



## BETWEEN VOLUTES, CYMAS AND COUNTER-VOLUTES: THE “FORMLESS” ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF JESUIT CHURCH OF SANTO ALEXANDRE IN BELÉM DO PARÁ

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Received: 09/15/2020

Accepted: 03/03/2021

### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes historiographical case studies about the elements formed by volutes, cymas and counter-volutes on the pediment of Jesuit Church of Santo Alexandre main façade, in Belém do Pará. It aims, from a decolonialist perspective, to review the epistemological and historiographical matrices on the works of John Bury (1991), Lúcio Costa (1941), Joaquim José Codina (1784) and Philip L. Goodwin (1943, on the *Brazil Builds*' exposition catalog, by the MoMA in New York) about these elements. It intends to contribute to fill a theoretical gap in the historiography of artistic objects from cultural hybridisms and exchanges on the context of the Society of Jesus' action in the Colonial Amazon, besides discussing contemporary methodological possibilities for their analysis.

**KEY WORDS:** Formless; Church of Santo Alexandre; Jesuit architecture; Colonial Amazon; cultural hybridisms.

### RESUMO

O artigo analisa estudos de caso historiográficos sobre os elementos compostos por volutas, talões e contravolutas presentes no frontão da fachada principal da Igreja Jesuítica de Santo Alexandre em Belém do Pará. Busca, a partir de uma perspectiva decolonialista, rever as matrizes epistemológicas e historiográficas das obras de John Bury (1991), Lúcio Costa (1941), Joaquim José Codina (1784) e Philip L. Goodwin (1943, no catálogo da exposição *Brazil Builds* do MoMA, em Nova York). Objetiva contribuir para a lacuna teórica na historiografia de objetos artísticos frutos de hibridismos e intercâmbios culturais no contexto da atuação da Companhia de Jesus na Amazônia Colonial, além de discutir possibilidades metodológicas contemporâneas para suas análises.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Informe; Igreja de Santo Alexandre; arquitetura jesuítica; Amazônia Colonial; hibridismos culturais.



Fig. 1 – Pediment of the Santo Alexandre’s Church.  
Source: Author, 2017.



My mind tossed up and down foul and horrible “forms” out of all order, but yes “forms” and I called it without form not that it wanted all form, but because it had such as my mind would, if presented to it, turn from, as unwonted and jarring, and human frailness would be troubled at. And still that which I conceived, was without form, not as being deprived of all form, but in comparison of more beautiful forms; and true reason did persuade me, that I must utterly uncase it of all remnants of form whatsoever, if I would conceive matter absolutely without form; and I could not; for sooner could I imagine that not to be at all, which should be deprived of all form, than conceive a thing betwixt form and nothing, neither formed, nor nothing, a formless almost nothing. So my mind gave over to question thereupon with my spirit, it being filled with images of forms bodies, and changing and varying them, as it willed; and I bent myself to the bodies themselves, and looked more deeply into their changeableness, by which they cease to be what they have been, and begin to be what they were not; and this same shifting from form to form, I suspected to be through a certain formless state, not through a mere nothing; yet this I longed to know, not to suspect only (AUGUSTINE, 2002).

## INTRODUCTION

This work is motivated by the concern about an architectural object that, provocatively, could be called “formless”. Not “formless” due to its absence of form – although the transmaterial aspects of the object are of essential discussion –, but due to a movement of transgression, displacement and transformation of what is usually, in traditional historiography, called “form”. Georges Didi-Huberman proposes, in *La ressemblance informe, ou Le gai savoir visual selon Georges Bataille* (1995), a structure of thought applicable to objects that share similarities to such an unformed object: in this case, an insubordination to the aesthetic parameters of classical treatise; the incorporation of aesthetic and anthropological values of the Amerindians – here, I do not argue about the permissiveness or awareness of this incorporation and the genesis of a hybrid object, epistemologically ambiguous, based on an imaginary operation that, at the same time that promotes conflict, rupture and incorporation, also operates in the fields of similarity, reception and repetition. The object of this analysis is the set of mirrored volutes, cymas and counter-volutes that form the pediment of the façade of the Jesuit Church of Santo Alexandre, in Belém do Pará (Fig. 1).

