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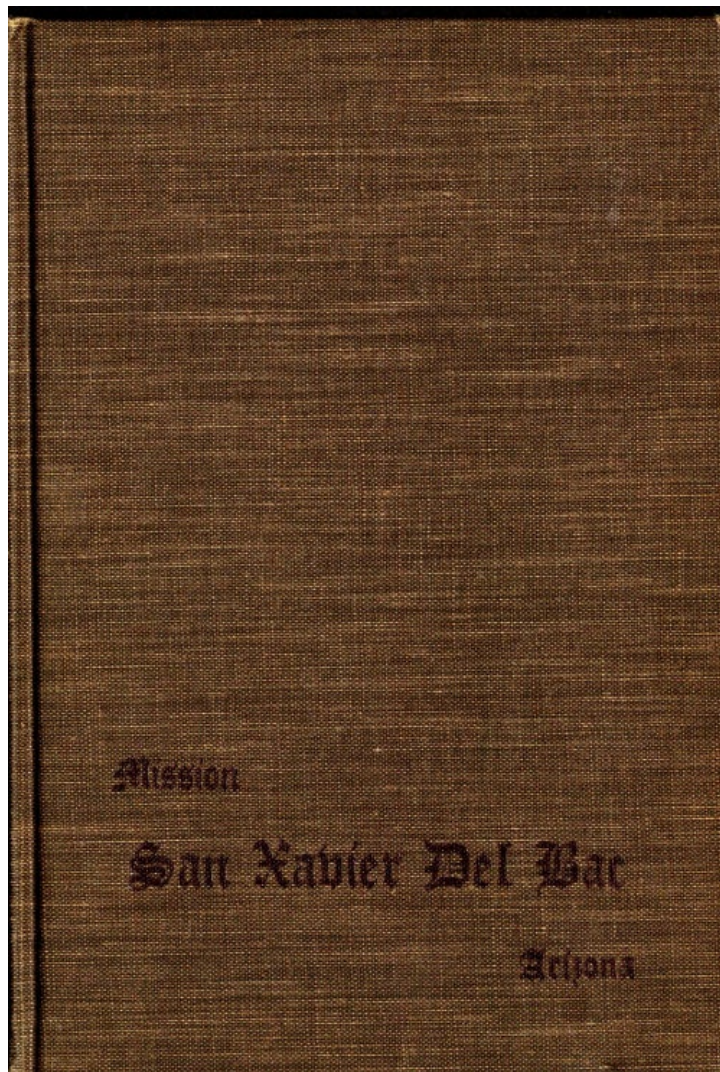
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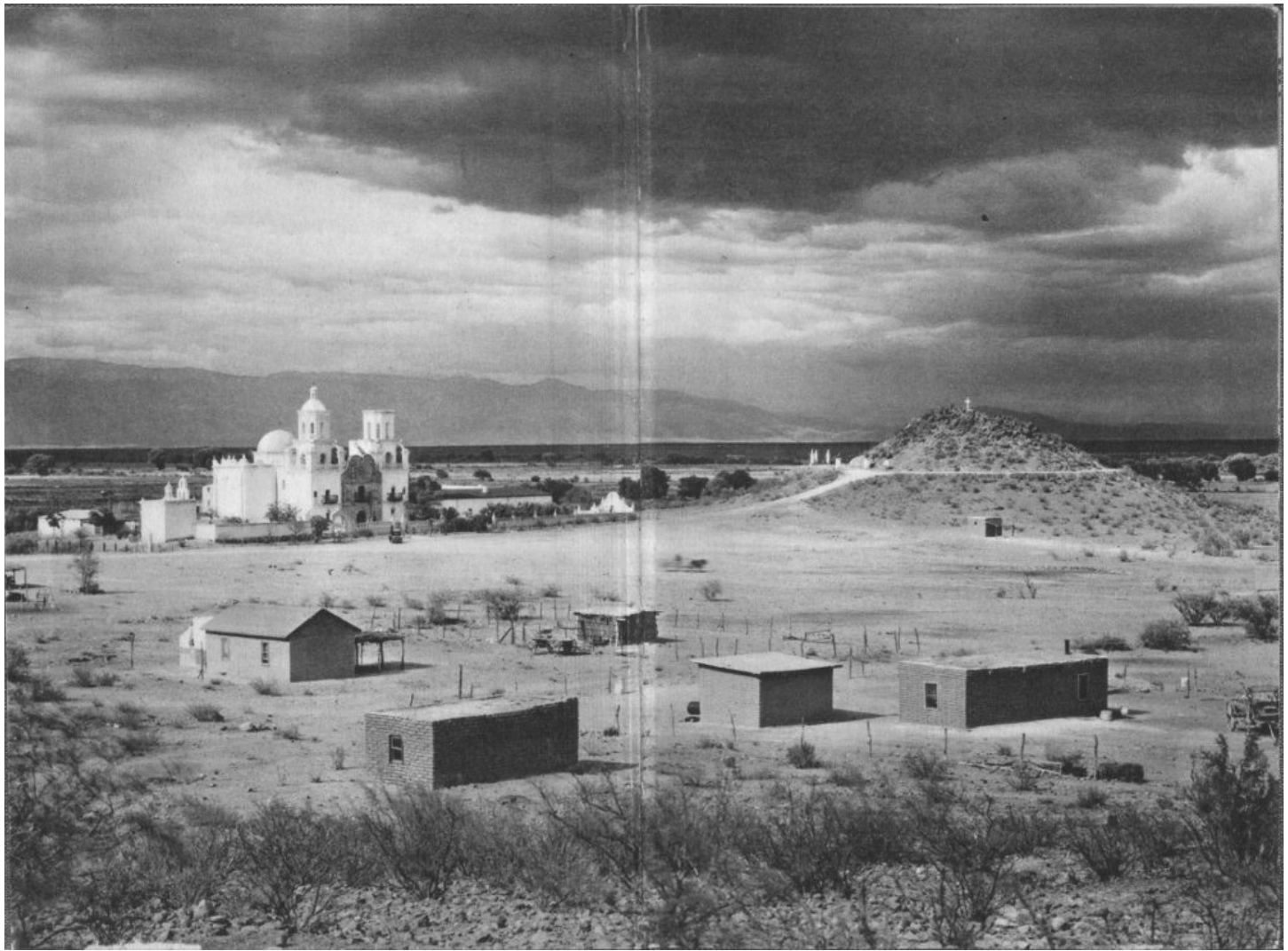
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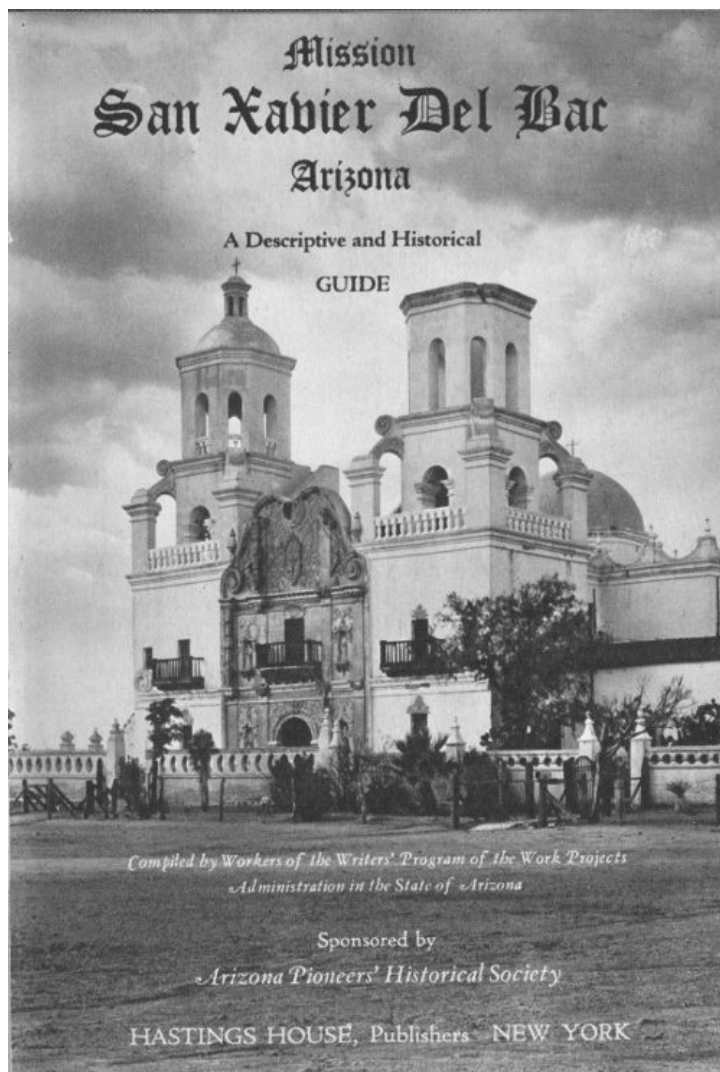




