

A Major Confraternity Commission in Quito, Ecuador: the Church of El Sagrario¹

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On 4 November 1694, members of the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament gathered excitedly in the chapel of San Ildefonso in the Cathedral of Quito where they were to draw up and sign a contract with the architect who would build their new church. The signing of the contract marked a moment of great triumph for the confraternity, for it represented the culmination of decades of effort and planning, both financial and logistical. According to its terms, the confraternity engaged the architect to undertake “the design and construction of the Church of El Sagrario starting from its first foundations until it is finished and complete with the required offices of sacristies, crypts, and all other necessities for the service of the said Church.”² The signature of the architect, José Jaime Ortiz, along with those of the governing members of the confraternity and two representatives from the Cathedral Chapter, appears at the end of the document.

The imposing colonial church of El Sagrario is one of the most well known historical monuments in Quito (fig. 1). Constructed along the south wall of the Cathedral, to which it is connected by an interior portal, El Sagrario serves as parish church for the lively Cathedral sector in the heart of colonial Quito. Despite its popular and historic status, until now almost nothing has been known of its origins, authorship, patronage, or process of construction. Even the dating of the church has been the subject of speculation by historians, although most agree that it was begun in the mid-seventeenth century, and that it was completed by 1706.³ Summarizing the state of knowledge about the history of El Sagrario, the great Ecuadorian art historian José Gabriel Navarro lamented, “We have not found the slightest indication among the archival documents regarding the architect of one

1 This article is a summary of aspects of a more in-depth study of the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament and the Church of El Sagrario that I am presently preparing as a book, which will be published in Spanish in Quito by the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador and Editorial Abya-Yala in 2001. I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to the Aquinas Foundation and the University of St. Thomas, whose generous support allowed me to undertake this research in Ecuador during the summer of 2000.

2 AHNQ *Censos y Capellanías*, caja 5, expte. 2, fol. 66v. “la fabrica y obra de la Capilla del Sagrario enpesandola desde sus primeros simientos hasta darla entera y acauada con las ofiçinas necesarias de sacristias bouedas y demas menesteres para el seruizio de dicha Capilla.”

3 For example, see José María Vargas, *Patrimonio artístico ecuatoriano* (Quito: Editorial Santo Domingo, 1972), p. 318; José Gabriel Navarro, *Guía artística de Quito* (Quito: La Prensa Católica, 1961), p. 167; Damián Bayón and Murillo Marx, *History of South American Colonial Art and Architecture* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 1989), p. 41.



Figure 1: Façade of the Church of El Sagrario, Quito (Photo: Hernán Navarrete)

of the most important monuments of Quiteñan architecture . . . The account book of its construction [*libro de fábrica*] does not exist.”⁴

The account book of construction has now come to light (fig. 2), and it affords an opportunity to illuminate not only the historical importance of the building and the architect, but that of the patron as well.⁵ The *libro de fábrica* demonstrates unequivocally that the sole patron, overseer, and decorator of the church was the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament. This confraternity is the earliest documented brotherhood in Quito, established in 1543, just eight years after the foundation of the city itself. In this early period, the confraternity was housed in an adobe and thatch structure on the main plaza that served as the city’s first church. In 1545, the church was elevated to the status of a cathedral, and in 1562 construction began on the building that stands today on the central plaza. Upon the completion of the Cathedral in 1578–79, the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament was located in a side chapel which they shared with an altar and confraternity dedicated to the Virgin of Copacabana for well over a century until its members were finally able to construct a church of their own in the late seventeenth century.⁶

Several copies of the confraternity’s earliest rule book survive, all dating from 1543, the year that marked its foundation.⁷ The confraternity was dedicated to the adoration of the Holy Sacrament, and especially to its salvific powers. According to the preamble to the ordinances, the founding members decided to form the confraternity “not solely for the honor of our lord and god more for the health and salvation of our souls.”⁸ Given that the Spanish citizens of Quito at

4 *Guía artística*, p. 167. “En los papeles del archivo no hemos encontrado el más ligero indicio del autor de uno de los monumentos más correctos de la arquitectura quiteña . . . Libro de fábrica no existe.”

5 “Libro de la Cofradía del Santísimo Sacramento, que sea alabado, y bendito para siempre, fu[n]dada en la capilla de n[uest]ra Señora de Copacabana en la Iglesia Cathedral de esta Ciudad de San Francisco del Quito: Diolo Bernardino de Anagoytia siendo Mayordomo desta S[an]ta Cofradía, el año de 1689.” The *libro de fábrica* is divided into two parts that are located in separate sections of the Archivo Histórico Nacional de Quito: AHNQ *Religiosas*, caja 7, expte. 1-VII-1692, and AHNQ *Censos y Capellanías*, caja 5, expte. 2.

