GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE IN SPAIN

CHAPTER XII

VALENCIA

From Toledo I took the railway to Valencia. But as the junction of the Toledo branch with the main line is a small station of the meanest description, and as there were three or four hours to dispose of before the mail train passed, I went back as far as Aranjuez, intending to dine there. The station is close to the palace, a large, bold, and uninteresting pile. The principal inn is kept by an Englishman with a French wife, and as it was not the right season for Aranjuez we had great difficulty in getting anything. In truth the French wife was a tartar, and advised us to go back again; but finally, the husband having interceded, she relented so far as to produce some eggs and bacon.

Aranjuez seemed to consist mainly of the palace and its stables, and to be afflicted with even more than the usual plague of dust: but in the spring no doubt it is in a more pleasant state, and may, I hope, justify the landlord's assertion that there is nothing in the world to compare with it!

Late in the evening we started for Valencia: it was a bright moonlight night, so that I was able, when I woke and looked out, to see that the country we traversed was an endless plain of extremely uninteresting character and that we lost little by not seeing it. I should have preferred leaving the railway altogether, and going by Cuenca on my way to Valencia; but time was altogether wanting for this détour, though I have no doubt that Cuenca would well repay a visit.

At Almanza, where the lines for Alicante and Valencia separate, there is a very picturesque castle perched upon a rock above the town, and here the dreary, uninteresting country, which extends with but short intervals all the way from Vitoria, is changed for the somewhat mountainous Valencian district, which everywhere shows signs of the highest luxuriance and
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cultivation, resulting almost entirely from the extreme care and industry with which the artificial irrigation is managed. The villages are numerous, and around them are beautiful vineyards, groves of orange-trees, and rice-fields; whilst here and there clumps of tall palm-trees give a very Eastern aspect to the landscape. The churches seemed, as far as I could judge, to be all modern and most uninteresting. After passing the hilly country, a broad plain is crossed to València. Here the system of irrigation, said to be an inheritance from the Moors, is evidently most complete. Every field has its stream of water running rapidly along, and the main drawback to such a system, so completely carried out, is that the beds of the rivers are generally all but dry, their water being all diverted into other and more useful channels. The Valencian farmers’ dress is quite worth looking at. They wear short, loose, white linen trousers and jackets, brilliantly coloured mantas—generally scarlet—thrown over their shoulders, coloured handkerchiefs over their heads, and violet scarfs round their waists. They have a quaint way of sitting at work in the fields, with their knees up to their ears, like so many grasshoppers; and their skin is so well bronzed that one can hardly believe them to be of European blood. They are said to be vindictive and passionate, but they are also, so far as I saw them, very lively, merry, and talkative. The farms appear to be very large, and when I passed the farmers were hard at work threshing their rice. This is all done by horses and mules on circular threshing-floors. In many of the farms eight or ten pairs of horses may be seen at work at the same time on as many threshing-floors, and the effect of such a scene is striking and novel.

As we went into València we passed on the right the enormous new Plaza de Toros, said to be the finest in Spain. Railroads will, I suppose, rather tend to develop the national love for this institution, and this theatre must have been built with some such impression, for otherwise it is difficult to believe that a city of a hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants could build a theatre capable of containing about a tenth of the whole population.

The national vehicle of València is the tariana, a covered cart on two wheels, with a slight attempt only at springs, and rendered gay by the crimson curtains which are hung across the front. Jumping into one of these, we soon found ourselves at the excellent Fonda del Cid, whose title reminds us that we are on classic ground in this city of València del Cid.
The Cid took the city from the Moors after a siege of twenty months, in A.D. 1094, established himself here, and ruled till his death, in A.D. 1099. The Moors then regained possession for a short time, but in A.D. 1238 or 1239 it was finally re-taken from them by the Spaniards.

It is hardly to be expected that anything would remain of Christian work earlier than A.D. 1095, or, more probably, than A.D. 1239, and this I found to be the case. The cathedral, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, is a church of only moderate interest, its interior having been overlaid everywhere with columns, pilasters, and cornices of plaster, and the greater part of the exterior being surrounded so completely with houses that no good view can be obtained of it.

The ground-plan is, however, still so far untouched as to be perfectly intelligible (1). It has a nave and aisles of four bays, transepts projecting one bay beyond the aisles, and a lofty lantern or Cimborio over the Crossing. The choir is one bay only in length, and has a three-sided apse. An aisle of the same width as that of the nave is continued round the choir, and has the rare arrangement of two polygonal chapels opening in each of its bays. The vacating compartments in the aisle are therefore cinquepartite, those throughout the rest of the church being quadripartite. A grand Chapter-house stands detached to the south of the west bay of the nave, and an octagonal steeple, called “El Micalete,” abuts against the north-west angle of the west front.

