

Iglesia de Santa Maria la Mayor



Before being converted to a Christian church, Santa María la Mayor was a Muslim mosque, and if tradition is true, even a Visigothic temple. Architecturally the church is a hodgepodge of styles. The columns of the south door and the transept are of Romanesque style, the naves are Gothic, and the choir balustrade is Plateresque. The diversity of styles is a result of the successive repairs done to the church throughout the years. (Lancia Publications, page 34) Three doors give access to the temple. The one at the base of the nave is made up of elliptic arches which rest on small columns. The entrance is guarded by two lions' heads. The door on the side where the epistle is read, from the 14th century, is similar, with elliptic arches supported by columns with spiral shafts. The door on the side where the gospel is read has been sealed shut. (Lancia Publications, page 38)

The construction of this church signified the rise of importance of Catholicism and also exhibits the riches invested in the Church during the 16th century. The grand *iglesia* was built inside the *muralla* over a mosque during the 13th century and was greatly modified during the economically industrious 16th century. It exhibits both Romanesque and Gothic architecture; the beautiful vaulted ceilings, the amazing altarpiece by Fernando Gallego, the gothic arch doorways, and Romanesque facades all give the church a wonderful and ancient charm. (Bissell, page 11)



From the artistic viewpoint, the best part of the church is the splendid painted wood ornamentation on the altar. It was created by the Castilian painter Fernando Gallego, of the Flemish school. Even after four centuries, the 25 painted boards are still in good condition. Most of them tell the story of the Virgin Mary. The side panels represent the four evangelists and the two doctors of

law. (Lancia Publications, page34)

This church hosted the solemn funeral mass for King John II of Aragón. The Catholic Monarchs were in Trujillo when the news of the young King's death reached them. The service was performed by the famous Cardinal Mendoza. The funeral mass for Ferdinand the Catholic took place here as well. The King perished in Madrigalejo, near Trujillo, in 1516. The local authorities decided to hold services in his honor. Members of the most notable families of Trujillo are buried on the church grounds, Bejaranos, Vargas', Paredes', Hinojosas, Torres', Cervantes', Pizarros and Carvajals. The ancestors of the men who were to make their lives in America sleep the centuries away under the domes of the temple.(Lancia Publications, page34)

Under the choir, by the west door, is the great font, which, according to legend, Diego García de Paredes lifted to bring holy water to his sick mother. The biographies of Diego García de Paredes tell the feats of this strongman from Trujillo, the "Samson of Extremadura". He earned his fame fighting alongside the Great Captain in campaigns in Ceriñola and el Garellano. According to Cervantes, "he alone, with the tip of his sword, challenged and held back the entire French army at the end of the bridge." Like Cervantes, other writers from the time recorded his deeds at Ostia and Cefalonia, where he was taken prisoner by the Turks after resisting numerous enemies for three whole days before hunger and fatigue overcame him.(Lancia Publications, page37)

The burial place of this famous man is under a pointed arch on the south wall. He died from a fall in Bologna, but his son Sancho had his remains brought back to Trujillo. The inscription above his sepulchre, composed by his friend Cardinal Esteban Merino reads:

"To Diego García de Paredes. Noble Spanish knight, colonel of the first militia, who from the youngest age behaved most honestly, with great praise and integrity, in the militia and in the encampments. He was second to no one in high spirits, in greatness, and in success in deeds or initiatives; frequently rewarded with crowns for assulting walls and trenches, many times victorious over his enemies in a single battle, but never defeated. He never found a man who equaled him, and he lived forever under the law of virtue, and as a skilled and great general this man died, a devout Christian, in returning most joyously from the war finished by the ever agust Caesar against the Turks in Germany, in Bologna, in the month of February, at the age of sixty and four years. Esteban Gabriel, Cardinal of Bari, piously wrote this laud dedicated to his meritorious friend in the year 1553, and his bones, by order of Mister Sancho de Paredes, son of said Diego García, which were taken from their rest on the third day of October of 1545 and brought to this place."(Lancia Publications, page37)

Another son of this famous man, who bore the same name, was the founder of the city of Trujillo in Venezuela. Diego García de Paredes (Jr.) after defeating the tyrant Aguirre in 1561, returned to his homeland to place the trophies he had earned in America on his father's tomb. Later was named governor of the province of Popayán by the Royal Council of the Indies, as a reward for his services to the crown and his peerless courage. Some time later he was killed by natives in the land near Blanco Cape. (Lancia Publications, page38)



From the outside two towers are visible. One is by the main entrance, and was built in the 16th and 17th centuries. The other one, by the apse, is much older, of Romanesque style. It was demolished by the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 and rebuilt a few years ago. A local stonecutter, Antonio "the Frog" Serván, was put in charge of providing the stones for the job. The architect gave him specifics on the size for the pillars, arches, columns and the 58 capitals. Antonio was left to decorate the capitals at his discretion. "The Frog" went about his work, and when he was about to start his last capital he happened to look down at the pin he wore on his shirt, a logo from his favorite football team, the Athletic de Bilbao. He saw a unique opportunity, and decided to "make Bilbao and its team the colophon of my work". (Lancia Publications, page38)



The logo is 50 cm tall and 40 cm wide. It is hardly visible unless one knows to look for it, so the architect decided to leave it.



Detail of the Towers of Santa Maria.