These complex objects do not conform to the usual parameters of the theory and history of “conventional” art and architecture, marked by Eurocentric aesthetic views linked to the classical and treatise tradition, with hermetic classifications and based on ineffective and insufficient chronologies in view of the historical, cultural and imaginary complexities of the objects treated. The range opened by the decolonial studies, in their transdisciplinary dialogues with anthropology, ethnology and philosophy, allows the constitution of new methodological paths to analyze the complexity of these culturally hybrid elements. The object analyzed here is just a microcase of an inexhaustible constellation of elements and works produced within the scope of the Society of Jesus’ action in the Colonial Amazon. From the perspective of the decolonial studies, this context is configured as a framework that, in an innovative and still recent way in historiography, establishes its foundations, producing important works that handle the most diverse operations obtained in the analysis of objects that materialize these interchanges and cultural hybridisms.

This article is motivated by this new historiographical moment and promotes, in addition to transdisciplinary methodological choices, theoretical provocations that seek to reiterate the obsolescence of the usual Eurocentric hermetic methods. Similarly, it seeks to analyze some of the main moments in the historiography about the Church in which these elements are analyzed.

Some of them, of which I highlight the works of Lúcio Costa (2010), John Bury (1991), Joaquim José Codina (1784), and Philip L. Goodwin (1943), corroborate to a derogatory aesthetic view in the analysis of colonial art and its cultural exchanges, based on an obsolete analytical sense. These affirmations – which, later, I will deal with more incisively and particularly at this work – accuse a certain primitivism and lack of sophistication (BURY, 1991, p. 55) in these artistic manifestations, due to the use of crude construction

techniques (COSTA, 2010, p. 164), resulting in an “almost grotesque aspect”<sup>1</sup> (BURY, 1991, p. 55), in a “crude and somewhat barbaric form”<sup>2</sup> (*Ibid, ibidem*), for fleeing from parameters established by the Eurocentric canonical traditions that guide their historiographic, aesthetic and socio-political views.

It is understood, however, the epistemological and aesthetic matrices that guided such historiographical works as resulting from their time, before an awakening caused moments later by the contemporary decolonial studies. Respectfully, the obsolescence of these matrices is analyzed in a contemporary historiography of art – recognizing, even, the possible gap in the operating machinery in which this work is inscribed, being the historiographical practice always trans-contemporary (SERRÃO, 2007).

## THE JESUIT CHURCH OF SANTO ALEXANDRE

The current building of the Jesuit Church of Santo Alexandre, originally called São Francisco Xavier’s Church, was built by the Society of Jesus in Belém do Pará, between the middle of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century. The Jesuit Complex, which corresponds to the Church and the School, is located in the initial nucleus of the city of Belém. The building of the School has undergone several uses and morphological changes, also functioning as an Episcopal Palace and, currently, as a Museum of Sacred Art. Synthesized here in three main ones, the Church had several moments in which it behaved in different morphological and utilitarian ways.

In its first moment, it was a small, earth-floor chapel, provisional in character, structured by wooden beams filled with palm leaves, with its construction started in 1653 by the father Souto Maior (MARTINS, 2009, p. 185), lasting only until 1668.

<sup>1</sup> Translated from the Portuguese edition: “aspecto quase grotesco” (BURY, 1991, p. 55).

<sup>2</sup> Translated from the original Portuguese edition: “forma tosca e meio bárbara” (BURY, 1991, p. 55).

The second building, using various construction techniques (stone and lime, rammed earth), constitutes a period of intense interventions that began approximately in the year 1670, which gave rise to the third building. At this point, many of the guidelines were established from the constructive priorities related to the School, but with important improvements motivated by the design of the church plan by the chronicler father João Felipe Bettendorff (1625-1698) in 1671 (MARTINS, 2009, p. 201). The church was built askew (BETTENDORFF, 1990, p. 248), with insufficient structure and very thin walls, requiring the reconstruction of a considerable part, with structural reinforcement and the rebuilding of thicker walls in stone and lime, under the orders of the Bettendorff himself (*Ibid*, p. 262). The works of the second building, accompanied by the father Manoel da Silva (1628-1705), designated as works director (MARTINS, 2009, p. 217), can be read as a period of improvements that precede the construction of a definitive church, in the structural, constructive and ornamental aspects.

Regarding the third building, analyzed in this work, there is no precise date for the beginning of the works in the chroniclers' literature and until then found other documentation. It had his consecration mass on March 21, 1719, celebrated by the third bishop of Maranhão and Grão-Pará, at this time, the church is made of stone and lime, instead of the mixed indigenous techniques of rammed earth, wooden beams and palm trees.

