

DECONSTRUCTING CONVENTUAL FRANCISCAN SCHOOLS:  
SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE,  
DECORATION, AND NAHUA  
EDUCATIONAL SPACES

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Deconstructing Conventual Franciscan Schools: Sixteenth-Century Architecture, Decoration, and Nahua Educational Spaces

In the sixteenth century, during a process commonly called the “spiritual conquest,” evangelical priests refashioned Mesoamerican temples and schools into Christian churches and convents. Traditionally, scholars regarded this aspect of the Spanish Conquest as a top-down, foreigner-derived process of immediate cosmogenic transformation. Utilizing interdisciplinary methodologies and relying on Nahuatl voices, this thesis contributes to the recent scholarly effort to reinterpret spiritual conquest theory. This study compares and contrasts pre-contact and colonial schools, education techniques, and symbolic ornamentation in order to “read” the iconography and layout of the courtyard of the convent of San Andrés Calpan as a text. In the end, this thesis argues that visually-bilingual Nahua communities, using an existing architectural vernacular, created a *nepantla* or “a middle place” perfect for mutual misunderstandings and the persistence of local indigenous narratives alongside institutional Christian ones. Thus, Mesoamerican gods lived on in the very places designed to destroy them.

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## DEDICATION

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

So it is clear to what a great degree the discovery—that is, the revelation—of a sacred space possesses existential value for religious man; for nothing can begin, nothing can be done, without a previous orientation....

-Mircea Eliade<sup>1</sup>

Walking around the bone-white walls of old Christian schools in Mexico one might forget that even older stone buildings once stood in their place. As modern observers, devout Catholics or tourists alike, we lack the context of the student's view from the center point that once existed in the churchyard. As religious historian Mircea Eliade noted, "without a previous orientation" one fails to grasp the cultural significance, his "cosmogenic value," of the constructed sacred spaces where knowledge once passed from teacher to student.<sup>2</sup> We forget that the churchyards and churches of colonial New Spain were schools.<sup>3</sup> But even then, if we've caught on to the idea that these walls once embraced religious instruction, we trick ourselves into assuming that we know the stories they told. On the surface we find detailed carvings of biblical events, winged angels and saints gloriously rendered in gothic and plateresque style. In these open spaces powerful Christian stories once echoed off the surfaces and fell upon the ears of indigenous students. We might then begin to view the old convents of Mexico as a defining part of the memory of the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Their presence marks the countryside with a story of a triumphal Church, a Christian conquest over what existed before. Thus,

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<sup>1</sup> Eliade, "The World, The City, The House," found in *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions* (1976), 22; this quotation continues: "...—and any orientation implies acquiring a fixed point... The discovery or projection of a fixed point—the center—is equivalent to the creation of the world. Ritual orientation and construction of sacred space has a cosmogenic value; for the ritual by which man constructs a sacred space is efficacious in the measure in which it reproduces the work of gods."

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "New Spain" was the official name of Mexico under Spanish rule.

the fixed point of the Spanish conquest is our beginning—our pivot point—into what happened before, and what happened after. By reconstructing the sacred space through measured steps, we learn about the other stories that once were spoken there, amidst the old bones of conventual schools.

There is a story of a completed Spanish conquest of the Americas. This story, based primarily on the written record left by the colonizers, encompasses a physical and psychological transformation brought on by Iberian entrepreneurs and Catholic evangelizers.<sup>4</sup> They, with ruthless efficiency, obliterated pre-colonial social networks, dominated political and financial economies, and, through war, disease, and displacement, shattered human life in the Americas. According to early professional histories written in the nineteenth century, Spanish colonization was an immediately effective, top-down process that defeated existing systems.<sup>5</sup> Native Americans were simply the victims (and, by some accounts, the beneficiaries) of a historical progression from savage societies to civilized subjects of the Spanish Crown.<sup>6</sup> Their story, accepted well into the twentieth century (and still alive in the twenty-first), was and is a dramatic story of spiritual and cultural domination, or, as Robert Ricard famously labeled this

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this study I use the term “Iberian” to distinguish Europeans coming from the Iberian Peninsula, (modern day Spain and Portugal) to the Americas in the sixteenth century. At the time, the peninsula consisted of numerous kingdoms (León-Castile, Aragon, Navarre, Portugal) the majority of which were freshly unified by the Catholic Monarchs Isabel I and Ferdinand II during the *Reconquista* (a gradual displacement of Arabic-speaking Islamist groups out of the lower Iberian Peninsula. For more on the multifaceted “Spain” in the lead up to American contact, see Bernard F. Reilly, *The Medieval Spains* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, [1993] 2009).

<sup>5</sup> William H. Prescott, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico, with a Preliminary View of Ancient Mexican Civilization, and the Life of the Conqueror, Hernando Cortés* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincot & Co. 1874).

<sup>6</sup> Stephanie Wood, *Transcending Conquest: Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 3-4; see also Matthew Restall’s thoughts on what he calls the “myth of completion;” *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 65.

experience, the “spiritual conquest.”<sup>7</sup> No tangible symbol helps to better solidify this old conquest narrative than the Ibero-Christian appropriation of indigenous sacred space, or the architectural transformation of indigenous material culture. Where once stood Mesoamerican temples now stand Christian churches. The assumption here is that acculturation, or the imposed cultural education conducted by Spanish agents, may be equated with the thorough Spanish acculturation, or Hispanization and Christianization of the Mesoamerican landscape.

There are obvious flaws in this assumption. Referring regularly to the use of architecture in Christian conquest and education, Ricard neglected cosmologies outside of the European religious paradigm, making his landmark study an incomplete discourse. Ricard understood the “main purpose” of sixteenth-century evangelization as a Christian mission to “create a new environment, in which to allow a new spirit to unfold.” According to this author, the process was completed through physical and mental domination, and later, he lauded it from a distinctly Eurocentric perspective,

[I]t would be Christ who obsessed the Indian... He would find [Christ] in the monasteries, where he was taught the catechism, reading, and writing; in the churches, where magnificent ceremonies were staged... He would find Him in the streets and square of his village. Here stood the church; there the processions marched past; and there was the stage for the next *auto sacramental*. ... The missionaries of Mexico transmitted to their Indians a whole Christianity, for Christianity really deserves its name only when it informs and penetrates.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay On The Apostolate and The Evangelizing Methods of The Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966), 163-175; Relying sparingly on indigenous sources, Ricard’s expansive study amalgamated the conversion efforts of the three first religious orders to arrive in Mesoamerica (Franciscan, Dominican, and Augustinian) into a narrative of conquest through conversion. Ricard believed that two forms of evangelism, or “two principal missionary attitudes”, had eventually defeated pre-contact religions. First a tabula rasa understanding that “with obvious exceptions... [that] prevailed in the old missions of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.” The second attitude was a mid-nineteenth century evolution in Christian thinkers to accommodate “decadent” or “backward” religious practices (284).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 291

For Ricard and his ilk, the physical presence of Christian structures and concepts dismantled and consumed local Nahua traditions.<sup>9</sup> He failed to consider how Nahua Catholics might have interpreted Christ's ubiquitous presence in light of their own culture and traditions. Fortunately, a growing discourse of "New Conquest History" is shedding light on the fundamental inaccuracies underlying these assumptions.<sup>10</sup> But "New" is certainly a misnomer. Beginning with Charles Gibson's attention in the 1950s to elite Nahua records from Tlaxcala and continued in the work of the School of New Philology in the 70s and 80s, investigations into what Nahuas and other Native American groups thought of the contact and conquest had remained sidelined by the thick tradition of consensus historians writing in the nineteenth century, epitomized by William H. Prescott's enduringly influential *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*, (1843). For more than fifty years after Gibson published his signature work about Tlaxcala, scholars have examined and reexamined the sources, adding new interpretations of the wealth of indigenous documentation before, during, and after Spain's colonial period—for the purposes of this study, roughly 1492 to 1820.<sup>11</sup> New Conquest Historians have grown more vocal in the discourse of Latin American history. Susan Schroeder describes the current focus as "boldly [shifting] attention from the familiar, singular Spanish version of

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<sup>9</sup> The Nahuas (Nahuatl speakers) were the dominant ethnicity of central Mexico at the time of Spanish contact, numbering among them the so-called Aztecs as well as other significant members of the empire of the Triple Alliance.

<sup>10</sup> Susan Schroeder, "Introduction," in *The Conquest All Over Again: Nahuas and Zapotecs Thinking, Writing, and Painting Spanish Colonialism*, (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 8.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Gibson, *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952); Prescott, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*, (1843).

what [transpired] during the taking of the Aztecs' capital and... challenges it with a new, vital literature produced by and for the natives themselves.”<sup>12</sup>

Though some scholars persist in the old story of the conquest, many recent scholarly works have instead reframed the discussion of “immediate and thorough domination and destruction” into one that includes the dynamic and gradual process of indigenous self-determination.<sup>13</sup> New Conquest Histories re-cast the story of colonization with a more shaded and nuanced perspective on colonization. These studies demonstrate the interdependent relationship between Native Americans and Spanish immigrants. They measure the degrees to which Spaniards actually struggled to maintain indigenous social, political, and economic practices. Significantly, we begin to see an inverted shape of colonization, one where indigenous Americans actively influenced and maintained a measure of autonomy from their colonial overlords by developing their own evolving identity after contact. This process is most apparent in the work of James Lockhart, such as in his collaborative work in *Beyond the Codices* (1976), which was a seminal production of translated and analyzed “everyday” Nahuatl documentation, and later in his individual effort, *The Nahuas After the Conquest* (1992), as well as in the research and publications of his former UCLA students from the 1980s forward.<sup>14</sup> This group of New Philologists has focused on including or “elevating indigenous perspectives” found in indigenous historical narratives and more mundane indigenous-language documentation has greatly advanced the field’s understanding of how the daily life of indigenous

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<sup>12</sup> Schroeder, “Introduction,” 8.

<sup>13</sup> Wood, *Transcending Conquest*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> James Lockhart, Frances Berdan, and Arthur J.O. Anderson, *Beyond the Codices: The Nahuatl View of Colonial Mexico* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976); Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

communities actually changed.<sup>15</sup> In a sense, colonization and conquest were never “completed,” only new pressures, now on a global scale, began to shape colonial identities over time. Excepting a few recent contributions to the field, that is not the story historians have told about sixteenth century architecture and what those created spaces meant to the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

According to one Franciscan, fray Gerónimo de Mendieta, the clergy active in sixteenth-century New Spain, sought to “strengthen the softness” of the spiritually “weak Indians” that they encountered in the Mexican countryside.<sup>16</sup> They believed that such strengthening had to be centered on education with “solid doctrine” in the confines of conventual schools. This was a time when widely diverse societies—Mesoamerican and Iberian—collided in a physical and psychological confluence of cultures. The transatlantic exchange of ideas, people, and goods in the sixteenth century radically affected human interactions on a global scale. One of the most crucial arenas of collision and exchange was indeed found in the colonial conventual schools. In the contained open-air courtyards of Catholic convents where Spanish friars looked to convert and educate the indigenous population so that they would become thoroughly devout Catholics. As Mendieta explained, Franciscans specifically envisioned a “terrestrial paradise” of indigenous “pupils, not teachers, parishioners, not priests,” living on “islands” of “good Christianity.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Wood, *Transcending Conquest*, 5-8; for more on the historiographical process of the school of New Philologists see Matthew Restall, “A History of the New Philology and the New Philology in History,” *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2003).

<sup>16</sup> John Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of The Franciscans in The New World: A Study of The Writings of Gerónimo de Mendieta (1525-1604)* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1956), 48, quoting Mendieta, *Historia ecclesiastica indiana*, IV, 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 66, quoting Mendieta, *Historia ecclesiastica Indiana*, III, 103-104.

Whether in the first *colegios* (colleges) in places such as Tlaxcala or the city of México-Tenochtitlan, or in the less famous monastery courtyards of the rural indigenous heartlands, Spanish evangelizers established environments of learning.<sup>18</sup> Immediately upon contact, Iberians and Native Americans devised ways of communicating and exchanging languages and iconography, and the classroom was but one locus of this ensuing colonial dialogue. In the early-modern period, on both sides of the Atlantic, religious specialists had operated as educators, and religion was education. Iberian schools were based on Greco-Roman academy designs combined with Christian concepts of sanctified ecclesiastic architecture and iconography. In Mexico, these Cristo-Pagan traditions butted-up against a plethora of deep-rooted indigenous architectural and religious traditions (just as they had done as Christianity spread across Europe). In the Americas, these traditions ranged from pictographic ideograms, painted pictures encoded with meaning, to oral narratives and mnemonic tools embedded in song and dance; in Iberia, educated peoples defined themselves through literacy in alphabetic writing, but even so the larger illiterate populace relied heavily on iconography and song and dance. As Spanish colonizers moved across the American continents, local and regional variations in classroom design were the norm; the pre-Hispanic linguistic and societal diversity that spanned the Americas greatly influenced the types of colonial classrooms that took root, and this study highlights only a handful of important examples of this process.

How then did the student body—specifically the indigenous students attending these schools, as well as those who built them in the decades after initial contact—

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Nesvig called the school an underpinning to the “triumphant Catholicism” model; “Introduction,” in *Local Religion in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico, 2006), xviii.

contribute to the developing educational space? How and why were Franciscan friars willing (or perhaps even forced) to innovate to the extent that they took pre-contact ways into account? In other words, what kinds of cultural, architectural, and symbolic dialogues emerged in the creation and operation of the colonial educational program for indigenous peoples, and who was responsible for this process?

### **Historiography, Theory, and Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to track the legacies of the “intercultural” Christianization and colonization that took place in Mexican schools.<sup>19</sup> Following the lead of the New Conquest Historians, my research incorporates indigenous voices and documentation into the historical narrative of education. I examine their contact and conquest narratives, their creation and foundation myths, and their root metaphors found in the visual and material devices used to trigger memories of these stories. I agree with scholars who have lately come to believe that “[m]yth, oral tradition, collective memory, and history all seem to end up being about legitimization in some way.”<sup>20</sup> Sixteenth-century Nahua students found expressions of their community’s legitimacy inscribed on the walls of the open-air convents, just as their predecessors had centuries before in temple courtyards. But the new post-contact schools were more intercultural, more complex, even if that had not been the aim of the clergy who founded them. Though Spanish priests and Viceregal authorities employed education as a tool of conquest, part

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<sup>19</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell commented on the ways that disparate cultures first make “intercultural contact” through sight and visual stimuli—gestures, the meeting of the eyes, etc—a form of communication that he posed was apt for “misrecognition, distortion, and a disfiguration of the other,” “Iconology, Ideology, and Cultural Encounter: Panofsky, Althusser, and the Scene of Recognition,” in *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450-1650*, edited with an Introduction by Claire Farago (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 292-293.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Haskett, *Visions of Paradise: Primordial Titles and Mesoamerican History in Cuernavaca* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 56.

of what was supposed to be a unidirectional transformative process, indigenous students made these educational environments into local cultural and spiritual “middle ground” and thus inverted the process of spiritual conquest.<sup>21</sup>

Ironically, Nahua cultural traditions carried on in the educational spaces that were meant to conquer them. They used these schools to “seek origins and to explain the past as well as the influence of the past in the present,” and in doing so they encouraged the persistence of pre-contact beliefs.<sup>22</sup> In a sense, persistence on the part of indigenous agents shaped the forms of colonization in colonial schools, just as much as institutional and ecclesiastical policy. As I see it, structures and architecture matter as a gauge of cultural and spiritual hegemony.<sup>23</sup> To make this argument, I examine the visual and material culture of the Nahuas of central Mexico, specifically groups living in the valley

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<sup>21</sup> In 1991, Richard White famously ventured into the discourse of frontier studies with his *The Middle Ground*, wherein he examined the multifaceted interactions between French and Anglo colonizers and the indigenous peoples of the northern modern United States (namely the *pays d'en haut* zone near the Great Lakes). White’s theory, like Lockhart and Burkhart before him, unpacked the specific socio-political interactions between Europeans and Native Americans and his work demonstrates indigenous agency on the part of Native American communities; specifically, he looked at the “mutual misunderstandings” between them and the “virtues of misreading” that groups and individuals may have found in these interactions. For White’s reaction to the reception of his work over the past two decades, see White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815*, Cambridge University Press, (2011 [1991]), xi-xxiv; though this thesis gets at similar spaces of contestation (“practices, rituals, offices, and beliefs”), I emphasize Burkhart’s concept of *nepantla* (“middle place”)—which is in turn based on a concept introduced in the work of the sixteenth-century Dominican chronicler, fray Diego Durán—to highlight the religious themes that she explored.