THE FACADE.

Mission
San Xavier Del Bac
Arizona

**A Descriptive and Historical
GUIDE**



Compiled by Workers of the Writers's Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Arizona

Sponsored by
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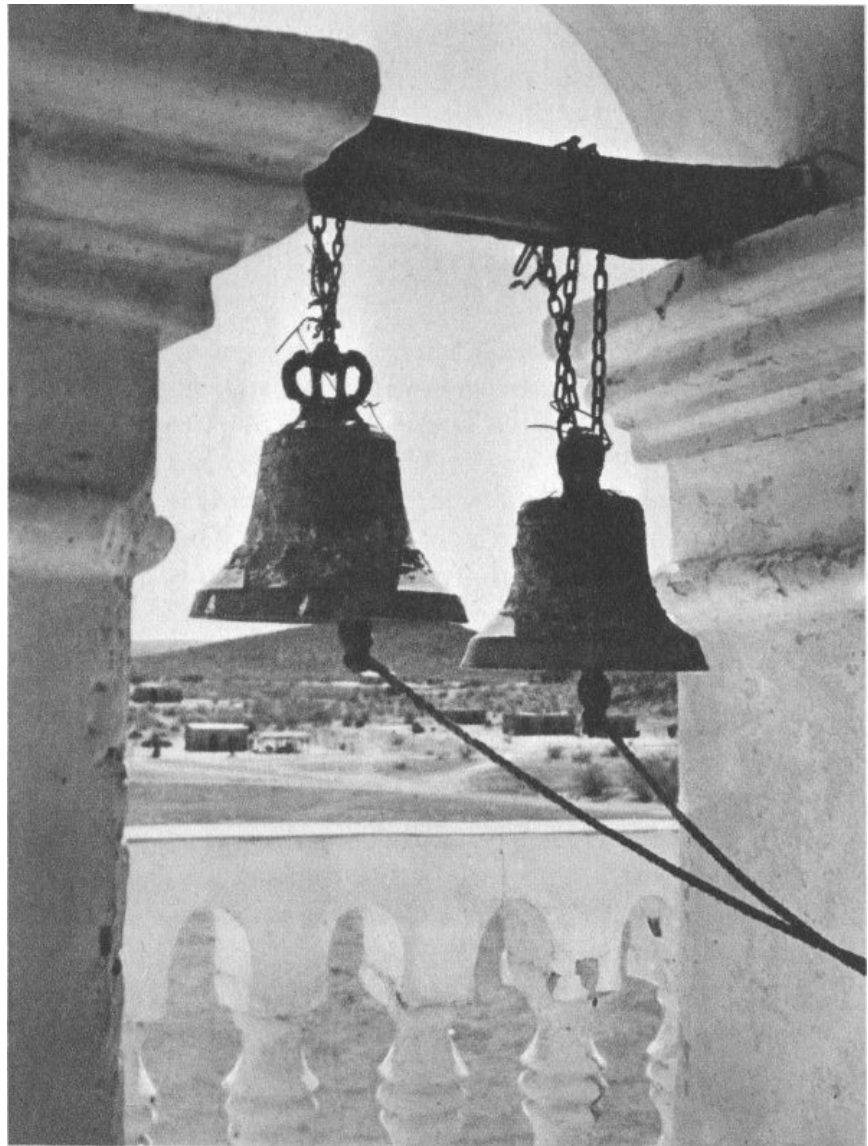
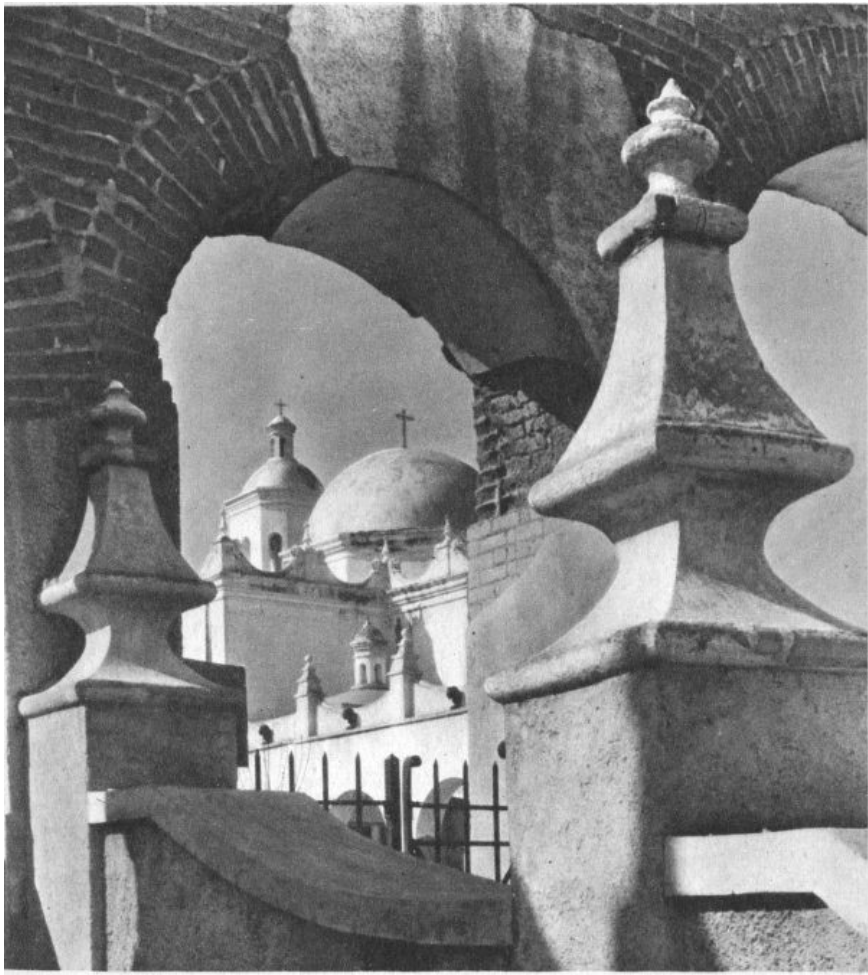
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Preface

The Mission of San Xavier del Bac, generally conceded to be the greatest of all the old Spanish missions and the finest example of pure mission architecture in the United States, has enjoyed a variable and fascinating development through nearly two and a half centuries. This descriptive and historical guide to the mission is designed to enable native Arizonans and tourists the more appreciably to enjoy San Xavier's great beauty and significance.