The final ornamentation of the church began with the activity of the School de Belém workshops, led by father João Xavier Traer (1668-1737), a Tyrolean sculptor who arrived in the city in 1704, responsible mainly for the woodcarving of the pulpits and altars in the church's chapels. This phase corresponds

mainly to the façade, the woodcarving of the altars and pulpits and the painting of the ceiling of the sacristy (LE BIHAN, 2005, p. 58).

With the help of the descriptions contained in the School Catalog, from 1720, which described the inventory and material heritage of the School and the Church, and in works on the Jesuit Complex (MARTINS, 2009, p. 369; MENDONÇA, 2003, p. 285; LOPES, 2014, p. 108), we can describe the main façade of the church, which is in front of Largo da Sé, as it was in the beginning of the 18th century, as follows: the façade has two towers with bells, with bulbous domes, topped by a jasper cross. The façade is horizontally composed of three panels divided by pilasters ornamented with geometric frames and rosettes, of Mannerist tradition. Vertically, it has a three-story central body, delimited by friezes that extend to the ends of the towers, with three large portals topped by volute pediments on the ground floor and by bay windows on the upper two. The crowning of the church – that is, its pediment – consists of the mirroring of a frieze element composed of large volutes, at the base of the pediment; smaller counter-volutes, at the top of the pediment, and deformed cymas connecting the two elements, which spill over the steeples of the church towers, these, slightly recessed.

## VOLUTES, CYMAS AND COUNTER-VOLUTES

The bibliography on the Jesuit Church of Santo Alexandre, when referring to the combination of these elements on the façade of this Church – volutes, counter-volutes and cymas –, perhaps due to a reductionist habit, uses the term “volutes”, generalizing the elements as if they were one<sup>3</sup>. In this

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<sup>3</sup> For example: “In Belém do Pará the three niches were taken to the pediment and here there was a need to escape the rigid scheme of a straight triangular shape in favor of a pediment composed of *two volutes* that strive to embrace the three niches, producing an unusual Baroque movement in the Jesuit elevations” (TOLEDO, 1983, p. 134, my emphasis and free translation from Portuguese); “Here, however, *the extraordinary volutes* overflow over the stocky towers [...]” (COSTA, 2010, p. 148, my emphasis and free translation from Portuguese); “The frontispiece of the Colégio de Vigia’s Church (1731) is undoubtedly inspired by that of Belém, with its pediment of *two gigantic volutes* [...]” (BAZIN, 1983, p. 104, my emphasis). Le Bihan, however, demonstrates paying attention to the separation of these elements, when he attests to the “[...] use of curves and counter-curves, ending with the set of volutes” (2005, p. 60).

work, I consider the elements as composed of three architectural words, integrated with each other, with atypical formal complexities and peculiarities.

In general, volutes are ornamental architectural elements that accompany the history and treatise of architecture since its classic period. They are elaborated from the spirals found in nature, elements of mathematical and geometric comprehension quite complex, which are curves that, starting from a point of origin, continually decrease their curvature as they move away from the origin; or, in other words, whose radii of curvature continually increase (THOMPSON, 1945, p. 748). The volutes – and the counter-volutes – behave the same way.

On the façade of the Church of Santo Alexandre, the cymas are the curved and ribbed elements that connect the volutes, at the base of the pediment, to the counter-volutes, at the top of the pediment. The cyma is the “frame formed by two arcs of a circle, one convex and the other concave”<sup>4</sup> (BRAGA, 1997, p. 228), and can be called “ogee”. In architectural treaties, the term “ogee” is predominantly used, as in Ferdinando Galli Bibiena (1764, p. 139): “[...] *volendo formar ela fagoma, o contorno dela gola diritta* [...]”.

## DEFORMATIONS

To analyze and refer to the complexities contained in the pediment of the church façade, I use the term “deformations”. Initially, the term may seem imperative and blunt, as can the terms used by historians who approach these objects. I use this term because it addresses three main discussions regarding historiography and epistemology: *irregularity*, *movement of change from the original form* and *questioning of the beauty*.

In their character of irregularity, the elements composed of volutes, cymas and counter-volutes are deformations when analyzed from the mathematical and geometric point of view of the cymas, perceiving them as alterations and technical misrepresentations, approaching treatise based on its grammatical character. This is due to the misalignment of the inflection points, which are the meeting points between the concave and the convex curve, and the geometrically fluid discontinuity of the circumference arcs that make up the cyma.

