

A study of the church of St. Paul in Macao and the transformation of Portuguese architecture

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ABSTRACT: The design of Portuguese Jesuit churches was transformed and intermixed with Indian and Oriental Arts in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Church of St. Paul in Macao is a valued symbol of this harmonious style, see Fig.1, but historical references have not been considered in Portuguese architectural typologies. This paper analyzes the construction and style chronology of the building with reference to other 17th century designs.

By defining Portuguese Manueline architecture as a late medieval Plateresque and North European forms intermingled with international compositions, the façade of St. Pauls must be considered as one of the masterpieces of the late Manueline style. It is suggested that the design was directly influenced by both Portugal and the transfiguration of the Portuguese Jesuit church in Asia with their own process from Serliana. Thus, the introduction of the Baroque style to the Portuguese colonies should be considered separately from Italian influences and local cultures.

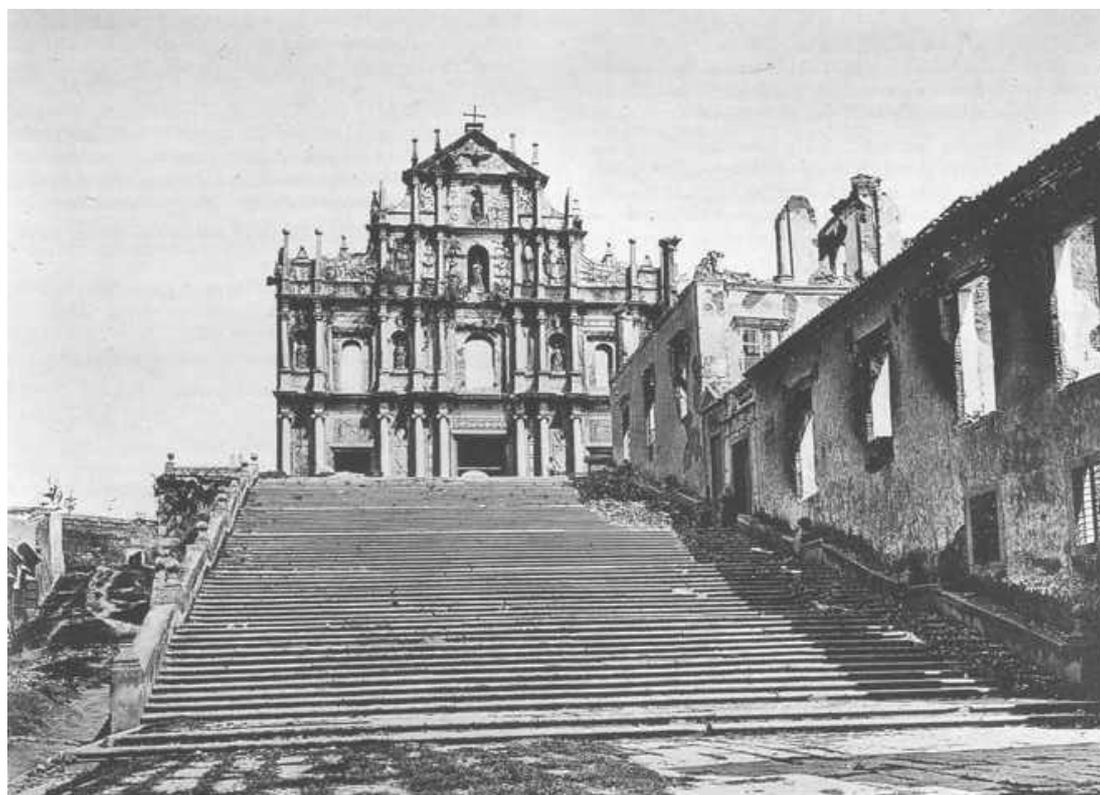


Figure 1: St.Pauls c.1874

1 INTRODUCTION

The Portuguese recognized the significance of East Asia as a distribution center in the 16th and 17th centuries and hence were instrumental in the development of many of the settlements. Their unique architectural history and style transformed many sites in the region with the result that many towns were completely redefined under their influence.