Acknowledgment is due to Dr. Herbert Eugene Bolton, Chairman, Department of History and Director of the Bancroft Library, University of California, for his helpful suggestions in connection with the history of the mission. Dr. Rufus Kay Wyllys, Head, Department of Social Science, Arizona State Teachers College at Tempe, was also very helpful in this respect. As to the architectural descriptions, the authority of Prent Duell, in his publication "Mission Architecture, Exemplified in San Xavier del Bac" was generously employed.

The Editors.

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The mission of San Xavier del Bac is on an elevation facing the Santa Rita Mountains, nine miles to the south of Tucson, Arizona, and is a conspicuous monument of the Santa Cruz Valley. An isolated church, white against the soft shades of the bare desert and the distant colors of the low-lying mountains, it is visible for miles in every direction. 9

Prent Duell, who calls San Xavier "the greatest of all missions" in his book on mission architecture, gives the following description of the view from the front: "The facade of the church is symmetrical, with two plain towers on either side of an ornate gabled entrance. Above the broken pediment of the gable, the noble dome may be seen between the towers. The windows and doors are symmetrically placed and thrown wholly in shadow by the heavy walls. Their blackness, contrasted with the glistening whiteness of the walls, and the reddish ornamentation about the entrance make a picture against the cloudless sky and endless desert, not to be forgotten." 10

The mission was founded by Eusebio Francisco Kino, picturesque pioneer missionary of the Jesuit Order, whose purpose was to Christianize the Indian population. San Xavier is the northernmost of his mission chain, extending up the West coast from Sinaloa to Pimería Alta. Pimería Alta, meaning the upper country of the Pima Indians, included all the territory between the Gila River, in what is now Arizona, on the North and the Río del Altar in Sonora, Mexico, on the south.

Kino visited the "great ranchería" of Bac on the Santa Cruz River for the first time in 1692 and later wrote an eloquent report to King Philip V of Spain describing the beauty and fertility of the valley whose fields extended as far as the present site of Tucson. It was during this visit that Kino named the place San Xavier, in honor of his own patron saint, the great Jesuit "Apostle to the Indies."

A visit in 1694 to Bac and the nearby ruins of Casa Grande, prehistoric fortress, convinced him that under

proper tutelage the Indians might erect large and permanent buildings.

In 1697 he drove cattle up from his mission Dolores in Mexico and established the first stock farm at Bac for the support of the projected mission.

Construction of the church began in April 1700, and Kino in his autobiography relates: "On the 28th we began the foundations of a very large and capacious church of San Xavier del Bac, all the many people working with much pleasure and zeal, some in digging the foundations, others in hauling many and very good stones of tezontle from a little hill about a quarter of a league away. For the mortar for these foundations it was not necessary to haul water, because by means of irrigation ditches we very easily conducted the water where we wished. And that house, with its great court and garden nearby, will be able to have throughout the year all the water it may need, running to any place or workroom one may please, and one of the greatest and best fields in all Nueva Biscaya ... on the 29th we continued laying the foundations of the church and of the house." (Note: The site of these foundations is not where the present mission stands, but at a point some two miles north.) 12

Kino died in 1711 and it is uncertain how much of the building had been completed. In 1751 the generally peaceful Pimas, disturbed by the inroads being made by Spanish settlers and prospectors, revolted and plundered the mission. Some of the Indians had been obliged to work in the mines, practically as slaves for the Spanish colonists, and it is probable that others found the discipline and regular work of the padres burdensome. All Pimería was shaken by this great uprising which nearly wiped out the frontier missions.

The following year a presidio was established at the visita of Tubac, 37 miles to the south, for the protection of San Xavier, its visitas, and the villages of the Christian Indians. Missionary activities were again started and many of the Indians who had previously fled, returned.

In 1767, by Royal Order, the Jesuits were expelled from all Spanish domain. Charles III of Spain, fearing the Jesuits were too persistent in their quest of new lands, decided to replace them with the Franciscan Order. San Xavier, like most of the abandoned missions of the region, was taken over by the Franciscans in 1768. San Xavier came under the direction of Friar Francisco Garcés and before the year was out, while he lay sick at a nearby visita, the mission buildings were destroyed by Apaches. 13

The padres' courage and spirit were unshaken however, as we find that four years later a "fairly large" church was erected. The danger from Apache raids became increasingly serious and in 1776, a presidio was established at nearby Tucson for greater protection of San Xavier.

About 1785 two Franciscan friars, successors to Garcés, began work on the building. This evidently was at the site of the present mission. What part, if any, of the present structure belongs to the period of Jesuit occupation is conjectural and there seems to be some confusion at this period regarding the two sites. However, the cruciform (cross-shaped) design of the present structure was not used by the Franciscans for missions and it is reasonable to suppose that the Jesuits may have laid the foundations for the present church, under these circumstances. Also, the name of San Xavier, a Jesuit, was retained, while the Franciscans changed the names of the other Jesuit missions. 14

The labor of building went on for more than ten years. Except for part of one tower, the structure was probably finished in 1797, as an inscription on the door of the Sacristy indicates: "Pedro Bojs ano die—1797 (Pedro Bojourques—on a day in the year 1797)." The actual building of San Xavier was carried on under the direction of Ignacio Gaona, Spanish architect and master mission builder. Ornaments and fixtures of the older church were placed in the new building.

After Mexico won independence from Spain in 1822, the friars were expelled from the country and the missions were confiscated. San Xavier remained for years without a priest, and the buildings were used for stables, barns, or barracks. At this time the faithful Indians buried many of the ornaments and statues to prevent their destruction in Apache raids. 15

In 1859, following the Gadsden Purchase, whereby the United States Government purchased from Mexico a large strip of land, San Xavier was brought within the boundaries of the United States. The Arizona missions were put in the diocese of Santa Fe, New Mexico. When the Indians heard that a priest was returning they brought forth the statues and other sacred articles, rang the long silent mission bells and brought their children to be baptized. The church of San Xavier was the only mission not in complete ruin. Extensive repairs were made on the building.

Although the mission withstood the earthquake of 1887, a period of rainy weather caused damage to its walls and ceilings. Restoration work, for the most part by Indian labor, was begun in 1906. Old pictures were studied in an effort to retain the lines of the mission as faithfully as possible. The work was so skillfully done that in many instances it is impossible to distinguish between the old and new construction.