Regarding the *movement of change from the original form*, the deformation represents the gesture of changing from the original form to the “deformed form”. In other words, it does not refer only to the deformation itself, but to its process, movement and gesture of transgression, encompassing the idea of transition and transformation of something ideal – not in its sense of perfection, but of idealism and abstraction, as geometry and philosophy are essentially – into something that takes shape and does not reach the perfection possible in abstraction, materializing in a complex and critical way.

Referring to the *questioning of the beauty*, the term “deformation” is, in a way, a break with the historiography of the classical canons, which usually do not understand these cases as having high complexity and imaginary power, but only as technical errors and aesthetic deviations.

Using the term “deformation” under this provocative questioning, of deprivation or inquiry of the beautiful, this, determined from the European aesthetic tradition, comes even closer to the essence of the Baroque<sup>5</sup> as a nuance of the bizarre and the extreme, of critical art, or even without refinement, taste and beauty, as was approached by art theorists at the beginning of the spread of the Baroque:

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<sup>4</sup> Translated from the original Portuguese edition: “moldura formada por dois arcos de círculo, um convexo e outro côncavo” (BRAGA, 1997, p. 228).

<sup>5</sup> It is important to reaffirm, therefore, that although the elements composed of volutes, cymas and counter-volutes on the main façade of the Jesuit Church of Santo Alexandre may approach a movement and a Baroque sense as to its *pathos*, the church is more adequately inserted in the aesthetic reading of what is considered as “plain architecture”, “Portuguese mannerism” or “Jesuit mannerism”. Therefore, the church in its entirety is finished off as a hybrid object, the result of various artistic interventions and traditions over the years, mainly in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. I reiterate the obsolescence of the analysis of the *style* or the existence of a *Jesuit style*. Obedience to certain Jesuit guidelines can be perceived, such as practical and technical issues related to size, party, economy and speed (BAILEY, 1999, p. 46), and not essentially the aesthetic or “stylistic” characteristics of the Jesuits.

The idea of Baroque carries with it the idea of ridicule, taken to the extreme. Borromini offered the greatest models of bizarre. Guarini can pass by the Baroque master. The Chapel of the Holy Shroud in Torino, built by this architect, is the most shocking example of this aforementioned taste (QUATREMÈRE DE QUINCY, 2001, p. 159 *apud* BAETA, 2012, p. 15).

It is important to reaffirm that this vision of art without refinement, taste and beauty is present in a large part of the historiographic analyses referring to the Church of Santo Alexandre, as I will exemplify below, promoting the maintenance of a usual aesthetic prejudice that corroborates the distancing of the appreciation of culturally hybrid arts.

The analytical problem of the large “volutes” on the pediment of the Santo Alexandre’s Church is directly linked to the idea of inflection points, both because they are points of mathematical and geometric complexity, and because they are theoretically and ideologically complex. We can understand, from the thought of Gilles Deleuze (2012), the *inflection point* as a critical point, on which the tension, the ambiguity, the complexity and the crisis are concentrated. It is where the fold changes direction, taking on a new center of curvature: where the fold becomes redouble, where it is perceived that the line can play freely (DELEUZE, 2012). The inflection point is exactly in the middle, at the intersection. Therefore, it is neither on the side nor on the other, neither in the concave nor in the convex, neither in the left nor in the right, nor in the top or in the bottom (NUNES, 2018). This point has intrinsic singularity and complex ambiguity. It is the point of turbulence and uncertainty. These deformations are an element that, when it is read and perceived, it stings, attracts, injures, “which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (BARTHES, 1982, p. 26). This point element, of poignancy, is conceptualized by Roland Barthes as *punctum* (*Ibid*, p. 43).

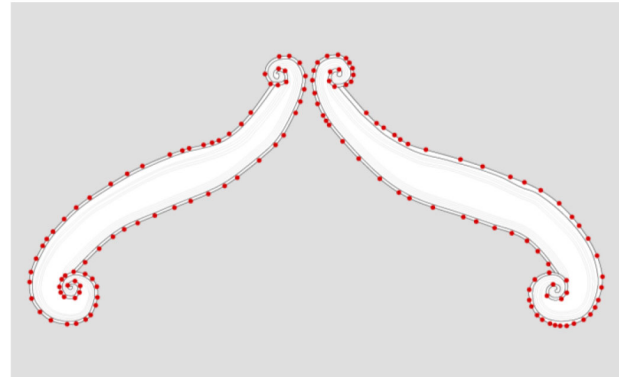


Fig. 2 – *Inflection points.*  
Source: Author.



Fig. 3 – *Symmetry: axial folding of the “volutes”.*  
Source: Author.