<sup>22</sup> Haskett, *Visions of Paradise* (2005), 55.

<sup>23</sup> I see similar themes threaded through recent works about the US education policy enacted against Native Americans in the nineteenth century; apparently, under a colonial regime acculturation and identity (trans)formation were never a zero-sum game. David Wallace Adams noted that US policymakers confronted pre-existing cognitions with textbooks in their devised “curriculum of civilization” imposed on Native Americans, but that “cultural preservation” was one form of indigenous resistance to enculturation; *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 223, 233-234; scholars, such as K. Tsianina Lomawaima, have begun to re-characterize the power dynamics in US boarding schools (on and off reservations), especially acts of resistance and cultural persistence in the very places that were built to destroy it; see, *They Called it Prairie Light: The Story of the Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994; also the coauthored volume with Teresa McCarty, *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy From a Century of Native American Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006).

east of Tenochtitlan-Mexico; however, I refer to other Native American ethnic groups when comparative examples are particularly revealing. Besides archaeological evidence, I rely on pre-contact Nahua pictography, iconography, and post-contact documentation.

As the first meaningful educational contacts in Mesoamerica, Franciscan evangelizers left us a plentiful array of sources, and I use their semi-ethnographic works, their chronicles, and histories to better contextualize Spanish ideologies and instruction pedagogies of the time. They established the first universities and scholastic monasteries, and they led the spread of Catholic, Iberian lifeways among the people of Mexico.

Though steeped in Eurocentric, or better, Ibero-centric paradigmatic perceptions, colonial Spanish authors and artists documented aspects of indigenous culture, and their girth of documentation is a vital source for ethnohistorians. Consequently, I read against the grain of many of these Spanish sources for evidence of indigenous cultural persistence and change. Since *both* non-natives and natives participated in the construction, ornamentation, and use of contact education spaces, the resulting pictures, carvings, and even written didactic texts can also be seen as at least “indigenous” in their worldview.

As I hope my research will demonstrate, an ironic feature of the so-called spiritual conquest is the decolonizing encounter that took place between Nahuas and Spaniards on the local level in colonial sacred spaces and Franciscan schools. Here I intend to follow in the footsteps of anthropologist Louis Burkhart. In her inspiring reevaluation of the “spiritual conquest,” *The Slippery Earth* (1989), she harvested terminology and concepts from Spanish authored and influenced sources, including alphabetic Nahuatl doctrinal and didactic texts, to determine the mixed messages that Nahuas confronted during Christian indoctrination. Her study demonstrated that colonial conversion was much

more a “dialogue” between priests and neophytes.<sup>24</sup> Burkhart advanced the concept of “nepantlism,” based on a Nahuatl term (*nepantla*) that means “in the middle.” She applied this term to those discursive spaces where Nahuas and Iberians communicated ideas about the sacred. She explained these spaces metaphorically as “combining a Christian surface with a Nahua structure,” but the combination was not syncretic, a “half-way meeting between complementary elements,” instead it was a hybrid space with both Christian and non-Christian aspects coexisting.<sup>25</sup> I extend this metaphor to the physical, displayed on the surfaces of Nahua architecture, and the hybrid *nepantla* that the Nahua builders created.

A form of this spiritual middle ground existed in the pre-Christian period in Mesoamerica. In fact, David Carrasco’s valuable contribution, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire* (1982) revealed that Mesoamerican empires had long struggled to maintain stability with an imperial religious identity, one based on ancient cyclical creation and destruction narratives that faithful citizens expected to be repeated. He traced the concept of the ideal Mesoamerican urban utopia, its architectural layout and the heroes of its foundation event, back to the Toltecs of central Mexico, and their sacred “primordial” city of Tollan (Tula), the capital city of the Toltecs (occupied from 900 to 1100 CE).<sup>26</sup> In the centuries following the fall of the Toltecs, successive Mesoamerican institutions

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<sup>24</sup> Louis Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 188; Jaime Lara recently described Burkhart’s theory as a “mestizaje... a religious nepantli, a middle zone where cultures and people met and intermingled;” his description is more muddled and syncretic, his rendition of the Nahuatl word is incorrect, and he retracts a bit from Burkhart’s foundational work; *Christian Texts for Aztecs: Art and Liturgy in Colonial Mexico* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 262.

<sup>26</sup> David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000 [1982]), 65.

attempted to claim legitimacy by adopting Toltec religious symbols, specifically the ideal urban layout of Tollan, and the ideal religious authority of Quetzalcoatl, the plumed-serpent god of wind.<sup>27</sup> In the end, Spaniards may have thought they represented change, but, according to Carrasco, this change fit well within the worldview of pre-existing Mesoamerican narratives.<sup>28</sup> In fact, the inclusive aspect of Mesoamerican spirituality allowed for it to mesh well with a similar flexibility found in Iberian Christianity.

Christians of the Iberian Peninsula at the time held tight to their own “local religion,” regardless of institutional dogmas as well.<sup>29</sup> As William Christian, Jr., explained in *Local Religion in Sixteenth Century Spain* (1981), Catholic doctrine remained relevant because of its flexibility on a local level.<sup>30</sup> Tracking community worship of specific saints and persistent monistic supernatural events, this scholar demonstrated that, though rituals began to look more like institutional Christianity on a superficial level, rites and devotion to the animated sacred world with roots in the pre-Christian past endured throughout the sixteenth century.<sup>31</sup> In fact, though administrators in the Catholic upper echelon began to rein in what they perceived as heretical practices by local religious communities, the inability of the state to delineate the top-down

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 192, 204.

<sup>29</sup> William Christian, Jr., defined “local religion” as distinct from simply “religion as practiced and religion as prescribed,” what is commonly called “popular religion,” explaining that the local variant is “tied to a specific place and a historical constituency.” The power of local versus state religion exists in the conservative “resistance to changes imposed on the terms of the outsider;” *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 178.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 176-178.

<sup>31</sup> For example, Christian examined the miraculous cures that Iberians actualized through devotions to shrines and sacred sites; *ibid.*, 93-105.

orthodoxy of Christianity allowed for the bottom-up heterodoxy to persist.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Christian, Jr., reframed the concept of the spread of Christianity. Instead of a top-down imposition of a church or religious site of worship and the priesthood that managed how locals interacted with the sacred space, he found that locals discovered/created sacred space themselves. Only later did the community demand religious specialists and recognition from the Church.<sup>33</sup> Iberian Christianity looked far different to locals than it did to most priests trained in doctrine and Catholic dogma. In a way, the hierocratic monarchy needed to adopt and then simplify a complex web of local beliefs in order to manage its subjects with efficiency. This was an imperial system that found new challenges to hierocratic authority in the colonization and Christianization of the Americas.<sup>34</sup>

Along these lines, James Scott's theory of "legibility" becomes an extremely useful analytical tool: the constant attempts of state apparatuses to reduce the nonconforming variations of its constituent parts on the local level down to simple manageable pieces can serve as a convenient conceptual model for the study of early-modern period central Mexico. Though not as sophisticated as the high-modern states

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<sup>32</sup> In the 1570s and 80s, the Catholic Church, led by the papacy, began documenting and regulating the authenticity of Christian relics and sacred items; *ibid.*, 137-146.

<sup>33</sup> Christian Jr., noted an under-riding notion of property ownership in Spain, wherein "[l]ocal religion was a fusion of sacred and secular, god-in-society or god-in-landscape. And the ultimate head of that society and lord of that landscape was the king... Certain ritual acts of modern diplomacy by heads of state" ritualized local shrines, thus reinforcing their legitimacy as ruler, but also the significance of the symbolic site. But who really controlled these sites were local lay brothers and brotherhoods. Thus, local devotions in the form of vows given to local patrons was "left largely untouched" by institutional demands for conformity; *ibid.*, 158, 166, 175-176.

<sup>34</sup> Like a "legible forest," the "simplification of measures," or what is left out of cadastral maps, early-modern state institutions are regularly limited by their ability to understand local complexity, and therefore, they oftentimes remove it; James Scott, *Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 18-19, 30-32, 44-47.

that Scott's study confronts, the institutions of the Catholic Church and the Spanish monarchy, though constrained by the communication technologies of their day, still pursued a scientific reasoning based on natural laws, only at the time, science was religion. In the early-modern period, we still find a "faith" in the "comprehensive planning of human settlement and production," plans that at the time were "scientifically" derived through what was perceived to be God's will, which in theory became that of the state.<sup>35</sup> Similar to the state's collection of taxes and imposition of a legible categorization upon its citizenry in the high-modernist state, I find the sixteenth-century Spanish imperial enterprise that collated information about the existing indigenous local apparatuses in order to exact tribute to be emblematic of later states. By examining how an early-modern state and its agents, in this case the Franciscan educators, imparted concepts of proper comportment and fealty to the Crown and Church, this thesis pulls Scott's study back to the period of initial globalization.

In the Franciscan and Christian ethos, and for that matter in the ethos of the Aztec Triple Alliance, there existed a utopian plan for an ordered society and a "condition of manipulation" by a self-reverential ideology.<sup>36</sup> However, the heavy machinery of the global economy of the high-modernist state was an important distinction between the transformative powers of the nineteenth to early-twentieth century states that Scott examined, in comparison to the incipient systems that are part of my study.<sup>37</sup> Thus, I apply the concept of legibility with the understanding that in the ordered schools of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 183; The Aztec Triple Alliance, commonly called the Aztec Empire, consisted of three Nahuatl city-states Tenochtitlan, Tezcoco, and the Tacuba who had established a military confederacy based in the Basin of Mexico at the time of Spanish contact.

<sup>37</sup> Scott noted this very point when examining the way that a state imposes its cultural preferences through educational systems; *ibid.*, 219-220.

colonial New Spain the early-modern hierocratic state of the Spanish Empire remained relatively weak, though Spanish educators from the time claimed otherwise. What we will see is that the variation of Christian instruction found in open-air courtyards maintained less-standardized Iberian lesson plans and more “local mutuality” on a level that made the Nahua system of knowledge illegible to visiting priests.<sup>38</sup>

Education historians have, until recently, ignored the imperial Spanish program of the contact period. Those studies that have examined it tend to focus on the spaces of institutional education, usually the first *colegios* that the Franciscans and later religious orders developed for the noble class of Nahua boys in major cities.<sup>39</sup> These works shed light on the transitional period between intellectual traditions and policy transformation in the decades after contact. However, studies such as these perpetuate the “spiritual conquest,” top-down story of the conversion of Nahua sacred educational space. They ignore the early period of public ecclesiastical education, assuming that this earlier phase was simply “education as conquest.”<sup>40</sup> For example, according to José María Kobayashi, Franciscans led the “enterprise” of education with the specific goal of Hispanization in mind when they subverted preexisting institutions in the Mexica core cities.<sup>41</sup> Kobayashi reasoned that the colonial colleges and convents that Franciscans had built on top of the

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<sup>38</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 219.

<sup>39</sup> Miguel Mathes, *Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco: La Primera Biblioteca Académica de las Américas*, (1982); José María Kobayashi, *La Educación Como Conquista : Empresa Franciscana En México*, 1. Ed. México: El Colegio de México, 1974); only recently have scholars looked at the major institutions through indigenous documentation to find pre-contact influence on colonial education. For example, SilverMoon explored Lockhart’s theory of “double mistaken identity” in the Colegio de Santa Cruz Tlatelolco, adding to “the project of decolonizing the history of education;” “The Imperial College of Tlatelolco and the Emergence of a New Nahua Intellectual Elite in New Spain (1500—1760)” (PhD. dissertation, Duke University, 2007), 143.

<sup>40</sup> Kobayashi, *La educación como conquista* (1974).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

Mesoamerican ruins function like cultural founts, or *palestras* (arenas), of Christianity and Iberian influence.<sup>42</sup> Reading indigenous documentation, he argued that the pre-contact formal system of education facilitated the transition to Franciscan schools.<sup>43</sup> Focusing solely on European measures of enculturation he ignored the Mesoamerican tradition of visual communication, landscape as memory, and ornamentation of architecture—the Nahuatl stories that lined these arenas of change, and the possible misunderstandings of religious metaphors. Furthermore, Kobayashi’s focus on the education of the elite left a lacuna in the study of local educational spaces, such as conventual schools. In the end, if Christian identity was manufactured and imposed in colonial schools but Nahuas constructed and taught in these spaces, then how do we reconcile the fact that the builders’ hands and heads were full of indigenous views of the world before Iberians arrived on the scene?

By interpreting the ornamentation of convents I contribute to a growing methodology in the interdisciplinary study of colonized peoples. Following the pioneering study of Nahuatl and ethnicity conducted by James Lockhart and the UCLA School of New Philology, I examine indigenous documentation with linguistic rigor, attempting to find other meanings in the writings of indigenous Americans. I apply Lockhart’s concept of “double mistaken identity,” or the mutual misunderstandings that existed in the shared spaces of colonial New Spain, to the study of building design, construction, and deconstruction in an effort to find different

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 70-71.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 409.

possibilities in colonial architectural narratives.<sup>44</sup> Through iconography and positioning, architecture was another avenue for Nahuas to develop their pre-contact and colonial religious traditions in a non-European form of “written” discourse. As such, this thesis borrows Cecelia Klein’s theory of “visual bilingualism.”<sup>45</sup> Klein’s talent for interpreting the stories of dispossessed peoples through the artworks that they produced under a colonial regime exposed the limits of imperialism and colonialism in the early-modern period. Though colonizers attempted to control the images and icons of art and culture, the colonized indigenous artists and teachers reframed the discussion to incorporate their voice. They had become literate in both their own and the colonizing language of visual communication. The Nahuas of central Mexico found similar avenues of identity (re)formation, and this study is an exercise in reading their visual and material religious culture, what David Carrasco calls the “storybooks” and “stone.”<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, my findings contribute to a recent visually-minded trend in education history and historical studies on the whole. If the School of New Philology reflected the linguistic turn in the nineteen-seventies, eighties, and nineties, then my inclination to incorporate the analysis of indigenous art history and architecture is shaped by the current “pictorial turn” of history—a process wherein interdisciplinary studies draw on visual

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<sup>44</sup> In his landmark study of the Nahuas, Lockhart poignantly surmised the bicultural “unwitting truce” that occurred on an individual and communal level, stating: “Each could view Indian town, government, the monastery complexes, mural painting, land tenure, and many other phenomena of the postconquest Nahua world as falling within its own frame of reference;” *The Nahuas After The Conquest*, 445.