The exteriors of the mission and dependent buildings were newly plastered and the decorations repaired. Some changes were made in the walls of the atrium and in the patio, which had been constructed as a measure of defense against the attacks of Apaches. Additional dormitory and class rooms were constructed. In 1908 the "Grotto of Lourdes," a replica of the shrine at Lourdes, France, was constructed on the "Little Mountain of the Holy Cross" just east of the mission. 16

In accordance with the usual custom of the Spanish friars in selecting a building site for a mission, San Xavier del Bac occupies a position in the very heart of the desert, slightly elevated above the surrounding terrain and hemmed in by distant mountains. The majestic mass of the church with its tiny mortuary chapel to the left, its walled atrium fronting a spacious plaza, and its L-shaped dormitory and patio adjoining the church proper at the right, forms an imposing architectural ensemble. The church faces directly south, contrary to the general rule that the apse should be to the east.

San Xavier is the best preserved and the only one of the old Spanish missions still being used. For two centuries and more the Indians have been coming to this shrine, exemplifying their faith in Christianity as first introduced by the kindly padre Kino. 17

No mission excels San Xavier in serious design and pure artistry. It more completely embodies the elements which enter into mission architecture, that is, the architecture of the Spanish Renaissance modified by native influences, than any other, and stands a perfect example of its type. In reality San Xavier, which cannot be designated as an example of any one style, is a combination of the many influences that created the mission architecture of the Southwest. Not the least of these influences was the scarcity of artisans capable of executing the elaborate detail of the churches in the homeland and the fantastic Churrigueresque mode of vice-regal Mexico with which the padres were familiar. Also the building materials were for the most part confined to those available at the site. In view of these many limitations it is not surprising that the structures, executed largely by native workmen, reflected Indian influences. 18

About the only materials used in the construction of San Xavier Mission not native to the site were the iron bells and the hinges on the doors. The statuary for the most part, and the gilt used on interior decorative features, were probably brought from Mexico. According to legend, the clappers of the Arizona mission bells were made

from a meteorite that fell in the Santa Rita Mountains nearby.

The architecture of San Xavier has traces of both Byzantine and Moorish styles. The lower half of the interior with its many brilliant decorations, statuettes, frescoes, and glitter of golden tones is partially Byzantine. The upper part reflects the Moorish style with stilted arches, domes, and fantastic windows. The distinctive towers and belfries were developed in Mexico and much of the accented yet restrained decoration suggests the influence of the Aztec.

The mission, except for the foundation, is constructed entirely of kiln-baked clay brick, covered with a white lime plaster. The pendentives and groins—even the roof including the huge dome, and the choir loft—are carried completely on vaulted arches. The ornamental features of the facade are of brick and plaster. 19

The foundation of stones imbedded in mortar, is nearly six feet thick under the front towers in order to support their great weight. The massive towers, with their arcaded belfries arranged in two stages, were of identical design. The one on the right, never having been completed, lacks the crowning dome and cupola of the one on the left, thereby destroying the otherwise perfect symmetry of the facade, though not detracting from the charm of the structure. A number of legends have arisen to account for the unfinished tower. It is said the King of Spain, anxious to increase his revenues, ruled that each church upon completion must pay a tax to the royal treasury. The astute padres left the church in a state that could not be considered completed. Another version relates that Ignacio Gaona, the mission builder, with but a few months of labor left, sustained a fatal injury in a fall off the unfinished tower which may account for its not being completed, as well as for the fact that the name of his assistant was inscribed on the Sacristy door, viz. "Pedro Bojourquez, 1797." 20

The imposing silhouette of the towers is greatly enhanced by the flowing lines of their flying buttresses at each corner. These corner buttresses are arched across to the base of the upper belfry in the form of graceful scrolls. The platform around the lower stage of the belfry is protected by a balustrade of finely turned balusters.

The most decorative feature of the facade is the gabled entrance pavilion which, with its curvilinear silhouette and baroque detail, exemplifies the excesses of the late Spanish Renaissance and recalls the Churrigueresque embellishments of the Mexican cathedrals. The original ornamentations—arabesques, shells, niched figures, and swirling volutes in both low and high relief—appear in soft shades of red, the faded residue of the original vermilion paint.

The deeply recessed entrance portal is framed with a low unilted classic arch. Its aged wooden doors are hewn from solid mesquite, swung on original hand-made hinges, and fastened with locks and bolts of the same period. The spandrels of the portal arch are adorned with rich floral arabesques. The portal is flanked by double columns, elaborately molded and decorated, and engaged to the face of broad pilasters. These columns are repeated in a superimposed ordinance flanking a central window. The window, admitting light to the choir loft within, has a delicate wooden balcony which casts a deep shadow over the entrance portal below. It is crowned with a large shell motif, symbolic of pilgrimage or baptism. Two other balconies of similar design accent the base of each tower at the same level. Decorative niched figures are placed between the columns. The upper figure on the left, with crown and royal robes, is variously described as representing either King Charles III of Spain or Saint Catherine. The black-robed figure below, though nearly effaced, is judged to be that of a lady saint. The upper figure on the right, with tambourine, is a representation of Saint Cecelia; the figure below, often blackened by the grease dripping from the candles of pious Indians who affirm that the saint cures their sore eyes, is thought to be an image of Saint Lucy. The gable of the entrance pavilion, in the form of a broken scroll pediment, is adorned with the arms of the Franciscan order, executed in high relief. The coat of arms consists of an escutcheon with a white ground against which are displayed a twisted cord, part of the Franciscan dress, and a cross bearing one arm of Jesus and one of Saint Francis. To the right of the escutcheon is the monogram of Jesus and to the left that of the Virgin. In the decoration above are two small Lions of Castile, and bunches of grapes signifying fertility. A broken bust of Saint Francis of Assisi surmounts the pediment. 21

Regarding the facade as a whole one is impressed with the striking contrast between the blank surfaces of the smooth outer walls and towers, and the concentrated decoration of the few wall openings. Over each of the lower windows in the towers is a delicate relief almost monastic in its simplicity. These windows are grilled with slender wooden spindles in the traditional Spanish manner. 22

Inside to the left of the nave is the Baptistery and over head the choir loft from which the best view of the interior is obtained. The plan of the vaulted interior is a perfect Latin cross with transepts, apse and nave. The right and left transepts are treated as chapels. At the north end is the chancel with its high altar. Over the crossing of transept and nave, the lofty dome rises over an octagonal drum supported on the arches and pendentives, while to the left and right are richly appointed transept chapels each containing two altars. Light streaming through the high windows in the clearstory and the four medallion windows in the drum of the dome is refracted from wall to wall in soft bluish tones.

The walls of the interior are richly adorned with frescoes and gilded ornament. The interior decorations of San Xavier, though somewhat faded in color are perhaps richer than those of other missions—the elaborate detail of its gilded altars, the bizarre painted statues, the spindled altar rails and wine glass pulpit, are in keeping with the rich traditions of Spain and Mexico. 23

The sides of the vaulted nave, adorned with frescoes, a painted dado and cornice, are lined with heavily capped pilasters. Frescoes, painted in bold reds, yellows, blues, and browns and outlined in orange and black, recall at once the work of early Spanish painters, the eastern heritage of early Christian art, and at the same time, the hand of a native race attuned to brilliant color. The large frescoes, *The Last Supper* and *The Holy Ghost Descending Upon The Disciples*, to the left and right respectively, are said to be the work of a monk from the college of Queretaro. The dadoes painted in imitation of tiles have almost disappeared. Below the molded brick cornice is a colorful frieze decorated with the cord and hem of the Franciscan vestments and the traditional fringe of bell and pomegranate.

