

Conservation in action

Ouro Preto, monument town

LUIZ GONZAGA TEIXEIRA



Church of São Francisco de Assis, built and decorated in the second half of the eighteenth century by the leading artist of the period, António Francisco Lisboa, known as Aleijadinho.

Known as Vila Rica in the eighteenth century, the present-day town of Ouro Preto has always been linked to the history of Brazil. From its founding in the latter years of the seventeenth century, until its recognition by Unesco in 1980 as a world cultural heritage, it has contributed significantly to the development and unification of the Brazilian nationality.

Located on latitude 20° 23' 28" South and longitude 43° 30' 20" West, and 1100 metres above sea level, Ouro Preto is approximately 500 kilometres from the coast (Rio de Janeiro). It is situated in the ore-bearing zone of the State of Minas Gerais, between the basins of the Doce and das Velhas rivers, and runs through a narrow gorge of the mountain range known as the Serra de Ouro Preto, which is part of the Serra do Espinhaço.

Discovered by Portuguese navigators who arrived in 1500, Brazil continued to be a vast agricultural venture for Portugal. The Atlantic seaboard—almost 6000 kilometres of coastline—was settled by Portuguese, domesticated Indians, and negroes brought from Africa as slaves to work in the sugar cane fields. Cities and towns founded as ports at strategic points along the coast (the majority of which today are capitals of Brazilian coastal states) were then Portuguese transplants acclimatized to the tropics and integrated with the habits and primitive customs of negroes and local natives. However, the Portuguese colonists pursued a fixed idea, that of the existence of precious metals in the discovered land. Taking a commercial attitude in vogue in Europe at the time, which went as far as to confuse wealth with the possession of metals, Portugal nurtured the dream (similar to her Spanish neighbours, enriched with the gold and silver discovered in their colonies of Peru and Mexico), of finding these, as well as precious stones, in the hinterland. After isolated experiences in regions near the coast, expeditions were made by *bandeiras* (armed bands of adventurers) into the interior, and in the latter years of the seventeenth century the longed-for discoveries were made in various parts of the central region of what is now the State of Minas Gerais.

The discovery of gold in river beds encouraged miners to establish themselves nearby, and their numbers increased quickly. These concentrations became hamlets—small gatherings of rough shelters—the more prosperous of which were transformed later on into *vilas* (an administrative category of urban organization established by Portugal).

At the turn of the century there was a process of fast and vigorous occupation of the region. Brazilians from the coast, Portuguese, adventurers of all kinds, and African negroes, came together and were brought to the mines in great numbers, to the alarm of the Portuguese metropolis.

In this situation emerged Vila Rica, today Ouro Preto, the most important of the region's mining centres and, consequently, chosen as the seat of the new *capitania* (in colonial Brazil, a jurisdictional division



Praça Tiradentes: the main square of the town of Ouro Preto. In the background is the Museu da Inconfidência. In the centre, the monument built in honour of Tiradentes. Recently a traffic control plan was put into effect, forbidding the access of heavy trucks to the historic centre and the possibility of forbidding parking of vehicles and loading and unloading in Praça Tiradentes is now being considered.

corresponding to a province). Its history is that of the region of what was known as the Gold Cycle. Vila Rica, which was founded in 1711 soon after the creation of the Capitania of São Paulo and Minas do Ouro, was formed by linking up various hamlets, originating from dispersed mining nuclei and located along the narrow gorge of the Serra de Ouro Preto. They were interconnected at that time by sinuous paths, almost all of which, under their original names, are today districts of contemporary Ouro Preto.