The ritual arrangements are all modern, and on the usual plan. The western bays of the church is open; the stalls of the Coro occupy the second and third bays; and metal rails across the fourth bay of the nave and the Crossing connect the Coro with the Capilla mayor.

The evidence as to the age of the various portions of the building is sufficient to enable us to date most of the work rather accurately. The foundation of the church is recorded by an inscription over the south transept door to have been laid in 1262: and some portion of the exterior is, I have no doubt, of this date. The whole south transept front, a portion of the sacristy on the east side, and the exterior of the apse, are all of fine early-pointed style, and, in the absence of any specific

1 Anno Domini MCCCCLXII. X. Kal. Jul. futur
Positus Primus lapsis in Ecclesia Beatae
Mariae sedis Valentinæ per venerabilem
Patrem Dominum Fratem Andream Tertium
Valentinæ civitatis Episcopum.
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statement of their date, might well have been thought to belong to quite the commencement of the century. But I think a careful examination of the detail will show that the work is possibly not so early as it looks: and it has so much in common with Italian work of the same age, that we need not be surprised to find in it features which would nevertheless be inconsistent with its execution in the middle of the thirteenth century in any work of the north of Europe. The south transept façade consists of a round-arched doorway, with a horizontal cornice over it, and a large and fine lancet-window above. The door and window have respectively six and three jamb-shafts, and the abaci throughout are square in plan. The archivolt of the doorway is very rich: it includes five orders of enriched dog-tooth moulding, one order of seraphs in niches, one of chevron, one of scalloping, and two of foliage; good thirteenth-century mouldings are also freely used. The shafts are detached, and there is foliage on the jamb between them. The abaci are very richly carved with animals and foliage, and the capitals are all sculptured with subjects under canopies (2). The detail of the whole of the work is certainly very exquisite. Undoubtedly in the north of France such work would be assumed to have belonged to the twelfth rather than the thirteenth century; but the quatrefoil diapering on the capitals, the canopy work over the subjects in them, and the pronounced character of the mouldings and dog-tooth enrichment, make it pretty clear that the recorded date applies to this work. Indeed I do not know how we can assume any other date for it without altogether throwing over the extremely definite old inscription: for as it is evident that the south transept and choir are of the same date, it is difficult to see how it could have been possible to speak of the first stone, if all this important part of the fabric were already in existence.1 Close to the transept on the east, in the wall of what is now a sacristy, is another lancet window, of equally good, though simpler detail. Enough, too, remains of the original work in the exterior of the apse to show that it is of the same age as the south transept. The clerestory windows seem to have been simple broad lancets; there are corbel-tables under the eaves; and the buttresses are very solid and simple. On the interior nothing but the groining has been left untouched by the pagan plasterers of a later day.

1 This doorway ought to be compared with the south door of the nave of Lérida cathedral, the detail of which is so extremely similar to it that it is impossible, I think, to doubt that they were the work of the same men (3).
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I have found no evidence as to the date of the next portion of the fabric, which is the more to be regretted as it is altogether very important and interesting in its character. It includes the whole façade of the north transept, a noble lantern at the Crossing, and a small pulpit, and the whole of this is a good example of probably the latter half of the fourteenth century. The north transept elevation is extremely rich in detail. The great doorway in the centre of the lowest stage—de los Apóstoles—has figures under canopies in its jambs, and corresponding figures on either side beyond the jambs. The arch is moulded, and sculptured with four rows of figures and canopies, divided by orders of mouldings. The tympanum of the door is adorned with sculptures of the Blessed Virgin with our Lord and angels. Over the arch is a gabled canopy, the spandrels of which are filled with tracery and figures. Above, and set back rather from the face of the doorway, is a rose window, the very rich traceries of which are arranged in intersecting equilateral triangles; over it is a crocketed pediment, with tracery in the spandrels and on either side, and flanked by pinnacles. Every portion of the wall is panelled or carved. This front affords an admirable example of that class of middle-pointed work which was common in Germany and France at the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth centuries. The style prevailed for some time, and it was probably about the middle of the fourteenth century that this building was executed.

The pulpit is placed against the north-east pier of the Crossing; it has evidently been taken to pieces and reconstructed, and it is not certain, I think, that it was originally a pulpit. Many of the members of the base and capital of its stem, and the angles of the octagonal upper stage, are modern, and of bronze; the rest is mainly of marble. The stem is slender, and the upper part is pierced with richly-moulded geometrical traceries, behind which the panels are filled in with boards, gilt and diapered with extremely good effect. A curious feature in this pulpit is that there is now no entrance to it, and if it is ever used for preaching, the preacher must get into it by climbing over the sides!

