

Colonial, Baroque Querétaro

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▲ House of the Count of Ecala. Left: one of the exquisite patios. Right: facade with wrought iron work, *talavera* tiles and carved stone.



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▲ Santa Rosa de Viterbo Church. Left: the sacristy with its Eastern-style central table. Right: side facade. Since it was a convent, it did not have a main facade.

Mexico boasts several cities laid out like checkerboards from the sixteenth century on. Most of them were founded as a result of the great rise in mining. Many towns that later developed into cities were originally sites for garrisons or protection along the routes of gold and silver shipments and were initially called way stations.

Querétaro is a city with a reticular lay-out of particular interest, whose foundation was the basis for colonizing the

Bajío region, part of Mexico's arid north and temperate central area. In the sixteenth century, Querétaro was the center of the colonization of new lands and by the end of the century one of the areas where the most cities were founded. It increased in importance when rich mineral deposits were discovered in Zacatecas in 1546.

To protect the silver highways the Spaniards broadened out their borders: in 1571 by order of Viceroy Enríquez, they founded Celaya, a great agricultural center initially named Villa de la Purísima Concepción de Celaya. Aguascalientes was founded in 1575 and León in 1576.

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▲ Felipe Neri College, one of the most attractive facades in religious architecture.

Continual Chichimec attacks led to a pacification plan for the new territories: about 1580 much of them were conquered thanks to the intervention of the mestizo Caldera and De La Magdalena, a Jesuit, who established San Luis de la Paz. Guanajuato was divided into the municipalities of Guanajuato, Celaya and León, and the areas of San Miguel, San Felipe and San Luis de la Paz district were the base for colonizing San Luis Potosí, another important mining center.

Litigation about territorial jurisdiction between the dioceses of Michoacán and Mexico led to the territory of Querétaro being ministered to exclusively by the Franciscans, and in the middle of the sixteenth century it became

a spiritual center. It would not be until August 22, 1586, that Querétaro would become part of the archdiocese of Mexico.

Querétaro was the Spaniards' first permanent urban settlement in the Bajío region. Its agricultural production satisfied the needs of the northern territories. First it was founded as a center exclusively for indigenous people, but later, when the Spaniards understood its strategic geographic location, they became large landowners there. In 1590, it had 1,000 inhabitants and the number of Spaniards, indigenous, blacks and mestizos increased year after year. The city was an example of the urban relationship between indigenous and Spaniards who ended up mixing their urban areas.

In the seventeenth century, different religious orders established themselves there, increasing the city's wealth and concentrating urban land, made up mainly of donations. As a mere way station, initially it did not have an archbishop, which gave the religious orders great freedom

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and meant they did not have to make constant economic contributions to the bishopric. Also, instead of a governor, it had a *corregidor* or magistrate.

URBAN ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Establishing the Santa Cruz Church was definitive for the urban organization of Querétaro: together with the monastery, the *Pueblo de Indios*, or “indigenous town” was built in the upper part of the La Loma neighborhood. The “Spanish town” was laid out in 1550 by Juan Sánchez de Alanís. In *Relación de Querétaro* (Querétaro Chronicles) it is written that “Querétaro is very handsomely laid out in the form of a chess board with large spacious streets arranged in good concert and order.” Although we do not have the original plans for the city, we can deduce that it was built in two parts: the original “indigenous town” and a checker-board rectangle that was the lowlands initially inhabited by the Spaniards.

The rectangle had streets 16 varas wide (about 13.2 meters) with two main boulevards: one that ran east-west, Real Street, that ended in the San Francisco monastery, and the other that ran north-south that corresponded to what is now Benito Juárez Street. Every block was 200 varas wide (approximately 166 meters). This is the same design as in most cities founded in New Spain between 1520 and 1580.

In the seventeenth century, Querétaro underwent important changes: commercial activity increased notably and the religious orders were established there. Juan Caballero y Ocio, former infantry captain of His Majesty's armies, former sheriff of Querétaro, priest, officer of the Court of the Holy Office of the Inquisition and ecclesiastic judge of the city of Querétaro and governor of California, a man of immense wealth, financed several of the large religious buildings built in the second half of the seventeenth century. This man's enormous wealth and that of his works show the strength, power and riches that the Spaniards achieved in

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New Spain. He financed the construction of the San Antonio Church and Monastery, the Del Carmen Church, the San Ignacio de Loyola Jesuit College, the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the provisional monastery that would later make way for the important Santa Rosa de Viterbo compound. Toward the end of the century, he financed and finished the Santo Domingo Church.

The noble and loyal town of Santiago de Querétaro was finally granted status as a city by the Duke of Albuquerque on January 25, 1656, and confirmed by King Felipe V on September 29, 1712. During the eighteenth century, the most important construction was the aqueduct to supply the city with purified water because the religious orders and the Spaniards were greatly concerned that there would be epidemics if the inhabitants drank contaminated water. Work was begun on the aqueduct in 1726 with money from Don Juan Antonio de Urrutia y Arana, the marquis De la Villa del Villar del Águila, whose statue is now on display in the Plaza de Arriba.

One of Querétaro's main attractions is its architecture, with unique examples of the baroque. The Santa Rosa de Viterbo and Santa Clara Churches, together with the cloisters of the former San Agustín and San Francisco monasteries are exceptionally valuable. It is important to visit the museums in the former San Francisco Monastery and the cloister of San Agustín which house exceptionally valuable art work. This visit is completed by the Carmelita church and cloister, the Jesuits' San Ignacio and San Xavier, the Congregation Church, Santo Domingo and the San Felipe Neri College.

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▲ Santa Rosa de Viterbo. The pulpit shows both Islamic and Chinese influence, with its tortoiseshell inlay in wood.



◀ The La Marquesa House patio.

The city has important colonial homes; outstanding among them is the Ecala House on the Plaza de Arriba. This plaza has a series of buildings that were homes like that of the marquis de Rayas and an old inn, today an elegant hotel. The Corregidora's Palace is complemented by the Escandón house, the home of "the count of Sierra Gorda". Very near the Santa Clara church is the magnificent House of La Marquesa, at the corner of Madero and Allende; another example of outstanding architecture is the House of the Dogs, on Allende Street. All these buildings have a clear Arabian influence seen in their use of trefoil arches.

Neoclassical influence can also be seen in the Teresas Church and the Neptune Fountain outside the Santa

Clara Church. Neoclassicism corresponds to the beginning of the fight for independence in which Querétaro played an important role: neoclassical art is taken as a symbol of freedom of thought, a movement which began in Europe in 1750. In Mexico, baroque altarpieces were burned in the plazas, such as the case of the Santa Rosa Church, which today has a neoclassical altarpiece.

Querétaro is one of Mexico's most important colonial cities, its downtown area paved in stone with delightful pedestrian walk-ways and notable production of precious stones, particularly opal. Despite its industrial development, Querétaro continues to be one of the most beautiful cities in Mexico. **MM**

One of Querétaro's most famous sites, the San Agustín Cloister. ▶

