

SPANISH COLONIAL MISSIONS IN CHIHUAHUA (MEXICO): ANALYSE THE STATE OF CONSERVATION AND THE HISTORIC-ARTISTIC INTEREST FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE RECOVERY OF THESE MISSIONS WITH A VIEW TO FAVOURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE AREA

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ABSTRACT: *Documentation and recording work is a key role in a conservation and restoration plan of cultural heritage. Documentation is linked to all the phases of a project, from its preparation and evolution to its conclusions, and is a faithful testimony of the results obtained. The study on the Colonial Missions in the State of Chihuahua, Mexico, that we present is a good indication of this.*

After one decade of work, the Documentation and Records Laboratory of the Heritage Conservation Institute at the Polytechnic University of Valencia (UPV) attempted to experiment its analysis methodology and study in a totally different work setting from the usual settings. The conclusions drawn in our research project will unquestionably improve our actions in the future.

KEYWORDS: spanish colonial missions, Chihuahua, conservation, restoration, heritage

INTRODUCTION

The project that we present herein, that of the research team of the Documentation and Records Laboratory of the Heritage Conservation Institute at the UPV, came about as a result of a long research development which commenced in 1990 in the Department of Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage, and whose development was subsidised in 2005 by the Business, University and Science Council of the Regional Valencian Government.

Since 1990 to the present-day, researchers of the Documentation and Records Laboratory have done exhaustive specialised work in the field of photographic and videographic heritage conservation and restoration records, and have developed record-based infrared band, UV light, reflectographic techniques, etc.

ANALYSING THE MISSIONS

In short, the overall objective is the historic identification of the development process and the coverage of the mission system that the Jesuits applied in the Tarahumara region. This system is an important element in the founding process of the present state of Chihuahua, and it forms part of the historical-cultural heritage of its people. Therefore its knowledge, its value and its conservation are fundamental.

In this sense, the specific and particular aim is to: record and assess the present state of the mission buildings in the Tarahumara Sierra;

inventory the tangible and intangible assets that form part of the Historical-Artistic Heritage; classify the basic information recovered in the fieldwork and the laboratory; elaborate the conservation and maintenance plans and programmes of the mission buildings, and promote and diffuse the missions from their historical, cultural, and tourist aspects. Given its nature, the project will enable us to draw up a document that analyses the Jesuit missions in the Tarahumara Sierra. This task first requires fieldwork to locate, document and record the constructions that the Jesuit Missions characterised in this mountain region.

The importance of this project is based on the need to rely on the basic information of the current conservation state of the Jesuit mission buildings located in the mountain regions of Chihuahua, known as the Tarahumara Sierra. This information will enable us to work further on the conservation and diffusion plans and projects of the Historical and Cultural Heritage of the state of Chihuahua. In this sense, the analysis objectives should be laid down as follows:

- Records: graphical location of the missions selected by photographic records to complement the fieldwork so that it is reliable. Presenting the current state of the mission sites and of the objects found inside them. This study is not merely an inventory of all the objects, but a document that reflects the overall state that they are in.

- Documentation: the Ethno-Historical documentary data collection of all the missions selected will be the basis of the historical heritage character of

these ensembles. Special care will be taken to conduct spoken interviews with the people in charge of the various buildings and/or with the inhabitants of the locality to complete the information as a complement of the review done in parallel of documents and archives.

Once the collected information has been classified, it will be possible to analyse the product of this project, and to also outline some cultural maps which indicate the places the missions were located, the present-day access routes, and those originally used by the Jesuit missionaries in their work as evangelists. With the basic information obtained and the analysis to be done, it will be possible to attain the elements required to propose a strategic plan for various specific projects for the structural improvements, restoration, conservation and maintenance of the mission buildings. Furthermore, the elements will allow a forecast to be made to assess the suitability of establishing coordination agreements with various sectors (tourism, educational, cultural and research) for the purpose of proposing joint plans and projects so that resources may be shared.

General state of the missions visited.

We will now offer a detailed description of the missions visited. We should remember that the selection of these missions was done by Dr. Clara Bargellini Cioni, professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM); the following locations have been selected:

MISSION: Huejotitán.

