“The Renaissance in Spain”
Plateresque, Griego-Romano and Churrigueresque Followed the Gothic in Quick Succession

*Through the Ages*, published by the National Association of Marble Dealers
Vol. 5, No. 8, December 1927, pp. 32-34

The article begins:

“While the main current of Spanish architecture remained national during the Gothic era, it was highly flavored by foreign influences, chiefly French. But after the fall of Granada, the rich art of the Moors was brought more forcibly to the attention of the Spanish artists, with the result that a Moresco-Gothic quickly followed. This soon gave way to Plateresque, so called because of the similarity of its surface decoration to the ornamentation used by gold and silver smiths, the Spanish name for such artisans being *plateros*…”

This article, which begins on the next page, is presented on the Stone Quarries and Beyond web site.

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Peggy B. Perazzo
Email: pbperazzo@comcast.net
May 2016
THE RENAISSANCE IN SPAIN

Plateresque, Grego-Romano and Churriguerese Followed the Gothic in Quick Succession

While the main current of Spanish architecture remained national during the Gothic era, it was highly flavored by foreign influences, chiefly French. But after the fall of Granada, the rich art of the Moors was brought more forcibly to the attention of the Spanish artists, with the result that a Moresco-Gothic quickly followed. This soon gave way to the Plateresque, so called because of the similarity of its surface decoration to the ornamentation used by gold and silver smiths, the Spanish name for such artisans being plateros. The founders of the style were the members of the Egas family, coming originally from Brussels, and famous for their architectural ability. During the last half of the fifteenth century they were influenced by the goldsmith, Pedro Diez, who had returned to Toledo from Rome, bringing back with him inspirations through contact with the early Renaissance while in Italy.

The Plateresque is characterized by tapestry-like detail, especially around the wall openings, with elaborately chiselled arabesques, broken entablatures, twisted shafts and florid escutcheons, usually interspersed with a mingling of Gothic in the archivolts, statues under niches and the like. A fine example of the earlier or transitional Plateresque is shown in the entrance to the hospital at Santa Cruz at Toledo, by Enrique de Egas (about 1504); a still earlier work is the College of Santa Cruz at Valladolid, by the same architect, but here there is a smaller proportion of classic forms.

Most of the cathedrals of the early Spanish Renaissance are considerably more Gothic in their motif than Plateresque. The ones at Salamanca, Segovia, Toledo, for instance,
are nearly pure Gothic. The churches built after 1525, on the other hand, show Plat-
eresque domination, as evidenced by the cathedrals at Malaga and Jaen. Siloé’s
Cathedral of Granada, with its domical
sanctuary, is distinctly classic in style. Ren-
aissance orders with frieze and cornice trans-
form the Gothic piers, and the design and
detail are alike interesting.

The secular structures of the period and
the more unimportant ecclesiastical build-
ings were quicker to adopt Renaissance
forms than the cathedrals. As early as 1497,
when the University of Alcalá de Henares
was founded, we see the use of Plateresque
by Pedro Gumiel. Most of these works were
two stories and basement, or even two
stories, and had patios with arcades loaded
down with minute ornamentation. The ex-
teriors rarely showed all-over decoration,
although several were so planned. The best
known of these were the Casa de las Conchas,
at Salamanca, and the Infantado Palace at
Guadalajara. The former has shells carved
over the whole front; the latter offers a
spangling of diamond-shaped carvings. Some
of the patios were Moorish, rather than
classic, as for instance, the courtyard in the
Casa de Pilatos at Seville. The pure class-
icism of the early Renaissance was introduced,
according to Sturgis, by the architect Pedro
Ibarra, probably influenced by Berruguete.
The latter had spent several years in Italy
and had become familiar with the ideas of
Michelangelo and Bramante. It was while
Berruguete was employed as a sculptor at
Saragossa that he co-operated with Ibarra
in the erection of the Santiago College. Cer-
tainly, as Sturgis points out, the influence of
the Cancelleria and the Court of S. Maria
della Pace is readily evident.

This coldly classic style was called the
Griego-Romano and it lasted until the mid-
dle of the seventeenth century. Besides the
artists above mentioned, other well-known
names closely connected with the period are
Juan de Herrera, who planned the Vallad-
dolid Cathedral; Juan Battista, who began
the Escorial; and Machuca, who began the
Palace of Charles V. The Escorial is gener-
ally considered the masterpiece of the era,
although it was not completed until about

(photo caption) “Patio of the courtyard of the Casa de Pilatos at Seville.” (Spain)
150 years after its inception. The scale is colossal—it is a huge block about 740 by 580 feet, with towers at each angle and the whole mass dominated by the domed chapel, a church of the Doric order, but having campaniles capped by domed lanterns. The interior of the chapel is in some respects similar to St. Peter’s in Rome, with heavy piers and coldly austere details. It is doubtful if the Escorial would attract as much attention if it were not for the majestic scale of the composition.

The Griego-Romano style was succeeded in part (and almost entirely in respect to the ecclesiastical works of Spain) by the Churriguereque, a term used to describe the Spanish equivalent of the combined French baroque and rococo. Like its counterpart, this style was the result of a natural reaction induced by the over-severity of the Griego-Romano, and consisted of an exuberance of treatment. Carried to the extreme, as it was in the doorway of the hospital at San Fernando, at Madrid, and, in the Palace at San Ildefonso, it violated the properties of architecture; but held in check by good taste, it produced buildings of real merit, as we see in the Cathedral of Murcia and the façade of Santo Domingo, at Salamanca. The designer of the former was Jaime Bort, who flourished during the first half of the eighteenth century.

Curiously enough the name given to the type was that of the head of a family of architects who dominated Spanish architecture while the baroque craze was at its zenith, but who was otherwise of no special ability. This man, Jose Churriguera, was the royal designer for Charles II, and his principal work was the San Cayetano at Madrid.

His pupils, the Quinones, are famous chiefly for the Plaza Mayor of Salamanca. The Churriguereque was marked by a profuse use of colored marbles, and one may gain some idea of the manner in which these materials were handled by a study of the chapel of San Isidoro Labrador in Madrid.