

# A Portrait of Zapopan

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Photos by Dante Barrera

Since the 1970s the municipality of Zapopan has been part of Guadalajara's metropolitan area. Many avenues connect both cities and in some places, only a single street separates them.

As late as 1950, however, they were still clearly distinguishable: the imposing outline of the towers of the Basilica of Zapopan was visible on the horizon several kilometers from Guadalajara. At that time, Zapopan had only 30,000 residents, while in 1998, they numbered more than a million.

The basilica, erected in 1739 and remodeled in 1892, with its plateresque facade and Corinthian reliefs, is one of the many fascinating buildings in Zapopan's

The basilica dedicated to the veneration of Our Lady of Zapopan.



A piece from the Huichol Art Museum.

historic downtown area. The church is dedicated to the veneration of the image of Our Lady of Expectation, or Our Lady de la O, popularly known as Our Lady of Zapopan. Made by the Purépechas of cornstalk paste in the sixteenth century, the image is only 34 cm high.<sup>1</sup> This figure has a great many faithful followers in western Mexico, particularly in the Archdiocese of Guadalajara, of which she is patron saint.

The close relationship between Our Lady of Zapopan and the *tapatíos*, as the residents of Guadalajara are called, dates from more than two centuries ago. In 1721, she was declared the "patron saint against epidemics" and in 1734, after a period of heavy rains, "patron saint of waters and against lightening and storms." From that

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time on, both civic and ecclesiastic authorities decided that the effigy should remain in Guadalajara from June 13 to October 5 of each year, to intercede for the city in preventing floods. This tradition survives even today.

During that period every year, then, the figure is carried through the different neighborhoods and markets of Guadalajara. The streets are festooned with *composturas* (garlands decorated with cut paper) and carpeted with alfalfa for the virgin to pass. At night, each parish organizes a fair and fireworks to the peal of church bells announcing her arrival or departure.<sup>2</sup>

This singular form of worship also stems from another of Our Lady of Zapopan's titles given to her in 1821 by the head of the province: "General and universal protectress of the armies of the state of Jalisco." It is said then, that in the last century, she received welcomes and send-offs in Guadalajara with a 21 cannon salute. Today, she is rendered military honors—complete with trumpet calls, drums and double-time marching—during her entire sojourn through church atria and Guadalajara streets by the "Guard of Honor," made up of great numbers of men, women and children wearing costumes and insignias befitting their title.

The "Pilgrimage of Our Lady" takes place every year on October 12 to celebrate "the carrying"—as it is popularly called—of the effigy back to its basilica.



Our Lady of Zapopan, patron saint and protectress of the state of Jalisco.



A view of Zapopan's main plaza.

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Approximately two million faithful, counting participants and observers, can be found along the almost 8-kilometer route. More than 250 groups of dancers also accompany the effigy's return to Zapopan after it has visited most of Guadalajara's Catholic churches.

Moving on to other topics, we should ask ourselves what kind of occupations are common in Zapopan. For almost four centuries the population of what was originally a hamlet, including the ranches and villages within its borders, has been occupied in trade and cattle raising, as well as cultivating corn, beans, wheat, fruit and vegetables, and logging trees from nearby forests to sell

wood for fuel and make charcoal.

Important haciendas were built in Zapopan, like Santa Lucía, the largest in the area in the nineteenth century, Copala, La Venta Del Astillero, De Lazo, La Soledad and La Magdalena. However, the large number of ranches and small holdings predominated in the Zapopan countryside, particularly in its Tesistán Valley.

In this century, since the 1960s, Zapopan has begun to be known as the corn belt because of the high crop yields in the Tesistán which made it number one nationwide in bushels per hectare. This has also led to the development of local crafts made with corn husks.

Some more remotely located Zapopan communities still celebrate festivities two or more centuries old. Among them



are the Christmas pastoraes in December, the Easter Week *Judea*, or passion play, and festivities to invoke good weather. But the most deeply rooted is the Fiesta of the *Tastoanes* celebrated every year in some of the towns with large indigenous populations: Ixcatán, Jocotán, Nextipac, San Juan de Ocotán and Santa Ana Tepetitlán.<sup>3</sup>

Zapopan's first textile factories opened in the 1840s. La Escoba was the earliest, famous for its modern machinery and highly mechanized work methods, followed by La Prosperidad in 1851 in Atemajac. The El Batán paper mill was inaugurated in 1844. Today, the city boasts industrial parks devoted entirely to manufacturing and assembly.

The municipality now has innumerable areas subdivided for housing and the majority of greater Guadalajara's hotels and shopping malls are in Zapopan, as well as campuses of the area's main universities and schools: the University of Guadalajara, the Autonomous University of Guadalajara, the University of the Atemajac Valley, the Panamerican University and the Monterrey Technological Institute, as well as the Defense Ministry's Air College.

Of cultural and tourist interest in the municipal seat is the Franciscan convent—located next to the basilica—, founded in 1819 as the Apostolic College for the Propagation of the Faith, which boasts an important collection of paintings in addition to the jewels and relics of Our Lady. There, too, is the Huichol Art Museum.



*The Town History.* Detail of Ricardo Peña's mural in Zapopan's city hall.



The main patio of Zapopan's colonial-style city hall.

Other important buildings are the neoclassical parish church of San Pedro Apóstol, built in 1819, and the colonial-style city hall, which holds the murals *The Universal Revolution*, by Guillermo Chávez Vega and *The Town History*, by Ricardo Peña.

Other places worthy of a visit are the eighteenth-century Nextipac Chapel, the seventeenth-century Santa Ana Tepetitlán Chapel, as well as the chapels of Ixcatán, San Juan de Ocotán, Tesistán, Jocotán and Atemajac. Other sights that should not be missed are the main houses—or their ruins—of the Santa Lucía, La Escoba, El Lazo, Copala, La Magdalena and La Venta Haciendas.

Zapopan also has admirable natural attractions, like the Doctor Atl Lookout Park, with its three sites built on the Santiago River Ravine; the Ixcatán geothermic geyser area; the Primavera and San Isidro Forests; and the Copalita and Santa Lucía Dams.

Even though Zapopan is part of the rapidly growing Guadalajara metropolitan area, the recovery of its own history gives it an identity of its own. **MM**

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Purépechas inhabited what is today Jalisco's neighboring state of Michoacán. Cornstalk paste sculptures, mainly religious figures, are made with pre-Hispanic techniques. See *Voices of Mexico* no. 45.

<sup>2</sup> There are actually three figures of the virgin: the original is at the altar at the Zapopan Basilica, donated to local residents in 1541 by Friar Antonio de Segovia; the one which travels to different neighborhoods around the city for several months a year; and an ivory figure housed in the Franciscan convent next to the basilica. [Editor's Note.]

<sup>3</sup> See the article in this issue about the *tastoanes* festivities in San Juan de Ocotán, pp. 33-35.