In addition, the Portuguese linked trade routes in the China Sea with others in Asia. In particular, they were noted for extending routes to other Pacific areas such as the Philippines in the 16th century. By disregarding the ambit of the Spanish Empire and prohibiting direct trade between Macao and Manila, they were able to form a link with the West Indies, a route called the Acapulco line along which the silver and gold of Mexico and Peru was often transported. This route enhanced the Portuguese network under a royal monopoly, and facilitated cooperation with local traders in Batavia, Timor, Malacca, Madras and Goa.

Evidence of Portuguese architectural influences in Asia is now limited to small areas in Macao and Goa. Studies on individual sites have been presented¹, but comparative researches of the region have been limited. In this paper, a comparative study of Portuguese architectural styles in Asia is presented, and its importance in European architectural history proposed.

2 HISTORICAL REFLECTION OF PORTUGUESE COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE IN ASIA

Portuguese architecture in the 16th and 17th centuries reflected the experimental attitude of the leading designers of the time, who mainly came from Italy by way of Spain. It is thought that most building designs emerged from associations with military architecture in connection with religious reform movements, as opposed to the monastic style². One possible explanation for the plain style adopted by the Portuguese was the quest for functionality and low cost. Hence, designs were often repeated.

A past study of Portuguese colonial architecture entitled "Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and their American Dominions, 1500 to 1800"³, by Dr. G. Kubler, which was focused on Brazil and India, suggested that the Portuguese colonial style originated from the Manueline style⁴. Kubler provided an analytical explanation of the link between Spanish Renaissance and Portuguese religious architecture, but did not include Asian examples.

Fr. Manuel Teixeira wrote an exceptional study of Portuguese colonial architecture in Asia and in particular the Jesuit mission in Macao. However, this widely accepted study, entitled "The church of St. Paul in Macau"⁵ does not make any comparison of the various Portuguese styles.

3 A CASE STUDY OF THE PORTUGUESE JESUIT CHURCH

Portuguese religious architecture during the reign of João III (1521 – 1557) was reformed under the Augustinian priests, enlarged under the patronage of Cardinal-King Henrique and continued by the Jesuits who henceforth dominated Portuguese education.

¹ A few studies of Portuguese India have been published. However, there is a significant amount of literature pertaining to the study of Macao by their governor of the region and these papers are listed in the reference section.

² Cf. Kubler, George. 1972. *Portuguese Plain Architecture between Spices and Diamonds, 1521-1706*. p165. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.

³ Cf. Kubler, George. 1959. *Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and their American Dominions, 1500 to 1800*. Harmondsworth: Pelican History of Art.

⁴ Manueline is the name of Portuguese national style of decoration from Italianate derivation with mudéjar forms. It was extended far beyond the reign of Manuel I (1495-1521), so that it is commonly called that name.

⁵ Teixeira, Manuel. 1979. *The Church of St. Paul in Macau*, Separada de STVDIA-Revista Semestral-N.41-42, Janeiro/Dezembro de 1979. Lisbon: Centro de Estudos históricos ultramarines da Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar.

According to the Kubler⁶, there were two fundamental designs of churches before Spanish rule, examples of which are the Jesuit churches in Évora (the crypto-collateral nave in Espírito Santo) and Lisbon (the salon auditorium nave at São Roque).

In this section, a comparative study of the façades of these designs is made and possible relationships suggested.

3.1 *The Church of St. Paul in Macao and The Transformation of Portuguese Architecture in The Colonies*

The architecture in Macao represents a later branch of the Portuguese style because of the mixing of Portuguese and Chinese styles. The Portuguese and Jesuit styles were transformed and combined with Oriental Arts and European architectural styles. The design of the Church of St. Paul in Macao, which is regarded as a prime example of the style, combined distinct schools into one harmonious product but is not generally considered in Portuguese architectural typologies.