The pilasters flanking the nave are adorned with niched figures of saints. On the left (front and rear) are St. Mathew, St. Bartholomew and St. Philip, on the right St. Simon and St. Thaddeus. These apostolic figures and many others set into the high altar and transept chapels are painted and modeled with charming naivete of form and expression. As Duell has suggested, "They were intended for the Indian, and his first lessons in Christianity were through art." 24

The frescoes on the pendentives and on the drum and dome over the crossing are especially decorative in that they are painted on the white ceiling in vignette. Here again are figures of various saints. Those decorating the pendentives represent St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, St. Jerome and St. Ambrose.

In the Gospel Chapel formed by the left transept are two richly carved and gilded altars. The larger one at the end, somewhat resembling the high altar, is dedicated to the Passion of Our Lord, the other, on the right, to St. Joseph. The frescoes on the left wall of this chapel symbolize *The Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple* (upper) and *Our Lady of the Pillar* (lower). Here also is the confessional.

The apse, containing the elaborately encrusted high altar, is framed by a wide and stilted chancel arch. On the piers of the arch (left and right) are figures of St. James, St. John, St. Thomas and St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus. On the corners of the piers are hung the figures of angels, life-size, said to be the likenesses of the two daughters of the artist who decorated the interior. The apse is separated from the rest of the church by a low spindled chancel rail. The central gate of the hand-carved railing is flanked by two grotesque carvings of lions on the escutcheon of Castile and Leon. In their paws were candlesticks—long since carried away by vandals. 26

The high altar is dedicated to St. Francis Xavier. A figure of the saint occupies a central niche above the altar table. Around it are carved cherubs and arabesques. Still higher is a brilliantly painted figure of the Holy Virgin. On each side of this central motif the corners of the octagonal apse are lined with elaborately carved and gilded columns and between them the niched figures of St. Peter and St. Paul. Surmounting the altar is the figure of God the Creator. The domed ceiling of the apse is embellished with a shell—a motif frequently used in the decoration of the church. The side walls of the apse are painted with colorful frescoes: *The Adoration of the Wise Men* and *The Flight Into Egypt* (right wall) and the *Adoration of the Shepherds* and the *Annunciation* (left wall). 27

A small door in the right wall of the apse leads into the Sacristy, a high square domical chamber containing the sacred vessels and reliquaries. The delicate floral decorations on the sacristy ceiling are especially notable. On the north wall is the *Crucifixion*, the largest and best preserved of any of the frescoes in the church. A small door in the east wall gives access to the arched cloisters of the patio.

In the east transept is the Epistle Chapel containing, like the Gospel Chapel on the left, two altars—the large altar at the end, dedicated to the Mother of Sorrows, containing a statue of Mary, clothed in a bridal gown donated by an Indian girl in appreciation of an answered prayer. Imbedded in the wall above is an antique wooden cross which formerly bore a “life-size” statue of the crucifixion, though nothing remains now but one arm. It is thought the statue was carried away by vandals. The altar at the left is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. 28

A high canopied hand-carved pulpit of rich dark pine, fastened with wooden pegs, stands against the transept pier at the right of the Epistle Chapel. Octagonal in shape and raised on a slender shaft-like pedestal, it is a notable example of skillful craftsmanship in woodcarving. The pulpit platform is approached by a narrow railed flight of steps.

Entrance to the finished tower is through the Baptistry. This room is groin-vaulted and handsomely ornamented. A fresco of the *Baptism of Christ* completely covers one of the walls. The baptismal font in the center of the room with its hand-hammered copper bowl, bears the inscription “IHS,” three letters of the name Jesus in the Greek language. This is one of the sacred fixtures that was taken from the original Kino church and placed in the present building.

A narrow stairway built into the thick walls leads to the choir vestry. The choir loft is adjacent. The walls of the choir loft are covered with frescoes of the *Holy Family*, the *Home at Nazareth*, *St. Francis in a Heavenly Chariot*, and *St. Dominic Receiving the Rosary from the Holy Virgin*. A door opposite that of the choir vestry gives access to the other tower. The old doors in the church still have their original heavy iron hinges, locks and latches. They are designed with heavy stiles and rails, enclosing small panels, and are relatively low and narrow. 29

The belfry of the finished tower, reached through a tunnel-like stairway from the choir vestry, is enclosed by a parapet with molded balustrades. Only three of the original four bells remain. It is thought that one of the three, accounted the best, is the “lost chime” from the San Juan Bautista mission of California, which was cast by a Peruvian who died without divulging the secret of his process. The inscription: “S. Jvan Bajtjsta,” is quite clear. Just how it came to be lost by the California mission however, if it came from there, remains a mystery.

Flights of stairs lead on upward to the cupola, which culminates in a domical vault. There is a splendid panorama of the valley from this point. In earlier days the cupola was perhaps used as a lookout to warn against Apache attacks. Here one may look down upon the domed surface of the roof which was painted in imitation of tile, and examine the detail of the elaborate roof parapet with its slender posts and finials and graceful wall curved in scalloped loops between them. The finials are flanked by carved Castilian lion heads. 30

The dormitory wing constructed of adobe has been greatly altered. Early drawings indicated that the windows and doors were originally arched. Especially notable is the roof over the dormitory and adjoining loggia. Except for the outer covering of tile its structure has never been disturbed. It is supported on heavy beams of mesquite timber and, as was the general custom, the beams were covered with stalks of ocotillo, leaves and reeds, the cracks then filled with soft adobe, the whole finally forming a solidly reinforced roof. The north wing of the dormitory, although entirely new, harmonizes with the earlier structure.

Engineers are working to bring back into line the massive walls of the mission and plan to reinforce the dome and portions of the fine facade which have recently fallen away. 31

Secret processes used in painting the murals are being utilized in restoring the walls of the structure. This process, recently discovered through research at the Smithsonian Institution, solves a problem artists have been attempting for years to achieve through the use of oil paint. The root of the ocotillo plant supplies the red. The pulpy sap of the saguaro (giant) cactus gives the blue. Brown and yellow are made from the first layer of skin under the bark of the palo verde tree, and green comes from sage leaves while mesquite beans make the thick black. The degree of boiling gives the shades desired.

The preservation of San Xavier del Bac is a worthy gesture in enabling increasing thousands to see intact this magnificent example of early mission architecture. 33