ALTARPIECE: The Calvary Altarpiece.

PRESENT NAME: (Saint Jerome) San Jerónimo.

MUNICIPALITY: Huejotitán.

Diocese of del Parral.

Date of the altarpiece: 18th century.

South route.

Access to the locality

Access to Huejotitán is good, be it via dirt tracks. The amenities of the town are minimum, for example, boarding house, school, bus stop. Huejotitán is a community of a considerable size in relation to the localities visited.

Building:

Having been extensively remodelled, it does not appear to conserve much of its original structure. However, a crack appears where the neighbouring building and the central church nave meet. The church roof has been recently changed. Only minimum safety measures are available, such as a guarded closure as it is in a more or less adapted community, although there are loudspeaker and lighting systems.

Description

The main piece is located on the right-hand side of the central nave. The polychromed wooden altarpiece-tabernacle is dedicated to an image of Christ crucified, with Our Lady of Sorrow at his feet. Both free-standing sculptures are made out of polychromed wood. The structure comprises two engaged columns and another two free-standing columns which support an egg-shaped closure with a rectangular frieze at the front. All the relief carving work presents a rich polychrome on white backgrounds with flower motifs of a naturalistic kind in tones of red, orange, green and blue. The columns are compound capitals with smooth shafts and geometrical reliefs on the lower third, set on a summer.

State of conservation

If we look carefully at the altarpiece, we see all the joints are in a bad state, especially the angles of the various parts it is made up of. This makes us suspect that the functional nature of the wall anchorage

pieces is deteriorating. Likewise, a whole range of minor repair works can be appreciated. Its polychrome is in good condition as it is not affected by the oxidation process of the varnishes protecting it, although some signs of damp are noticeable. It might be that at some stage the altarpiece was not protected from the weather. The most obvious damage is the severe loss of the pictorial film, particularly on the upper parts of the columns. During the visit, the combination of the wooden parts was dry and apparently unaffected by xylophage insects.

The piece that appears to be in the poorest state is the free-standing sculpture of Christ crucified. Apparently, this figure is still horizontally transferred today in processions, and these transfers have deteriorated the figure, which is particularly clear in the areas where the arms are attached to the body. This figure of Christ has been submitted to repair work without any specific criteria or skills, which is confirmed in the difference of the degree of dirtiness noted on the arm dressings.

MISSION: Papajichi.

ALTARPIECE: The Virgin of Guadalupe.

PRESENT NAME: Virgin of Guadalupe.

MUNICIPALITY: Guachochi.

Diocese of Tarahumara.

Date of the altarpiece: 18th century.

South-Southeast route.

Access to the locality

This is not an easy place to get to as 90% of the road is via dirt tracks. It is a clear example of traditional indigenous populations.

Building

The building is still of an adobe brick structure. The external patio perimeter is made up of a cob wall with an area provided as an entrance opposite the main church door. Indeed two bells remain next to the patio. A wooden cross is erected on a stone pedestal in the middle of the patio.

The degree of cleanliness both inside and outside the church is surprising despite the lack of partitions in the door and windows. The maintenance of this building is also extended to the paintwork on the walls, which shows typical icon motifs of the region. Its appearance suggests that some redecoration work has occasionally taken place. The roof is in very good condition despite being of a primitive type of construction. No stains on the walls have been seen as a result of filtrations caused by capillarity. All in all, the atmosphere is fresh and dry.

Description

The ornamentation found is very simple and is made up of a large canvas oil painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The virgin is depicted within an architectural decoration and is accompanied by angels. A small shrine-like sacarium of gilded wood is laid down on the altar table.

State of conservation

As mentioned earlier, the atmosphere of the building is sound which is in contrast with the lack of partitions in the door and windows. The general state of the canvas is bad given the considerable amount of dirt, paint drops and remains of wax darken and distort the colours. The lack of stress in the picture is also emphasised, which occasionally causes problems in relation to the aspect of the pictorial film.