6 For the most recent history of the Cathedral of Quito that is based on primary documents, see Marcela Alemán A., Rita Díaz, Nidia Gómez, and Lucia Galéas, *Salvaguarda de la Catedral Primada de Quito* (Quito: Instituto Nacional de Patrimonio Cultural, 1997). References to the chapel in which the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament was located appear in the “Libros del Cabildo de la Catedral,” Archivo de la Catedral de Quito (ACQ), especially Libro 9 (1646–73), fols. 291v–292r, et passim.

7 AHBCQ *Fondo Jijón y Camaño*, primera serie, 7/10; 17/11. Three copies of the rule book of 1543 exist among the cited documents: one is dated February, 1543; one in August, 1543; one is undated, but obviously from the same year. The rule books exhibit only minor differences. To avoid confusion, hereafter I will refer only to the two dated rule books, which are referenced following their catalog numbers as 7/10 (August) and 7/11 (February).

8 Ibid., 7/10, fol. 172v. “no solamente para la honrra de n[uest]ro dios y señor mas para la salud y saluación de n[uest]ras anymas.”

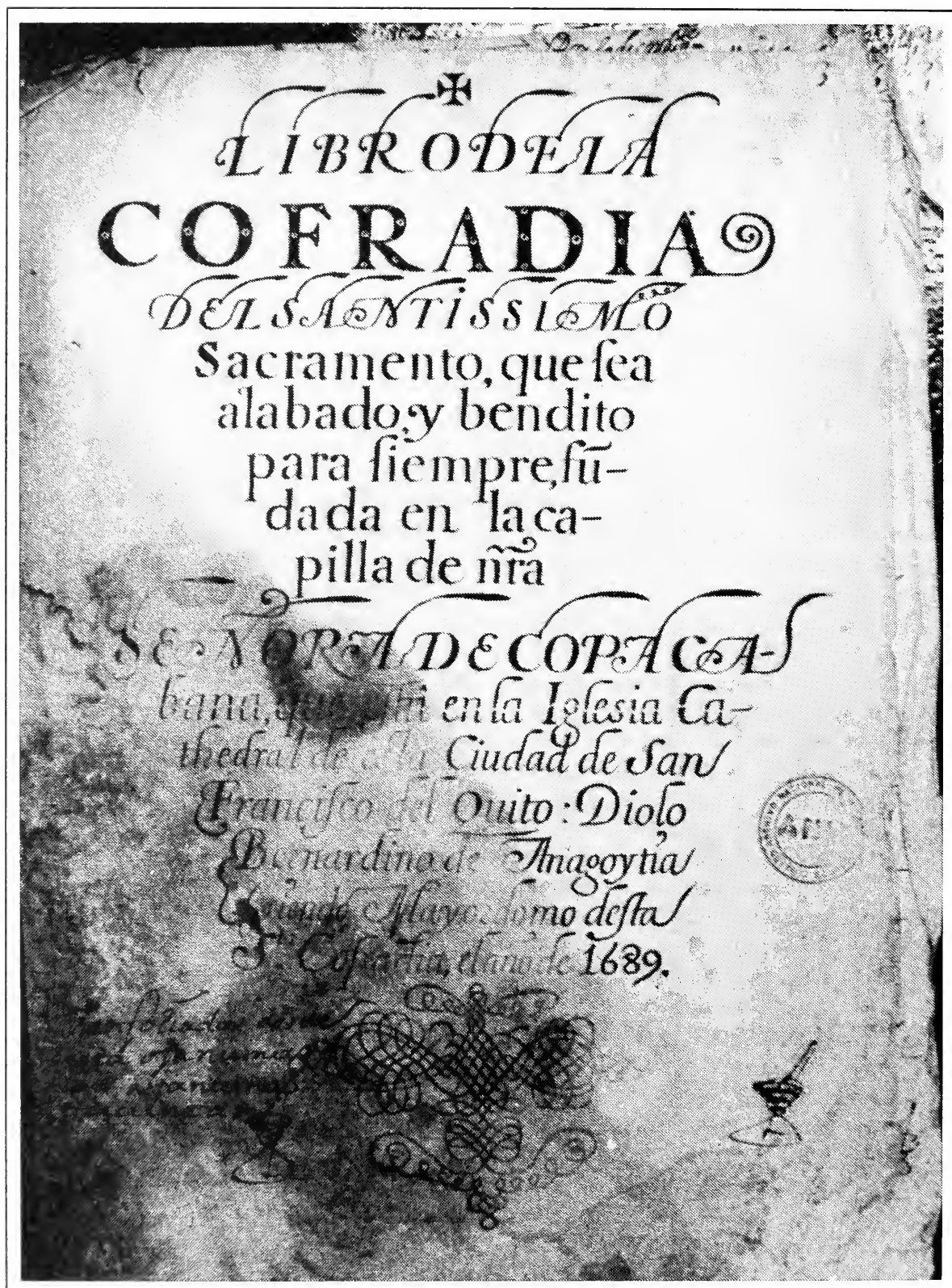


Figure 2: Frontispiece of the *Libro de Fábrica* of the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament, 1689–1716 (Photo: Hernán Navarrete)

that time were the conquistadors and first colonists who found themselves in an unfamiliar land distant from the spiritual traditions and comforts of Europe, they likely felt a strong impetus to form a confraternity in order to ensure the salvation of their souls and an appropriate Christian burial. The establishment of the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament afforded above all a means of securing important spiritual insurance, and the confraternity documents emphasize that many such benefits would accrue to their members. The preamble to the ordinances highlights these attractive features of membership, stating, "And to incline us toward [the Holy Sacrament] in love And devotion, the most holy pope paul III now has conceded us many graces And indulgences And remissions [of sins] and pardons to all those who become brothers of the Most Holy Sacrament And who accompany it when it goes out to visit a sick person."⁹ Indeed, there was ample incentive to join the confraternity, for its ordinances are followed by fourteen folios that list more than 125 separate occasions in order of feast days, week days, and special actions and devotions on which the myriad indulgences, graces, pardons, and remissions accorded to the confraternity might be gained by its members.¹⁰

