

Baroque in New Spain

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers Baroque architecture in New Spain, or the Americas. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, briefly explain the Spanish conquest and colonization of the New World, explain how Catholic churches became important symbols of both Spanish and Catholic authority, and identify examples of Spanish Baroque architecture in New Spain by stylistic characteristics. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:

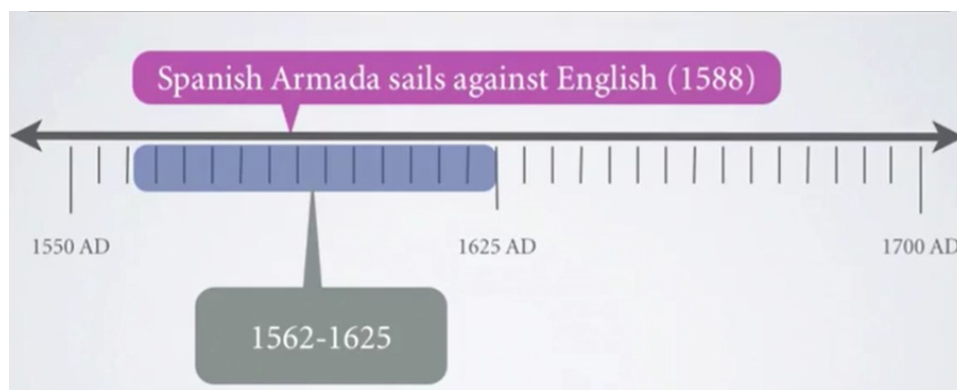


BIG IDEA

Catholic churches were important symbols of Spanish and Catholic authority in New Spain.

1. Period and Location: Baroque Architecture in New Spain

The architecture that you will be looking at today dates from 1562 to 1625. Most of the churches are found in modern-day Mexico.



2. Spanish Conquest and Colonization

Colonization involves the displacement of an existing civilization and accompanying enforcement of another civilization's will on the **indigenous** population. There's a reason it's called the Spanish **Conquest**. You can see the extent of Spain's colonization at its peak in the map below.



Although this period is looked upon as the Golden Age of Spain because of this extensive colonization, it marks a very dark time for the native civilizations, such as the Aztec, Inca, and Maya, that were conquered by the Spanish in the name of her king and the Catholic Church.



This influence reverberates today; from Mexico through Argentina and South America, this area is the largest region of Spanish speakers on the planet. It also marks the largest, and arguably most devout, Catholic region and population in the world.



TERMS TO KNOW

Indigenous

People who are native to a certain place.

Conquest

3. Spanish Colonial Architectural Influences

The cultural and linguistic influences and blendings are very apparent in the people of Latin America today. Like any civilization that expands into other areas, the influence of Spanish art and architecture is apparent as well. Construction of churches was extremely important, given that Spain was one of the most devoutly Catholic countries of this time. Also, by Vatican decree—meaning from the pope himself—Spain's expansion was to coincide with the spread of Catholicism by conversion of conquered civilizations.

This is why the Spanish conquests and spread of Catholicism go hand in hand. Churches were a physical representation and reminder of the Church's and Spain's authority over the New World. The architectural influences on the churches that you'll see today can be traced back to the Spanish churches in Europe. Just as the culture that developed out of this time became a mixture of native and Spanish cultures, the churches that were built here embody influences from continental Europe, as well as from the local people.

At the time of its initial construction in Spain, Valladolid Cathedral was located in one of Spain's most important cities, Valladolid, home to Philip II and his court. It's an example of Spanish Renaissance design.



Valladolid Cathedral

1668

Valladolid, Spain

Remember, periods such as the Renaissance and the Baroque occur at different times depending on the region and the rate of penetration. You can see the more simplified exterior of Valladolid contrasted to the

noticeably more decorative façade of Jaén Cathedral, shown below, which is also an example of Spanish Renaissance design. Both of these would serve as important influences on the design of churches in the New World.