<sup>45</sup> Cecelia Klein, “Depictions of the Dispossessed.” *Art Journal* 49, no. 2 (1990), 108-109; Klein applied her talent for visual analysis and her theory to a directed study of the depictions of women, specifically “wild women” as depicted by Spaniards and how mutual misunderstandings may have formed around these depictions; see “Wild Women in Colonial Mexico: An Encounter of European and Aztec Concepts of the Other,” in *Reframing the Renaissance*, 245-263.

<sup>46</sup> Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and The Irony of Empire*, 21-22.

media to explore the cultural significance of human interaction that relied on visual communication.<sup>47</sup> Stephanie Wood's recent study exemplifies the path for future investigations; her comparative analyses of pictographic and alphabetic text-based studies deconstructed myths of the completed conquest, and the current study is an attempt to contribute to that historiography.<sup>48</sup> My intervention is then a study of how indigenous narratives, iconography, and the extant architecture demonstrate the physical transformation of sacred structures and education practices as contrasted with colonial Spanish accounts. This element in my research is linked to an attempt to strengthen the theories of Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter Mignolo, essentially derived from Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, and other recent scholarly works challenging, or "exploding" our conceptualizations of "both verbal and nonverbal systems of graphic communication."<sup>49</sup> The current view of pre-contact and colonial literacy continues to widen, but as Boone poignantly noted, scholars who look solely to alphabetic texts, "just chose the narrower and more evolutionary view" of communication devices.<sup>50</sup> The purpose underlining this study is a desire to accept the constructed indigenous architecture as just as authentic and decipherable as alphabetic text. I hope to expand on this concept with interpretations of discourse found in the architecture and ornamentation of the Franciscan Convent of San Andrés Calpan, a community in the Puebla region of

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<sup>47</sup> António Nóvoa, "Texts, Images, and Memories: Writing 'New' Histories of Education," in *Cultural History and Education: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Schooling*, edited by Thomas S. Popkewitz, et al., (Routledge Falmer, 2001), 55-56.

<sup>48</sup> Wood, *Transcending Conquest*, 12-15.

<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth Hill Boone, "Introduction: Writing and Recording Knowledge," in *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes*, edited by Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter Mignolo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

central Mexico (to the east of the Valley of Mexico).<sup>51</sup> As Latin American literary specialist Gordon Brotherston stated in the 1990s, by “deciphering” the “complex grammatology” of what he called the “Fourth World” of Mesoamerican literature, we are then “entering the history of both its internal relations and its five-hundred-year encounter with the West.”<sup>52</sup>

In the past, scholars have regularly referred to the architecture of Calpan as one of the many spaces of conversion and instruction of European culture.<sup>53</sup> Generally, they have relied on the concept of the Christian overlay of ornamentation and surface iconography to determine what Franciscans taught to Nahuas in the atriums of the sixteenth century. Architectural historian George Kubler began his monolithic two-volume set *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century* (1948) with the same kind of spiritual conquest cant as Ricard’s: “One generation after the Conquest of Mexico, by

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<sup>51</sup> Recently, Philip P. Arnold called for a “rigorous self-consciousness about the task of ethnohistory,” especially the field’s connection with the history of religion and the landscape, I am attempting to break out of, as he put it, the “solipsistic strains of postmodernism that has asserted that all understanding is constrained by the text;” “Paper Rituals and the Mexican Landscape” in *Representing Aztec Ritual: Performance, Text, and Image in the Work of Sahagún*, edited by Eloise Quiñones Keber (Boulder, CO: 2002), 242-243; also, I agree with Ronald Spores and Nelly Robles García who consider architecture and archaeological remains to be some of the “useful ‘texts’ available” to ethnohistorians; “A Prehispanic (Postclassic) Capital Center in Colonial Transition: Excavations at Yucundaa Pueblo Viejo de Teposcolula, Oaxaca, Mexico,” in *Latin American Antiquity*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Sep., 2007), 334; codices specialist Byron Hamann has proposed an interesting exploration into the ways that indigeneous Americans would read their documents through landscaping from far away, and I see concept working well with my reading of posas in Chapter IV of this study; “Seeing and the Mixtec Screenfolds,” *Visible Language* 38, No 1 (2004) 72-122.

<sup>52</sup> The “fourth world” describes the series of recognizable “worlds,” that he believes are Asia, Europe, African and the Americas. Brotherston focused on “highly flexible” media such as Mesoamerican screenfold books and deerskin *lienzos*, as well as Andean *quipu* (knotted cord histories). In turn, I extend this conversation into stone engraving and architectural design; *Book of the Fourth World: Reading The Native Americans Through Their Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 45.

<sup>53</sup> The 1990s witnessed a rash of publications: Richard Perry, *Mexico’s Fortress Monasteries* (Santa Barbara CA: Espadaña Press, 1992); Robert Mullen, *Architecture and Its Sculpture in Viceregal Mexico*, 1st ed. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1997); Ignacio Cabral, *Las capillas posa de San Andrés Calpan, Puebla* (Puebla México]: Universidad de las Américas Puebla, 1997); see also, Susan Morehead, “An Iconology of Architectural Ornament at the Sixteenth-Century Mexican Monastery of San Andrés Calpan,” MA Thesis, Department of Art History (Austin, TX: University of Texas at Austin, 1997).

1550, a great colonial state stood upon the ruins of Indian civilization.”<sup>54</sup> Supporting the myth of a completed “spiritual conquest” of the Americas, Kubler failed to incorporate the possible Nahua narratives at play in colonial architecture. Kubler recognized indigenous contributions to ornamentation only in esthetic constructs, and when he did, their creations were described as backward, underdeveloped, and incoherent. In 1965, John McAndrew followed Kubler’s example. His *The Open-Air Churches of Sixteenth-Century Mexico*, though just as detailed and perhaps more regionally specific, defined “Indian architecture” as “not at all alike” and he argued that Mesoamerican architects could not accurately represent what Christian designers dictated to them. He gave them little artistic agency and ignored the wealth of pre-contact artistic traditions.<sup>55</sup> Indigenous forms of architecture, he argued, could be better seen in the “humbler buildings,” like rural houses, away from Spanish influence, even though their influence was relegated to life among indigenous allies.<sup>56</sup> Throughout the seventies, eighties, and into the nineties, architecture studies followed Ricard, Kubler, and McAndrew’s assumptions on the aesthetics and spiritual conquest.<sup>57</sup> Nahua contributions were termed *tequitqui* art,

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<sup>54</sup> George Kubler, *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1948), 1.

<sup>55</sup> John McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches of Sixteenth-Century Mexico: Atrios, Posas, Open Chapels, and Other Studies* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 187.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>57</sup> Written in what I will call “tourist language,” and attempting to sell the idea of what he considered to be *Mexico’s Fortress Monasteries* (1992) of the sixteenth century, Richard Perry’s study compiled diverse architecture into a well-sketched and impressive package; however, following the Ricardian ethos, Perry’s work suffered from a skewed interpretation of European-derived customs and rituals in sculpture and construction, and for that reason historians must be advised of the pitfalls of Eurocentrism. In 1997, Robert Mullen published *Architecture and Its Sculpture in Viceregal Mexico*, and though his methodical study did not incorporate Calpan, it did examine the “ideal convento” of the Franciscan of other orders. More a picture book than an actual study of the context of the architecture of Calpan, Ignacio Cabral’s *Las Capillas Posa San Andrés Calpan, Puebla* (1997), reaffirmed Kubler’s methods and Ricard’s thoughts.

Nahuatl for “tribute labor,” and the builders’ labor was dependent on the Spaniards for direction and design.<sup>58</sup> Indigenous artistic agency was disregarded, and, as we will see later, commonly criticized for its lack of European refinement.

In the late-1990s, history of architectural historian Susan Morehead conducted a close study of the architecture and what she called the “adjectival borders” of the ornamentation of San Andrés Calpan.<sup>59</sup> She speculated that indigenous builders used specific pre-contact icons that they were familiar with to emphasize important aspects of the Christian imagery in the colonial period. I apply her concept to my study; however, I look to expand on the possible Mesoamerican stories that these carved and stamped borders, which trace the façades of courtyards, might have emphasized as well. Instead of relegating Nahua contributions to the margins of the schoolyard, I bring this iconography to the foreground.

Recently, Samuel Edgerton and Jaime Lara have broached the subject of indigenous architecture and art history with greater nuance, only to arrive at divergent viewpoints. Edgerton’s work incorporated indigenous pictography and followed Burkhardt’s understanding of the lopsided syncretism—that syncretism “implies a resolution of contradictions”—in religious visual communication, and he plunged into

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<sup>58</sup> “Tequitqui” art is a term coined by José Moreno-Villa in the first half of the twentieth century. Before that, Ignacio Bernal derogatively called indigenous contributions, “arte primitivo” or primitive art. In 2000, Constantino Reyes-Valerio moved away from the connotations of labor and tribute, and he began using “Arte-indocristiano,” or Indian Christian Art; *Arte indocristiano*, México D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2000). . Though this was an important step in recognizing indigenous contributions, I prefer the term used by art historian Gauvin A. Bailey’s concept of “hybrid art,” which he used to describe the architecture created in the Andes in the mature colonial period, assumedly a high-point of cultural mixing; *The Andean Hybrid Baroque: Convergent Cultures in the Churches of Colonial Peru* (Norte Dame, IN: University of Norte Dame, 2010), 2-3.

<sup>59</sup> Morehead, “An Iconology of Architectural Ornament,” 53-54, 109.

indigenous art and religious practices to find the hybrid parts of colonial architecture.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, Edgerton carried the spread of the Franciscan conversion effort into the northern periphery of the empire in the Spanish missions, something I hope to explore in my own continuing research. The current study's emphasis on the use of conventual architecture and the courtyard as part of the larger education system of the empire adds to his work. Lara, in turn, described the numerous functions of the churchyard, which he called "a multipurpose space, acting as a schoolroom, an assembly hall, a dance floor, and unroofed nave, a cemetery, an orchard, and a sort of chapter room for lay friars."<sup>61</sup> Through Jewish and early-Christian and Islamic blueprints, Lara linked the open-air chapel to pre-contact European structures; however, his study on the existing architecture and its religious and educational function was limited in its inclusion of indigenous voices, and further investigation into what he called "reverse influence" upon architectural forms in the Iberian Peninsula begs to be fleshed out.<sup>62</sup>

Most recently, Eleanor Wake reframed the discussion of religious space and communication with *Framing the Sacred* (2010). Analyzing colonial "churches [as] documentary evidence in their own right," Wake "read" them with the understanding that "the native perceived the inseparability of 'ritual and the image,'" and that all elements of

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<sup>60</sup> Samuel Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion: Religious Architecture and Indian Artisans in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 2; Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*, 188.

<sup>61</sup> Lara, *City, Temple, Stage: Eschatological Architecture and Liturgical Theatrics in New Spain* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 21.

<sup>62</sup> Lara feared that the cultural focus on the indigenous voice, proposed by James Lockhart, a cultural and linguistic emphasis on indigenous agency, needed balancing, and his research attempted to track the structural precedents like the atrium and *posas* back to European models; *City, Temple, Stage*, 6-7; this conceptualization is flawed from its inception. Besides the most recent studies of Edgerton (2001) and Wake (2010), I have found very little in the way of indigenous architectural studies, and even less in the study of how Nahuas used these spaces. The bulk of literature describing colonial architecture remains locked within the top-down Christian narrative.

religious performance included “even what we understand to be the settings and décor of performance (architecture, floral coverings) together,” which functioned as visual “text.”<sup>63</sup> Wake perceived these rituals as a way for colonial Nahuas to frame that which they understood to be sacred with icons that were familiar to their communities.<sup>64</sup> I follow her methodology of reading indigenous architecture and I extend my own interpretations of the other stories that the Eastern Nahuas of central Mexico might have told around the surfaces of this framed architecture, specifically with the community of San Andrés Calpan.<sup>65</sup>

### **Thesis Organization**

I have arranged this study chronologically and thematically in three parts to emphasize the steps taken by both Nahuas and Franciscans in the architectural conversion of Mesoamerican schools into Iberian convents. Chapter II begins with the assumed pivotal moment of the Spanish Conquest in the early sixteenth century, including an exposition on the pre-contact period, and then the spiritual conquest efforts of the two decades following conquest (~1500—1540). This chapter examines the preexisting pedagogy of Mesoamericans and Europeans, as well as the local religious practices and traditions that combined at contact. It reviews the introduction of Iberian Christianity and education among the Nahuas, and the documented evidence of existing Mesoamerican architecture traditions found in the proto-ethnographic work of the Franciscan Fray Bernardino de Sahagún and others. Next, it turns to the time of the military conquest as a

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<sup>63</sup> Wake *Framing the Sacred*, 8.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Specifically I apply Wake’s theories of landscape as a mnemonic device, the embedding of indigenous iconography in church walls, and her adoption of Franz Tichy’s article on Mesoamerican “sightlines,” 130-137.

period in which the physical domination by Spaniards of educational and sacred space was attempted. By explicating the process of first the toppling and then “topping” of sacred spaces, such as the Christian church that replaced the pre-contact temple of *Tlachihualtepetl*, also known as the Great Pyramid of Cholula, this chapter argues that, though the Spanish intended to physically transform key sacred sites, in the end indigenous agents followed traditional patterns of religious renovations.<sup>66</sup> The first Christian educational spaces were to represent a clean pedagogical slate and a rupture with the preexisting, “demonic” traditions. Yet the stones they used, the ground they chose to build upon, and the very hands that built the first Christian structures in central New Spain descended from, and at first actually belonged to, the same people who had been raised in those same “ancient traditions.”

In Chapter III, I examine the mature Franciscan period of ecclesiastical education from the 1540s to roughly 1580s. This chapter concentrates on the social, political, and religious identity of the Nahua sub-*altepetl* and community of Calpan, and the top-down institutional forces that attempted to extend control over the education system of the convent schoolyard there. It examines the stories surrounding a fixed point of sacred space. I begin by determining some aspects of the religious and educational history of the Calpanecas. I contrast the possibility of a preexisting *cuicacalli*, pre-contact open-air schools, with the Franciscan courtyard of San Andrés Calpan, and how Christian instruction might have transformed the use of this sacred space. Like other extant sixteenth-century open-air monasteries, this courtyard can be seen as what the

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<sup>66</sup> “Topping” is a term that best describes the way that Ricardians understood as the placement of Christian church on “top” of pre-contact sacred sites; Wake, *Framing the sacred*, 103. Similar to recent studies of medieval palimpsests, wax engravings that were recoated and reused by literate Europeans, the study of architecture in Latin America reveals layers of use.