Following European tradition, the confraternity also played a philanthropic role in the community. The principal act of charity undertaken by the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament, and the focus of much of its day to day activity, was that of visiting the sick and dying. Indeed, the confraternity came to identify itself over time as that of the "Most Holy Sacrament and Viaticum of the Sick." Several chapters in the rule books directly address these procedures, describing the procession with the viaticum under a baldachin to the house of the afflicted accompanied by confraternity members carrying lighted candles.¹¹ Confraternity records demonstrate that this practice was extended to the poor and needy of the community, including those incarcerated in the local prisons. In a related manner, the confraternity also functioned as a burial society, organizing funeral processions (with a certain number of members and lighted candles), and offering masses and prayers for the souls of the deceased. Burial benefits were extended to the families of members and, in keeping with the confraternity's charitable role, to poor members of the community.¹²

Membership in the confraternity apparently was not limited to Spaniards, for according to its rules, anyone who was "calm and of good life and reputation and not rebellious so that the *cabildo* might remain in peace and tranquillity" might be accepted as a member.¹³ Not surprisingly, however, no indigenous names

9 Ibid., fols. 172v–173r. "E por nos ynclinar en su amor E devocion nos conçedio su santidad del submo pontiçe paolo terçio agora reciuen muchas gracias E yndulgencias E remisiones e perdones a todos aquellos que fueren cofrades del sanctissimo sacramento E le acompañaren quando saliere a visitar algun enfermo."

10 Ibid., 7/11, fols. 194r–200v.

11 Ibid., 7/10, fols. 173v–174r.

12 Ibid. 7/10., fols. 174v–176r.

13 Ibid., 7/10, fol. 173v. "quieta y de buena vida e fama e no reboltosa porquel cauyllo este

appear on the early membership rosters, and the only women initially permitted to join were the wives of members. All members were required to swear an oath to uphold the rules of the confraternity, and were forbidden from discussing any of their activities outside of the meetings.