During a phase of urban occupation, called by the architect and historian Sílvio de Vasconcellos 'settling of immigrants',¹ the first decades of the eighteenth century were troubled times, when people had no firm intention of staying there and, consequently, of setting up a system of community life. The urban organization reflected this situation. Existing unplanned paths were transformed into streets where poor and unadorned buildings were put up as dwellings or for the emerging trade. Small and simple chapels became centres of community life. Besides its natural functions as a spiritual centre, the Church began to play a major role in the political and social organization of these emerging communi-

¹S. de Vasconcellos. 'A Arquitetura Colonial Mineira,' in *Primeiro Seminário de Estudos Mineiros* (Universidade de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 1957) p 61. (Conference proceedings)

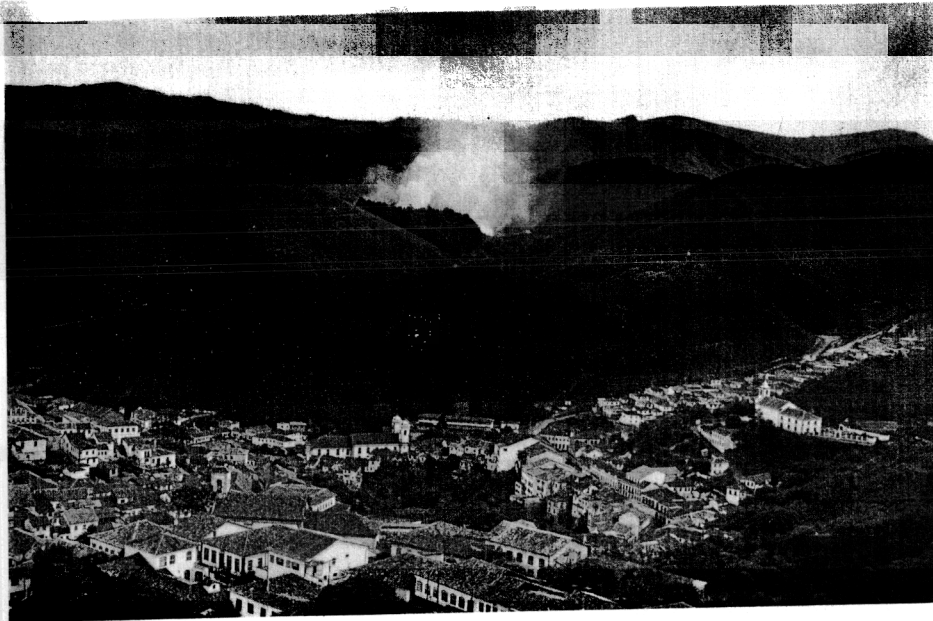
cult. They were economically powerful and relatively independent at the level of religious services, (the priest who conducted them was an employee paid by the brotherhood) and played a role of the greatest significance in the social, cultural and artistic life of Vila Rica and of the Capitania as a whole.

The brotherhoods arose with the building of the first chapels and churches. Under the aegis of the Holy Sacrament, the elite of the hamlet gathered together, the so-called 'good men'—miners, tradesmen and landowners—who took it upon themselves to build the first two churches, the parish churches of Vila Rica.

In the second half of the century, the more important and wealthier brotherhoods had already decided to build their own churches. This phase corresponded to the cultural and artistic peak of Vila Rica, with the brotherhoods acting more as a blend of what are now social clubs and professional associations, rather than as religious groups. The prestige and power of each was expressed by the importance, wealth and artistic value of its church, and thus stimulated the constant inventiveness and research of artists whom they patronized.



Ouro Preto, Rua São José, the main commercial street. On both sides are typical two-storey houses. The ground floor, which has doors only, was intended for trading and the upper floor, with windows and doors opening onto balconies, decorated with handsome railings, was used for residential purposes.



Partial view of Ouro Preto. In the background is the district of Pilar, showing Vila São José on the right. In 1979, torrential rains caused serious landslides: the solution was to flatten out the slopes, removing 600 000 cubic metres of earth. Final stabilization was achieved by planting grass and trees and by installing an efficient draining system. This work cost approximately one million dollars. The smoke is from an aluminum and iron alloy plant which, due to its proximity to the town of Ouro Preto, pours tons of polluting residues into the atmosphere, these later settle on the town's roofs and streets, particularly in the winter when the prevailing winds blow in that direction. Attempts to control this pollution have been made by state government bodies, but so far without success. However in 1983, the National Historical Property Service, together with the University and state bodies in charge of this matter, studied this serious problem further.