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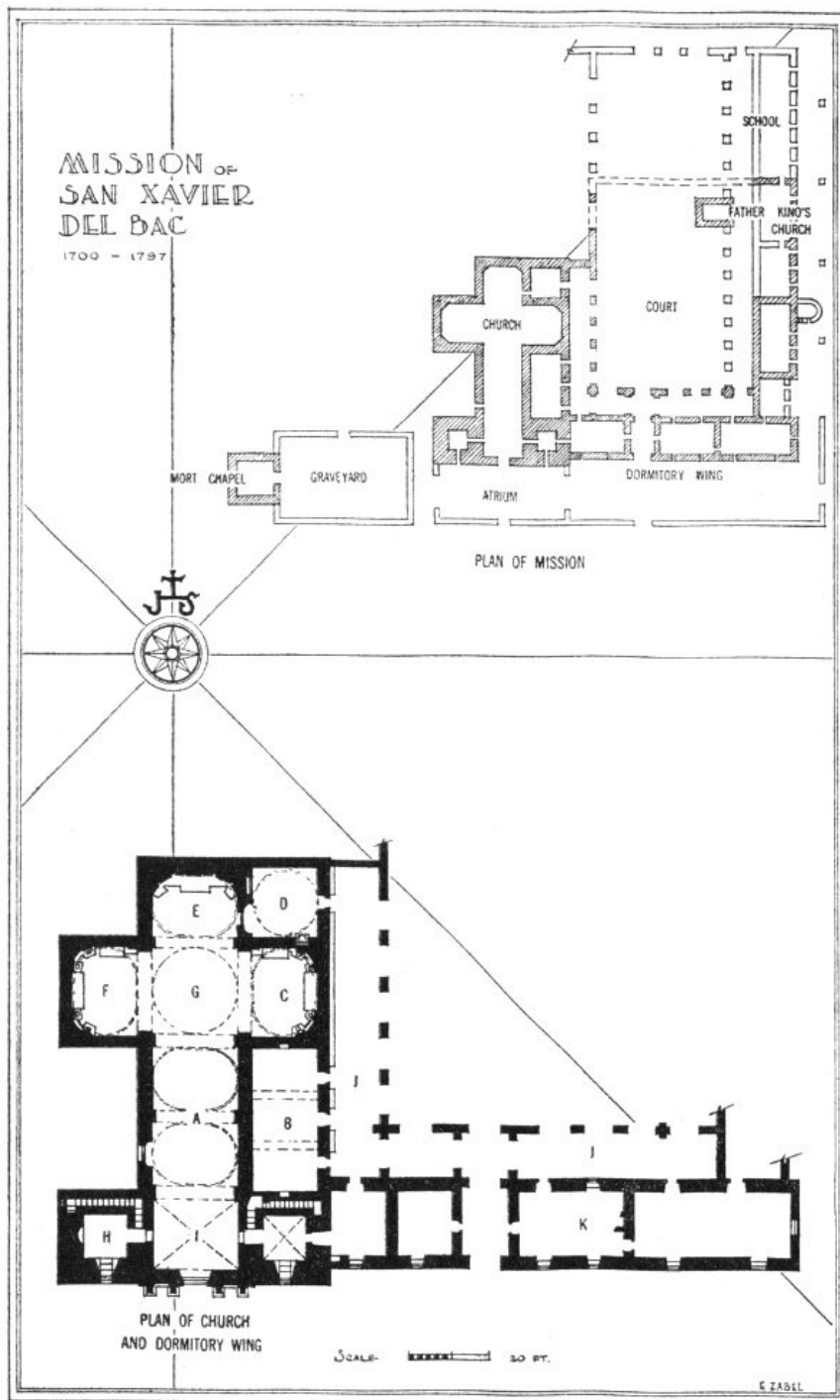
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Illustrations

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MISSION OF SAN XAVIER DEL BAC · 1700-1797

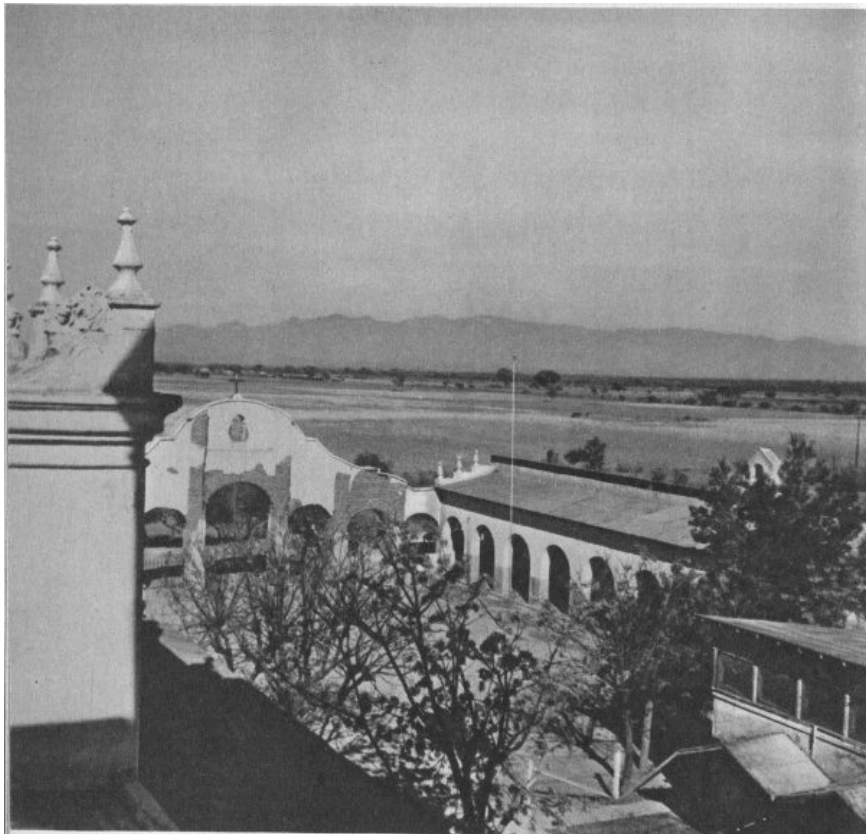
KEY

- A NAVE
- B PROVISION ROOM
- C EPISTLE CHAPEL
- D SACRISTY
- E APSE
- F GOSPEL CHAPEL
- G CROSSING
- H BAPTISTRY
- I NARTHEX
- J CLOISTER
- K DORMITORY WING



THE MISSION OF SAN XAVIER DEL BAC. PAPAGO VILLAGE IN FOREGROUND.

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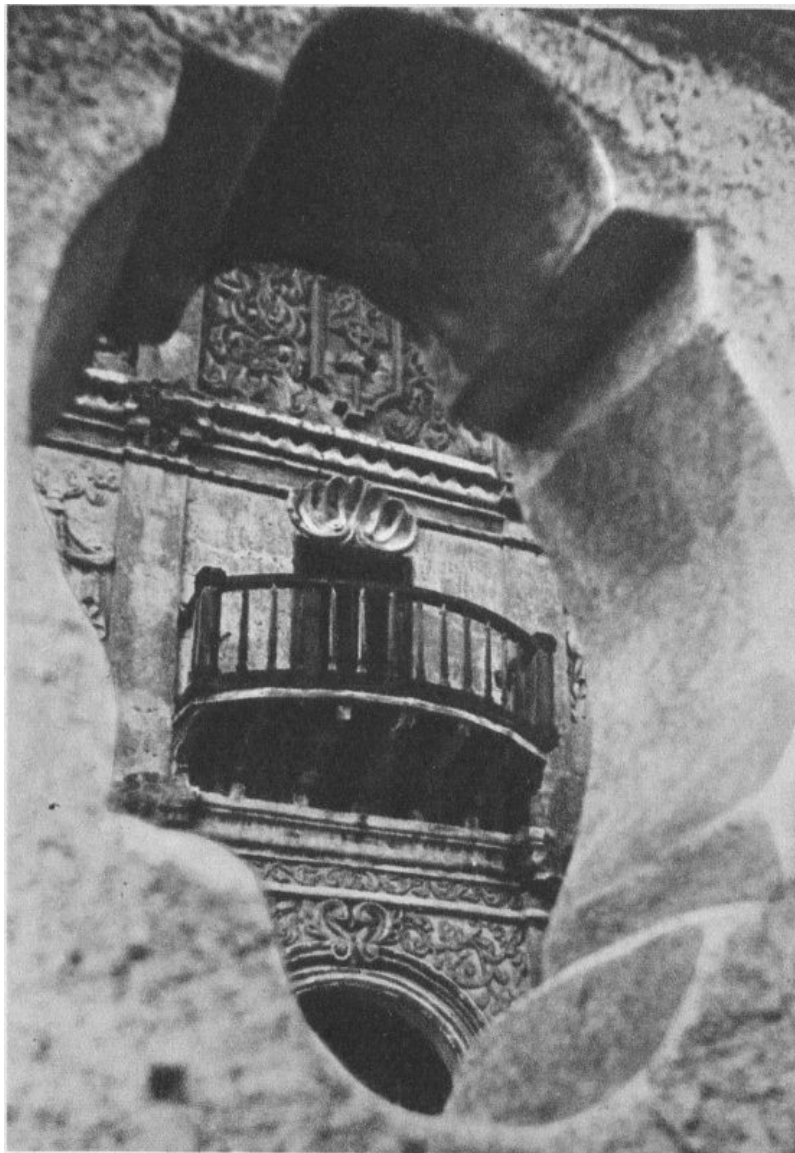


MISSION COURTYARD FROM ABOVE....