The advantage is that the oxidation observed on the protective layer is not excessive and that the dirt is homogeneous on the whole surface area. To conclude, it is important to note that there is a loss of canvas in the lower right-hand area, assumedly where the signature would have been.

MISSION: Tatahuichi.
ALTARPIECE: Image of Saint Francisco Javier.
PRESENT NAME: San/Saint Francisco Javier.
MUNICIPALITY: Guachochi.
Diocese of Tarahumara.
Data of altarpiece: 18th century.
South-southeast route.

Access to the locality.

Access is via dirt tracks, similarly to the Papajichi location.

Building

The building is similar to the previous case: an adobe construction with an outer enclosure and the same type of material. Likewise, we come across an access to the central patio through an opening in a casing next to a bell. Once more, there is a wooden cross stood on a stone pedestal in the middle of the patio.

However, the ensemble is in a more evident state of deterioration than the previous case. The various parts that make up this church are no longer serviceable. In the main building, we see that a partition no longer exists and that the degree of maintenance is minimum. Even though both the temperature and humidity inside are acceptable and the atmosphere is dry and fresh, the layer of paintwork inside has loosened which reveals the composition of structure. The roof has signs of having undergone repair work recently, and it has newer crossbeams on two thirds of it than those nearer the altar.

The only difference that we can find between the churches at Papajichi and Tatahuichi is that the latter shows no type of paintwork on its walls, and that the main door is painted very crudely.

Description

We come across the main part of the front-end of the church, which like the Papajichi location, is a large-sized oil painting of Saint Francisco Javier, represented in an architectural composition and accompanied by angels. This is one of the humblest churches that we have visited. Further proof of this is the lack of other types of images.

State of conservation

The state of conservation that the painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe presents is similar to that at the Papajichi church. Once more, we find the homogeneous layer of dirt with remains of paint or wax on the walls. Equally, the lack of stress in the framework causes the problem of the loss of pictorial film on the surface.

Once more, the advantage we saw lies in the fact that the oxidation observed on the protective layer is not excessive and that the dirt is homogeneous on the whole surface area. One final detail of the church description is to note the loss of canvas in the lower right-hand area, assumedly where the signature would have been, just as with the Virgin of Guadalupe painting at the Papajichi church.

MISSION: Carichi.
ALTARPIECE: Disappeared.
PRESENT NAME: The Holy Family.
MUNICIPALITY: Carichi.
Diocese of Tarahumara.
Date of the altarpiece: 18th century.
Central west route.

Access to the locality

The church we now describe has very few particularities as its altarpiece has disappeared. At one time, there used to be a small

Salmonic altarpiece in Carichi, which was probably the oldest in the state of Chihuahua. It dated back to the 17th century and was originally painted. The church is one of the most important in the north. There is little to state as to access and infrastructures due to its proximity to the town of Cuautémoc.

Building

The building has undergone extensive remodelling over the years, and new infrastructures have been included. It is possible that the only remains of the ancient mission are the foundations and the structuring of the place itself. Outside it is possible to see the enclosed patio and the cross standing in the middle of it. Both the enclosure and the cross are stone.

Description:

As mentioned, the altarpiece disappeared and it is not possible to describe it. All that remains of it is the free-standing sculpture of Christ crucified which presumably accompanied this altarpiece. The figure we refer to is kept in the vestry and is in good condition. The mobility of the arms for it to be laid down in processions is noteworthy.

State of Conservation

This figure is in a good state of conservation although it presents a considerable amount of repainting. The mobile parts are in good condition.

MISSION: Cusihuirachi.
ALTARPIECE: altarpiece of Santa/St. Teresa.
PRESENT NAME: Santa/St. Rosa de Lima.
MUNICIPALITY: Cusihuirachi.
Diocese of Cuautémoc.
Date of the altarpiece: 18th century.
Central west route.

Access to the locality

There is nothing singular to point out in this sense, as in the other churches, because Cusihuirachi is close to Cuautémoc. The population we found presents very few inclinations towards an indigenous community.

Building

The building has been extensively renovated and contains all the infrastructures in accordance with the community it belongs to. It is easy to see the perimeter of the enclosed patio and the cross standing in the centre of the patio on a wooden pedestal from outside the building.