The lantern or Cimborio, though in some respects similar to, is no doubt later than the transept; it is one of the finest examples of its class in Spain. Mr. Ford says that it was built in A.D. 1404, but I have been unable to find his authority for the statement, and though he may be right, I should have been inclined to date

Maceda gives the same date.—Dicc. Geo. Esp. Histórico.
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it somewhat earlier. It is an octagon of two rather similar stages in height above the roof. Crocketed pinnacles are arranged at each angle, and large six-light windows with very rich and varied geometrical tracery fill the whole of each of the sides. The lower windows have crocketed labels, and the upper crocketed canopies, and the string-courses are enriched with foliage. From the very transparent character of this lantern, it is clear that it was never intended to be carried higher. It is a lantern and nothing more, and really very noble, in spite of its somewhat too ornate and frittered character.¹

The portion of the work next in date to this seems to have been the tower. This, like the lantern, is octagonal in plan, and it is placed at the north-west corner of the aisle, against which one of its angles is set. A more Gothic contempt for regularity it would be impossible to imagine, yet the effect is certainly good. The circumference of this steeple is said to be equal to its height, but I had not an opportunity of testing this. Each side is 20 ft. 8 in. from angle to angle of the buttresses, so that the height, if the statement is true, would be about 165 feet. It is of four stages in height; the three lower stages quite plain, and the belfry rather rich, with a window in each face, panelling all over the wall above, and crocketed pediments over the windows. The buttresses or pilasters—for they are of similar projection throughout their height—are finished at the top with crocketed pinnacles. The parapet has been destroyed, and there is a modern structure on the roof at the top. The evidence as to the age of this work is ample. It is called "El Micalete" or "Miguelete," its bells having been first hung on the feast of S. Michael.

¹ The illustration which I give of this lantern is borrowed from Mr. Fergusson’s Handbook of Architecture.
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Some documents referring to it are given by Cean Bermudez, and are as follows:—

I. A deed executed in Valencia before Jayme Rovira, notary, on the 20th June, 1380, by which it appears that Michael Palomar, citizen, Bernardo Boix and Bartolomé Valent, master masons, estimated what they considered necessary for the fabric of the tower or campanile at 853 scudi.

II. From the MS. diary of the chaplain of King D. Alonso V. of Aragon, it appears that on the 1st January, A.D. 1381, there was a solemn procession of the bishop, clergy, and regidores of the city to the church, to lay the first stone of the Micalete.²

III. By a deed made in Valencia, May 18th, A.D. 1414, before Jayme Pastor, notary or clerk of the chapter, it is settled that Pedro Balaguer, an “able architect,” shall receive 50 florins from the fabric fund of the new campanile or Micalete, “in payment of his expenses on the journey which he made to Lérida, Narbonne, and other cities, in order to see and examine their towers and campaniles, so as to imitate from them the most elegant and fit form for the cathedral of Valencia.”

IV. By another deed, made before the same Jayme Pastor, September 18th, A.D. 1424, it is agreed that Martín Llobet, stonecutter, agrees to do the work which is wanting and ought to be done in the Micalete, to wit, to finish the last course with its gurgoyles, to make the “barbacana,” and bench round about, for the sum of 2000 florins of common money of Aragon, the administration of the fabric finding the wheels, ropes, baskets, etc.

An inscription on the tower itself, referred to by Mr. Ford (but which I did not see), states that it was raised between A.D. 1381 and A.D. 1418, by Juan Franck, and it is said to have been intended to be 350 feet high.³

It is evident, therefore, that several architects were employed upon the work, and I know few facts in the history of medieval art more interesting than the account we have here of the payment of an architect whilst he travelled to find some good work

1 Noticias de los Arquitectos, etc., i. 256.
2 Viaje 1436, a las Iglesias de España, i. 31.
3 L’an 1338, lorsque Jacques I. Roy d’Aragon assiégea Valence, qui était au pouvoir des Mores, il déclara que les premiers qui l’emporteraient auraient l’honneur de donner les poids, les mesures, et la monnaie de leur ville à ceux de Valence; il dessus ceux de Lérida s’y jetterent les premiers, et prirent la ville. C’est pourquoi, lorsqu’on repeupla Valence, ils y envoyèrent une colonie, leurs mesures, et leur monnayé, dont on s’y serv encore aujourd’hui; et la ville de Valence reconnaît celle de Lérida pour sa mère.—Les Délites de l’Espagne, iv. 613. Leyden, A.D. 1715.
4 Ponz, Viaje de España, iv. 21, 22.
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to copy for the city of Valencia. The steeple of Lérida cathedral will be mentioned in its place, and it is sufficient now to say that it is also octagonal, of great height, and dates from the commencement of the fourteenth century. I know nothing at Narbonne which could have been suggestive to Pedro Balaguer, but the city was Spanish in those days, and it is probably only mentioned as one of the most important places to which he went.