The first members of the confraternity were among the upper echelons of the Spanish conquistadors and colonists, and included numerous captains and city officials. The Rule Book of August 1543 is signed by four founding members, Captain Fernando Ortiz y Mena, Captain Francisco Ruiz, Pedro de Baesde, and Hernando de la Parra.¹⁴ Historical records show that at least two of these members, Francisco Ruiz and Hernando de la Parra, were among the founding citizens of Quito. During the sixteenth century, both held large *encomiendas*, or land and labor grants, in the region.¹⁵ In a document of 1572, Francisco Ruiz is cited as one of the two wealthiest citizens in the Audiencia of Quito.¹⁶ The membership roster demonstrates that numerous captains, civil authorities, and *encomenderos* joined the confraternity shortly after it was founded.¹⁷

Over the following centuries, the confraternity maintained a membership of elite and wealthy citizens, and thus developed into a powerful and financially sound institution. Like most confraternities, the finances of the Most Holy Sacrament were derived from membership fees and dues, alms collected in the streets and offered by members, testamentary bequests, and above all, *censos*, or the interest on rental properties owned by the institution. In 1630, plans for the construction of a more ample and appropriate private chapel were discussed by the confraternity and the Cathedral Chapter; however, financial and logistical problems prevented the project from moving forward.¹⁸ By 1693, however, the confraternity had substantially increased its revenue from *censos*, which in that year accounted for 60% of its annual income, and alms and donations had reached an all-time high.¹⁹ The burgeoning economic prosperity of the brotherhood finally provided the means to construct a new building entirely dedicated to its purposes. Negotiations with the Cathedral Chapter in the early 1690s suggested the use of a large space located directly to the south of the Cathedral. However, the existence of a ravine in this location would require a feat of engineering in order to construct a stable base.²⁰ In search of a solution, the confraternity set about locating and

en paz y en quietud.”

14 Ibid., 7/10, fol. 176v.

15 Hernando de la Parra was granted the title to Chumaque, Caque, and Cañares by President Gasca, and Francisco Ruiz was given the estates of Canzacoto, Pingolqui, Pifo, Inga, Pilloli, Chañanchillo, and Uyumbicho by the conquistador Francisco Pizarro. See Pilar Ponce Leiva, ed., *Relaciones Histórico-Geográficas de la Audiencia de Quito* (Quito: MARKA and Ediciones Abya-Yala, 1992) I, pp. 202, 204.

16 Ibid., p. 206.

17 AHBCQ *Fondo Jijón y Camaaño*, primera serie, 7/11, fols. 192r–193v.

18 José María Vargas, *Patrimonio artístico ecuatoriano* (Quito: Editorial Santo Domingo, 1972), pp. 317–18.

19 AHNQ *Censos y Capellanías*, caja 5, expte. 2, fols. 48r–49r.

20 In fact, the architect did undertake a feat of engineering in order to construct the

engaging an architect to prepare the foundation and to design and oversee the construction of the church.

Fortuitously, a young Valencian architect recently arrived from Spain, José Jaime Ortiz, was passing through Quito in early November 1694 en route to Lima, Peru, in search of major commissions.²¹ The confraternity members were undoubtedly delighted to discover his presence in the city, and must have acted quickly in order to secure his services. According to the minutes of a *cabildo* (board meeting), celebrated on 5 November 1694, the brothers noted that “finding [present] in this city Don Jaime Ortiz, who is said to be an architect, and having been informed by the brothers that he is an expert in the art, it appeared to them appropriate that the said person undertake the said work and construction . . . and they signed a contract with the said architect so that he could begin the said work.”²² The confraternity agreed to pay architect the impressive sum of 4,500 *patacones*; 2,250 upon the initiation of the work, 1,125 at the halfway point, and the remaining 1,125 *patacones* upon its completion as specified in the contract.²³

In the subsequent *cabildo* of 12 March 1695, the governing board of the confraternity added a clause to the contract with the architect in which they stipulated that, in addition to overseeing the project, Ortiz be required to work personally on the construction, and that he be visibly present each day on the job. For this added obligation, the board awarded him an annual salary of 100 *patacones* in addition to the previously agreed upon fee.²⁴ Construction thus began on the Church of El Sagrario in 1695 under close supervision by both the architect and the confraternity.

The *libro de fábrica* demonstrates that the confraternity was intimately involved in every aspect of the construction and decoration of El Sagrario. Dating from the time of the architectural commission, special officers were elected to oversee specific aspects of the work. In the *cabildo* of 12 March 1695, in addition to the election of the traditional offices of *mayordomo mayor*, a series of subsidiary offices (*mayordomos menores*) were created, including those of *mayordomo* of the quarry and *mayordomo* of the construction.²⁵ As the building progressed,

foundation of the church in this difficult site. In 1699, the architect lodged a complaint with the ecclesiastical authorities in which he demanded that the confraternity be required to pay him more than that stipulated in the original contract due to the extra time, effort, and risk to his own life involved in the process of laying the foundations. The architect describes these vicissitudes in detail in AAQ *Cofradías*, caja 2 (1699), fols. 1r–16r. I am grateful to my research assistant, Gaby Costa, for bringing this document to my attention.