Description

The altarpiece dedicated to Saint Teresa is found on the high altar. This altarpiece features estípites made from gilded wood and is articulated by three bays and three structures set on a pedrella and a summer. Its structure is surrounded by a back wall and follows a straight floor. Ten canvas paintings appear on this altarpiece with scenes of the Saint's life, the Immaculate Conception and with archangels. The image of the Saint is placed in a central niche which stands out.

State of conservation

A considerable number of pathologies are noted. The surface of this altarpiece's polychrome has been totally repainted with metallic paint. The canvases are in a very bad state due to the lack of stress, to damage to the paint or to a loss of effectiveness of the linkage points. The lack of stress in the pictures has led to a loss of pictorial film and to certain tears on the surface. But the loss of paint is due to a possible water-

related pathology. The outline that the damage it presents is a large lagoon of pictorial film running along the left bay, which is narrower at the top and wider at the bottom as a result of constant leaks. This particular pathology has not only produced this lack of painting and priming, but also a certain lack of support in the lower part of each painting.

MISSION: Churo.
ALTARPIECE: Altarpiece of the Holy Trinity.
PRESENT NAME: Archangel Michael (San Miguel Arcángel).
MUNICIPALITY: Urique.
Diocese of Tarahumara.
Date of the altarpiece: 18th century.
Central southwest route.

Access to the location

The serious problems to reach this town are conditioned by its evolution in history. Although not as extreme as in Tatahuichi or Papajichi, it is located far from any other town of a considerable size. In this community, which belongs to the municipality of Urique, both the so-called modernising indigenous people and traditional indigenous people co-exist.

Building

This building presents a mixture of original adobe structures with much repair work done with cement. The church was constructed with a repeated structure which affords the ensemble an economic architecture and rationality, although it offers a more anarchic vision of space. It is a clear example of seeking the more functional nature of the ensemble rather than its aesthetical image.

The church has a generous enclosed patio which adapts to the irregular land features. The entrance cross stands exactly in front of the church on a stone pedestal. What is striking is the year which appears on the beam over the main entrance; this inscription dates the church to 1786. The patio encompasses the graveyard as well as the outbuildings used for training tasks.

The construction work is in good condition despite being made from very simple structural elements.

Description

The inside of the church houses a surprise. Under what appears to be complete austerity, an altarpiece is found among the decorative elements at the front-end of the church, and is dedicated to the Holy Trinity. It is a gilded wooden altarpiece of Rococo influence, and is composed of two horizontal structures divided into three bays which are set on a summer and a pedrella. Structurally, it is rectilinear and attached to the back wall, and only the altar table stands out. This altarpiece appears to be decorated by nine canvases and one sculpture.

The centre depicts the Holy Trinity, and two pictures of Jesuit saints appear on either side of the central structure.

A small niche houses the polychromed sculpture of Archangel Saint Michael on the upper storey with two other paintings on the sides. The relief carving work shows abundant decoration with reliefs depicting flowers, pebbles and shells, all of which are gold-coloured. A small sacarium is found on the altar table but it does not match the style of relief carving work seen on the altarpiece.

We also emphasise the polychrome at the Churo church found in both the artisans' finishing touches and in the window openings and where they come into contact with the wall. This decoration effect is

in tones of red, blue, green and with some orange tones upon a white background with flower motifs. It is possible that this decoration was once appreciated throughout the church because we found remains under the white paint.

State of conservation

On first sight, the overall state of conservation is good, but many pathologies were discovered after a detailed examination. Starting with the polychrome, we see that it has deteriorated, perhaps from constant cleaning without any specialised care. The canvases, which have the same problem, have an even layer of dirt on their surface and present a multitude of losses here and there. The upper canvases of the side bays are in a worse state, even the canvas located to the right of the main image presents ample tears in the painting. Lack of stress is also noted on their surfaces and there are signs of humidity.

MISSION: Cerocahui.
ALTARPIECE: Image of St./San Francisco Javier.
PRESENT NAME: San Francisco Javier.
MUNICIPALITY: Urique.
Diocese of Tarahumara.
Date of the altarpiece: 18th century.
Central southwest route.