Portuguese religious architecture has long been considered an expression of Spanish influences under the Habsburg rule (1580 – 1640). It has also been suggested that it represents a reaction to the Manueline style that emerged in about 1550 and which owes its origin to Spanish and other European styles⁷. However, the style has been recognized before the Italian Jesuit's Churches transformation of their colonial cities in India at the time of the construction of the Sé Cathedral in Goa (1562-1619).

Even the sculptures on the façade of St Pauls are not characteristic of the style and it has been suggested that they were carved by priests banished from Japan⁸. Regional Indian and Chinese cultural influences can be observed by consideration of Japanese Buddhist art of that time. The Holy Mother trampling the head of the dragon is one of the most impressive works found in both fields and was formed in the style of transformed Christian art and native Buddhist art from India.

Following consideration of the phases of construction, a modification of the estimates of the date of completion and style chronology is proposed. Such a study would provide significant data owing to the lack of information in current literature.

3.2 *The Relationship Between Vignola's Gesù and St. Pauls*

The famous façade of the Church of St. Pauls, the foundation stone of which was laid in 1602 after the first church was destroyed in a fire, was added in 1603. The first record of a service in the new church was on Christmas Eve in 1603. According to Teixeira, the statues on the façade were possibly added after 1622 and before 1671⁹, see fig.2, but Peter Mundy¹⁰, an English traveler, suggested a date of 1637.

The design of St. Pauls is sometimes attributed to Father Carlo Spínola¹¹ and it has been suggested that the design is reflected in the Gesù in Rome, see fig.3, but this has not been verified from plans. St. Pauls was destroyed by fire in 1835 and there is no record of the original plans. Therefore, such suggestions are based on the design of the remaining façade.

⁶ Kubler, George. 1972. *Portuguese Plain Architecture between Spices and Diamonds, 1521-1706*. p165. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.

⁷ Ibidem 3, p1.

⁸ Teixeira, Manuel. 1993. A Fachada. Artistas Japonesa e a Igreja de S.Paulo. *Japoneses em Macau*, pp11-13. pp1516. Macao. Instituto Cultural de Macau.

⁹ Ibidem 5, p75.

¹⁰ Boxer, C.R.. 1984. General Introduction to Part I, descriptions of Macau at the time of the Restoration, 1635-1638, Macau in 1637 by Peter Mundy, *Seventeenth Century Macau in Contemporary Documents and Illustrations*. p39-41. Macao: HEB.

¹¹ It is not clear who first suggested this, but partial reference to it is made in Teixeira's article (Ibidem 5, p63).