21 Ibid., fol. 1r. This information is drawn from Ortiz's own testimony.

22 AHNQ *Censos y Capellanías*, caja 5, expte. 2, fol. 66r.

23 Ibid., fol. 67r. The *patacon* was a silver coin weighing one ounce, and was the coin of greatest value during the colonial period. See Tamara Estupiñán Viteri, *Diccionario básico del comercio colonial quiteño* (Quito: Ediciones del Banco Central del Ecuador, 1997), p. 262.

24 AHNQ *Censos y Capellanías*, caja 5, expte. 2, fol. 69v. Several years after the work was initiated, the architect's salary was raised to 200 *patacones* per annum.

25 Ibid., fol. 69r.

the numbers of *mayordomos menores* increased, and a variety of new offices were created to address specific needs. For example, in the *cabildo* of 4 April 1704, the office of *mayordomo* of the quarry and the facade was created, marking the year in which the special stone for the facade was first quarried.²⁶ The *mayordomo* who served as overseer of the facade until its completion in 1706, Gabriel de Escorza, was apparently so proud of the results of his efforts that he had an inscription to that effect carved on the entablature above the main portal, which reads: "This facade was begun under the care of D. Gabriel de Escorça Escalante on 30 April of the year 1699 and it was completed 2 June of 1706."²⁷ The *libro de fábrica* demonstrates that Gabriel de Escorza was consistently re-elected to the post of *mayordomo* of the quarry and facade from 1699 to 1706.²⁸

The confraternity officers maintained close supervision of the materials and processes of construction, and worked to ensure quality control. In 1704, for example, a delivery of 500 bricks was summarily rejected by one of the *mayordomos* because they were "badly fired and [too] small and will not serve for the work."²⁹ In another case, one of the *mayordomo menores* was fired from his position "for not complying with his obligations," and was immediately replaced by another member of the Confraternity.³⁰ It is worth noting that the Confraternity officers elected to oversee the various aspects of construction in most cases pursued their charges as full time employment, and were well paid for their work.

Detailed expenditures for the materials of construction, as well as the manpower, are recorded in the *libro de fábrica*. Payments for huge quantities of brick, stone, tiles, and slaked lime dominate the yearly expenses throughout the period of construction. Notable events, however, such as the laying of the first stone in 1695,³¹ or the consecration of the church in 1715,³² are mentioned only in passing reference to their associated expenditures. Among the more interesting expenses in terms of construction processes are the many payments for mule-loads of pumice stone that were brought from a special quarry in Latacunga, located nearly 50 miles over steep and treacherous Andean mountain passes from the city of Quito.³³ These records indicate that the lightweight, volcanic stone was used to construct the vaults — an ingenious and appropriate structural innovation.

The salaries and payments to the many carpenters, masons, workmen, and laborers are also recorded in detail. In this respect, it is worth noting that although the confraternity financed and oversaw the building process, the actual construc-

26 Ibid., fol. 171r.

27 "Comenso esta portada al cuidado de D. Gabriel de Escorça Escalante en 30 abril del año de 1699 I se acabo 2 de junio de 1706."

28 This inscription led some scholars to mistakenly include Gabriel de Escorza among the possible architects of El Sagrario. For example, see Navarro, *Guía artística*, p. 167.

29 AHNQ *Censos y Capellanías*, caja 5, expte. 2, fol. 179v. "mal cocidos y pequeños y no sirven para la obra."

30 Ibid., fol. 228r. "... por no cumplir con sus obligaciones."

31 Ibid., fol. 67v.

32 Ibid., fol. 277r.

33 See for example, *ibid.*, fol. 117v.

tion of the church was undertaken almost exclusively by native workers. Records of payment to the “albañiles, indios y peones” (carpenters, Indians, and peons) dominate the accounts of expenditure, and specific names are rarely associated with these workers. The sculptural decoration of the facade and the interior of the church are also documented as the work of indigenous artists. Thus, like most colonial buildings, El Sagrario was designed and overseen by Spaniards, but was constructed and decorated by native artisans.

By 1699, the construction of the church was well underway: the walls and pillars were in place, the vaults, dome, and cupolas were being erected, and the facade was initiated. The imposing size of the building and the rapidity with which it took shape must have impressed the civic authorities, for in this year the architect Ortiz appears for the first time in the documents as “arquitecto mayor nombrado por la ciudad” (master architect, named by the city), and is thereafter referred to as “Captain” Ortiz.³⁴ The building also impressed local religious authorities, for just two years later, with the vaults and dome in place and the facade well underway, Ortiz was awarded the commission as architect of the church of the Monastery of La Merced.³⁵ He undertook this new construction while the Church of El Sagrario was still being completed.