Access to the location

Cerocahui is a consolidated town reached via dirt tracks and whose overall state of conservation is good. The town centre offers the typical infrastructures of a small town. Compared with the other towns visited, Cerocahui may be considered a small city.

Building

Although it underwent ample reform work at the start of the century, it is still a unique building in this area. Made from red quarry stone which affords it a singular look, the outer area of the central dome stands out, which is tiled in yellow, as does the red covering of the finials of the central nave.

Both the interior and exterior of the building suggest busy parish activity. The structure is similar to previous cases. The church has a generous front patio which is enclosed with access at the front. A cross stands in this patio, a stone cross on this occasion, and which forms a transversal axis with the central church nave.

There are no negative aspects regarding the substructures of the church which are in perfect condition.

Description

An octagonal stone altarpiece which is incorporated into the church apse, formed by three bays and whose main structure is set on a pedrella and summer with an ornamental top. The image of Saint Francisco Javier appears in the main structure upon a gilded wooden corbel.

Estipites appear on both sides, which lead to side bays that are arranged obliquely to the main bay.

Two stained glass works are set in the side bays depicting scenes of the Saint's life and which illuminate the apse. The work as a whole is a richly decorative carving with flower motifs and primates.

State of conservation

Nothing significant stands out as this altarpiece is in excellent condition. Only certain isolated loss of support is noted, especially in some joints where certain deterioration is evident.

MISSION: Santo Tomás.

ALTARPIECE: Altarpiece of St. Thomas/Santo Tomás.

PRESENT NAME: Santo Tomás.

MUNICIPALITY: Guerrero.

Diocese of Cuauhtémoc.

Date of altarpiece: 18th century.

Central northwest route.

Access to the location

The church of Saint Thomas is on the outskirts of the town centre of Guerrero, located in the lower part of the mountain passes. For this reason it is a totally integrated community where the indigenous population is minimum. The proximity of the church to the city of Guerrero has meant that it has been provided with a series of infrastructures, for instance, loudspeaker and lighting systems, and it resembles the churches of a city with a considerable large number of inhabitants. Access is far off, via dirt tracks, as are the other churches visited.

Building

The building has undergone alterations in recent years to make its facilities more suitable. Similarly, no significant pathology has been noted. Outside, we see the patio surrounded with iron fencing which encompasses a small graveyard, a stone cross which stands at right angles to the Cardinal doorway, and the main doorway to the church.

Description

The church houses three magnificent altarpieces. The main one is situated on the altar itself and depicts the Saint that this church is named after. The other two are found on both sides of the central nave: one depicts the Virgin of Guadalupe, while the one opposite is dedicated to Saint Joseph.

The altarpiece at the Saint Thomas church is made out of gilded and polychromed wood in a rectilinear design from which corbels and estipites stand out. It is made up of two structures and three bays with irregular entablatures. The images of Saint Thomas and the Virgin of Guadalupe appear in the niches of the central bay.

Its relief carving work is decorated with flower, shell and volute motifs. It also has four canvas paintings in the form of tondi, as well as six canvas paintings on its predella.

The altarpieces depicting Saint Joseph and the Virgin of Guadalupe are twin works made out of gilded and polychromed wood formed by three bays and a main structure and upper element, which stand opposite the side walls of the building. Both show polychromed backgrounds in red from which the gilded reliefs stand out and are arranged over the entire relief carving work.

Child telamons are seen on the corbels of the pedrella which support the estipites of the main structure. These are polychromed, just as the small putti are which are arranged on the consoles and in the carving details.

State of conservation

In the main altarpiece which depicts Saint Thomas, the degree of repainting predominates. The original gilded work is covered by a thick layer of golden metallic paint. The good condition that the paintings are in suggests recent touch-up work has been done. There is no lack of pictorial film. The intervention work might possibly date back to the time the church was remodelled. We were allowed into the vestry. Here the upper element of the altarpiece is kept but it is not on show. However, this element has also been submitted to touch-up work. The only outstanding point of this altarpiece is that some of its parts do not come together properly.