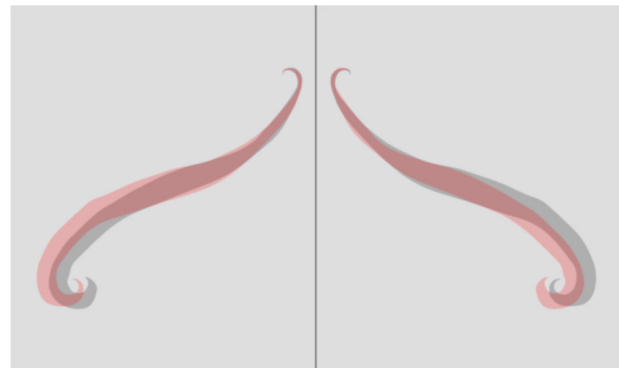


Fig. 4 – *Symmetry: axial folding of the panels formed by the friezes of the “volutes”.*  
Source: Author.

## HISTORIOGRAPHY ABOUT THE OBJECT ANALYZED

Next, I will analyze the historiographic operations of John Bury, Lúcio Costa, Joaquim José Codina and Philip L. Goodwin<sup>6</sup> when referring to the pediment of the Santo Alexandre's Church, be materialized in text, as in the first two cases, either in image, as in the last.

John Bury's historiographical matrix is based primarily on formal aspects<sup>7</sup>, with a universalist-generalist scope. From broad themes and chronologies, he funnels his objects in typological classifications, in case studies, in general aspects of the work, highlighting information in relation to dates, authorships, locations and morphological aspects of artistic objects. As for classification, he uses delimited and objective, tangible groups, which provide a more defined sense of ordering. With this methodology, Bury evidences an evolutionary and linear thought structure, of an objectivist character, seeking to contribute with general information about the formal aspects of the works.

As much as it highlights case studies, his intentions are those of a panoramic historian, who encompasses large temporal, geographical and "stylistic" arcs. He lists, in his analyses, "serial heads" (BRAZÓN, 2018, p. 194), which are examples of objects that open a classifying group of similar; significant specimens, nuclei of irradiation and diffusion of ideals and models. When defining these specific objects, however much he points out some individualities concerning only those works, he does so as a sampling tool, seeking to highlight similarities and

establish greater connections, such as the recognition of an aesthetic current or the attribution of a style.

With this historiographical operation, he finds a shrewd way of trying to overcome the large epistemological fields established by Universalist historiography, focused on major topics. Transposing this matrix to the historiography of art and architecture, the operations of stylistic classification, periodization and formal description are recurrent in Bury's works. It is important to reiterate that, for the author, the definition of style favors form over spirit, adopting the formalist aspect as "original meaning", inherent to the work:

Restricting our definition of stylistic terms to the formal characteristics of the buildings to which they refer may, therefore, seem audacious or even tasteless. However, we will be stepping on dry land and avoiding the quicksand of contradictory conjectures about 'meaning' and 'intention', which are rarely supported by solid and comprehensive evidence from the periods in question (BURY, 1991, p. 209).<sup>8</sup>

As much as there was a historiographical choice of Bury focused on formalism, as for the Baroque, Mariela Brazón points out that the author understood it as "a phenomenon presents in several historical moments" (BRAZÓN, 2018, p. 196), as a *pathos* that went beyond the limits of the 17th or 18th centuries.

As for the aesthetic view of cultural hybridisms and exchanges materialized in the arts of the Jesuits, as in the case of the object analyzed in this article, it is

<sup>6</sup> Philip L. Goodwin (1885-1958) was the organizer of the exhibition and bilingual catalog *Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old 1652-1942*, exhibited at MoMA between January 13 and 28 February 1943. Architect, studied at Yale and Columbia universities, in the United States; he was a member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and designed, together with Edward Durell Stone, the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA – NY).

<sup>7</sup> It is important to emphasize the historiographic importance that Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945) had in defining a historiography of formalist art. Wölfflin started from an assumption that privileged the study of the conception of style, in detriment to the biographical approach of the artists, as it had been predominantly done since Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), as it is highlighted in the title of his important book *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art* (Wölfflin, 2015). Similarities are not only in the establishment of a history of art based on style, but also on a universalist-generalist character, understanding chronological, national and individual variations as bottlenecks of a predominant style.