39



... AND BELOW.



THE ENTRANCE PORTAL HAS A DELICATE WOODEN BALCONY ABOVE, CROWNED WITH A LARGE SHELL MOTIF.



PAPAGO INDIAN CHILDREN RECESSING AT THE MISSION SCHOOL.



HIGH ALTAR FROM REAR OF NAVE.



ONE OF TWO GROTESQUE CARVINGS OF LIONS.



HIGH ALTAR.



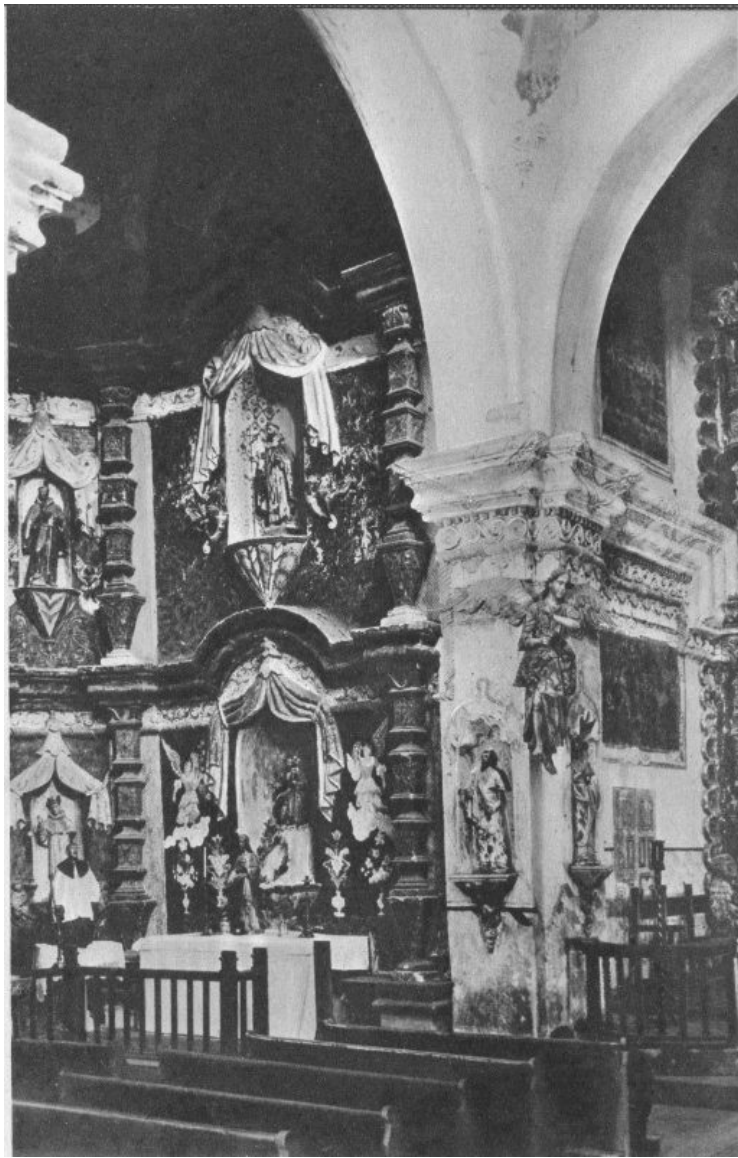
HIGH ALTAR FROM CHOIR LOFT.



A HIGH CANOPIED HAND-CARVED PULPIT OF RICH DARK PINE.



CHOIR LOFT FROM THE HIGH ALTAR.



LOOKING TOWARD ONE CORNER OF THE WEST
TRANSEPT.



GOSPEL CHAPEL—WEST TRANSEPT.



EAST TRANSEPT—EPISTLE CHAPEL.

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THE STATUE OF MARY CLOTHED IN A BRIDAL GOWN
DONATED BY AN INDIAN WOMAN.



ALTAR DEDICATED TO THE MOTHER OF SORROWS.

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BAPTISMAL FONT IN CENTER OF BAPTISTRY. PEDESTAL AND BOWL OF BAKED BRICK WHICH INCLOSES A COPPER BOWL ENGRAVED ON TOP WITH MONOGRAM I. H. S.

51



THE BAPTISMAL FONT SEEN FROM THE NAVE.



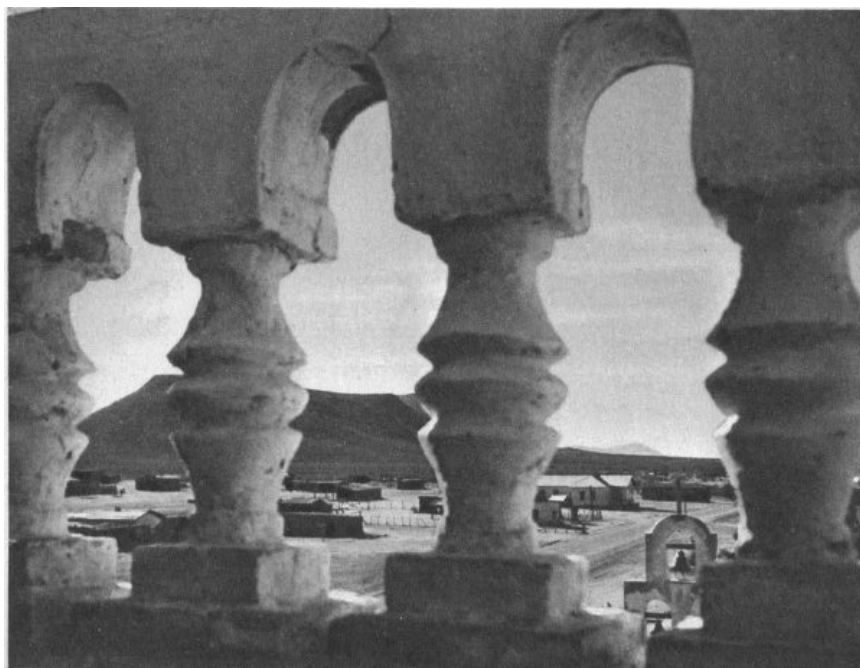
DETAIL OF BAPTISTRY WINDOW.