The twin altarpieces depicting Saint Joseph and the Virgin of Guadalupe present the same state of conservation. Both have been repeatedly repainted. In some recesses we detected remains of other green or blue background colours. The wood is apparently in a sound state and does not show signs of any affects of xylophage insects.

MISSION: Yepachi.

ALTARPIECE: High Altar.

PRESENT NAME: Nuestra Señora del Refugio.

MUNICIPALITY: Temósachic.

Diocese of Cuauhtémoc.

Date of the altarpiece: 18th century.

Central northwest route.

Access to the locality

Access is very good, be it via dirt tracks. The community in this town of the Temósachic municipality is mainly comprised of modernising indigenous people. The level of infrastructures in this community is considered high.

Building

One aspect that reflects the level that the Yepachi community has acquired is the state of the church. Intense reconstruction is noted in the walls, and also in the roof and partitions. If we look carefully at the roof, we see that the transverse beams have different colour types, which indicate recent interventions on most of them. The wood flooring is also in good condition irrespectively of the fact that it undergoes much use.

Outside the church we find a partition formed by a stonework enclosure which delimits the central patio. A wooden cross on a stone pedestal stands near the entry railings. The structures near this building form a single unit with it. In general, there are no structural problems or significant pathologies.

Description

The altarpiece is attached to the wall and adopts the rectangular shape of the front of the church. It is formed by two structures which are divided into three bays, all of which are set on a single plane with a simple facture. It comprises seven canvas paintings that have been reframed in simple polychromed wood with geometrical decorations and flower motifs in tones of red and blue on a pale background.

The fact that the upper area of the altarpiece is discontinued suggests that it was possibly somewhat higher. Another of its peculiarities lies in the materials used. An illusionist-type effect is observed on the canvases to emphasise the image by means of a simulated frame, and paper has been used to create this effect.

Four shields remain and are located on the intersections between the first structure and the second, with their respective bays, and these parts are those which stand out the most. We should indicate the richness of the polychrome of the panels of what would have been the rear columns. The same decoration is also seen on the pedrella of the altar, and of similar quality.

State of conservation

This collection of works presents worn surfaces from non-specialised cleaning techniques. This factor as a result of its maintenance and the passing of time result in a surface with no bright colours, a lack of stress in the stretchers, and also in a loss of the possible metallic brightness that the aforementioned papers would have had.

The loss of stress in the stretchers has led to the loss of a large amount of pictorial film. The unsuitable use of the altarpiece has favoured breakages and tears to the surface. The whole area covered by protective varnishes has undergone an oxidation process. What is

most striking is the apparent lack of interventions in the paintwork and polychromes which reveals dirty images that have not been touched up. This needs to be confirmed by a thorough UV radiation examination.

What we have been able to verify in this kind of communities is the importance of the image of the work on the material supporting it. Its state does not seem to be the object of interest, but the idea that the work conserves the image it is devoted to. An example of such in this church is a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe. We were unable to see the remains of the image, only a brief hint of it. These circumstances do not mean a loss of its functional nature as this work still participates in processions.

MISSION: Batopilillas.

ALTARPIECE: Altarpiece, Saint Joseph.

PRESENT NAME: San José.

MUNICIPALITY: Uruachi.

Diocese of Tarahumara.

Date of the altarpiece: 18th century.

Central northwest route.

Access to the locality

Perhaps Batopilillas, located in the municipality of Uruachi, is the most out-of-the-way place we have visited. Therefore this town does not appear on the conventional road map we used as it only appears in cartographic maps. In fact, we came across points that were practically impassable. It was thanks to the tenacity of the people who came with us that we could finally reach Batopilillas.

Building

After the description of its access, the church presented clear evidence of abandonment. Only a few inhabited homes were visible throughout the community. The whole church structure had undergone a lot of recent repair work, where the most visible works corresponded to the roof tiles and outer walls where metal corrugated materials and cement supports were found. The buildings next to the church were in ruins.

In Batopilillas, the state of abandonment had led to the disappearance of the patio and the possible cross which we have seen on numerous occasions.