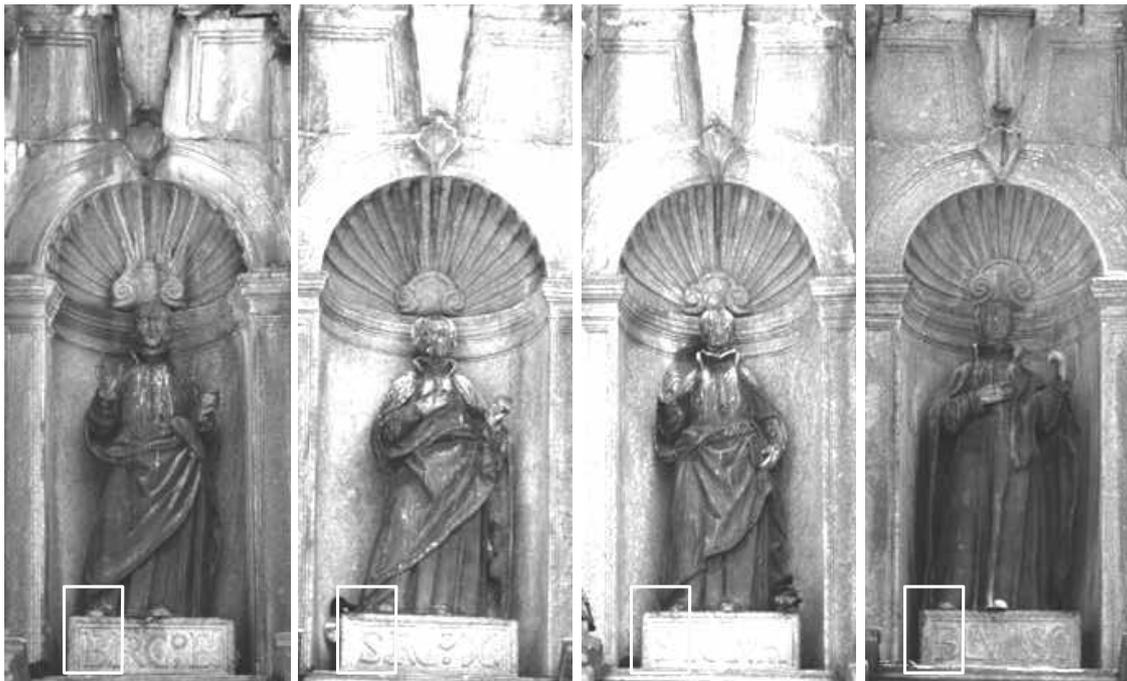


Figure 2: Statues on the façade of S.Pauls

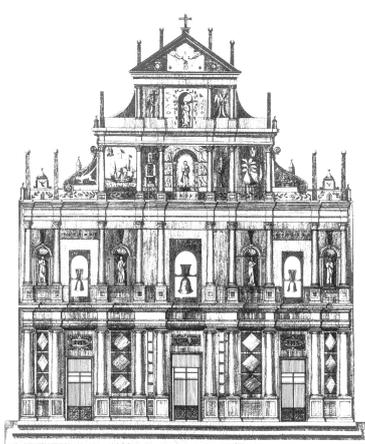


Figure 3: Façade of St.Pauls in Macau and Gesù in Rome

Resemblance to the design of the façade of Gesù by Vignola (1554), see fig.4, such as broken pediments, stratification and half-isolated pair columns can be seen but the design was changed in the final design by Porta (1577), see fig.5. Additional features confusingly suggest similarities with the Sé cathedral in Goa (1562-1619), see fig.6, and Bom Jesus de Velha Goa (1594-1605). Considering the formation of plans, it is suggested therefore that the final design was defined in 1568 and completed in 1577. However, considering the layout of the foundations

and the chronology of the formation of the elements, it could also be concluded that the design and construction of the Church of St. Pauls is not related to that of the Gesù.