The overall design and expanse of the church of El Sagrario is impressive. It is a three-aisle, rectangular-plan church with massive interior pillars arranged in the form of a cross. The crossing is capped by a high dome with an ample lantern, and three smaller cupolas provide light for each of the side aisles. The massive dome is decorated on the interior with polychrome sculptural reliefs and elaborate mural paintings, and cartouches containing relief sculptures of the four evangelists adorn the pendentives. The interior is imposing in terms of the relationship of the soaring vaults to the relatively narrow width of the nave. The church contains an ample sacristy, a baptistery,³⁶ and several offices, and six impressive Baroque altarpieces occupy the side aisles, leading the eye to the towering Baroque main altar that dominates the apse. One particularly spectacular feature of the church is the *mampara*, an elaborately carved, polychromed, and gilded inner portal, that was completed by the famed artist Bernardo de Legarda and others in 1747.³⁷

Perhaps the most impressive element of the church of El Sagrario is the commanding facade (fig. 1), which was constructed between 1699 and 1706 in a restrained Baroque style. The facade is divided into two stories that are separated by heavy projecting cornices, and is crowned by a dramatically projecting broken pediment. The lower story is supported by two groups of three Ionic columns that are balanced on the second story by equal groupings of shorter columns of the Corinthian order. Imposing stone sculptures of Saints Peter and Paul occupy high

34 Ibid., fol. 117r.

35 Luis Octavio Proaño, *La Merced, arte e historia* (Quito: Rafael Rivadeneira Palacios, 1989), p. 96.

36 The present baptistery chapel is a later addition, constructed in 1769 (Navarro, *Guía artística*, p. 169).

37 Vargas, *Patrimonio artístico*, p. 319.

positions to either side of the second story, and just below them stand sculptures personifying the virtues of Faith and Hope.

The primary identity of the patron, however, is described within the vertical axis of the facade (figs. 1 and 3). On the lower level, the sculpted keystone of the portal depicts a cartouche containing two angels that support the sacramental chalice. Personifying the confraternity's charitable role, the virtue of Charity in the traditional form of a maternal figure nurturing three infants appears in a large sculptural relief panel that is centered above the main portal.³⁸ A third indication of the confraternity's identity likely appeared directly above in the large niche set within the dramatic broken pediment that crowns the facade. As seen in early twentieth-century photographs, this niche may originally have held a large sculpture of a monstrance housing the Holy Sacrament.³⁹ Thus, the major devotional and charitable roles of the confraternity are publicly presented within the vertical axis of the facade. Additional sculptures once adorned the niches that occupy the spaces beside the column groupings on the lower level. Ornately carved planiform relief sculptures decorate all flat areas of the facade, incorporating grotesque masks within complex organic forms and strapwork.

By 1714, the decoration of the interior of the church was nearing completion, and preparations were underway for the festivities to accompany its consecration and the official installation of the Holy Sacrament in the newly-constructed tabernacle. In the *cabildo* of 22 March 1714, the confraternity appointed several members to take charge of the ephemeral decorations of all the chapels, the sacramental plays (*autos sacramentales*) and fireworks displays that were to accompany the festivities.⁴⁰ The preparations were apparently extensive and were undertaken well in advance, for it is not until 14 February 1715 that the church was consecrated, and the installation of the Holy Sacrament was appropriately delayed until the day of Corpus Christi of the same year.⁴¹ The expenses incurred by the confraternity in the Corpus festivities that year were understandably far more extensive than they had been in the past. The *libro de fábrica* permits us to