ties. The ban imposed in 1712 by the Portuguese on access to the region by priests belonging to religious orders, because of the fear that they would incite rebellions, gave the Church the semblance of a very special institution, with a strongly secular nature. Hence, its contribution towards the development of the Capitania was great, particularly in the second half of the century, when cultural and artistic life was quite different from that in the rest of the Colony, where the European religious orders imposed social, cultural and artistic standards and habits, which were copied and even transplanted from their European houses. In contrast, however, in the Capitania of Minas it was left to the lay community to organize and manage religious life. Forming guilds, the various social groups—lay orders, brotherhoods and fraternities—founded institutions far exceeding their exclusive function of religious



Church of São Francisco de Assis, built and decorated in the second half of the eighteenth century by the leading artist of the period, Antônio Francisco Lisboa, known as Aleijadinho.

The Capitania was experiencing a phase of intense development in its more prosperous villages and hamlets. Attracted by the ever more abundant gold, more strangers continued to arrive. The Portuguese metropolis was increasingly present in its collecting and controlling activity. Apart from the *quinto*, a tax paid for all gold found, new taxes were levied, and the system of administration and control of their collection was improved, in order to avoid fraud through diversion of gold.

The atmosphere of coercion in which they lived, aggravated by the announcement of new and more severe measures to be taken by the Portuguese metropolis, caused rebellions to break out against Portugal in the mines. The Capitania of Minas was created and Vila Rica chosen as its capital, thanks to the growing gold production which contributed to its prestige. Its rising population and local topography defined its urban outlines, which had arisen spontaneously at the beginning of the century around the mines and along the paths that linked up the various hamlets.

Separated by a hill, where later on the town's central square was to be built, on one side was Ouro Preto (a name which afterwards was to apply

to the whole town) and on the other Antonio Dias, both forming the nucleus of the two zones and parishes into which the town is still divided today.

The abundance of financial resources began to become evident in the community which, already separated into diversified social groups, busied itself in organizing the town's life. Its inhabitants set out to build new but simple houses, and at the same time, in a collective effort, replaced the original chapels built at the beginning of the century with larger and more beautiful churches, whose decorative richness was essentially symbolic evidence of their economic power. Craftsmen and artists, Portuguese and men from the coast (all trained in the Baroque style prevailing in Portugal and on the coast), were brought to build these new churches. The earliest were Baroque in composition and typically Portuguese, their austerity and outward simplicity strongly contrasting with the profuse and rich interior decoration of gilded carving. Of



The façade of the Carmo church. (SPHAN: Pedro Lobo)

Church of Santa Efigênia.
(*SPHAN: Pedro Lobo*)



particular interest are the parish churches of Nossa Senhora da Conceição de Antônio Dias and Nossa Senhora do Pilar de Ouro Preto, both built to replace original chapels in the two former hamlets.

In comparison with the impressive and luxurious religious architecture, the fruit of the community's collective efforts, civil architecture was subdued. A few better-kept houses of a superior quality, or some buildings put up by the Portuguese administration, were exceptions to the general rule.

The appearance of Luso-Brazilian towns, their main streets and alleys—almost all narrow and winding—shows a certain degree of uniformity. Buildings are always lined up along the streets, some having one storey, others having two or more; the majority are painted white, with parts of the structure and the wood bridging of the beams painted in various colours. The later ones were sometimes built of stone. Among

the buildings ordered by Portugal, besides some bridges and fountains for supplying water, of particular interest is that intended for the seat of the Capitania government, then called *Palácio Novo*, and afterwards the *Palácio dos Governadores* (Governors' Palace). Built on a slight rise facing the central square, it looks more like a fort than a palace.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, Vila Rica was one of the most prosperous urban concentrations of the Americas, the richest and probably the largest in the Colony. It had a population of nearly 50 000, which was a respectable number for any town of that time. Gold mining reached its climax at that time, when it has been estimated that the amount produced in the Capitania between 1700 and 1750 was over 100 000 kilograms. But as gold is essentially alluvial, it was natural that its abundance should be short-lived, and the last decades of the century saw a progressive drop in production, even though it has not totally ceased even today, in spite of being uneconomic.

Vila Rica did not immediately feel the impact of the recession which was presaged. Only at the end of the eighteenth century did it begin to show signs and symptoms of weakness and stagnation. On the contrary, as so often happens when an economic decline is imminent, it underwent a period of intense social, cultural and artistic activity.