Franciscans regarded as the “perfect classroom” for the intellectual transformation of the Nahuas. Thus I examine the lesson plan of the Franciscan priests, their understanding of how best to reach the Nahuas, and the challenges they faced in the “slippery” spaces of religious education. Here I explicate aspects of fray Diego de Valadés’ opus *Rhetorica Christiana*, a sixteenth-century doctrine and didactic teaching manual that he designed for his fellow friars. I then examine the community education effort of the Nahuas of Calpan, the mechanics of running the convent, and their ownership of this educational space. Lacking the documentation of local Nahua church officials, I examine similar sources from their neighbors in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley.

Finally, I spend Chapter IV reading the documentation of San Andrés Calpan, built throughout the 1550s and 1560s, at the high watermark of Franciscan influence. Though the religious rhetoric of the priests examined in Chapter III trumpeted the triumphal implantation of the Church and Iberian culture on top of indigenous soil, instead, I argue, local deeply felt beliefs and political identities of the Calpanecas might still have existed in the convent and educational space of Calpan. Comparing the iconography of the posas, the corner chapels found only in the open-air courtyards of American convents, with the visual and material culture of pre-contact and colonial Nahuas and the landscape of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, I interpret the possible messages that the Calpanecas built into the frame of this school. I argue that the landscape, especially community orientation regarding mountains and volcanoes, were a crucial part of Nahua memory.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Recently scholars have incorporated indigenous uses of the landscape in their documentation. In the 1990s, Franz Tichy studied the possible sight lines that he found aligning churches with mountain tops and other objects on horizon; in Broda, *Arqueoastronomia Y Etnoastronomia en Mesoamerica*, 447–459; recently, Robert Haskett documented landscape features as mnemonic triggers—he developed a typology

The mountains and volcanoes of the valley are a fixed point in the landscape, much older than the walls of Christian churches or the skeletons of Nahua temples. But they keep changing. The volcanoes affect the landscape with sharp bursts of magma and ash that cover over what once stood on the side of the mountain. The mountainside becomes unrecognizable, even to the locals who must vacate their homes to avoid the lethal vapors and ash. Once the threat has subsided, the locals come back. They rebuild. And through a gradual process of reclaiming the land and the memories of their past, the people of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley continue to live around the old mountains, but now with a new story of resilience added to the old ones. A similar process was at work in the sixteenth century, when a force of change entered the valley, this time from the east. Iberian influence was no more violent than the forces of change that the Nahuas were used to. They had long contested their place in the world with polities from the west, European contact and Franciscan evangelism only added to the mix of complexity of local religions and the polyphonic political discourse. By controlling the way that their schools functioned before and after contact, local communities maintained their identity in the Spanish imperial world.

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for the possible significance of caves, mountains, springs, tree, crosses, and other relevant visual devices—in primordial land titles from Cuernavaca, Mex.; *Visions of Paradise*, 134-192; also Eleanor Wake's valuable study of embedding engraved stones to emphasize and direct the eye toward landscape features; *Framing the Sacred*, 121, 130–137.

## CHAPTER II

### BROKEN SCHOOLS: REEXAMINING THE SPIRITUAL CONQUEST AND THE PERSISTANCE OF “ROOFLESS” NAHUA EDUCATION

Broken spears lie in the roads; we have torn our hair in our grief. The houses are roofless now, and their walls are red with blood... We have pounded our hands in despair against the adobe walls...

Nahua Poem: León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears* (1992).<sup>68</sup>

“Broken Spears” is a powerful metaphor for the defeat, dislocation, and desolation experienced by the inhabitants of the Aztec imperial capital as they remembered how their world was shattered by the triumphant Spaniards and their allies. Yet this is not the only indigenous view of and reaction to what is usually still glossed as “the conquest.” Scholars continue to debate the story of overwhelming physical as well as spiritual defeat of Mesoamerican traditions, including the extent to which their ideas about the cosmos and the character of sacred spaces actually changed.<sup>69</sup> Thanks to a series of relatively recent scholarly investigations of indigenous-authored documentation—both pictorial manuscripts and alphabetic texts—our own ideas about these issues have been changing. The title of this chapter, for example, is derived from Miguel León-Portilla’s anthology of Nahua conquest narratives entitled *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* (1992), in which the author translated and presented excerpts from Nahuatl accounts of the conquest in an effort to

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<sup>68</sup> Miguel León-Portilla (editor), *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1992 [1962]), 137.

<sup>69</sup> See Chapter I.

bring indigenous voices to a wider audience of readers.<sup>70</sup> For example, in one excerpt we find evidence that seems to prove that the Nahuas had actually anticipated the coming physical conquest of their religion and culture. Apparently, after receiving word that the “god” Hernando Cortés and his entourage were nearing the capital, the “magicians” of Tenochtitlan sought the guidance of the deity Tezcatlipoca:

[T]hey hurriedly built [Tezcatlipoca] a small temple and altar and a seat made of coach-grass. But for a while they could not see him. They labored in vain, they prepared his temple in vain, for he spoke to them only in oracles. . . . They looked in the direction of Tenochtitlan. The temples were in flames, and so were the communal halls, the religious schools and all the houses.<sup>71</sup>

By highlighting accounts that focused on disturbing omens and the terrorized reactions to military defeat written mainly by inhabitants of the Aztec capital city, or in other words those who lost the most in the war of conquest, it is all too easy to conclude that all Nahuas saw themselves as a helpless people victimized by the Spanish.<sup>72</sup> But León-Portilla actually re-inscribed a top-down image of defeat etched into the minds and the material culture of this entire ethnicity, no matter where they lived or what their real experience of “the conquest” had been. Looking back over a generation or more, those who related the memory of the Aztec priests and their efforts to find divine guidance and support against the invading *conquistadores* to the Franciscan chronicler fray Bernardino de Sahagún made their loss seem pre-ordained and inevitable. Without admitting to any other possibilities and motivations for the construction of the Tezcatlipoca altar, these

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<sup>70</sup> León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 1992; while some have criticized the accuracy of León-Portilla’s translations, as well as the presumption that these accounts represent indigenous memories of the conquest shared by all of central Mexico’s indigenous peoples, the book remains an accessible and valuable introductory work.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

<sup>72</sup> Wood, *Transcending Conquest*, 7; Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and The Irony of Empire*, 225.

informants (as well as Miguel León-Portilla) made it appear simply that the Nahuas foresaw the ineffectiveness of their pre-contact rituals and their religious structures, as well as the likely destruction of their capital, and even of their “religious schools.”<sup>73</sup> But how might rereading this and other post-conquest Nahua sources allow us to better understand the complexity of the initial physical displacement brought on by the “spiritual conquest” and Iberian colonization?

This chapter rethinks the victimization narrative of the conquest story, which is after all an intellectual holdover from the nineteenth century, by considering how the philosophy and practice of pre-colonial education endured in various ways despite the assumed destructive aftermath of contact. It is particularly important to examine the forms of teaching that took shape during the early contact period (1519 to roughly 1540), and how the Nahuas influenced and used the educational spaces that developed at this time. These zones of cultural preservation, contact, and cultural dialogue were inherently religious in nature (as they had been before the Spanish arrived on the scene), even if the colonizers regularly tried to divest them of their preexisting “diabolical” connotations. This “topping” process had been characteristic of the spread of both Iberian and Mesoamerican societies prior to 1519. Thus there were many important precedents on both sides—the Spanish and the indigenous—that influenced how the early colonial process functioned in the culturally rich Nahua communities of the Valley of Mexico, the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, and other densely populated regions of central Mexico.

Crucial sources for this kind of study include the narratives of the first Iberian educators to come to the Americas, primarily the regular clergy of the Order of the Friars

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<sup>73</sup> León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 54.

Minor, or the Franciscans. The contact-era Catholic priests played a paradoxical role as religious and cultural assimilationists, but also as virtual “ethnographers” of indigenous lifeways. Though the priests left us with some of the first semi-ethnographic work about Mesoamerican civilizations, they intended to use that information to ensure its extinction. Conversely, in an effort to communicate the organization of their society and their worldview to these interested priests, community elders and elite envoys assisted in making each locality “legible” to the Europeans.<sup>74</sup> Thus Nahua elders taught Franciscans about their ritual practices and cultural training devices which they had benefited from in the past, and the Franciscans began to understand the Nahuas’ sacred networks and how to best defeat them. Therefore, care must be taken to maintain a critical eye when relying on clerical assumptions about and reactions to existing indigenous cultural traits, education processes, as well as when we read the rhetoric that the friars created in the decades after contact. In fact, it turns out that native rituals actually facilitated the physical transformation of sacred spaces at this crucial point in time from “pagan” to “Christian,” making what might be taken to be a “spiritual conquest” into something far more complex than this.

### **Not Just Christians Breaking Things**

Entering the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley in the late summer of 1519, the rag-tag group of Iberian conquistadors, led by Hernando Cortés and accompanied by priests acting primarily as the group’s chaplains, were befriended by the Nahuas of the powerful province of Tlaxcala (though not without some preliminary fighting between the two groups). Traditionally the enemies of the Nahuas of the Valley of Mexico, the Tlaxcalans

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<sup>74</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 4; for more on Scott, see Chapter I.

established a convenient partnership with the newcomers, promising to escort the *conquistadores* to the capital of the so-called Triple Alliance empire, México-Tenochtitlan.

According to the colonial-era Tlaxcalan historian Diego Muñoz Camargo, the Tlaxcalans already had been alerted to their coming encounter with the Spaniards when their sacred mountain, Matlalcueitl (home of their patroness Matlalcueye), developed a funnel of dust and wind rising from its peak.<sup>75</sup> The oddity lasted for an entire year, until news of the Spaniards' arrival reached them. Though the specific dimensions and implications of this omen are lost to us, it compares well with existing concepts of Mesoamerican transformation. Winds were omens of change in Nahua cosmology, ushering in the fertilizing powers of rain. As victors in the allied war effort against the Aztecs, the Tlaxcalans undoubtedly used this omen to explain the inevitability of their victory, much as their counterparts in Tenochtitlan remembered a series of omens as presaging their inescapable defeat.<sup>76</sup> For Tlaxcalans, their triumph was as natural as the wind bringing the rain; their sacred mountain had proven it.

Among other things, this story reveals the truth that the war of conquest erupted at a highly contentious time in Mesoamerica, as micropatriotic political entities called *altepetl* (Nahuatl for “water-mountain” and translated today to mean a “city-state”) competed for resources and hegemony, compromising the intended unity of the empire that claimed sovereignty over them. Though victims of wars supposedly fought against

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<sup>75</sup> León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 11-12; Matlalcueye (from *matlalin*, “blue-green/jade color”, and *cueitl*, “skirt”), also known as Chalchiuhtlicue (from *chalchihuitl* “precious green/blue stone,” and *cuietl* “skirt”) was the goddess of lakes and springs, see Chapter IV.

<sup>76</sup> Lockhart, among other scholars, conducted a “new reading” of Nahua documentation for the veracity of pre-contact “omens,” and he determined that most of the conquest omens are examples of “extensive and conscious re-writing” by Nahua intellectuals; as described in Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and The Irony of Empire*, 225.

forces of the Triple Alliance for sacrificial victims (but which were in reality imperial wars of attrition) metaphorically called “Flowery Wars” by the Aztecs, the Tlaxcalans had been able to maintain political autonomy. For the vastly outnumbered Iberians, this alliance and others like it would prove crucial ingredients in the eventual defeat of the empire.

One incident in the conquest struggle that presaged what was to come later as far as indigenous sacred spaces were concerned took place at the important *altepetl* of Cholollan (now San Andrés y San Pablo Cholula), a recent addition to the Triple Alliance Empire and an important religious center in its own right. Before their eventual arrival at Tenochtitlan the allied conquest army—now ballooned to a force of tens-of-thousands—moved into the outskirts of Cholollan, which thus unwillingly became the first true battleground over religious space and Mesoamerican culture.<sup>77</sup>

What happened next remains controversial. At some point in the initial meeting between the Spaniards and the leaders of Cholollan a battle erupted, leaving thousands of indigenous dead. Spanish and Tlaxcalan accounts blame the “treacherous” people of Cholollan.<sup>78</sup> Though Spaniards tell the tale differently, casting themselves in leading roles, Muñoz Camargo’s story of the divine wind ended up legitimizing Tlaxcala’s conquest of a traditional enemy; it was the children of Matlalcueye, not the Spaniards,

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<sup>77</sup> Upon arrival, the Iberians planted crosses in the “new” town of Vera Cruz. Furthermore, one might argue that another early battleground of conversion occurred when the Iberians converted women on the Mayan coast, gaining a translator, La Malinche, in the process. Even more, we might say that the story of the baptism of Tlaxcalan lords was a more likely candidate for the first physical conversion of indigenous sacred space. In the end, I focus on the transformation of architecture, and area that is less emphasized in the recent studies, excepting some key examples.

<sup>78</sup> One of the entrepreneur/soldiers of the Cortés entrada, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, described the “Cholulan treachery” and foiled assassination plot in great detail; see *The History of The Conquest of New Spain* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 137-141.

who were responsible for Cholollan's defeat, an event linked to their divine patroness and protector's gift of powerful new allies, the Spanish (if limited in number). The Tlaxcalan victors described the physical transformation of a sacred space, for the bloody massacre of the Cholulteca took place in the very center of the *altepetl*. Allegedly, the Cholollans claimed,

that their foes would all be drowned by their idol Quetzalcoatl... that when the crust was scraped from a portion of the limed surface of the temple, water gushed out... They said that if they were ever in danger during a war... they would break open all the mortared surfaces, from which a flood of water would pour forth to drown their enemies. And when they saw how hard pressed they were, they set to work.<sup>79</sup>

If the beliefs behind these assertions were authentic, then it is clear that the Cholulteca thought of the physical structure of the temple as the container of a particular kind of sacred power, making it into as a supernatural weapon in times of need. Plaster, apparently made from a mixture of blood from child sacrifices and lime, held back a powerful and potentially destructive divine flood. By removing this "crust," a deluge would overcome their enemies, in this case the Tlaxcalan and Iberian forces.<sup>80</sup> These supernatural powers failed them in the actual battle; upon realizing this, "the greater part of them died in despair, by killing themselves," casting themselves from the top of their main temple.<sup>81</sup> An old and inefficient belief system had been found weak and wanting in the face of a combined Christian and indigenous one—God and Matlalcueye—one sacred force strengthening the other. In fact, the Tlaxcalans adopted the Christian call to arms: "Santiago! And at them," invoking (but probably not understanding) Saint James the

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<sup>79</sup> León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 47.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

Moorslayer of Iberian legend.<sup>82</sup> The story becomes problematic when it turns out that though the Tlaxcalans cried out for the military aid of Santiago, they also donned “plaited garlands of feather-grass on their heads, in order to recognize each other,” seemingly carrying the symbolic force of Quetzalcoatl.<sup>83</sup> Here the Catholic enters the indigenous; it is an early example of the operation of Lockhart’s process of double mistaken identity, powerful Mesoamerican warriors invoking the power of a Spanish warrior saint while maintaining the cultural “baggage” attached to pre-contact symbols.<sup>84</sup>

Tlaxcallan motives may have been to claim ownership of the temple of Cholollan by wearing emblems of its patron deity and by donning the feathered garb they may have attempted to communicate their intentions to the Chololteca. In turn, the auto-sacrifice carried out by the Cholollans may have been a way for the community to prove its greater devotion and loyalty to Quetzalcoatl. By reenacting Quetzalcoatl’s journey to the earth, found in Nahua cosmology, the faithful Cholollans demonstrated their faith, not simply for the audience of a few hundred Spaniards, but for the tens-of-thousands of Tlaxcalans. Furthermore, by dismantling the temple of the religious capital and attempting to release the sacred flow of water from within, instead of flooding their opponents with a weapon, the Cholollans might have been attempting to divest the site of its sacred power. We must remember that in the battle for Cholollan, and other Nahua sacred sites, more than just the imposition of Christianity was at stake. Though the Spaniards tell us that their indigenous allies immediately adopted Christianity, Tlaxcalan and later Huejotzincan leaders (another vital conquest ally living in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley) had their own

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> For a discussion of “double mistaken identity,” see Chapter I.

religio-political intentions when confronting their Nahua neighbors and enemies. And that brings us to an issue with the accounts of the battle itself. In the end, Tlaxcalan and Cholulteca alike needed to justify the battle on cosmic terms, for their new cosmologic world included the Christian God as a force to be reckoned with. Thus the story could simply be a metaphor by which the victors explained their conquest (having adopted Christianity as their faith now) of the sacred space of ancient deities. It incites the question of who wanted conversion more; a few priests with a millenarian's agenda, or the millions of pantheists with a tradition of adopting the sacred beings of their conquerors looking to add that introduced spiritual legitimacy to their pantheon.