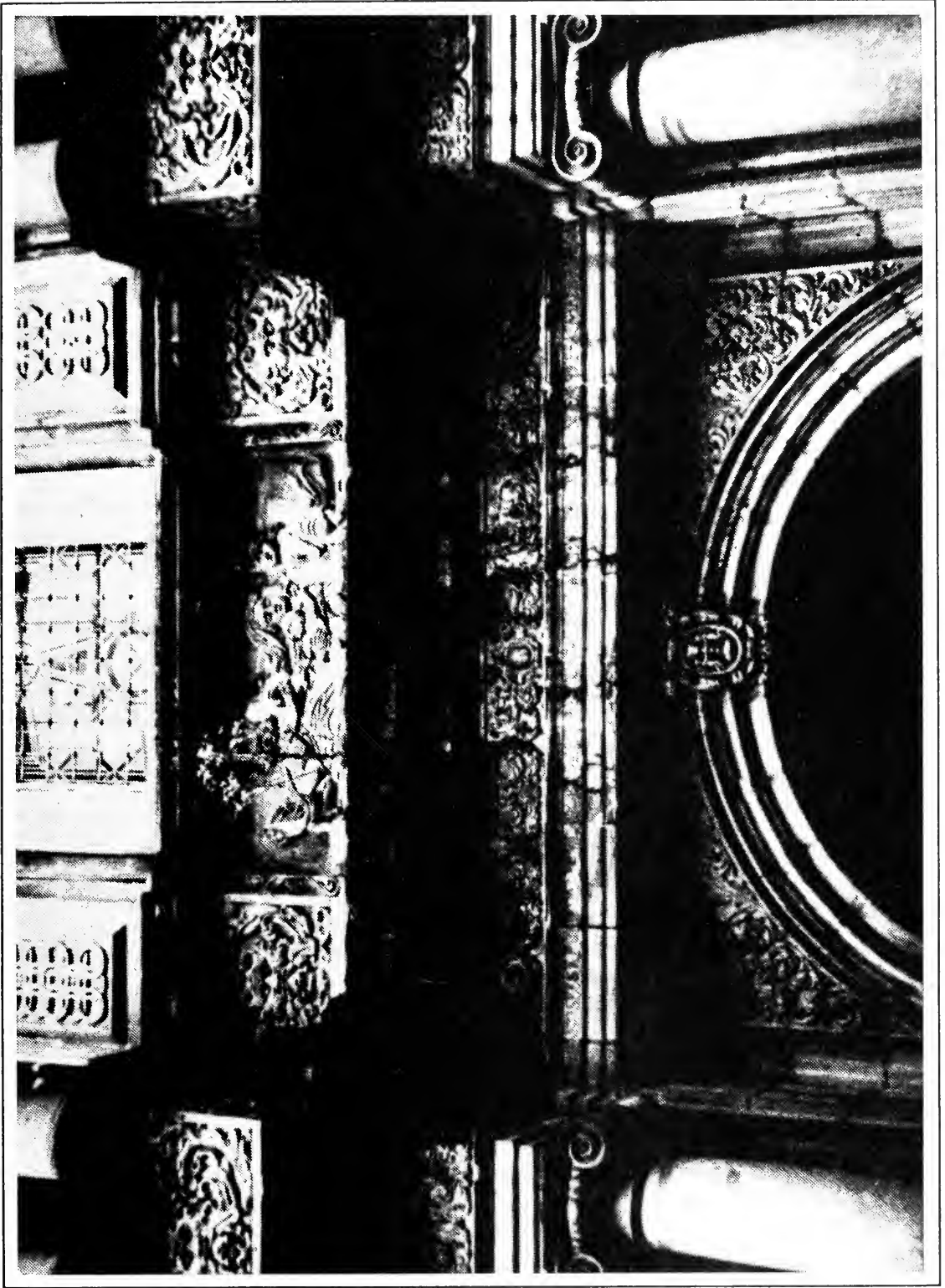
38 The Ecuadorian art historian José Gabriel Navarro first identified the figures in this relief as "a group of angels" (*La escultura en el Ecuador* [Madrid: Antonio Marzo, 1929], p. 125), and later as a "Nativity" scene (*El arte en la provincia de Quito* [México: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1960], p. 47). Clearly, recognition of the patron of the church would have precluded such mis-identifications.

39 A sculpted monstrance crowning the facade would clearly be the most appropriate image, and photographs from the early 1920s shows just such a sculpture located within this niche. For example, see Carlos de Gangotena y Jijón, *Monografía ilustrada de la Provincia de Pichincha* (Quito, 1922), n.p. Further supporting this notion is the fact that sculpted monstresses adorn the uppermost levels of the facades of many Latin American Sagrario churches, including those at Mexico City and Bogotá.

40 AHNQ *Censos y Capellanías*, caja 5, expte. 2, fol. 266r–267r. It is worth noting in this regard, that the official elected to oversee the festivities (*prioste*) was the Count of Selva Florida, don Diego Ponce de León Castillejo, a prominent member of the upper nobility whose election to the this position characterizes the nature of leadership in the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament.

41 *Ibid.*, fol. 277r.