<sup>8</sup> Translated from the Portuguese edition: "Restringir nossa definição dos termos estilísticos às características formais dos edifícios a que se referem pode, portanto, parecer pouco audacioso ou mesmo inosso. Mas estaremos pisando em terra firme e evitando as areias movediças de conjecturas contraditórias sobre 'significado' e 'intenção', que raramente têm fundamentos apoiados em evidências sólidas e abrangentes dos períodos em questão" (BURY, 1991, p. 209).

important to highlight two aspects. The first is the adoption of European thought as an original parameter, with hybrid works being always interpretations – or normative deviations – of a defined rule, agreed as standard. Therefore, he understands the European tradition in the colonial arts as defining the principles, and the interventions or transformations resulting from this cultural inflammation of the native communities as irregularities in relation to the canon. When he observes these distances in artistic objects, he attests a certain “originality”, with a tone of eccentricity and exoticism. Regarding this view by Bury, Brazón highlights: “he maintains that the supposed ‘ruptures’ may actually be ‘defects’, characteristic of ‘provincial’ productions” (2018, p. 197).

The second aspect concerns the recognition, by Bury, of the adaptability of the artistic programs of the Jesuit groups, generating objects that proposed local readings of the general spirit of the Society of Jesus. This adaptability, as pointed out by Bailey (1999), is one of the main aspects of the corporate, expansionist and logistic character of Jesuit art. These two aspects of Bury’s historiography converge for the understanding of culturally hybrid arts in the context of the colonial performance of the Society of Jesus as recurring, for political reasons, but distorted, under the Eurocentric aesthetic perspective.

John Bury, in *Arquitetura e Arte no Brasil Colonial* (“Architecture and Art in Colonial Brazil”), reiterates this optics when he writes about Santo Alexandre’s Church:

In Belém, the crudest techniques and the lack of familiarity with the classic rules in a way freed the project from the restrictions manifested

in Salvador. The triangular pediment flanked by volutes has been replaced by a curved tympanum, defined only by two very elongated volutes, which will be found under the cross that crowns the set. The steeples of the towers, instead of being narrowed, as in Salvador, were slightly receded and partially covered by the lower spirals of the volutes, as is the case in Coimbra and Antwerp. The global effect is not sophisticated, but it is original and robust, and can actually be called ‘colonial’ in the best sense of the word (BURY, 1991, p. 55)<sup>10</sup>.

Lúcio Costa, in *A arquitetura dos jesuítas no Brasil* (“The architecture of the Jesuits in Brazil”), published in 1941 in the *Revista do Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional* (“Journal the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Service”), presents historiographical and epistemological confluences and divergences in comparison to the work of John Bury. Costa also approaches history and time as an evolutionary process, however, in which there are cyclical oscillations of approach and distance in relation to the classical repertoire. Therefore, there is always a wave of denial after a movement to incorporate classicizing norms, cyclically (MASSERAN, 2006, p. 284).

Sensitive to aesthetic differences and the flexibility of incorporating local cultures in the use of materials and techniques, Costa also uses the comparative method in the analysis of his artistic objects, but does so in the sense of hierarchically equating the characteristics that differentiate them and that unite them under the same Jesuit spirit. He differs, therefore, from Bury, who evidences in the text a greater concern in presenting similarities and globalizing characteristics than the specificities of each work, time and place.

<sup>9</sup> As he does repeatedly in the attempt to define the “Aleijadinho style”, for example, in BURY, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Translated from the Portuguese edition: “Em Belém, as técnicas mais toscas e a falta de familiaridade com as regras clássicas de certa forma libertaram o projeto das restrições manifestadas em Salvador. O frontão triangular flanqueado por volutas foi substituído por um tímpano encurvado, definido apenas por duas volutas muito alongadas, que vão se encontrar abaixo da cruz que coroa o conjunto. Os campanários das torres, em lugar de estreitados, como em Salvador, foram ligeiramente recuados e parcialmente encobertos pelas espirais inferiores das volutas, como ocorre em Coimbra e na Antuérpia. O efeito global não é sofisticado, mas é original e robusto, podendo na verdade ser chamado de ‘colonial’ no melhor sentido da palavra” (BURY, 1991, p. 55).



In the delimitation of his analytical scope, Costa (1941, p. 11) circumscribes his objects to a “Jesuit style”: “When we speak here in Jesuit style, what it means, preferably, are the more Renaissance compositions, more moderate, regular and cold, still imbued with the severe spirit of counter-reform”<sup>11</sup>. Regarding this position, I highlight two very important aspects: the first is the choice of the expression “Jesuit style”, demonstrating the precedence of Costa’s text in relation to crucial works of Jesuit art historiography that combat the existence of a so-called “Jesuit style”, such as the texts of Christ (1962), Patetta (1989) and Bailey (1999), for example. However, the debate about the existence of a Jesuit style was already widely discussed – and its imprecision was verified –, as in the texts of Serbat (1902) and Braun (1907).