Nativism had taken over the Capitania, particularly Vila Rica, and the generation of those born there began to play a prominent role in the political, economic and cultural activities of local life. In art, a major contribution was made by the mulatto, son of the white man and negress (the number of negroes working in mining was large, greatly exceeding the white population). Many of them were educated in European universities, principally in Coimbra (Portugal), and they had been instilled with the encyclopaedist ideas that were spreading throughout



Parish church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição de Antônio Dias. This church, as well as the parish church of Nossa Senhora do Pilar, was built between 1720 and 1750, during the most opulent period of the former Vila Rica. In contrast with their outer simplicity, their interiors are lavishly decorated with Baroque carving.



Partial view of Ouro Preto; in the centre is the Morro de Santa Quitéria on which is the Praça Tiradentes with the Museu da Inconfidência, the former Casa de Câmara (Municipal Chamber) and Cadeia (Prison). To the left, is the church of São Francisco de Assis and the district of Antônio Dias.

the civilized world at that time. They were joined by Portuguese who were living on the coast of the Colony and had become culturally adapted. There was a common dream, of freedom, of change, of renewal. The desired freedom was not only at the political level, of a Capitania independent from the colonial control of Portugal, but also freedom of artistic creation, of questioning and innovation in relation to standards and criteria prevailing in European aesthetics. This was the rebel spirit that had characterized the Capitania since its early times, and it was being revealed with all the force of the first truly native generation.

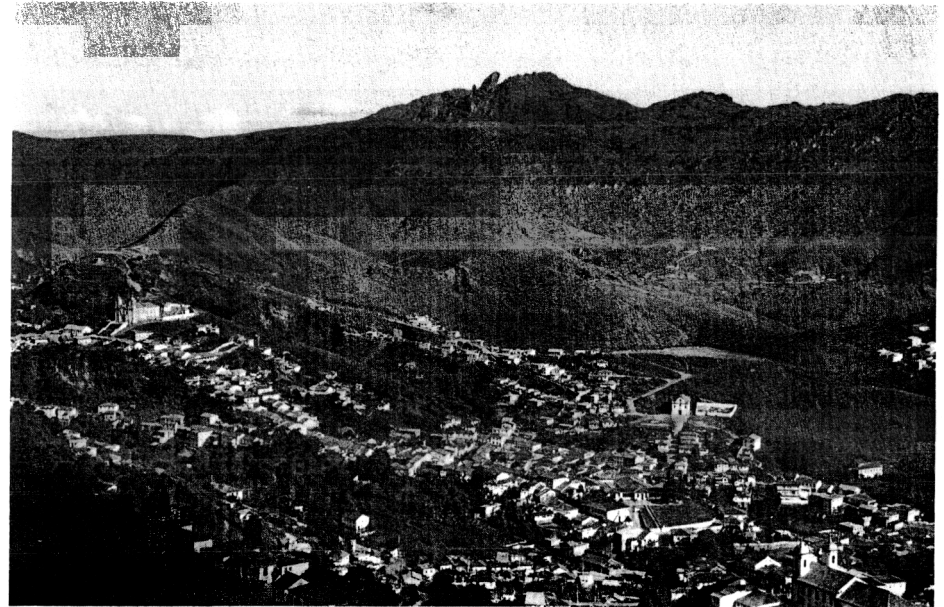
The years 1760 and 1770 were to produce what Brazilian historians generically call the 'Mineira School'. In political philosophy, in literature, poetry and music, in the theatre, architecture and the plastic arts, the creative spirit of the man of the mines was asserting itself. In some areas it was more strongly or originally evident than in others; sometimes it showed audacity and creative inventiveness, with typically local solutions, while at other times it followed European examples more closely.

It was from the 'conflict between the local and the imported',² of indigenous establishment of form, or the duplication of foreign aesthetic examples and standards, that Mineira art, particularly the plastic arts, was

² L.G. Machado. 'O Barroco em Minas Gerais,' in *Primeiro Seminário de Estudos Mineiros* (Universidade de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 1957) p 30. (Conference proceedings)

to take the elements that were to contribute to its marked authenticity and originality in the rest of the Colony. Although there is some question about their local origin (*'mineiridade'*), literary and musical creations were prolific and forceful. However, it was in architecture and in the plastic arts that the craftsmen and artists from Minas Gerais attained a peak in the period's artistic creation.