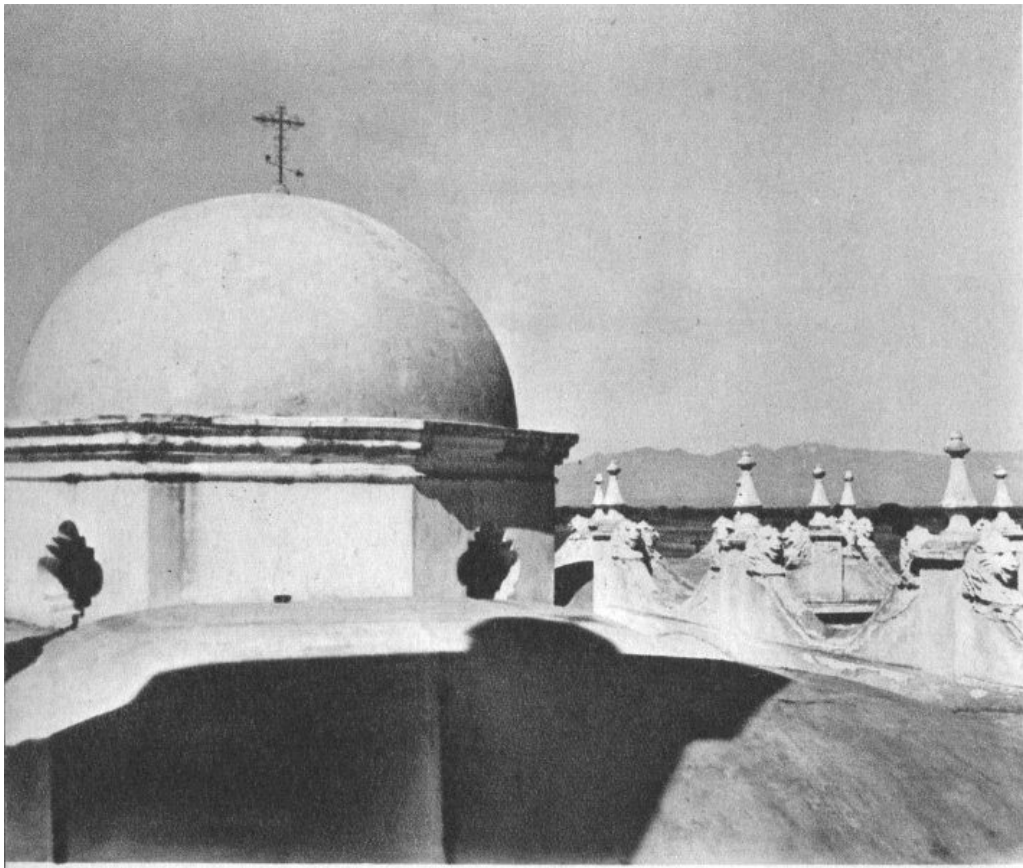
WINDOW OVER ENTRANCE PORTAL.



THE BELLS OF SAN XAVIER.



PAPAGO INDIAN HOMES.



THE GREAT DOME, THE DOMED ROOF, AND THE FINIALS FLANKED WITH CARVED CASTILIAN LION HEADS.

55



PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS IN A CORNER OF THE GARDEN.

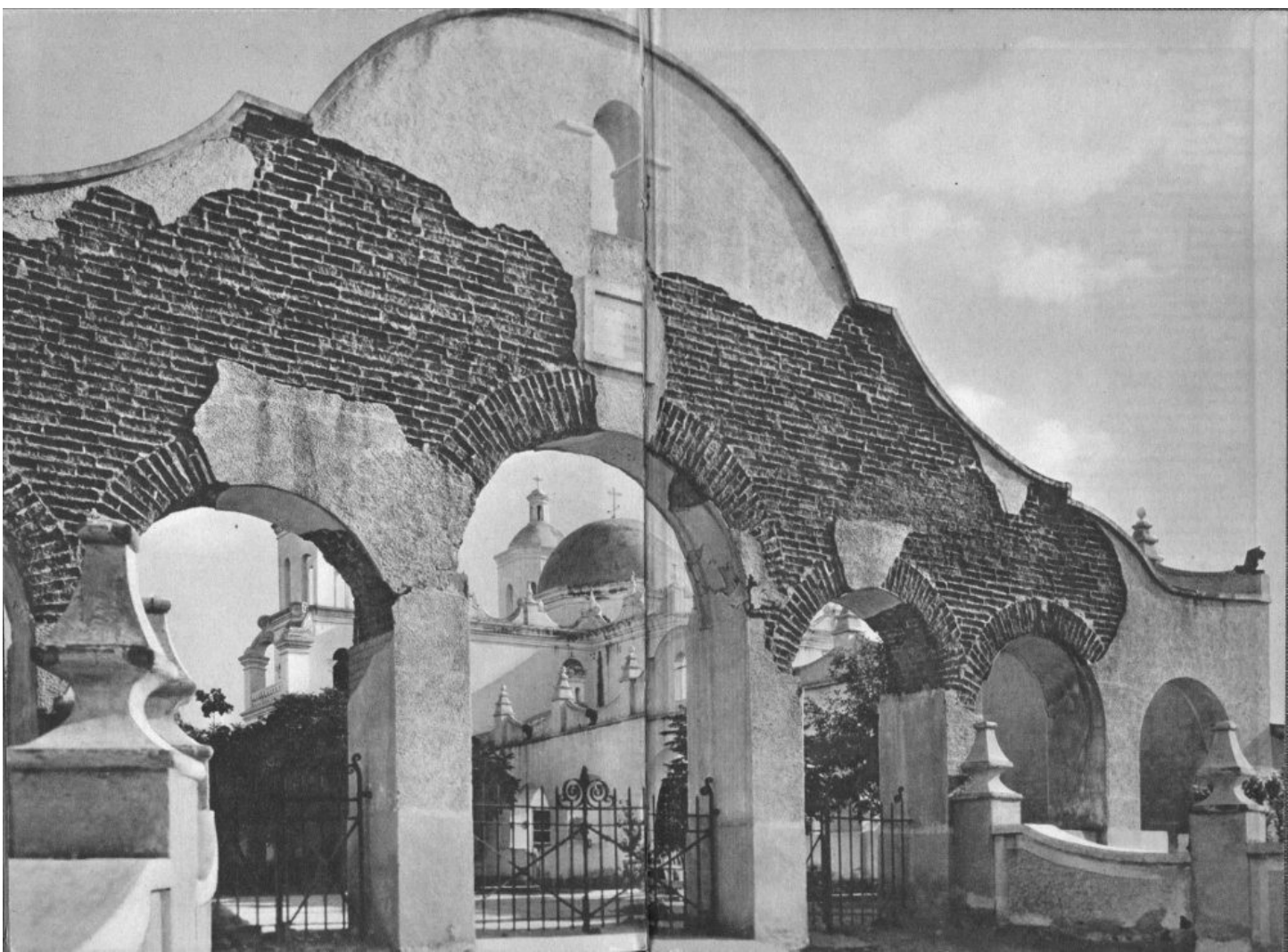
56



MORTUARY CHAPEL AND GARDEN.



MEXICAN AND INDIAN BURIAL GROUNDS JUST WEST OF THE MISSION.



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- Silently corrected palpable typos; left non-standard spellings and dialect unchanged.
- Moved some captions closer to the corresponding pictures, removing extraneous spatial references like “(next page)”.
- In the text versions, delimited italicized text by underscores.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SAN XAVIER DEL BAC, ARIZONA: A DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL GUIDE ***

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