



Antonio Miranda García, *designer*

Madrid, 1710 – Avilés, 1786

Jerónimo Antonio Gil, *engraver*

Zamora, 1731 – Mexico City, 1798

Detailed Design of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Covadonga

1759

Engraving: copper, etching and burin on whitish silk

Plate mark: 320 × 409/415 mm

The Sanctuary of Covadonga as we know it today is a relatively modern architectural complex. To find out what it looked like originally, before the fire that destroyed the **Church of the Santa Cueva** in 1777, we can refer to a number of artistic representations. One of the most important is this **print**, which was made just a few years before the catastrophic blaze.

The sacred image of the Virgin Mary is raised on a cloud, at the top of the scene, accompanied by the figures of **Pelagius of Asturias** and his son **Favila**, both of whom are kneeling in prayer. It is surprising to see the Virgin Mary given such a small space within the composition, but this is because the designer preferred to focus on the site's geography, architecture and human landscape, from a simultaneously topographical yet reverent perspective. It is as though he wished to present us with a detailed view of each of the constituent parts of Covadonga. The most notable of these is directly below the Virgin Mary: it is the **original church inside the cave**, which, held up by a wooden scaffold, appears to be floating in the air above the water cascading down the rock. This “floating” appearance inspired the legend that the church was built by angels.

The funding for this particular print came from the **Royal Congregation of Our Lady of the Battles and of Covadonga**, a religious confraternity that was based at the **church of the Convent of San Hermenegildo** in Madrid. For many years, the print was used to teach worshippers and interested members of the public in Madrid about the unique nature and extraordinary symbolism of the locale that is home to the Sanctuary of **Covadonga**, and its relationship to the beginnings of the so-called *Reconquista*. Indeed, the illustration was so popular that it was reprinted numerous times. It served as a tool to promote not only faith, but also the concept of Covadonga as a **sanctuary for the Spanish nation**, and as the setting for the remote and heroic genesis of the Spanish monarchy.

The notion of identifying a sacred image with a specific place is an interesting one. In this way, the three aspects that define this sanctuary and its representation come together: **landscape, piety, and history**.