Long apprenticeship with various masters and craftsmen, both Portuguese and coastal dwellers, who had been living and working for a long time in Vila Rica, combined with the facility provided by the brotherhoods, who in their emulative craving wanted to see their church stand out from the others because of its beauty and originality, created conditions favouring the emergence of new and creative craftsmen and artists. A vast team of architects, builders, master masons, wood carvers, sculptors, painters and gilders devoted themselves to rebuilding, improving and embellishing Vila Rica, erecting impressive and stylish manor houses, public buildings, bridges and fountains and, principally, churches and chapels, as many as were necessary to show the community's power. Among them all, one stood out as the most important



Partial view of Santa Efigênia/Itacolomi. In the foreground is the Church of Santa Efigênia with the steep street leading up to it. Along the street are more recent, popular constructions. In the background are the Serra (mountain range) and Pico (peak) of Itacolomi, an important landmark at the time of the discovery of gold in the region.

Brazilian plastic artist of the colonial period, Antonio Francisco Lisboa, known as Aleijadinho.

Born in Vila Rica in 1738, the son of the Portuguese builder Manuel Francisco Lisboa and a slave, he was afflicted as an adult by an insidious disease which affected his entire body, though mainly his hands and fingers; but this did not prevent him from achieving three great works towards the end of his life. These are the images of the Martyrdom of Christ in polychromed wood for the chapels of Passos, the Prophets in soapstone (a geological variety of steatite) for the shrine of Bom Jesus de Matozinhos de Congonhas do Campo, a hamlet not very far from Vila Rica, and the São Francisco Church in Ouro Preto.

The urban and architectural history of Vila Rica was experiencing its golden age. Taste for, and preoccupation with, comfort were perfected and reflected in the houses of the wealthier residents, whose façades were enriched by the addition of elegantly panelled doors and large windows with balconies or window sills, decorated with ornamental vertical railings and framed cornices. In the more refined examples, handsome stonework replaced wood to form supports, stairs and impressive portals.³ An example of that time was the largest and most imposing residence then built in Vila Rica, known as the Casa dos Contos. Another important monument of the period, in the class of official civil architecture, is the Casa de Câmara (Municipal Chamber) and Cadeia (Prison), built facing the Governor's Palace in the central square and now housing the Museu de Inconfidência.

Aleijadinho's mark of creative originality was to be revealed, however, with all its strength, in religious architecture, in the construction and decoration of churches of the brotherhoods, which at that moment were reaching their period of greatest splendour and most vigorous activity. Although each one shows, in its construction and decoration—wood carving, paintings, imagery and ornaments—a historical meaning and artistic value, that of São Francisco de Assis is conspicuous as a masterpiece of artistic creation, not only of Vila Rica, but of all the Capitania and even the Colony. Built in 1766–94 entirely from the designs of Aleijadinho, who was responsible for everything from the architecture to the carvings, it illustrates the independence which this artist's genius managed to achieve. Combining different architectural elements, Aleijadinho broke away from the rigid rectangle, which was the traditional shape of the churches of Minas Gerais, and designed a light and elegant building in which the curved line predominates, especially in the façade which is thus given a pleasing feeling of movement. From the foundations to the towers, now receding and gentle in their cylindrical shape, the proportion is perfect, with total balance of constructive and decorative elements. The group is completed by the monumental and impressive doorway in soapstone in which are placed medallions showing the symbols of the Order and the images of Our Lady and of São

Francisco no Monte Alverne, framed by angels, beading, garlands of flowers and ribbons that seem to float.

The perfection of the outside continues inside, principally in the high chapel, where the elegant rococo retable of the high altar, the impressive decoration of the dome, with an exquisite angel in the middle and the major saints of the Order placed alongside, the pulpits sculpted in soapstone, all harmonize and bear witness to Aleijadinho's versatility and talent.