Description

The altarpiece dedicated to Saint Joseph is made out of gilded and polychromed wood in a rectilinear fashion, and is a combination of two structures and three bays. The architectural elements consist of corbels and estípites which serve as divisions between bays. On the other hand, an irregular entablature is used as an alteration between the two parts, which presents carved decorations (consoles, shells, etc.).

The images of Saint Joseph and the Virgin of Guadalupe appear in the niches of the central bay. Formerly, four images were placed in the side bays, but they no longer remain, and would have been set on corbels and framed in niches with polychromed backgrounds. The decoration of the relief carving work is a combination of polychromed backgrounds with reliefs (flower, shell and pebble motifs).

State of conservation

The pathologies noted in this altarpiece vary and most are attributed to people's actions; a similar situation also applies to certain works that were made inside the church in the past, particularly the disappearance of some figures. This means that the figurative fabric as a whole is discontinued in many places, which makes interpretation difficult. The serious dehydration of the woodwork has also caused numerous

problems, for instance, some joints and anchors are no longer safe, or the loss of the background polychrome due to the profound marks from the lack of adhesion and connection of the various materials. Of all the churches visited, this is perhaps the one where most harm is seen, basically because of abandonment and slovenliness.

MISSION: San Francisco.

ALTARPIECE: Disappeared.

PRESENT NAME: Saint Francis of Assisi.

MUNICIPALITY: Chihuahua.

Diocese of Chihuahua.

Date of the altarpiece: 18th century.

Access to the locality

As the capital of the state is easy to reach, there are no problems in relation to infrastructures or accessibility. Furthermore, we can state that this church undertakes much community activity.

Building

The church is in good condition. It was constructed in the second half of the 18th century and is of good quality.

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Description

At the San Francisco church in Chihuahua, we find two Jesuit altarpieces, plus a third Franciscan one from the mid 18th century, which were originally gilded and polychromed. It is possible that the Jesuit works were built in this town, unlike the Franciscan one which would have come from Mexico City.

Of the two Jesuit altarpieces, of similar quality but with a different composition, we highlight the one to the left of the altar. It is a work depicting the Virgin and Child which is a collection of gilded and polychromed wooded pieces of an octagonal design, and whose structure is attached to the back wall. It is formed by two structures and three bays, from which estípites, pedestals and corbels stand out. It has irregular entablatures as an alteration between its two structures, which entail copious decorative carvings.

In the centre we find a niche which houses the Virgin and Child and Saint John the Baptist, accompanied by angels. Canvas paintings appear in the side bays of the two major structures which depict the apostles James, Peter, John the Evangelist, and Mary Magdalene.

A large cross on the upper storey dominates the work. It can be noted that an image of Christ crucified used to hang on this cross.

All the relief carving work is decorated with gilded reliefs combined with a red polychromed background. The altarpiece is covered with large consoles represented as reliefs, decorative motifs of plants and polychromed putti. The Franciscan altarpiece is found in pieces behind the high altar, and all that remains is its gilded wooden structure. Of all the images it is made up of, some have disappeared while others have been restored. We have seen the restored images in some of the outbuildings.

State of conservation

If we centre on the work of the Virgin with Child, we can appreciate that the main problem lies in extensive repainting of the whole surface. Estípites, pedestals, putti and corbels have a thick covering which is the result of layers of paint. The wood it is made up of appears to be in good condition, unlike the pictures that decorate it. The canvases present general stress problems and a large amount of dirt on the protective varnish.

Results and diffusion.

Photography is a powerful communication instrument, especially as a documentary source of valuable history. Nonetheless, a photographic record is not the final objective as it may be accompanied with a strategy that contributes to the knowledge and diffusion of the results of this research project.

It is our wish that the results obtained from this research work are reflected on DVD and in an Internet page. We also wish to highlight that several publications have been achieved during the project's development. For example, see the following publications presented at the 16th International Meeting on Heritage Conservation held in Valencia, Spain, in November, 2006:

- "Misiones coloniales en Chihuahua (México): repercusión de su recuperación integral para la comunidad indígena". Por José Antonio Madrid, Juan Valcárcel, Julia Osca, Victoria Vivancos, M^a José Ballester and Eva Pérez Marín.