Figure 3: Detail of the façade of the Church of El Sagrario, Quito (Photo: Susan Verdi Webster)



envision something of the nature of the celebration in the notation of expenditures for 10 pounds of incense, a wide range of fireworks, musicians, singers, and numerous, elaborate, newly-commissioned ecclesiastical vestments, chalices, and other sacred utensils.⁴² Corpus Christi in Quito in 1715 must have been an impressive celebration to behold, as the Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament celebrated the culmination and savored the fruits of close to a century of its planning, labor, and determination embodied in the translation and installation of the Holy Sacrament in its impressive new Church of El Sagrario.

At the time of the installation festivities, the confraternity had invested nearly a quarter of a century and more than 100,000 *patacones* in the construction and architectural decoration of the church (excluding the side altars, which were commissioned later). The three-aisle church was constructed with side altars in mind, for three cupolas run the length of each of the aisles, providing illumination for the large altarpieces that were eventually installed therein. Indeed, by the end of the eighteenth century, El Sagrario had become a haven for confraternities, as the brotherhoods of San Pedro, San Pablo, Nuestra Señora de la Presentación, the Escuela de Cristo, the Benditas Animas, and Nuestra Señora de Copacabana, among others, constructed elaborate altarpieces of their own along the side aisles of the nave.⁴³

During the remainder of the colonial era, El Sagrario enjoyed a high status as one of the most prestigious and well-appointed churches in Quito. Numerous eighteenth-century chroniclers and travelers found it notable and praiseworthy. For example, Jorge Juan and Juan Antonio Ulloa, Spanish scientists who passed through Quito in the 1741, remarked that the Church of El Sagrario, “in addition to being very spacious, and [made] completely of Stone, is of beautiful Architecture, and the exterior is no less harmonious than the well designed interior,” adding that it “is rich in all decorations, as much in Silver as in Textiles, and very costly Ornaments.”⁴⁴ In 1766, a previous governor of the Audiencia of Quito, Dionisio de Alsedo y Herrera, submitted a report to the Spanish Crown in which he placed the Church of El Sagrario on a par with the Cathedral itself. Alsedo y Herrera reported that in Quito there were

so many monuments of true religion, and devout and Catholic magnificence, such as the greatest and most sumptuous temple of the Cathedral, [and] another contiguous church, with the name of the Chapel of El Sagrario, and two great

42 Ibid., fols. 285r–285v.

43 The remaining records in the Archivo de la Iglesia del Sagrario (APSQ) document the presence of at least seven confraternities in El Sagrario in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and others may also have been located there during this time. For anyone interested in pursuing research on these confraternities, ample registers and documents exist, most dating from the eighteenth century.

44 Jorge Juan and Juan Antonio de Ulloa, *Relación histórica del Viage a la América meridional* (Madrid: Antonio Marín, 1748) Libro V, Cap. IV, pp. 354–55. “fuera de ser muy capaz, y toda de Piedra, tiene bella Arquitectura, y no es menos harmoniosa la exterior que bien distribuída la de adentro,” [] “es rica en todos adornos, assi de Plata, como de Telas, y muy costosos Ornamentos.”

exterior doors and one interior [door] that connect them, so that they rival one another in the grandeur of the buildings and the services and adornments of their cults; and in the latter [El Sagrario], [there are] two resident priests with their assistants for the administration of the extensive parishioners of its most principal and distinguished citizens, that occupy the largest and most expansive part of the city center.⁴⁵

Today, El Sagrario remains one of the most important and frequented historic churches in the old colonial centre of Quito; however, it should now be recognized not solely for its magnificent architecture, but also as a major monument to the reverence, dedication, and determination of its patron: the Quiteñan Confraternity of the Most Holy Sacrament.

University of St. Thomas

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ACQ	Archivo de la Catedral de Quito
AHBCQ	Archivo Histórico del Banco Central, Quito
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APSQ	Archivo de la Parroquia del Sagrario, Quito

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45 Quoted in Ponce Leiva, ed., *Relaciones Histórico-Geográficas*, II, p. 421. "tantos monumentos de verdadera religión y magnificencia pía y católica, como el mayor y más sumptuoso templo de su Catedral, otra contigua iglesia, con el nombre de Capilla del Sagrario, y 2 grandes puertas exteriores y una interior para la comunicación, en que se compiten la grandeza de los edificios y el sevicio y adornos del culto; y en la segunda, 2 curas rectores con sus tenientes para la administración en la dilatada feligresía de su más principal y distinguido vecindario, que ocupa la más grande y extendida parte del centro de la ciudad."

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