Then there are the paintings, principally the large panel in the ceiling of the nave, with the composition in perspective representing the glorification of the Virgin surrounded by an orchestra of angels, which is the work of Manoel da Costa Ataíde, the greatest painter of the region and a colleague of Aleijadinho.

While the 60s and 70s saw this outbreak of cultural and artistic development, it was a time when there was strong pressure from Portugal, because of the progressive drop in gold tax (*quinto*), due to the increasingly lower gold production. A spirit of nonconformity had taken hold of the population, and in the intellectuals of Vila Rica it found its most committed defenders. Rationalists who were well acquainted with the reformist ideas that prevailed throughout Europe, no longer willing to accept Portuguese coercion, planned a separatist independence movement, historically called the Inconfidência Mineira. Led by Joaquim José da Silva Xavier, known as Tiradentes, they began to conspire. However, the movement was thwarted by the imprisonment of its leaders, who were condemned to perpetual exile with the exception of Tiradentes, who paid for his dream of freedom with his death.

A century passed. The dream of gold reached its end. Vila Rica and the entire Capitania, with its depleted mines, was experiencing a different social situation, of political apprehension and economic recession.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the seat of the Capitania had 78 000 inhabitants and nineteen churches and chapels where, without the earlier splendour, social life still went on. From 1823, Vila Rica became known as Ouro Preto and was the capital of the Province of Minas Gerais. The transfer of economic activities to other regions of the province imposed on the capital a stability, reflected basically in its architectural aspects; and the transfer of the capital in 1897 to the city of Belo Horizonte contributed conclusively towards the preservation of that appearance which the present century has valued because of what the town represents in its political, cultural and artistic history.

In the 20s, with the celebration of Brazil's hundredth anniversary of Independence, both the Minas Gerais Bishopric and the Government of the State of Minas Gerais supported the town's protection in what can be regarded as a progressive and pioneering spirit. A combination of efforts in 1933 led the Federal Government to raise it to the status of a National Monument, forbidding any alteration or modification of its urban

³ S. d. Arquiteu in *Primeir Mineiros Minas Ge* (1957) pp proceedir
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reja de Nossa Senhora do Rosário, built in the latter half of the eighteenth century by a negro brotherhood.



appearance. This order was strengthened when, after the creation in 1937 of the National Historical and Artistic Property Service (today the Under-Secretariat of National Historical and Artistic Property), the entire town and its environs was declared a protected national property.

Complex and expensive work then began, and it still continues. Care has to be taken simultaneously to preserve and to recover not only religious and civil monuments, but also private residences ranging from the town centre to outlying zones. As it is a living town, attention must be paid to the reasonable hopes of its inhabitants of making use of the material benefits that progress affords to modern life, adapting them to

the town as appropriately as possible. At the time basically a university and cultural tourist centre, Ouro Preto began in the 1950s to experience a phase of development and urban expansion, as a result of the installation of mineral and metallurgical industries throughout the region; this produced harmful effects for its preservation.

The disorderly occupation of its surroundings and encircling hills, which had been losing their green covering since mining days; the vibration caused by heavy vehicles passing through the narrow and steep streets; the visual pollution of its façades, which commerce and modern services tend to introduce, are among the problems faced by the groups seeking to preserve Ouro Preto.

Conspicuous among these problems is the geological one caused by the movement and sliding of land, which had already begun in the eighteenth century because of the intense mining of the hill slopes that encircle part of the town. Located on land with an irregular relief and uncertain geological formation (great structural complexity of rocks and lithological types with extremely varied geotechnical properties) its stability can easily be affected by the heavy and continual rains common in the region, or by improper cutting of land for urban expansion projects. Starting with the efforts of the federal preservation body (particularly of its former Director, Rodrigo M. F. de Andrade) in 1967–78, the National Highway Department built a by-pass directly linking the capital to the eastern region of the State. This highway also allowed heavy vehicles carrying raw materials and finished products from the metallurgical industry located in Saramenha to be diverted from the historic centre.