### **Who Led the Conversion Effort**

The religious rhetoric of the first Iberian-trained educators is the origin of the triumphant story of “spiritual conquest” and the defeat of traditional Nahua education found in “old conquest history.” One of the most influential of them was a member of *Los Doce* (“The Twelve”) Franciscans who arrived in Mesoamerica in 1524, fray Toribio de Benavente. Upon arriving in New Spain and interacting with the Nahuas, he adopted the name “Motolinia” (the Nahuatl word for “poor”) because it highlighted his strict devotion to the mendicant life of poverty.<sup>85</sup> Spiritual conquistadors, like Motolinia, were determined to stamp out idolatrous practices, and according to one scholar, Motolinia's work represented the “moral guide” or compass for the first millenarians.<sup>86</sup> Franciscan

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<sup>85</sup> Historians may never know the exact circumstances that led to fray Toribio to be called Motolinia; see Elizabeth Foster's interpretation in *Motolinia's History of the Indians of New Spain* (Berkeley: Bancroft Library, Cortés Society, 1950), 2. She also reports that, when he died in 1569, he was the last of *Los Doce* and he finished his service to Christianity with a final sermon in one of the first churches built in the Americas (10).

<sup>86</sup> Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and The Irony of Empire*, 17; George Kubler, *Esthetic Recognition of Ancient Amerindian Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 5, 53; Millenarian Christians believe in the eventual end-of-the-world scenario found in interpretations of the Book of Revelations. Franciscans and

specialist John Phelan described Motolinia as an advocate for the “moderate use of coercion.”<sup>87</sup> Phelan’s *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans* (1956) draws directly from the Spanish sources, especially the writings of a successor of Motolinia’s, fray Gerónimo de Mendieta, and unfortunately Phelan does not fully contextualize the top-down, outsider-gazing-in viewpoint that he presents. And yet, we do come to understand Mendieta’s cognitions and ruminations, as well as those of some members of the colonial order, and therefore we find reverberations of Motolinia’s evangelical voice. According to Phelan, Franciscans were exceptional in that they followed a practice of Spiritual moderation in the conversion process. Spiritual Franciscans differed from their brothers in the order, those who had turned away from the traditional vow of poverty of mendicant friars.<sup>88</sup> Through Spiritual reforms, Franciscans such as Motolinia and, later, Mendieta, hoped to reproduce a “primitive” church in New Spain. Phelan’s study helps us to understand the nostalgia of the early conversion phase, Mendieta’s “Golden Age of New Spain” (1524-1564), as well as the grim outlook for Franciscan influence in the seventeenth century.<sup>89</sup>

In his writings, Motolinia expressed a quality of colonial anxiety at a crucial time for initial cultural interactions in the decades following the conquest, a period

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Dominicans at the time hoped for a swift conversion of all diabolical practices that confronted them in the New World, in order to bring about the end-of-days and the Rapture of Christian dogma. The term “millenarian” or “millenarianism” derives from the association of eschatologists with specific calendric points, as seen in the more recent secularized example of the end of 1999 and the beginning of 2000 (Y2K) Crisis, as well as the most recent anxiety over the supposed “end” of the Mayan Calendar in December of 2012. Motolinia tempers these visions of the Rapture with comments on the use of “patience as a shield” by the clergy, even highlighting indigenous agency in adopting Christianity; see Foster, *Motolinia’s History*, 193-196.

<sup>87</sup> Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans*, 10.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-16, 43-44.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

ethnohistorian Kevin Terraciano called “a state of crisis” between the 1530s and the 1540s. During this period of time a small number of Spanish religious feared that without a direct usurpation of the pre-Christian cults, the “indios” would simply continue to worship in the same places in the same ways.<sup>90</sup> And yet, perhaps to emphasize the work at hand, Motolinia wrote that the indigenous adoption of Christianity was well on its way to completion. In fact, most his *Historia* reads like a catalogue of large-scale conversions. For example, while he was evangelizing in the 1540s in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, he noted, “for I am telling the truth when I say that in the five days that I was at the monastery another priest and I baptized, by actual count, fourteen thousand two hundred and some odd, giving them all the oil and chrism, which was no small task.”<sup>91</sup> Taking him at his word, the unnamed priest and Motolinia would have rubbed each convert with the Holy oil, which is certainly “no small task.” Significantly, his account alludes to aspects of indigenous agency. Though not stated directly, the converts seem to have come willing to see the friars and to be touched by these new religious specialists.

Into the latter half of the twentieth century, historians used Motolinia’s account and others like it to develop the rhetoric of domination of one faith over another.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Kevin Terraciano studied the Nahuas, Mixtecs and Zapotecs of Yanhuitlan, which neighbored Teposcolula. He believes that Spanish church building and evangelism was a response to the traumas of disease and confusion that followed the dissolution of the Triple Alliance. See Terraciano, “The People of Two Hearts and the One God from Castile: Ambivalent Responses to Christianity in Early Colonial Oaxaca,” in *Religion in New Spain*, Susan Schroeder, and Stafford Poole, eds. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 17. For an example of Motolinia’s account of Spanish fears of a return to old ways, specifically regarding church construction, see Foster, *Motolinia’s History*, 49, 54-56.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 138; from 1523 to 1537 Motolinia claims over nine million successful baptisms (130-133), which gives the impression of eighteen back-to-back 1969 Woodstock Festivals over the course of fourteen years. This trying accomplishment would of course lack the accompaniment of a microphone or the National Guard.

<sup>92</sup> As explained in the introduction, Robert Ricard was instrumental in explaining this process of conversion as a “Spiritual Conquest” of Spanish culture over the pre-Hispanic customs and rituals. James Lockhart has

Motolinia understood conversion in the New World as a process in which the indigenous population participated in the dismantling and deconstructing of pre-Hispanic pagan temples, which were later refashioned into Christian churches.<sup>93</sup> Motolinia believed that with the procurement of these building materials the willing native population, regardless of preconditioned motivations or ritual practices, converted to Christian ideologies with the establishment of Iberian-styled architecture.

And yet, Motolinia feared the future of an unguarded and disorganized Order. The preexisting rituals had been diverse. “Besides the festivals already mentioned there were many others, and each province had its own customs and each devil was served in his own way with sacrifices and fasts and other diabolical offerings, especially in Tlaxcallan, Huexotzinco, and Cholollan.”<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, Motolinia recognized a developing dissonance in the best way to teach the indigenous with the introduction of competing methodologies “from other orders, Augustinians, Dominicans, and Franciscans,” each with their “different and contradictory opinions.”<sup>95</sup> The next generation of Christian teachers tended to “correct the work of those that had come first and, if possible, cause it to cease and be forgotten and make their own ideas prevail.”<sup>96</sup> How could the great works that he and his fellow teachers exacted upon the Nahuas suffer the disunity of a nonconforming institutional Catholic message?

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characterized the “Ricardian School” as a theory of “quick replacement of indigenous elements of structures;” *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 2.

<sup>93</sup> Kubler, *Esthetic Recognition*, 5-6.

<sup>94</sup> Foster, *Motolinia's History*, 71.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-134.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

## The Franciscans Break In; A Nahua Breakdown

This transformative force exercised by both Iberians and Nahuas eventually made its way to Tenochtitlan. Conquerors' accounts lavish the structural designs of the religious center of the city and the priestly training grounds nearby with high praise. Within two years, at the height of a devastating siege, Spaniards, piloting improvised schooners with powerful canons attached to their small decks, conducted day-long ballistic assaults on Aztec imperial temples and walls. In the aftermath, at least according to the one tragic Nahuatl account, "three wise men of Ehecatl [priests of the wind god], from Tezcoco, were devoured by [the Spaniards'] dogs. They had come only to surrender; no one brought them or sent them there. They arrived bearing their painted sheets of paper. There were four of them, and only one escaped; the other three were overtaken, there in Coyoacan."<sup>97</sup> The highly educated priestly scholars, ripped to shreds by Spanish war dogs, must personify the fear among the Aztecs that pre-contact culture and its educators would be hunted down wherever they might attempt to hide. The lyrics of a sixteenth-century Mexica song recorded in the Franciscan school at Tlatelolco (Tenochtitlan's "twin city"), perhaps best summarize the metaphorical memory of structural—and hence cultural—demolition: "We are crushed to the ground; we lie in ruins."<sup>98</sup>

Franciscan evangelizers relayed a similar theme of their own cultural superiority and the ruination of Nahua ways in their accounts of the rebuilding phase that followed the military struggle. Certainly, in the *altepetl* city-centers, new political entities vied for

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<sup>97</sup> León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 144.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

control over the dynamic system of commerce and access to *calpulli* and *tlaxillacalli* (component districts of an *altepetl*) tribute. With their access to introduced commodities like steel tools and other goods from Iberia and beyond, as well as through marriage with noble women, Spaniards quickly usurped the highest positions in Mexico City, and Cortés began to allocate tribute grants (called *encomiendas*) to his men. Access to spiritual spaces went to the Franciscans, Cortés' favorite order, and in 1524, *Los Doce* were chosen to begin the building of the Church in New Spain, bringing the Catholic educational enterprise to perhaps thirty million Nahuas.<sup>99</sup>

Motolinia enthusiastically documented the successful early-colonial Christian conversion of the “indios” at a time when mutual misunderstanding actually abounded in the interactions between Iberians and Mesoamericans. From the 1530s to 1540s Motolinia wrote his account, *Historia de los indios de Nueva España (History of the Indians of New Spain)*, while evangelizing in central Mexico. His memoirs are full of conversion stories dedicated (as were many evangelical histories) to the Pope, the Holy Roman Emperor, and intended for the edification of the literate Christian faithful living on the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>100</sup> Motolinia's religiously inspired account aggrandized Spanish conversion methods, and his Iberian audience could reaffirm and rejoice in the progress of the Faith and its defeat of “Indian” spirituality.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> An incredibly ambitious undertaking, since when *Los Doce* are combined with the clergy already in central Mexico, there were at the time only fifteen evangelizers dedicated to the instruction of the indigenous people.

<sup>100</sup> Foster documents only 13 biblical references and considerably less rhetorical moralizing; see *Motolinia's History*, 14; that said, the 1950 and later 1973 reprinting of her translation of *Historia* begs to be updated with current scholarly interpretations and commentary. Although an important attempt at ethnography, Motolinia highlighted the flaws of his study of the diversity of Mesoamerican cultures, what he considered a “mere patchwork (216.)”

<sup>101</sup> Motolinia was specifically taken with the primacy of devotion to Saint Francis; *ibid.*, 172-174.

In the decades following his arrival in New Spain, Motolinia witnessed numerous physical conversions, some of them seemingly autonomous ones instigated by indigenous communities themselves:

but with all this [the Indians] always tried to keep their temples whole and sound... [then] they began to lay hands on them and take stone and wood from them to build churches, and so the temples were left desolate and destroyed, and the idols of stone, of which there were infinite numbers, not only were broken and knocked to pieces, but came to serve as foundations for churches... the best thing in the world for the foundation of so great and holy a work.<sup>102</sup>

According to Motolinia, not only did the indigenous ardently desire to become Catholics, but they also deconstructed their holiest structures to make a place for God in the New World. The very rocks that Christ's churches in the Americas were built upon were the "broken and knocked to pieces" of stone and wood of the "desolate and destroyed" sacred spaces. To legitimize the transformative nature of Christian structural conversion, Motolinia first identified the orderly upkeep of what had existed before, and then described the piece-by-piece dismantling of things non-Christian. But the Franciscan may not have been aware of the dynamic cycles of structural destruction and rebuilding that had been at work in central Mesoamerica long before Christian architectural designs entered the scene.

### **Deconstructing the Toppling and Topping of a *Tlachihualtepetl***

In 1535, Motolinia carried his religious fervor with him when he and his companion fray Martín de Valencia participated in the architectural domination of Cholollan.<sup>103</sup> Cholollan

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 89.

symbolized the cosmogenic primordial city of many Mesoamerican belief systems.<sup>104</sup> Geography and sacredness have been explored by scholars such as David Carrasco, in his redaction of the eternal city Tollan and its manifestation in the city surrounding *Tlachihualtepetl*.<sup>105</sup> Other scholars have noted the city's centrality as "the ancient city... invested with the power to legitimize rulers in central Mexico."<sup>106</sup> Now its great pyramid dominates the center of modern-day municipalities of San Andrés and San Pedro Cholula, and the church of Virgen de los Remedios (Figure 1). As noted by archaeologist George McCafferty, the early-Classic period pyramid *Tlachihualtepetl* is the "largest pre-industrial building in world history," surpassing, by volume, Egyptian pyramids and monoliths, Emperor Qin's tomb in China, and Native American structures and earthen mounds in the modern day United States (Figure 2).<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and The Irony of Empire*, 65; George McCafferty, "So What Else is New? A Cholula-centric Perspective on Lowland/Highland Interaction in the Classic/Postclassic Transition," in *Twin Tollans: Chichén Itzá, Tula, and the Epiclassic to Early Postclassic Mesoamerican World* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, 2007), 449.

<sup>105</sup> Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and The Irony of Empire*, 90-91, 133-140; he used the methodology of Mircea Eliade's theories to define what he called the "ideal type of city in Mesoamerica" that Nahuas attempted to recreate with each city layout. Carrasco argued that both the city and pyramid of Cholula are expressions of the cosmogenic reproduction of the Nahuatl sacred city of Tollan; this fact is significant, in that, if Cholula was the religious center of the Nahuas, in contrast to the economic and political center of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, when the Spaniards invaded and massacred Cholula in the weeks before the conquest of the capital, they had, in effect, attacked a vital pilgrimage site of learning and cultural knowledge. It would have been as if a small Turkic force, backed by the French aristocracy, had first slaughtered the Pope, his council, and the Holy See, and then turned to the wholesale destruction of the Vatican.

<sup>106</sup> Wake, "The Serpent Road," in *Cave, City, and Eagle's Nest*, 213.

