which six columns stand out, giving it its characteristic appearance. The bell-tower is crowned with a structure in the form of a lantern-turret.



ELX. CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA

© ARCHIVES MAS

Amongst these baroque facades, we can also pick out that of the Església del Carme, the work of Fra Gaspar de Sant Martí, who also designed the great church of Xelva; that of the Archpriest's Church of Llíria, the work of the Jesuit priest Pau Albiniano, or the church at Xest, by Fra Francesc de Santa Barbara.

Of equal note are the facade and parish church of Benicarló, the church of Alcalà de Xivert, designed by Josep Herrero and built between 1736 and 1766, which has a magnificent and exceptional projecting bell-tower, the work of Joan Barceló, completed by T. Teruel. Built between 1783 and 1799, it is, at 68 metres, the highest bell-tower in the País Valencià and one of the most admired.

A tour of the Valencian baroque should

not, however, leave out other buildings, such as the magnificent City Hall of Alacant, which has a beautiful rococo oratory and a facade with two towers, with a solemn arrangement of balconies, a curved divided pediment, dome in Valencian tile, etc.

There is also the customs building in Valencia (now the courts), the work of Felip Rubió, which was begun in 1758. This is the most important civil building erected in the city during the eighteenth century. Of palatine architectural structure, the decorative details bear the unmistakable mark of civic baroque. It is worth mentioning the curved pediment of the main porch, finished off with a group of figures –two allegories of virtue and a statue of Charles III– by Ignasi Vergara.

But without any doubt at all, the build-

ing in the País Valencià that sums up the whole essence of the baroque is the Palau del Marquès de Dosaigües, the home today of the National Ceramics Museum. The baroque restoration of the original Gothic was carried out between 1770 and 1774. On this occasion, sculptors, painters and decorators took on a job which, while the architect is unknown to us, was supervised by the Valencian painter Hipòlit Rovira, according to Orellana. The building underwent further restoration work in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, many clearly baroque modifications still remain, in particular the porch by Ignasi Vergara in alabaster, with slight variations on the original composition by Rovira, who was also responsible for the paintings and the graffito-work on the facade. ●