The complexity and variety of problems affecting Ouro Preto and the lack of suitable technical studies to enable their correction or prevention, starting with overall planning, led to the preparation in 1968, under the sponsorship of Unesco, by the Portuguese architect Alfredo E. Viana de Lima, of the study 'Renovation et mise-en-valeur d'Ouro Preto'⁴, in which basic recommendations are made for a plan of action for the town. Subsequently, in 1975, the João Pinheiro Foundation of the Minas Gerais Government took those recommendations and produced a broad urban development plan for the town, which has been partly accomplished.⁵

As from 1978, modifications introduced in its organization made it possible for the Under-Secretariat of National Historical and Artistic Property to expand its local activities considerably. The Government of the State of Minas Gerais, the Municipal Authorities and the Federal University of Ouro Preto, were called upon to make a joint effort. This was to consist of the creation of a local technical team which, following its new philosophy of action, was required to take into account the population in shaping the urban philosophy, because, according to the former head of that body, Aloisio Magalhães, 'the community itself is the best guardian of its property'.

Much work has been done since then, both in technical planning

⁴ Alfredo E. Viana de Lima. *Renovation et mise-en-valeur d'Ouro Preto*. (Unesco, Paris, 1970) Number: 1739/BMS-RD/CLT (Photographic reproduction from the originals—limited distribution)

⁵ Fundação João Pinheiro. *Plano de Conservação, Valorização e Desenvolvimento—Ouro Preto—Mariana*. (Belo Horizonte, 1975) (Mimeo)

(preparation of a geotechnical chart, traffic plans and plans for occupying outlying zones) and in building structures for retaining slopes, in the restoration and preservation of monuments and even recovery of private residences in a precarious state of conservation, whose owners are financially unable to repair them.

As regards the stabilization of hillsides in the historic town centre and its vicinity, the technical team, apart from accompanying and supervising the work of building retaining structures near the principal monuments, has been giving technical advice to the Municipal Authorities and to residents; it has also carried out minor drainage works, reforested eroded areas and supplied schemes for retaining walls. The organization of town traffic in the historical centre is a great problem, but a proposal is already in effect forbidding the circulation through the narrow and very steep streets of vehicles with a load of more than five tons.

At an international level, the efforts that have been made by Brazil to preserve and maintain the town, in order to record for posterity one of the greatest monuments of the history of mankind's culture, were rewarded in 1980 when Ouro Preto was recognized by the Executive Committee of World Heritage of Unesco as a World Cultural Heritage.

Résumé

La ville de Ouro Preto, connue au XVIII^{ème} siècle sous le nom de Vila Rica, a toujours joué un rôle majeur dans l'histoire du Brésil. Depuis sa fondation dans les dernières années du XVII^{ème} siècle jusqu'à 1980 lorsque l'Unesco l'inclut dans le Patrimoine Culturel Mondial, elle a contribué de façon significative au développement et à l'unification de la nation brésilienne.

Le Brésil, que les navigateurs portugais découvrirent en 1500, ne représenta pour eux tout d'abord qu'une vaste entreprise agricole avec des ports établis le long de la côte. Mais la découverte de l'or vers la fin du XVII^{ème} siècle dans la région centrale de ce qui est aujourd'hui l'Etat de Minas Gerais aboutit rapidement à la création de centres miniers dont le plus important fut Vila Rica, fondée en 1711. Cet article décrit le développement de la ville et le rôle joué par les communautés religieuses dans la vie sociale, culturelle et artistique. La richesse et la valeur artistique de leurs églises fut le reflet de leur prestige et de leur puissance. De style baroque portugais, elles ont des extérieurs austères qui contrastent avec de riches intérieurs.

La fin du XVIII^{ème} siècle vit la diminution progressive de la production de l'or, mais comme il arrive souvent juste avant un déclin économique, cette

époque fut l'apogée de la vie sociale, culturelle et artistique de la ville. La littérature et les arts reflètent un esprit créateur original qui présida à la reconstruction d'une grande partie de la ville et à son embellissement. L'artiste le plus célèbre fut Antonio Francisco Lisboa, appelé Aleijadinho.