<sup>107</sup> George McCafferty, "Altepetl: Cholula's Great Pyramid as Water Mountain," in *Flowing through Time, The Chacmool* (Calgary: Archaeological Association of the University of Calgary, 2008), 23.



Figure 1: *Tlaxihualtepetl*, Puebla, Mexico. The sixteenth-century church of the *Virgen de los Remedios* “topping” *Tlaxihualtepetl*, the “artificial mountain of Cholollan/Cholula (photographed by the author, August 2011).



Figure 2: “Artificial Mountain” Exposed. The ancient man-made mountain built at the center of the Nahuatl religious capital Cholollan (photographed by the author, August 2011).

With evidence of long-term occupation and growing amounts of archaeological discoveries, scholars consider the site a valuable pre-contact source for religious and cultural studies.<sup>108</sup> Linked to Quetzalcoatl and fertility, and ritualized with ancient pilgrimage routes that brought dignitaries to the *altepetl* as a rite of their legitimization, the importance of the idea of Cholollan as a holy city remained relevant to the Nahuas in the colonial period.<sup>109</sup>

Nahuas depicted the pyramidal structure of *Tlachihualtepetl* in a variety of colonial codices, painted and written in the decades following the contact. As seen in a map of the city from the late-sixteenth century, Nahua illustrators continued to depict it as an earthen mound with water underneath it. In the *Relaciones Geograficas* map of Cholollan we find *Tlalchihualtepetl* in the top-right of center (Figure 3). A gloss of “tlachivualtepetl” is written above a mountain with evident bricolage beneath the vegetation covered, curvilinear surface. Beneath the pyramid we see a swirling current of water symbols, or *atl* in Nahuatl. The Nahua artist also depicted patches of tall reeds growing out of the waters under the *tepetl* (hill, mountain), on either side of the pyramid. Reeds were an iconographic signifier for the Toltec city of Tollan/Tula (Nahuatl for “the place of reeds”). Glossed with the title “TOLLAN.CHOLVLA,” we begin to see how Nahua painters, using pre-contact concepts, communicated place-names by attaching religious ideograms to their ethnic city-state’s name-glyph.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.; also Amos Megged, *Social Memory in Ancient and Colonial Mesoamerica* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 162-163 Carrasco reexamined and compiled various data surrounding the pre-Christian “city” Cholula/Cholollan/Tollan and the symbol of the “city’s” connection to the Man-God Quetzalcoatl.

<sup>109</sup> McCafferty highlighted the legitimization associated with a “nose-piercing” ritual in pre-Contact Mesoamerica and depictions of Cholula/Cholollan priests, which points to the centrality of the city to the region; “So What Else is New?,” 460-465.



Figure 3: *Relaciones Geograficas* (1583); sixteenth-century city map of Cholula/Cholollan showing introduced architecture. The cartographer has chosen to depict *Tlachihualtepetl* with pre-contact iconography, like the reeds (red box, top right and close up); the gloss “TOLLAN.CHOLVLA” connects this site to pre-contact notions of the eternal utopian Toltec city of Tollan/Tula. Note the water icons that highlight the ancient spring. Also, note the six small monasteries with *altepetl* symbols behind them (used with permission from the Benson Library, University of Texas at Austin).

Furthermore, we find *tepetl* in the background of each colonial church, save the Franciscan *convento* illustrated in the map's center.<sup>110</sup> Perhaps the Nahuatl artist reinforced each church with pre-contact ideograms in order to communicate with a wider Nahuatl audience. In the end, the map of Cholula reinforced the cosmologic significance of *Tlachihualtepetl* and Cholollan as the religious capital—now, part Christian—of the Nahuas. This raises the question, why was it not wholly Christian?

Whereas, the pre-contact *Tlachihualtepetl* pyramid connected each community with the Mesoamerican universal deity Quetzalcoatl, a spring flowing out of the side of the pyramid similarly served a concrete function, what Amos Megged defined as a Nahuatl “place of memory.”<sup>111</sup> Robert Haskett also noted the supernatural draw of springs for Nahuatl idols and altars.<sup>112</sup> Water and springs were locations of great sacred importance to both pre-Christian and later Christian Nahuas, as seen in the social significance Nahuas placed on the location of springs in primordial titles.<sup>113</sup> Almost immediately following the establishment of a Christian structure on top of the *Tlachihualtepetl*, building planners incorporated a shrine over and around the popular pre-contact spring.<sup>114</sup> Motolinia expressed the ecclesiastical anxiety over the use of the spring of Cholula by the indigenous, and he explained that his companion Martín de

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<sup>110</sup> See a digital reproduction of this map made available by the Nettie Lee Benson Library, University of Texas at Austin, [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/benson/rg/rg\\_images2.html](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/benson/rg/rg_images2.html).

<sup>111</sup> Megged, *Social Memory*, 164.

<sup>112</sup> Haskett, *Visions of Paradise*, 161.

<sup>113</sup> *Títulos primordiales* or “Primordial titles” are later colonial, indigenous language, locally-focused descriptions of *altepetl* history and land arrangements. Haskett also stated, “Nahuatl reverence for springs would have made it easy for them to maintain this orientation even after the Spaniards with similar beliefs arrived on the scene;” *ibid.*, 160-162; Megged, *Social Memory*, 164-179.

<sup>114</sup> McCafferty, “Altepetl: Cholula's Great Pyramid,” 20-21.

Valencia remedied the situation with the construction of the Christian shrine built over the community pilgrimage site.<sup>115</sup> Today, faithful Catholics honor the Virgin of the Remedies at the altar situated next to a well inside the small chapel, all of which are sixteenth-century constructions (see Figure 4). If the guard is on hand—and willing to open the massive iron grate—you might be able to see the ancient conduit that extends southward at approximately five feet below the lip of the well (see Figure 5). This well and conduit cover the remnants of the pre-contact spring and water duct that so worried Motolinia and fray Martín.

With rains the well would fill with water and, in turn, the conduit sent this vital agricultural resource careening to the valley floor below — travelling nearly the length of a football field—down the side of the artificial sacred



Figure 4: Side chapel, south side of *Tlachihualtepetl* (Photographed by the author, August 2011).

mountain. We have no account of the rituals that went along with this aquatic event, but health and rejuvenation were pre-contact themes associated with springs, which most likely resonated later with devotionals paid by Cholula's Nahuas to the Virgin of the Remedies.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 24 and “fig 2” of that essay.



Figure 5: The refashioned spring of *Tlachihualtepetl*. View of the pre-contact aqueduct that brought water to the base of the pyramid (Photographed by the author, August 2011).



Figure 6: The “frog-like” idol of *Tlachihualtepetl*. This object invests the pyramid with pre-contact notions of fertility and regeneration (Photographed by the author, August 2011).

Scholars agree that Cholula was the “religious capital” and a pre-Christian “pilgrimage center par excellence,” and a religious twin to the political capital, Tenochtitlan.

Together, the pair resembled a Mesoamerican version of the Islamic dual capitals, where Tenochtitlan was Medina, Cholula was Mecca.<sup>116</sup> Congruently, Motolinia seemed to understand the site’s religious significance when he described the act of casting down an idol of a frog like the biblical Tower of Babel in the process of topping the structure, and as noted by McCafferty, archaeological digs in the nineteenth century unearthed a sculpture of a “frogs-like” head (Figure 6).<sup>117</sup> Therefore we have evidence of the pyramid’s connection to the fertility and regenerative qualities of frogs and the anxieties of Spanish priests.

As seen in another colonial Nahua map, the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*, indigenous authors kept the memory and sacredness of Cholollan and its spring at the center of their pre-contact origin narrative. On their migration from mythic to actual time, the people of Cuauhtinchan first passed through Cholollan, gaining religious legitimization there, before continuing on into the valley south of the *altepetl*. This strong memory of Cholollan as a religious “Mecca” was apparent to the Franciscans, as well; in the 1530s, Motolinia highlighted the city’s sacred past through a Catholic paradigm, “[t]his Cholollan was considered to be a great sanctuary, like another Rome, in which there were many temples of the devil.”<sup>118</sup> Spaniards quickly realized the magnetic draw

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<sup>116</sup> For the centrality of the site as a “religious capital”, see Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and The Irony of Empire*, 43, 54; for pre-contact “pilgrimage;” see, Carrasco and Scott Sessions, *Cave, City, and Eagle’s Nest: An Interpretive Journey through the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>117</sup> Geoffrey McCafferty, “Mountain of Heaven, Mountain of Earth,” in *Landscape and Power in Ancient Mesoamerica*, edited by Koontz et al. (Westview Press, 2001), 301-302.

<sup>118</sup> Foster, *Motolinia’s History*, 72.

of the *Tlachihualtepetl* and the spring, even though scholars believe that at the time, besides the Nahuas' ritual use of the man-made well-spring, the top of the site had been abandoned perhaps for a century.<sup>119</sup> This does not mean that the pyramid had lost its significance. On the contrary, along with use of the spring, a temple stood at the top of it, and it was clearly a tangible threat to Christian evangelizers. They quickly moved to have it refashioned into a Christian sacred site.

According to Motolinia, "On the top of [the pyramid] there was a small old temple. [The Nahuas] tore it down and set up in its place a tall cross."<sup>120</sup> Though Motolinia did not explain which group of Nahuas "tore" down the "small old temple," we know that Nahuas did the brunt of the work in the area. Furthermore, if they were trained as pre-contact stoneworkers then their refashioning of the top of the Great Pyramid of Cholula did not stray from Nahuatl tradition. In the Eighth Chapter of Book Ten of the Florentine Codex we find the Nahuatl *Tetzotzonqui* and *Tetlapanqui*, "Stone Cutters" and "Stone Breakers."<sup>121</sup> Listed together in one entry, these valuable occupations were among the seven "other ways of gaining a livelihood" besides the fine artisanal crafts like featherworker and goldcasting.<sup>122</sup> According to Sahagún's informants, stonecutters and breakers followed ancient patterns of construction, "accomplished [after the manner of] Tula," which included the breaking, tumbling, shaping, and carving out of "habitation in

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<sup>119</sup> McCafferty, "Altepetl: Cholula's Great Pyramid," 22.

<sup>120</sup> Foster, *Motolinia's History*, 89; there is no distinct person indicated for the removal of the "small old temple." "They" were most likely indigenous laborers and not a group of Spanish conquistadors, colonists, and priests. Some karmic vengeance may have been at play; however, the toppling of temples is depicted in numerous indigenous sources from the early colonial era.

<sup>121</sup> Sahagún, Fray Bernardino de, *General History of The Things of New Spain: Florentine Codex*, Arthur J O Anderson, Charles E Dibble (trans. and edits), (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1950-1982), *Book Ten*, 27-28.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-30.

the rock.”<sup>123</sup> Spanish accounts revel in how efficiently the Nahuas worked and the orderly construction of their building, and the words of the Nahua elders in the Florentine Codex evidence a preexisting desire for orderly-constructed buildings; in contrast, “bad” builders were “of lame, feeble arm; a crooked cutter, a crooked builder: a mocker—as if [they were] a builder of curved, leaning [walls]. He mocks people, builds crooked, builds with mud.”<sup>124</sup>

Breaking down the “small old temple” on the top of *Tlachihualtepetl* apparently went quickly, but another issue arose with an attempt at the planting of a cross there. According to Motolinia the first cross “was shattered by lightning.”<sup>125</sup> Two successive crosses were later erected on the top of the pyramid, only to be destroyed in the same manner.<sup>126</sup> Excavating the ground beneath the remains of the smoldering crucifixes, the determined friars and Cholutecas unearthed a cache of pre-Hispanic artifacts.<sup>127</sup> After removing these “diabolical” items, the third cross miraculously persisted.<sup>128</sup> Persistence and Christian faith had won out over paganism, even though, to this day, the gigantic mound functions like a lightning rod in stormy weather. At the time, propaganda like this could be used by the Franciscans to progress the triumphant story of planting crosses, which might resonate with Charles V, civil administrators, and the members of the religious hierarchy back home. When told to Nahua neophytes and perspective converts,

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>125</sup> Foster, *Motolinia's History*, 89.

<sup>126</sup> McCafferty has fittingly called Motolinia's account of the Christian claiming process of the top of the Great Pyramid an “exorcism;” “Altepetl: Cholula's Great Pyramid,” 21.

<sup>127</sup> Foster, *Motolinia's History*, 89.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

the story might take on ever more locally complex tones. Motolinia might have intended to challenge Tlaloc the god of rain and lightning. He could now point to a physical reminder of a triumphal Christianity.

Thus Ricard, holding the Franciscans at their words, adamantly stated that the “topping” process physically subordinated or “completed the political disorganization and initiated a policy of substitution.”<sup>129</sup> McAndrew understood this process as the “appropriation” of pyramid or “raised site” locations that both Christians and non-Christian religious would have found a fitting reuse.<sup>130</sup> Whereas Ricard speculated that Franciscans chose to replace a *teocalli*, or “sacred-force houses” because of their military qualities, so that “the spiritual conquest completed and reinforced the military occupation,” quite likely the population’s regular attendance at important pre-Christian sites demanded that priests direct the disassembling of popular *teocalli* and the construction of convents in their place.<sup>131</sup> By the mid-1570s, indigenous builders began construction of a chapel and later the convent and church of the Virgen de los Remedios, which today draws more than one million faithful pilgrims annually.<sup>132</sup> In the same way that the *Tlachihualtepetl* functioned as a local and regional sacred site in pre-Christian times, the existing Catholic Church continues to revivify the faith of a Christian audience today.<sup>133</sup> A pagan temple had been toppled and topped by Christian structures.

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<sup>129</sup> Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, 163.

<sup>130</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 186.

<sup>131</sup> Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, 163.

<sup>132</sup> Kelly, *An Archaeological Guide*, 159-164.

<sup>133</sup> McCafferty, “Altepetl: Cholula's Great Pyramid,” 22.

Motolinia felt assured of the physical Christian domination of sacred space; similarly, architectural historian Joseph Baird, Jr., noted that “psychologically [New World Christian churches] dominate the countryside around them, much as a medieval castle.”<sup>134</sup> In the eyes of Christian believers, the location of the shrine of the Virgen de los Remedios and the chapel spring are still an important pilgrimage destination, a combined site of spiritual renewal and veneration.<sup>135</sup> Standing atop the pyramid, after reading placards that describe Motolinia’s triumphal planting of the cross, Catholics (and tourists) entering the church have the opportunity to circle the altar and its relic of the Virgin Mary. Her healing powers still resonate with locals and foreigners alike. Ironically, some of these visitors may already have passed by the murals of *Los bebedores de pulque* (“the pulque drinkers”) that line the walls of the pre-Christian subterranean passageway under the pyramid. Long associated with primarily male gods, rabbits, and fertility, *pulque*, the fermented liquid of the maguey plant, also signified the milky-white full (or filled) moon and the healing qualities of “mother’s milk” expressed from the breasts of the Earth goddess.<sup>136</sup> The *tetzotzonqui* and *tetlapanqui* masons may have broken the temple on the top of the pyramid, but by transforming the exterior of an indigenous sacred space they were perhaps only giving the Earth goddess a face-lift.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Joseph A. Baird, Jr., *The Churches of Mexico 1530 – 1810* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1962), 82.