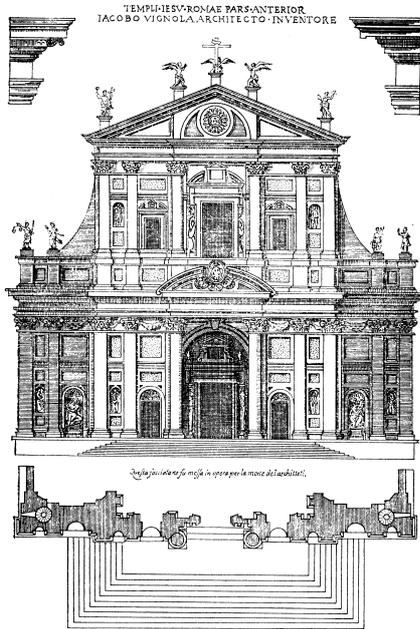


Figure 4: Façade design by Vignola



Figure 5: Façade design by Porta

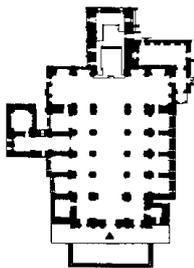


Figure 6: Sé in Goa

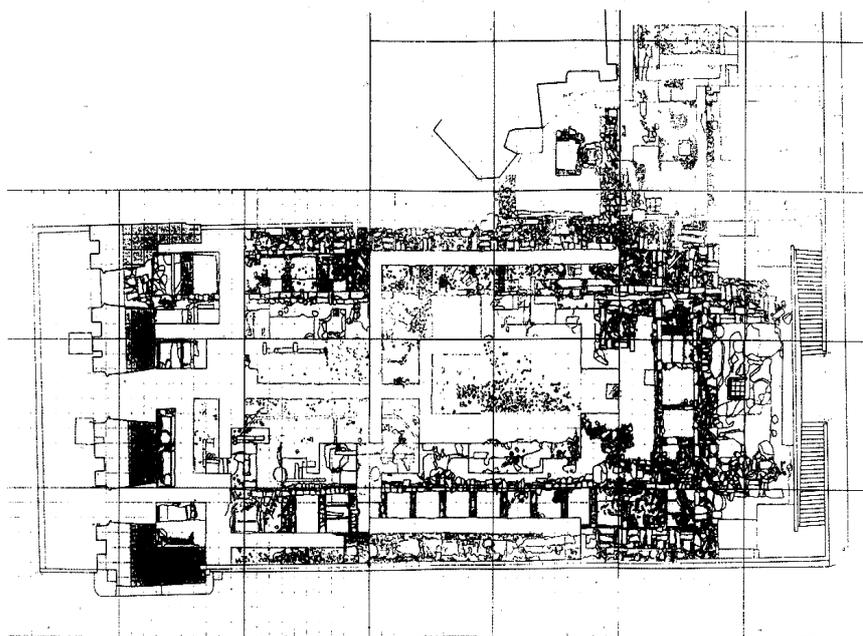


Figure 7: Plan of St. Paul's at the final state of excavation

3.3 *The Conjectural Reconstitution and Characterization of St. Paul's*

Excavations of St. Paul's by Cultural Institute of Macau (ICM) from early 1988 to 1990, revealed a significant amount of information about the design and construction methods of the time, thus facilitating the formulation of several hypotheses regarding the original plans, see fig.7.

The Church of St. Paul's has been thought of as a reflection of the European Jesuit's Church and it is widely accepted that it was built in the Portuguese Hall church style using a style of decoration derived from various forms of Oriental art. Thus, in the transformation of this European colonization, a large amount of experience was imported from other parts of Asia.

Fernando António Baptista Pereira, the commissioner of the ICM project, reported the characteristics of St. Paul's including the specifications of the three naves, the dimensions of the main body of the church and the high-chapel and descriptions of the College with reference to the Carta Anua (Annual Letter at 1603) and Apparatos by Father Montanha¹².

According to Montanha, the original church was very large, 84 palmos¹³ wide (approximately 63 feet), and 160 palmos long (37 feet). The walls were approximately 50 palmos high (37 feet) and made from pressed clay and straw. There were three naves, three chapels and the chapel of 1100 Virgins. ICM identified 32 spans and calculated the volume with reference to G. Chinnery's drawings¹⁴. They also referred to the well-known impression of Peter Mundy¹⁵, who described a wooden body with square and lozenge-shaped boxes of lacquered and gilt carving, with hanging rosettes of width 90 cm.

ICM found that the width of the nave is identical to the span of the church in Goa and identified a Latin cross plan with a basilica scheme.

¹² Guerreiro, Fernão. 1749-1752. *Carta Anua de 1603*, codex 49-v-66, fls.87 v.-89, Real Biblioteca da Ajuda, Coleção "Jesuítas na Ásia". P. José Montanha, *Apparatos para a Historia Ecclesiastica do Bispado de Macau*, in 2 vols. Macao.

¹³ A palmos is the distance between the tip of the thumb and the tip of the little finger. However, the definition of P. Manuel Teixeira at *ibidem* 4, p1 is used in this paper.