Au début du XIX^{ème} siècle, Vila Rica comptait 78 000 habitants et dix-neuf églises ou chapelles; le transfert graduel de l'activité économique à d'autres régions de la province fit qu'Ouro Preto (ainsi appelée à partir de 1823) ne fut pratiquement pas modifiée; en 1897 elle perdit son rang de capitale de province. Lors de la célébration du centenaire de l'indépendance du Brésil au cours des années vingt, l'Etat et l'Evêché financèrent la sauvegarde du centre historique et, en 1933, il fut classé monument national; en 1937, la ville toute entière et ses environs devinrent propriété nationale protégée.

Mais aujourd'hui Ouro Preto est une ville vivante et ses besoins actuels doivent être pris en compte: la circulation, la défiguration des façades due aux commerces et aux activités modernes, les glissements de terrain à la suite des excavations minières intensives, voilà quelques uns des problèmes qui se présentent à Ouro Preto. Cet article décrit les solutions adoptées.

Resumen

Conocida como Vila Rica en el siglo dieciocho, la actual ciudad de Ouro Preto ha estado siempre vinculada a la historia del Brasil. Desde su fundación durante los últimos años del siglo diecisiete hasta ser reconocida por la Unesco en 1980 como Legado Cultural Mundial, ha contribuido de modo significativo al desarrollo y unificación de la nacionalidad brasileña.

Descubierto por navegantes portugueses que arribaron en 1500, al principio el Brasil fue una vasta empresa agrícola para Portugal con puertos a lo largo de la costa. El descubrimiento de oro en la región central de lo que es ahora el Estado de Minas Gerais a fines del siglo diecisiete llevó a un rápido establecimiento de centros mineros, el más importante de los cuales fue Vila Rica, fundada en 1711. El presente artículo considera el desarrollo de la ciudad y el papel desempeñado por las hermandades religiosas en la vida social cultural y artística. Su prestigio y su poder se vieron reflejados en la importancia, riqueza y valor artístico de sus iglesias. De composición barroca y de gusto portugués, poseen un exterior austero que contrasta con un rico interior.

Las últimas décadas del siglo dieciocho presenciaron una baja progresiva en la producción de oro, pero, como ocurre tantas veces cuando es inminente el

decline económico, fue éste el período más intenso de la vida social, cultural y artística de la ciudad. Un espíritu original y creador era evidente en literatura y en las artes, y Vila Rica fue reconstruida y embellecida en su mayor parte. El artista principal fue Antonio Francisco Lisboa, conocido como Aleijadinho.

A principios del siglo diecinueve, Vila Rica tenía 78 000 habitantes y diecinueve iglesias y capillas, pero la gradual transferencia de las actividades económicas a otras regiones de la provincia dejó a Ouro Preto (su nombre después de 1823) relativamente inmutable; y en 1897 dejó de ser la capital de la provincia. Durante la década de 1920, como parte de la celebración del centenario de la independencia del Brasil, la protección de la histórica ciudad fue apoyada por el Estado y por el Obispo; y en 1933 fue declarada Monumento Nacional. En 1937, toda la ciudad y sus alrededores fue declarada patrimonio nacional protegido.

Con todo, Ouro Preto es una ciudad viva y hay que dar cabida a las necesidades actuales. El aumento de tráfico; la degradación visual de las fachadas por el comercio y los servicios modernos; los corrimientos de tierras resultantes de la minería intensiva: estos son algunos de los problemas con que se enfrenta Ouro Preto, y el presente artículo examina lo que se está haciendo en este sentido.

Professor Luiz Gonzaga Teixeira is adviser to the Under-Secretariat of National Historical and Artistic Property (SPHAN) in Minas Gerais. He graduated in Law and History at the Minas Gerais Federal University where he is professor of the History of Art and Movies. He is also adviser to the Culture Coordination of the State of Minas Gerais, where he occupies a place on the Culture Council.

Professor Dimas Dario Guedes [author of captions to the illustrations] is the Director of the Under-Secretariat of National Historical and Artistic Property (SPHAN) responsible for the State of Minas Gerais. He graduated in geological engineering at the Ouro Preto Federal University, where he has been teaching for many years. Now he coordinates the Preservation Program of Ouro Preto. He is also a member of the board of Directors of the Art Foundation of Ouro Preto and a member of the Brazilian Committee of ICOMOS.