<sup>135</sup> The “colonial” variation of ritual pilgrimage included newly constructed “churches with stairs of access”, see Baird, Jr., *The Churches of Mexico*, 10.

<sup>136</sup> Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and The Maya* (New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 138.

<sup>137</sup> In many ways this process resembles the comingling, or perhaps conversion, of the Virgin of Guadalupe into *tonantsij* the current fertility deity of the Nahuas of Amatlán, venerated together today; Alan Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood: Culture and Ethnic Identity in a Contemporary Aztec Indian Village* (Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1992), 242.

In turn, by continual ritualization of these sacred spaces, the actual flexibility of colonial Catholicism allowed for the assumptions of Spanish priests, like Motolinia, that Christianity dominated these religious spaces. Therefore, we can see a physical representation of Lockhart's theory, the assumption of false cognates on the part of both the Nahuas and the Iberians about the meanings of the architecture of *Tlachihualtepetl* that allowed for this kind of flexibility.<sup>138</sup> For Nahuas were used to this process: they had long built over their temples. In fact archaeological digs in the nineteenth and twentieth century on *Tlachihualtepetl* revealed that the "artificial mountain" was actually artificial mountains, plural, what one scholar called an architectural "palimpsest."<sup>139</sup> Evidently indigenous Mesoamericans built up the current mountain in stages, beginning in the third century BCE (Figure 7). The temple that Motolinia had dismantled had been dedicated to a twin of the deity Quetzalcoatl; however the mountain itself had been associated with frogs and springs, and thus Mesoamerican concepts of fertility.<sup>140</sup> It is believed to be the oldest continuously ritualized site in the world.<sup>141</sup> The Nahuas of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley held their own tradition of toppling, and it facilitated what the Franciscans understood as spiritual conquest.

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<sup>138</sup> Lockhart explained that the priest may have colluded with the Nahuas mistaken association of saints such as the Virgen de los Remedios; *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 243-244.

<sup>139</sup> McCafferty, "Mountain of Heaven, Mountain of Earth," 281.

<sup>140</sup> The implication of *Tlachihualtepetl*'s religious significance is explored in fully detail in the fourth chapter of this study; *ibid.*, 304.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.



Figure 7: Layers of construction, *Tlachihualtepetl*, Building 3. Evidence of the Pre-contact tradition of covering over sacred spaces (Photographed by the author, August 2011).

In a sense, the non-Christian elements attached to the ritualized use of *Tlachihualtepetl* were re-centered into the colonial Christian paradigm. Following the recent argument of Veronica Salles-Reese's valuable examination of pre-Incan/Incan origination and creation narratives that were incorporated into Andean Christianity, *Tlachihualtepetl* can be seen as representing another shared sacred space, a pre-Christian/Christian "unmoving center" of cosmic power.<sup>142</sup> In the decades following the conquest, *Tlachihualtepetl* continued to function as the "Mecca" of the Nahuas, and by toppling their own structures, an ancient tradition, and rebuilding their own "Christian" temple in its place, they continued to honor the same sacred site as well as the Earth goddess in the guise of the Virgin of the Remedies. Simultaneously, the friars, without

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<sup>142</sup> Verónica Salles-Reese, *From Viracocha to the Virgin of Copacabana: Representation of the Sacred at Lake Titicaca*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 17-18; for Salles-Reese (and for Andean cultures over time) the "unmoving center" continues to be Lake Titicaca (175).

the ability to wipe the memory of Cholula-as-Mecca away, accepted the outward appearance of Ibero-Christian architectural structures as an affirmation of the Nahuas adoption of Christianity, while discarding or deemphasizing the notion of what Salles-Reese called “intermingled” stories.<sup>143</sup> Whereas new Christian Andeans found a cosmological center around Lake Titicaca, many Mesoamerican cultures found a similar re-centering of their faith atop *Tlachihualtepetl* in the heart of Cholollan. As such, introduced dominant and institutionalized religious practices were forced to conform to the physical culture and presence of local sacred space, be they monolithic mountain or minute healing spring.<sup>144</sup> Thus, in the colonial re-construction of the space on top of *Tlachihualtepetl* we find an example of Nahuas toppling and topping one of their sacred sites so that it would continue to be a locus of cosmic power.

### **The Nahua Roofless Schools**

As Nahuas came to terms with the transformation of age-old sacred sites such as the temple of *Tlachihualtepetl* into Christian churches and thus schools, how truly innovative were the mechanisms of Christian education that they encountered? Their culture already boasted well-developed educational techniques and even schools, though the types of education the people received undoubtedly varied from place to place. For example, in the *altepetl* city-center Tenochtitlan, the Mexica and their allies in the Triple Alliance ritualized the institutional foundation story of the deity Huitzilopchtli alongside

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<sup>143</sup> Salles-Reese concisely demonstrates her reconstructed version of narratives in “Figure 8” (130); however, the reader must incorporate, or “recontextualize” the Christian narrative found in the latter half of *From Viracocha to the Virgin*. In Salles-Reese’s words, in regards to religion in the Andes “stasis is impossible”, and we, as historians, are but to “confront the textual evidence” and then superimpose our own frame of reference on top of the polyphony, *From Viracocha to the Virgin*, 173.

<sup>144</sup> Mircea Eliade theorizes on the “symbolism of the center” the *axis mundi* of mountains and in turn cities in *Cosmos and History: The Myth of Eternal Return*, (New York, NY: Harper, 1959), 12; see also, Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and The Irony of Empire*, 122.

a much older deity, Tlaloc.<sup>145</sup> Rising to dominate the Triple Alliance, the Mexica first incorporated Huitzilopochtli into the narrative of creation, and then linked him with Tlaloc to legitimize their position of power. The Mexica signaled this sacred alliance in the form of the twin pyramid now called the Templo Mayor, which featured a pair of *teocalli*, or “sacred-force house,” each devoted to the one of the two deities. Regular teaching—as well as propagandizing—about these deities helped to maintain their and the Aztecs’ legitimacy. At the time of contact, the Mexicans claimed commercial, military, and spiritual domination over numerous *altepetl* and the smaller polities that made up each city-state. In the pictorial accounts of the empire’s spread and domination, artists painted images of each conquered community, with a flaming temple-like structure, each with a specific place glyph to define the group. Much like the Mexica tragic account of the “temples... in flames, and so were the communal halls, the religious schools and all the houses,” transition from hegemon to hegemon, be it Nahua or Iberian, included an attack on the local sacred identity of a community.<sup>146</sup> Certainly, Nahua educators in the cities taught deep cultural traditions through a formalized education system. This system helped to maintain access to the production and labor of rural Nahua agrarians, the home communities of each incorporated as flaming temples on the Mexica map. What was education like for the public in the countryside? Due to the lack of local documentation or oral records we might never know the specifics, but from traces of the

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<sup>145</sup> Carrasco called him a “latecomer to the central plateau... [who] becomes one of the four original sons of the high god and is named as Quetzalcoatl’s co-creator;” Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 95.

<sup>146</sup> León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 53-54.

education practices of at least one *altepētēl* we can recreate the education system of the local Nahua schools.<sup>147</sup>

The Codex Mendoza, considered the “Rosetta stone” for studies of the Aztec empire, is a hybrid colonial manuscript consisting of native pictography with accompanying Nahuatl glosses and Spanish commentary, all of it inscribed on European paper.<sup>148</sup> The Spanish compiler and interpreter (we only get the enigmatic “G” to identify him) stated explicitly that the production was rushed to completion for Viceroy Mendoza and intended for King Charles, and specialists place its composition sometime in the 1540s. It is a three-part collection of texts describing, first, the foundation and imperial history of the Mexica, next, their tributary subjects and the forms of tribute that the empire collected, and finally, an ethnographic explanation of the daily life of the Nahuas. In the third section we find some of the earliest extant representations of pre-contact schools. Even though these depictions were filtered through the memories of post-contact sixteenth-century Nahuas, the sensibilities of the Spanish editor, and most likely idealized in various ways, they remain crucial for the investigation into pre-contact educational philosophies and practices.

The creators of the Codex Mendoza pictured the pre-contact method of instruction, both local and institutional, on folios from 58r to 70r. The painters began by describing childhood development and the enculturation of the youth, segmented into male and female divisions of domestic and mercantile training. This practical education began apparently as young as age four, with “minor” chores like collecting water for boys

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<sup>147</sup> For more on pictographic and textual writing forms, see Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Stories in Black and Red: Pictorial Histories of the Aztecs and Mixtecs*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 31-38 and 49-55.

<sup>148</sup> Berdan and Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza*, xi.

and the first introduction of the spindle for girls. These tasks increase in complexity and difficulty, and though from age eight to eleven we only learn about the gender-specific corrective measures and physical punishments exacted by the male or female parent, by about age fifteen, male and female youths were ready to participate in Nahua formal education.<sup>149</sup> At this critical stage a class distinction separated noble from commoner. Whereas noble boys entered elite institutions that were attached to temples called *calmecac* (“The House of Lineage”), and many commoner men entered military and tactical training in the *telpochcalli* (“House of the Youths”), most local commoner boys and girls began their education in the *cuicacalli* (“The House of Song”).<sup>150</sup> The institutional scholastic program of the *calmecac* and *telpochcalli* focused on a more formalized academic training in pictography, statecraft, warfare, and institutional religion.<sup>151</sup> The *cuicacalli*, as the name suggests, taught youths the arts of song and dance, much of it freighted with sacred meanings on the local level.

In the 1570s, the Dominican friar fray Diego Durán spent time documenting the accounts of indigenous record keepers, seemingly to capture the pagan practices that he believed to be fading away but which still threatened Christianity.<sup>152</sup> Fray Diego noted in the introduction to his *Book of the Gods and Rites* (1581) that Catholic priests were obligated to extinguish and erase the “heathen ceremonies and false cults of their

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<sup>149</sup> Berdan, *The Aztecs of Central Mexico*, 95.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.; the Codex Mendoza gives us only a representation of males entering the *calmecac* and *cuicacalli*, Berdan and Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza*, 123-127.

<sup>151</sup> Carrasco described the lesson plan of the *calmecac*, or “schools of higher learning” as, “the theology, ethics, divine songs, and history of the realm;” *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 77.

<sup>152</sup> Durán, *Book of Gods and Rites*, xvii.

counterfeit deities.”<sup>153</sup> And yet, by studying and then relaying this information to his fellow religious, both in New Spain and back home, he preserved the words of Nahua elders and ritualized Nahua forms of education. As well, fray Diego described some of the religious rituals and cultural traditions that the Nahuas used to maintain their histories. He did all of this from the world-view of an educated Iberian, rationalizing conversion through the events of the Spanish Reconquista and the Catholic monarchs’ often heavy-handed fifteenth-century efforts to convert or expel Muslims and Jews.<sup>154</sup> Similar to many other priestly “ethnographers,” fray Diego searched out indigenous documentation in an effort to prove that the civilized and powerful societies of Mexico could only have derived from Old World forbearers. For instance, Durán traveled to Ocuituco (in the “hot lands” near Cuernavaca) to find “a large book there, four fingers in height and written in characters... but [the Indians] swore that six years before they had burned it since they could not understand the writing.” The friar laments that, “I was sorry to hear this, because the manuscript could have shed light on our suspicion that it might have been the Holy Gospel in Hebrew.”<sup>155</sup>

At least according to Durán, Hebraic traditions, corrupted over time, were the foundation of Mesoamerican religious education so that “no matter how beastly, they practiced their religion and its precepts well.”<sup>156</sup> Unfortunately, as far as fray Diego was concerned, the “fine order in which these people lived under their old religion,” had been

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 51-52; also Reilly, *The Medieval Spains*, 2009.

<sup>155</sup> Durán, *Book of the Gods*, 63.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 287-288.

“turned upside down and lost regarding the ancient religion and customs.”<sup>157</sup> The events of the conquest and ensuing decades of Iberian colonization had nearly confounded “everything,” leaving “[n]o more than a shadow” of the pre-contact religious system of education. Still, though Durán defined Nahua religious education practices as dead or dying, the Nahua elders he consulted remembered them, and in fact his book included indigenous drawings of how “teachers... taught dancing and singing [in] [t]hese houses... called Cuicacalli.”<sup>158</sup> This highlights the fact that Nahuas maintained their pictographic traditions well into the sixteenth century, even if stylistically the pictures had been influenced by European artistic conventions.

Though shadows indeed covered much of the knowledge of the past, Durán preserved the elders’ descriptions and memories of how dance and song functioned in the pre-contact school of the darkened spaces of their past.<sup>159</sup> In Chapter Twenty-one, which describes the “God of Dance and the schools of dance,” Durán explains that elders assembled local boys and girls—here between the ages “twelve to fourteen”—daily in a local school attached to the temple. Most likely each *calpulli*, (a subunit of an *altepetl*) had specific customs they followed, but according to Durán the “teachers” lived in the *cuicacalli*, and they regulated instruction.<sup>160</sup> Durán’s informants did not mention teaching tools like manuscripts or books, instead only “singing, dancing, and the playing of instruments.”<sup>161</sup> In fact, there is little evidence that the Nahuas, neither teachers nor

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

students, relied on pictographic manuscripts in the *cuicacalli*; apparently lessons in pictographic literacy were reserved for the noble males attending the *calmecac*. This division of the access to knowledge and the “language” of the elite most likely maintained the social distinctions between noble and commoner. Instead, inside the walled, rectangular, roofless “schools” standing “next to the temples,” commoner children regularly reaffirmed their devotion to the sacred patrons of their *altepetl* and sub-*altepetl* through song and dance.<sup>162</sup>

This is not to say that these instructors *cuicacalli* lacked any kind of recognizable “textbook,” for in fact, they did rely on a “text” to maintain local knowledge.<sup>163</sup> It is important to note that the teachers resided next to the sacred temple structure, a physical relationship that was part of their occupation as keepers of cultural knowledge. These teachers, both male and female, taught the boys and girls song and dance through “audiovisual” materials and by means of physical training.<sup>164</sup> The students memorized movements, rhythm, and lyrics under the guidance of a specialist. The concrete demonstration of dance movements performed by teachers was a kind of visual “textbook” inscribed on and by these instructors’ bodies. Durán’s informants in the “hot lands” south of Mexico City, in the region inhabited by the Nahuatl-speaking Tlalhuica ethnicity, emphasized that dance was central to the transmission of knowledge in the

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<sup>162</sup> Durán explains that “Attendance at these schools was so important and the law [in regard to attendance] was kept so rigorously that any absence was considered almost a crime lese majesty,” *Book of the Gods*, 289.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> For female teachers see, Kellogg, “From Parallel and Equivalent to Separate and Unequal,” found in *Indian Women of Early Mexico*, (1997) 127-130.

“House of Song.”<sup>165</sup> Instruction took place daily, at sunset. Elders, both male and female, collected the youths in two segregated lines, one for boys followed by the male elder, or *teananqui* and the other for girls, with the elder female, or *cihuatepixqui*, following them. These positions were appointed, and the two officials helped to maintain an orderly procession into the classroom.