¹⁴ G. Chinnery arrived in Macao in 1825 and died in the region in 1852. Most of his collection is kept in Macao, Lisbon and Tokyo.

¹⁵ *Ibidem* 10.

This suggests that the Jesuit church adopted an unusual style that had been used by the society of Jesus in several other countries, such as in Portuguese-India in the 16th century at the Good Jesus of Old Goa and the church of the Holy Ghost in Margão¹⁶.

However, examination of the transept raised further questions. Clear similarities were found with other examples in other colonies but such comparisons could not be made with examples identified in Portugal. One such example is the Jesuit College, as detailed by Jean Vally-Radot in a catalogue of plans of the buildings erected by Society of Jesus¹⁷.

3.4 Portuguese Manueline Style and The Jesuit Church

The origin of the three nave Jesuit church in Portugal is however similar to the Manueline style. It was not possible to quantify the influence of Manueline, a style of decoration enhanced outside of Portugal, on the architecture of Macao. As suggested by G. Kubler¹⁸, these foreign components flourished side by side with Italian, Islamic, and other North European and Plateresque imports, but not, it would appear, with other forms of Asian Art.

Portuguese architects Manuel Pires and Juan Álvares designed a remarkable church complete with tribunes, the Espírito Santo at Évora for the Jesuits in 1567¹⁹, see fig.8. Their design may have influenced by the Hispanic or Lusitanian schools, as they were familiar with other Portuguese churches in Asia. Construction was begun on October 4, 1566 and it was inaugurated on March 22, 1574²⁰.

The Espírito Santo was designed according to the formula used for Vignola's Gesù in Rome. It was through such churches that the Iberian countries made such important contributions to the new Jesuit program.

The Espírito Santo has three naves in which the communication is restricted to the clergy in the common sense of Jesuit plans of the late medieval period. This church is said to incorporate plans drawn in Rome, but such drawings remain undiscovered. However, Kubler also described the fidelity with which the building express both Portuguese architectural aspirations and traditional building practices of Alentejo, making it unlikely that directives from Rome would have governed such powerful local expression. It contains fragmentary reflections of Palladio and Vignola and Alessi, but these influences were absorbed into a new, un-Italian rhetoric of minimal ornamentation, that reflects what was already a distinct and definitive Portuguese influence.

The church is the earliest example of a Portuguese Jesuit church in which the nave is treated as a chamber in a formula subsequently used in most Portuguese churches that included broken pediments and stratification but not a half-isolated pair columns. Thus, it is possible that the transformation of these architectural styles originated from Serliana, which suggests a North Italian model and is widely referenced to the Jesuit church.

3.5 Spanish Influence

Another characteristic form of the Church of St. Pauls is the design of the retable-façade. The style was standard in Spain and Spanish America after 1650. However, the accepted range of completion dates (1622-1637) of St Pauls are earlier than this time.

According to Kubler²¹, Juan Guas may have used this design in the chapel of San Gregorio (1488) in Valladolid. Guas, who was the leading Spanish architect after 1480, was born in Brittany in Northern France and trained in Brussels before settling in Toledo with a group of

¹⁶ Cf. Pereira, Fernando António Baptista. 1994. As ruínas de S. Paulo: História e Arte, *Missão de Macau em Lisboa*. pp63-86. Lisbon, Instituto Cultural de Macau.

¹⁷ Cf. Valley-Radot, J. and E. Lamalle. 1960. *Lerecueil de plans d'édifices de la Compagnie de Jésus conserve à la Bibliothèque nationale de Paris*. Rome.

¹⁸ Ibidem 3. p101.

¹⁹ Espanca, Túlio. 1959. *Notícia dos edifícios do co colégio e universidade do espírito Santo de Évora*. pp161-175. Évora: A cidade de Évora.

²⁰ Ibidem 2. p57.

²¹ Ibidem 3. p1.