The second point is that, perhaps by definition of scope, he distances Jesuit art from the Baroque and brings it closer to Mannerism. I feel, however, that this approximation is made only in the field of architecture, in the definition of party, in the overall morphology of the building, in the composition of the façades and plans, in the spatial diagrammatic definitions. On the other hand, regarding the carving work of the pulpits, for example, the author demonstrates a link – somewhat analogous – to the expressions of the Baroque, not only in its aesthetic characteristics, but also in its heterogeneity and subordination to contextual socio-political issues. There is, therefore, an indication of the aesthetic and spiritual disparity between the interior and the exterior in Brazilian Jesuit buildings.

Lúcio Costa expresses the critical tone that we mentioned earlier in his analysis of the carved works of the Church of Santo Alexandre:

In the composition and carving of both, the same barbaric accent mentioned above is observed when we allude to the architecture of this church. But, despite the crude technique, which sometimes resulted in an almost grotesque aspect, despite the lack of scale and half-tone, the plastic boldness and the passionate sense of the design of the pulpits reveal such fervor, such a rapture, that its analysis does not fit within the measured limits of objective criticism. The impetuosity with which the shapes erupt through the wall above even has something of telluric, reminiscent of Hindu sculptures carved on a mountain slope (COSTA, 2010, p. 161-164)<sup>12</sup>.

In the same work, Costa also testifies that “the extraordinary overflow over the stocky towers” (*Ibid*, p. 148), and continues, still on the Church of Santo Alexandre:

“[...] in a crude and barbaric way, with certain elements so out of scale that they even seem brutal. What, however, is not without its beauty, as well as an authentic fruit of the land, in contrast to the most recent architecture of the city, both religious and civil, architecture from the second half of the 18th century, all of it exquisite and one hundred percent realm (*Ibid*, *ibidem*)<sup>13</sup>.”

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<sup>11</sup> Translated from the original Portuguese edition: “Quando se fala aqui em estilo jesuítico, o que quer significar, de preferência, são as composições mais renascentistas, mais moderadas, regulares e frias, ainda imbuídas do espírito severo da contra-reforma” (COSTA, 1941, p. 11).

<sup>12</sup> Translated from the original Portuguese version: “Na composição e na talha de uns e de outros, observa-se o mesmo acento bárbaro referido anteriormente, quando aludimos à arquitetura dessa igreja. Mas, apesar da técnica grosseira, de que resultou, por vezes, um aspecto quase grotesco, apesar da falta de escala e de meia-tinta, o arrojo plástico e o sentido apaixonado da concepção dos pulpitos revelam um tal fervor, tamanho arrebatamento, que a sua análise não cabe dentro dos limites comedidos de uma crítica objetiva. A impetuosidade com que as formas irrompem pela parede acima tem mesmo qualquer coisa de telúrico, fazendo lembrar esculturas hindus talhadas sobre encosta de montanha” (COSTA, 2010, p. 164).

<sup>13</sup> Translated from the original Portuguese version: “[...] de uma forma tosca e meio bárbara, com certos elementos tão fora de escala que chegam mesmo a parecer brutais. O que, entretanto, não deixa de ter a sua beleza, assim como um autêntico fruto da terra, em contraste com a arquitetura mais recente da cidade, tanto religiosa como civil, arquitetura já da segunda metade de setecentos, toda ela requintada e cem por cento reinol” (COSTA, 2010, p. 164).

Fig. 5 – Main façade of the Jesuit Complex, by Codina, from 1784.

Source: FERREIRA, 1800, board 11.



Similarly, Philip L. Goodwin highlights the distant aspect of the canons from the elements that make up the pediment of the façade of the Santo Alexandre's Church. Interestingly, in his brief account of the church, he highlights the elements analyzed here, as follows:

Church and convent form an agreeable mass on one of the attractive squares of Belém. Squat towers and bid volutes crown a façade remarkable for its naive large scale ornament. The effect is not unpleasant and suggests an inexperienced designer, amateur of Portuguese precedent. (GOODWIN, 1943, p. 76).

