

Tradizioni europee e opportunità locali. L'architettura delle missioni di San Antonio, Texas

Abstract

European Traditions and Local Opportunities. The Architecture of the Missions in San Antonio, Texas

In the current metropolitan area of San Antonio, Texas, during the 18th century, five Franciscan missions were established along the local river. The missions were created to encourage the conversion of the indigenous locals to Catholicism and to control one of the most strategic crossroads of the New World. These compounds were developed as autonomous citadels, and their characteristics can be clearly related to the European Counter-reformist tradition. The peculiar features of their layout highlight the builders' knowledge of the relevant architectural and urban innovations of that time. Other elements, however, adhere to the medieval tradition, such as the use of the light as a tool to persuade potential converts. Diverse strategies were combined to define these settlements, involving spatial and formal outcomes. Their completion, however, was constrained by the limited availability of both materials and skilled workers. Unpublished archival sources and analysis of the individual buildings of the compounds uncover specific outcomes resulting from the construction processes. This article examines three of the established missions, i.e., those that reached the highest level of completion during the period of the Franciscan friars' most intense activity. These buildings are the most authentic expression of Texas cultural and architectural syncretism, corroborating the 2015 UNESCO World Heritage Site designation.