When the Micalet was built the nave of the church seems to have been still unfinished, the choir and transepts and part of the nave only having been built. In 1459, under the direction of an architect named Valdomar, a native of Valencia, the work was continued, and the church was joined to the tower. The authority for this statement is a MS. in the library of the convent of San Domingo, Valencia, which says: “In the year of our Lord 1459, on Monday, the 10th of September, they commenced digging to make the doorway and arcade of the cathedral; Master Valdomar was the master of the works, a native of the said city of Valencia.” Of Valdomar’s work in this part of the church nothing remains, the whole has been altered in the most cruel way, and the most contemptible work erected in its place. Valdomar appears to have died whilst his work was in progress, and to have been succeeded by Pedro Compte, who concluded the work in 1482. The manuscript already quoted from the library of San Domingo is the authority for this statement, and describes Pedro Compte as “Molt sabut en l’art de la pedra.”

On the south side of the nave there is a Chapter-house, which is said by Ponz to be the work of Pedro Compte, and to have been built at the cost of Bishop D. Vidal Blanes, in A.D. 1558. If this statement is correct, it follows that there were two architects of this name, the second having erected the Lonja de la Sedia, to which I shall have presently to refer, in A.D. 1482. The tracery of the windows, and the details generally of the Chapter-house, is so geometrical and good, that it is probable that the date given by Ponz may be depended upon. It is a square room nearly sixty feet in diameter, and groined in stone. The vault is similar to those which I first saw at Burgos, having arches

1 Valdomar also built the chapel “de los Reyes,” in the convent of San Domingo, commenced 19th June 1439, and completed 24th June 1476. This convent is now desecrated, and I did not see it, but it is said still to contain a good Gothic cloister.
2 Pedro Compte is mentioned as having been invited by the Archbishop of Zaragoza to a conference with four other architects as to the rebuilding of the Cimborrio of his cathedral, which had fallen down in 1520.
3 Viaje de Esp. iv. 29, 30.
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thrown across the angles to bring it to an octagon, and the triangular compartments in the angles having their vaults below the main vault. It is lighted by small windows very high up in the walls on the cardinal sides, and these are circular and spherical triangles in outline, filled with geometrical tracery. On the south side is a very elaborate arcaded reredos and altar, and on the west a pulpit corbelled out from the wall. The design and detail of the whole are extremely fine, and I regret that I was able to make but a very hurried examination of it, and no sketches; meeting here, almost for the first time in Spain, with a sacristan who refused to allow me to do more than look, the fact being that it was his time for dinner and siesta! (4)

In the old sacristy to the east of this room are still preserved two embroidered altar frontals, said to have been brought from our own old S. Paul’s by two merchants, Andres and Pedro de Medina, just about the time of the Reformation.¹ They are therefore of especial interest to an Englishman. They are very large works, strained on frames, and were, I believe, hangings rather than altar frontals, as they are evidently continuations one of the other. The field is of gold, diapered, and upon this a succession of subjects is embroidered. On one cloth are (beginning at the left) (1) our Lord bearing his Cross; (2) being nailed to the Cross; (3) crucified, with the thieves on either side; (4) descending from the Cross; (5) entombed. The next cloth has (6) the descent into Heli; (2) the Maries going to the sepulchre; (3) the Maries at the tomb, the angel, and (4) the Resurrection. The effect of the whole work is like that of a brilliant German painting, and the figures are full of action and spirit, and have a great deal of expression in their faces. The diapered ground is made with gold thread, laid down in vertical lines, and then diapered with diagonal lines of fine bullion stitched down over it to form the diaper. The gold is generally manufactured in a double twist, and borders and edgings are all done with a very bold twisted gold cord. The faces are all wrought in silk, and some of the dresses are of silk, lined all over with gold. The old border at the edge exists on one only of the frontals. The size of each is 3 ft. 1 in. by 10 ft. 2 in., and the date, as nearly as I can judge, must be about A.D. 1450. There is also preserved here a missal which once belonged to Westminster Abbey.

¹ Spain boasts other like treasures, e.g. a figure still preserved at Mondómedo, and which is still called “la Ynglesa,” because brought from S. Paul’s.—See Pont, Viaje de España, iv. 43.