As a historiographical representation, but in image, not in text, we realize that the Eurocentric aesthetic line of thought is also manifested in the drawing of Joaquim José Codina (18th century-1790) of the Jesuit Complex. With José Joaquim Freire (1760-1847), he was the designer of the Philosophical Journey of Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira (1800). In the following drawing (Fig. 5), by Codina, the deformation of the cymas was changed graphically – possibly with an intention of correction according to the European aesthetic canons –, resulting in a new representative proposition for the design of the volutes, cymas, counter-volutes and their friezes.

He redesigns the aforementioned elements of the church façade without the deformations, probably guided by canons of architectural design close to those of the architectural treatise *I sette libri dell'architettura* by Sebastiano Serlio (1475-1554), treatise reference close to Codina's work (FARIA, 2001). In this treatise, there is even a repetition of the element *volute-cyma-counter-volute* at different times<sup>14</sup>. It is also possible that this attempt at correction was based on the treatise of Giacomo Barozzi da Vignola (1507-1573), of 1562, considering the important role of the author in the initial and main buildings of the Society of Jesus in Rome and considering his importance in the diffusion of Jesuit, Baroque and Counter-Reform architecture throughout the world, including in colonial missions.

In this case, an historiographical exercise in inversion of perspective is interesting: while Amerindian artistic expressions of European models are usually read as *interpretations, reinterpretations or art of the other*, here there is the reading – and the writing – by a designer of Portuguese tradition and training of a complex object, the result of cultural hybridisms, which does not obey the pictorial and geometric rules to which Codina is accustomed, and he traces it from the tools representative he dominates. This interpretative flow

<sup>14</sup> As in the *Livro Terço*, when he illustrates ornamental motifs from the Corinthian order and the Roman tradition (SERLIO, 1619, p. 100, 105, 107, 111 and 113); in the crowning and corbels of the portal of the *Quarto Livro* (*Ibid.*, p. 125), in the crowning of the niche of the Doric order (*Ibid.*, p. 158); in the frame of doors of the Ionic (*Ibid.*, p. 163) and Corinthian (*Ibid.*, p. 173) orders etc.

is usually done when the Amerindian represents European models, and not when the latter represents hybrid models, as in this case.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

I recognize and emphasize, therefore, two important points in this historiographical discussion and its epistemological matrix. First, it is inappropriate to demand a posture or inattention from these authors in view of aspects that are the result of contemporary thinking and, at the same time, the valuation of perspectives – mainly socio-political<sup>15</sup> – of a current, later or even initial thought at the time when the analyzed texts were written. The adequacy – or the “updating”<sup>16</sup> – of these thoughts to historiography is still given in a complex way, not so fluid and articulate. This recognition does not, however, open up a permissiveness for mistaken conclusions resulting from lack of scientific rigor, inattention or dissonance in relation to primary documentary sources, as in some cases<sup>17</sup>. It is important to remember that every work is contemporary in its time, be it artistic or historiographical.

Based on this assumption, I do not intend to decree this way of thinking, of making history, of operating concepts, of manipulating images, as definitive, ultimate or permanent work. I understand the exercise of writing this text as an opportunity to present just one of the multiple labyrinthine paths that can be taken when studying colonial art and writing about its history. This proposal, formed by the assembly of multiple transdisciplinary and transhistorical variables, proposes a methodological-operative perspective of what is possible and, perhaps, of a recommended structure for studies in the History of Colonial Art. I point out that this is an analysis that is produced in

this early 21st century, with a theoretical framework pertinent to the complexity of the analyzed objects and listed based on personal and intellectual criteria, whose choices about a theoretical structure derive from personal, biographical and affective parameters (EIRÓ, 2014). They are, therefore, totally and recognizably susceptible to obsolescence, to approaches from other perspectives and to criticisms of the angles and scopes determined for the analysis made in this work.

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<sup>15</sup> I highlight the *dialectical materialism* by Marx and Engels, the structural anthropology by Lévi-Strauss, the *power dynamics* in Foucault, the *rhizome* in Deleuze and Guattari, in addition to the resonances of these and countless other currents of thought in contemporary French philosophy, especially.

<sup>16</sup> In this case, I do not use the term “updating” in the sense of “overcoming” or “declaring obsolescence from the past”, but I only mean the methodological ventilation and attention to the reception and review of these other proposals for the dynamics of thinking – and, consequently, of making history – within the scope of the historiography of art and architecture. When it comes to colonial art, it can be seen that this update takes place even more slowly and distantly, as it involves factors that are usually more marginal to the nuclei of scientific discussion.

<sup>17</sup> As highlighted in: MARTINS, *Op. Cit.*, p. 34-35.

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