Jaén Cathedral

1249-1724

Jaén, Spain

4. Examples of Spanish Baroque Architecture in New Spain

4a. Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico City

Construction began on the Metropolitan Cathedral in Mexico shortly after the conquest of the Aztecs by the Spanish. The intent of the Spanish was to consolidate their power and influence by building a monument of Spanish and Catholic authority in the former Aztec capital.



Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico City

1573-1813

Baroque Architecture

Mexico City, Mexico

It's a mixture of styles, most notably Baroque and Renaissance. It's essentially a classical layout with Baroque decoration and ornamentation seen throughout the exterior and interior of the church (see below).



Interior of Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico City

Here are a few additional views of the outside of the cathedral:



Exterior of Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico City



Exterior of Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico City

Shown below, one of the best examples of ultrabaroque can be seen in the elaborate ornamentation of the façade of the tabernacle, which is adjacent to the main **cathedral** structure.



The dense ornamentation characteristic of **ultrabaroque** tends to work best when it's affixed to a classical layout such as this, the juxtaposition of which is intended to create a trance-like effect or an impression of the glory of heaven.



Tabernacle of Metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico City



TERMS TO KNOW

Cathedral

The main church that contains the bishop's throne.

Ultrabaroque

An architectural ornamentation in southern Spain characterized by dense, elaborate decoration.

4b. Cathedral of San Ildefonso

The churches of New Spain incorporated elements of Spanish architecture, but possessed a much more varied mixture of styles in comparison to their European counterparts. For example, the Cathedral of San Ildefonso is largely Renaissance in its execution, particularly with its restrained and logical façade, dominated by the use of the rounded arch and overall simplicity in its design.



Cathedral of San Ildefonso

1562-1599

Baroque, with traits of the Renaissance

Mérida, Yucatán (Mexico)

Interior elements are, again, simple in their overall concept, but there are Baroque elements, particularly in the altars, as well as examples of Gothic tracery on the sides of the nave.



Altar of Cathedral of San Ildefonso



DID YOU KNOW

The church itself is constructed from repurposed stones from a former Mayan temple and most likely built with Mayan slave labor—a physical representation of the authority of Spain and the Church and their subjugation of the native population to the will of the Spanish.

4c. Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption

The **churrigeresque**, or ultrabaroque style, was the result of the incorporation of the work of local sculptors and artisans, as well as the unique inclusion of devotional and instructional devices called **retablos**. The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption in Zacatecas is an example of this fusion of European and native styles.



Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption

1568-1752

Baroque Architecture

Zacatecas, Mexico

The austere-looking native brickwork serves as the perfect surface for the elaborate ornamentation of the façade and bell towers of this church.



Façade of Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption



Bell Tower of Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption

The contrast of these two styles creates a strong impression, as if the entrance to the church truly marked a transitional point between the earthly and heavenly realms. It's a style that, interestingly enough, corresponded to the Rococo in the rest of Europe, a style that was itself known for its similar level of ornamentation and detail.



Entrance of Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption



TERMS TO KNOW

Churrigueresque

Refers to an elaborate sculptural stucco detailing, decoration, and ornamentation seen on Spanish Baroque architecture.

Retablo

In Latin America, a devotional painting that uses religious iconography from the Catholic Church.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about **Baroque architecture in New Spain**, or the Americas. In addition to learning how to identify and define today's key terms, you also learned how to briefly explain the **Spanish conquest and colonization** of the New World. You learned how the **Spanish churches in Europe influenced the art and architecture of the New World**, especially given that the Catholic churches in New Spain represented important symbols of both Spanish and Catholic authority. Lastly, you learned how to identify **examples of Spanish Baroque architecture in New Spain** by examining the stylistic

characteristics of several cathedrals built in Mexico.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell.



TERMS TO KNOW

Cathedral

The main church that contains the bishop's throne.

Churrigeresque

Refers to an elaborate sculptural stucco detailing, decoration and ornamentation seen on Spanish Baroque architecture.

Conquest

The subjugation of another group, in this case the New World by Spain.

Indigenous

People who are native to a certain place.

Retablo

In Latin America, a devotional painting that uses religious iconography from the Catholic Church.

Ultrabaroque

An architectural ornamentation in southern Spain characterized by dense, elaborate decoration.