Flemish workmen in 1450. Guas exemplifies the cosmopolitan nature of the Isabelline²² style. He reconciled medieval structures with mudéjar ornamentation and Italian space design and found lasting solutions for the peculiar rituals and decorative needs of the Spanish both at home and abroad.

It is difficult however, to derive a relationship between Spanish architecture with other styles predominant in Asia.

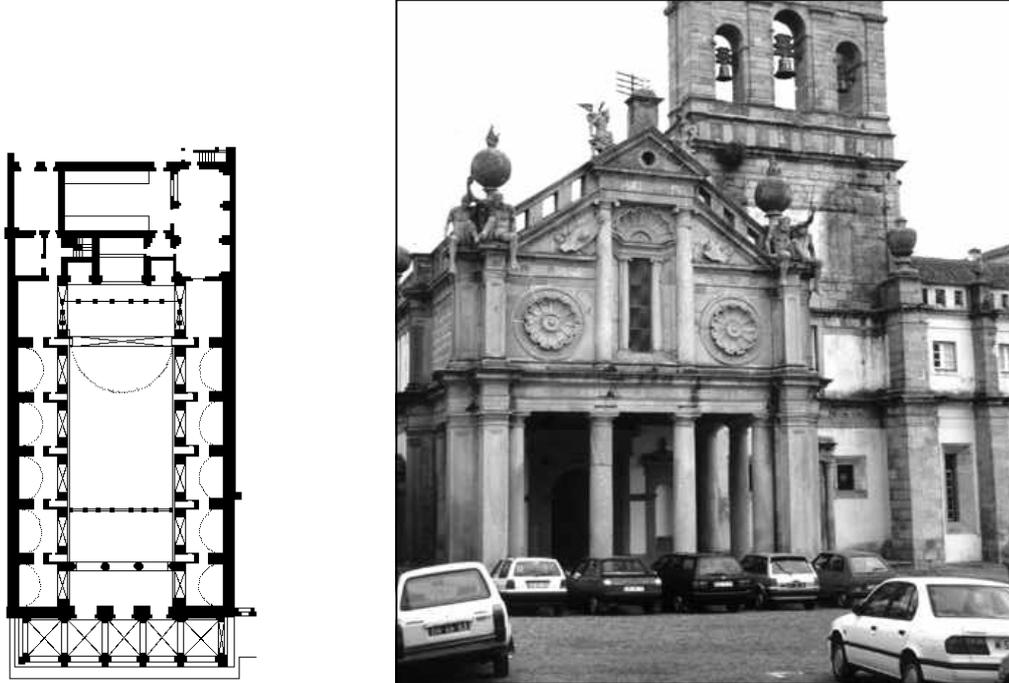


Figure 8: Church of Espírito Santo

3.6 Manueline Styles in Macao

If we define Portuguese Manueline architecture as a late medieval Plateresque and North European form intermingled with international composition, we can consider both the transformation of plans and façade in the colonial cities. The façade of St. Pauls must be considered as one of the masterpieces of late Manueline style influenced directly from Portugal.

When we consider the transfiguration of the Portuguese Jesuit church in Asia, we should reconfirm past studies of the transformation of the Portuguese self-contained style derived from Serliana. The columns, ornaments and even sculptural logic could be defined under the rules of Manueline design as a decorative rhetoric of late Gothic designs.

4 CONCLUSION

The design of Portuguese Jesuit churches was influenced by both Indian and Oriental styles. The church of St. Paul in Macao is an important example of this harmonious style, but the historical references have not been considered in architectural typologies.

By defining Portuguese Manueline architecture as a late medieval Plateresque and North European forms intermingled with international compositions, the façade of the Church of St. Paul must be considered as one of the masterpieces of late Manueline design. Thus, the announcement of Baroque in the Portuguese colonies at the fundamental phase should be considered separately from Italian influence and local intermixed culture.

²² The Isabelline style is contrastive to the Portuguese Manueline. Whilst, some elements do differ, it is thought to be a direct forerunner to the Manueline school.

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