- "Diagnóstico del estado de conservación e interés histórico-artístico de las misiones coloniales virreinales en Chihuahua (México). Situación actual del retablo de la misión de Yepachi". Por Juan Valcárcel, José Antonio Madrid, Julia Osca, Victoria Vivancos, M^a José Ballester and Eva Pérez Marín.

Both the DVD and Internet page will not only show the general aspects and details of all the missions visited, but will also emphasise their exceptional character from an architectural perspective, given the constructive techniques applied in relation to the historical period in question.

These two formats will bring together these mission sites in the form of a guided visit. We have attempted to emphasise the spirit of adventure which this journey has unquestionably meant for us. This has been done by attempting to stress the difficulties encountered while reaching many of the towns, involving hard journeys over kilometres and kilometres of dirt tracks.

In this sense, we have wanted to develop a very simple graphical setting in such a way that access to each mission requires only two or three steps. Written information about each mission visited is provided on an individual basis along with a video. We are able to discover the settings of the mission buildings with the video images, which reveal the conditions encountered to reach them, the type of community they belong to, among other aspects. On the same screen, we will be able to view photographs taken both indoors and outdoors, along with some of the most important aspects.

From the start menu, we can enter the scientific-technical page with a long list of all the mission visits that we have been able to find in the state of Chihuahua. At this point, we can see the contact details of the team which took part.

We are fully aware of the negative and positive impacts that these documents may have on these mission sites. Therefore, we will act with caution and will be very careful when considering how to diffuse this information about them to the general public. In this sense, a consensus needs to be reached as to the strategy to be implemented by all the parties, both civil and governmental, involved in its safekeeping.

In short, the final product will have to reflect the spirit of all the parties involved and their protagonists. The benefits will be revealed in the level of awareness that may be reached, or in the degree of implication that may be achieved on the part of various organisations related to this theme.

The project today.

The Internet page is merely the starting point to diffuse all these works. With the different institutions involved, work is being done to study the possibility of maintaining this page and of constantly updating

it with data. It is only the starting point of the expansions, not only of the mission sites visited, but also of those that are considered appropriate enough to be included. This work group does not rule out the possibility of further fieldwork like that done in this Mexican sierra. When this project was being written, data were included, such as the maps of each mission site visited, the speed of the Internet page was tested to improve access, and the content of the fifteen mission sites is being improved. Checking the data, including detailed records and the inventory of the objects found inside the churches, are some of the aspects that we are working on.

Presenting a place as a starting point makes different actions viable which will collectively strengthen this work. Including information may be done on-line which is not an expensive process for the institutions, and allows access to this information to all researchers who are interested in this theme. The environment which supports this information includes all the characteristics and possibilities that state-of-the-art Web pages offer, such as FTP service, access control, number of visits and statistics, forums for chats, etc.

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Versión española

TÍTULO: *Misiones Coloniales Españolas en Chihuahua (México): diagnosis de su estado de conservación e interés histórico-artístico para la recuperación integral de las mismas a fin de propiciar un desarrollo sostenible de la zona*

RESUMEN: *La labor de documentación y registro adquiere un papel de gran importancia en un plan de conservación y restauración de bienes culturales. La documentación se vincula a todas las fases de un proyecto, desde su gestión y evolución hasta su conclusión, como testigo fiel de los resultados obtenidos. El estudio sobre las Misiones Coloniales del Estado de Chihuahua en México que presentamos es buena prueba de ello.*

Tras una década de funcionamiento, el Laboratorio de Documentación y Registro del Instituto Universitario de Restauración del Patrimonio de la UPV ha intentado experimentar su metodología de análisis y estudio en un entorno de trabajo totalmente distinto al habitual. Las conclusiones obtenidas en nuestro proyecto de investigación sin duda mejorarán nuestras futuras actuaciones..

PALABRAS CLAVES: *misiones coloniales españolas, Chihuahua, conservación, restauración, patrimonio*