Apparently, the Nahua instructors among the Tlalhuicas venerated a stone idol, which Durán called “God of Dance.” Most likely this idol represented Xochipilli (Flower Prince), god of dance, flowers, and the arts. A large stone statue of Xochipilli can be found in the collection of the Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia (MNAH), Chapultepec, Mexico City.<sup>166</sup> It has been dated to the late fifteenth century, and is posed in a sitting position, arms raised with partially closed fists, knees elevated, with legs crossed at the ankles. Its readable carved markings run along its head, arms, and legs.<sup>167</sup> According to Durán’s informants, the “idols” used by the Tlalhuicas were also made of stone and were small enough to be carried to the center of the classroom from “a chamber in front of the courtyard” maintained by the teachers. When placed before the teachers and students of the *cuicacalli*, the symbols inscribed on such a statue would carry culturally significant connotations, and could be “read” by the teachers, bringing a form of legible text into the classroom.

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<sup>165</sup> Haskett explored the Tlalhuicas the “dominant ethnicity” of Cuauhnahuac (modern day Cuernavaca) and their role as an “expansionist state” in the late pre-contact era; see, *Visions of Paradise*, 60-69.

<sup>166</sup> For the museum’s website, see <http://www.mna.inah.gob.mx/index.php/la-coleccion/historia-de-la-coleccion/el-museo-de-la-calle-de-moneda.html>

<sup>167</sup> In the 1950s, Justino Fernández noted the connections between the detailed butterfly, floral, and animal symbols recognizable on the surface of the Xochipilli idol and the idols significance in the recapitulation of the birth of the sun; see his “Una aproximación a Xochipilli,” *Estudios de Cultura Nahuatl*, I (1959), 31-41.

At the time of instruction, the idol was adorned in the “native way,” with intricate floral arrangements placed in the holes of his open fists and feathers attached to his head and neck. The Nahuatl youths assembled before it, prepared to reenact local knowledge; assembling the boys and girls at sunset was also an affirmation that the sun would be reborn because of the teachers’ guidance and the students’ interaction with the idol-text. The bedecked statue was embellished with a complex “text” of signifiers appropriate for the reproduction of whatever specific story about the idol was to be learned and acted out. Once the idol had been set in the center of the schoolyard, the Nahuatl “asked [the idol] permission before beginning the dance,” demonstrating not only the animistic quality of their rituals, but also showcasing the Nahuatl custom of interacting with the classroom environment, which had become a space of community participation. Then the children performed memorized dance steps and sang songs that recreated local knowledge. Each dancer or singer, as they had been instructed, referred to the adorned mnemonic device like a three-dimensional and multi-sensorial text. In fact, as Durán noted, they feared that the idol might become angry if the performance did not recreate the local knowledge accurately, and in some cases the Nahuatl of Tlalhuica would “create new chants” for the idol.<sup>168</sup>

Education in the *cuiacalli* was a living and malleable construct, and though the primary symbols of the idol-text remained the same, the teachers created new histories around these idol-texts, reworking the past and present. Certainly the idol-texts of the Tlalhuicas reinforced different memories and local knowledge than the ones used by their neighbors in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley to the northeast, and further comparative studies might help to identify regional variations. However, it is apparent that the local,

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<sup>168</sup> Durán, *Book of the Gods*, 289-291.

community-level form of Nahua education relied on regular directed study in an ordered, controlled, and sacred environment based at least in part around the use of idols as a text and mnemonic device. This instruction and ritual most likely included other materials; for example we know of the use of intricately designed drums and sumptuous regalia that must have told different stories. But it is enough to know that the roofless *cuicacalli* education of the Nahuas included the use of stone surfaces to remember the divine past.

### **Conclusion**

The toppling and topping of *Tlachihualtepetl* did not end Nahua ritual devotion to the site, and the Catholic church that Nahuas built in its place did not symbolize a completed conquest. Though the surfaces of temples and walls had been altered, the same stones were refashioned to create a “new” sacred space out of the old. They included Christian themes alongside pre-contact ones. Scholars continue to explore the flexibility of Mesoamerican cultural traditions that allowed for these types of spiritual exchanges to take place. But it is also a process of remembering and claiming ownership of Mexican Christianity. As seen in the work of Linda Curcio-Nagy, even when indigenous citizens adopted Christian saints and icons, like the Virgen de los Remedios, over time larger political and social movements, such as the lead up to Mexican independence, coopted religious icons, and they constructed new stories around them to find legitimacy in popular piety.<sup>169</sup> These movements would have had a less coherent message without their associations with Christian saints, and those saints would not have stayed relevant to the population of New Spain had the indigenous not framed the Virgin Mary within a

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<sup>169</sup> Curcio-Nagy, Linda, “Native Icon to City Protectress to Royal Patroness,” in *The Church in Colonial Latin America* edited by John Schwaller (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2000), 183-208.

Mesoamerican worldview.<sup>170</sup> Similar to the refashioning of *Tlachihualtepetl*, the physical toppling and topping and the visual persistence in indigenous *mapas* of the city of Cholula, these stories became more complex for the locals, but the same spiritual landscape of learning remained a viable zone for re-creating stories.

In the end, local sacred rituals persisted into the colonial era in the same physical locations that they had existed in for centuries before. Though Spanish priests might claim the victory over pagan gods, in fact the Nahuas claimed a similar victory right alongside them, in the schools that they built and in the ways that they learned to keep their faith. As we will see in the next chapter, Nahua builders functioned within the acceptable parameters of early Mexican Catholicism, incorporating concepts that fit well within their local customs. And yet their tradition of instruction in the *cuicacalli* and *calmecac* shaped the way that Spaniards could reach them. Thus we turn to an investigation of Nahua contributions to iconography and architecture in educational spaces built at a time that Mendieta believed was the “Golden Age of the Indian Church” in central New Spain.<sup>171</sup> Similar to the written and painted Spanish and Native sources of the era, the iconography of the classroom becomes a valuable tool in understanding the localized renovations of religious rituals in sixteenth-century New Spain. Furthermore, these “new” structures housed the next generation of Nahua students, young and old. What pre-Christian stories resonated in the architectural programs of the next generation of colonial classrooms? If, as we have seen in this chapter, the outward refashioning of

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<sup>170</sup> Crucio-Nagy noted the irony of the traditional story of saint adoption, beginning with an indigenous man, Tovar, began to worship her statue/idol on a sacred hill. Later, once her likeness had been fully incorporated into that of the fertility deity Tonantzin and adopted by central Mexicans and bureaucrats, Royalists used her as a banner in the fight against the important saint of the resistance movement, the Virgen de Guadalupe in 1810; “Native Icon to City Protectress to Royal Patroness,” 184-185, 195-198.

<sup>171</sup> Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans*, 39-55

American sacred spaces represented a material propagation of pre- and post-contact indigeneity, how did indigenous decolonization of educational spaces take place *within* the open-air conventual schools?

### CHAPTER III

#### (RE)CONSTRUCTED SCHOOLS: THE COMMUNITY OF SAN ANDRÉS CALPAN AND THE FRANCISCAN LESSON PLAN

Over the course of two years, from 1577 to 1579, Franciscan friar fray Diego de Valadés constructed his liturgical masterpiece describing the best practices for the conversion of Native Americans to Christianity.<sup>172</sup> At the same time, virulent sickness ravaged the native populations of New Spain. In the words of one Nahuatl chronicler, “here two million of the indigenous people died in all.”<sup>173</sup> Seemingly, these two diametrically-opposed forces, one the extension of human knowledge in literature and the other the elimination of human knowledge in the form of failing local oral traditions, worked together, sifting indigenous culture like a colonial sieve. Fray Diego’s designs, when applied in the schools of the Americas, delimited the types of knowledge that the indigenous would learn in the conventual classroom, and how those spaces should be put to use in molding good Christians and subjects of the Crown. That said, Nahua students and teachers used the same educational spaces, structures that they had built themselves throughout the mid-sixteenth century, as tools to maintain their culture and cosmology. Though disease and catechization threatened to deaden the voices of local knowledge, there is ample evidence that the Nahuas of communities like San Andrés Calpan actively pursued other possibilities for learning and interpretation as evinced in the surfaces of the reconstructed colonial classrooms.

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<sup>172</sup> Fray Diego de Valadés, O. F. M., *Rhetorica Christiana*. (*Retorica Cristiana*. Perusiae: Petrumiacubum Petrutium, [1579]) Reprinted in Spanish with notes and translation by Esteban Palomera, (Mexico City, Mexico: UNAM and Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1989), xii.

<sup>173</sup> The text reads, *yn omomiquili masehualtzintli ome millones ycmoChi*; Camilla Townsend, *Here In This Year: Seventeenth-Century Nahuatl Annals of the Tlaxcala-Puebla Valley* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 83.

Disease may have instigated the building of the new school at Calpan. Three decades before the 1578 epidemic and the publication of fray Diego's *Rhetorica*, from 1546 to 1548, the Nahuas of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley were stricken with a devastating *huey cocolistli*, or "great plague."<sup>174</sup> The Nahuatl chronicler briefly noted, "Here in this year a great epidemic occurred; at that time clouds kept running across the heavens."<sup>175</sup> Perhaps the chronicler believed that the supernatural events were linked to the sickness. Though they were recorded after the fact, we know that the Mexica put great portent behind omens when describing the conquest and the fall of the Triple Alliance.<sup>176</sup> The lead up to the mid-century saw an increase in ecclesiastical building projects, which have commonly been associated with the adoption of Christianity. According to one specialist, for instance, the era of the 1530s to 1550s was a period of "enthusiastic Tlaxcalan Christianity," coinciding with the construction of their church of San Francisco.<sup>177</sup> One scholar notes that from mid-century on there was "a burst of extraordinary inventiveness and creativity, still visible today in the stone facades of scores of sixteenth-century Catholic churches where indigenous craftsmen incorporated [building materials bearing]

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<sup>174</sup> For "diseases" of the region see, Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810*, (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1964), 448-450.

<sup>175</sup> The Nahuatl reads: *Nican ypan xihuitl yn omochiuh huey cocolistli yn icuac motlatlalo mixcoatl ytech yllhuicatl*; the "Annals of Tlaxcala" place the epidemic in 1545; Townsend, *Here In this Year*, 72-73, 162-163.

<sup>176</sup> León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 3-12; for a critique of post-conflict "omens," see Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and The Irony of Empire*, 225.

<sup>177</sup> Gibson, *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century*, 29.

religiously charged images of plants and animals that had [once] adorned [the dismantled] pre-conquest temples.”<sup>178</sup>

It was during this time of change, in the aftermath of disease and at the dawn of Christian conversion, that the Nahuas of Calpan, a sub-*altepetl* subordinate to the *altepetl* of Huejotzingo, began the construction of their Christian courtyard and church that was later to be known as the *convento* of San Andrés. From Spanish tributary records we know that community itself was changing. After the conquest the people of Calpan contributed 20,000 to 24,000 laborers to their Spanish *encomenderos* and royal projects, and within fifty years that number had dropped to a fifth of the original (4,876 in 1570).<sup>179</sup>

Who led, and therefore who should get the credit for, the convent and its decorative embellishments? How did the Iberian religious specialists, and in particular members of the Franciscan order, intend to teach in venues like Calpan’s new convent atrium? In particular, how successfully were the ideals expressed in fray Diego de Valadés’ liturgical work actually realized on the ground and in everyday practice? What sorts of mutual misunderstandings (if any) were inherent in the process of catechization in New Spain, elements of Lockhart’s “double mistaken identity” that could have allowed for local Nahua religion to exist alongside institutional Christianity in conventual

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<sup>178</sup> Espinosa Yglesias, Angeles, “Foreword,” in *Cave, City, and Eagle’s Nest: An Interpretive Journey through the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan no. 2*, edited by David Carrasco and Scott Sessions (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), xix.

<sup>179</sup> Robert Himmerich y Valencia, *The Encomenderos of New Spain, 1521-1555* (Austin, TX: University of Texas-Austin, [1991] 1995), 208; census records in the years following the conquest must be read with skepticism. The Spaniards looked to emphasize their grants with greater numbers and the displacement of people may have affected the accuracy of the later records. We cannot know if Calpanecas moved to nearby San Nicolás de los Ranchos, Huejotzingo, or further afield; however, these figures are helpful in understanding how Spaniards may have viewed population changes at the time.

schools? What resonances and dissonances existed between the words and methods of the Iberian teachers and the possible interpretations of those same things made by Nahua students?

### **Reconstructing the School of Calpan**

Arriving in the Americas in 1528 with Fray Juan Zumárraga (who soon became the first archbishop of New Spain), fray Juan de Alameda became part of the first wave of Franciscans waging what they saw as the “spiritual conquest” of Mesoamerica.<sup>180</sup> Architectural historian Richard Perry considers fray Juan’s “contribution to monastic architecture... [to have been] enormous,” especially in the area of Calpan and the Puebla-Tlaxcalan Valley.<sup>181</sup> John McAndrew called him “one of the most active Spanish architects” and credited him with building the convents and courtyards of Huejotzingo, Calpan, and Tochimilco.<sup>182</sup> Recently, scholars have noted the significant contributions of indigenous laborers at every step of construction; however, even these recent works persist in following solely the Franciscans accounts and they attribute the designs of what was being built to fray Juan alone. Certainly, historians should respect the extant documentation regarding fray Juan’s architectural prowess; and yet, limiting indigenous lapidaries, architects, and even common laborers to a submissive and passive role in construction slights their vital contributions.<sup>183</sup> For we know from the same set of sources that laud fray Juan’s distinction as a visionary that his collaborators in the creation of

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<sup>180</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 334; Perry, *Mexico’s Fortress Monasteries*, 93.

<sup>181</sup> Perry, *Mexico’s Fortress Monasteries*, 93.

<sup>182</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches* 334–339.

<sup>183</sup> Kubler, “Architects and Builders in Mexico: 1521-1550,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 7 (1944), 16–17, 16n2.

sites like Calpan were primarily a group of architecturally-inclined Nahuas from the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley.<sup>184</sup> Apparently, from the 1540s until his death in 1572, fray Juan managed a team, or teams, of indigenous builders from Huejotzingo, some of whom came from Calpan. Their construction efforts resulted in related structural themes.<sup>185</sup> Eventually the monastery in Puebla and four convents in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, including Calpan's and Huejotzingo's, would come to be associated with him.<sup>186</sup>

McAndrew considered the ornamentation at Calpan to be a “derivative” of Huejotzingo (built in the late-1540s); however, he noted that with the experience of building Huejotzingo behind them, the indigenous builders of the convent of Calpan “may have worked with less direct European supervision.”<sup>187</sup> In 1570, it is believed that fray Juan died while living at the monastery of Huaquechula, a Nahua community on the southern end of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley. His inspired designs, borrowed from the woodcut engravings found in popular religious texts of the time, left an indelible mark on

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<sup>184</sup> The historical memory of fray Juan's building campaign and the works that grew out of the project in many ways resembles the efforts of other Franciscans, such as fray Bernardino de Sahagún. Sahagún is usually credited with the Florentine Codex; however, most of the manuscript was created by indigenous authors, in this case painters and scholars, with fray Bernardino acting as editor.

<sup>185</sup> Fray Juan attempted to recruit laborers from Tlaxcala, too, but failed. The Tlaxcalan cabildo (town council) noted that at the beginning of August, 1549, the priest, sent by Motolinia, came to them “to request tribute labor to help build the Franciscan monastery in Puebla.” But they said no, stating that “there are many things in Tlaxcala itself which need attention and are not yet done;” James Lockhart, Frances Berdan, and Arthur J.O. Anderson (trans. and eds), *The Tlaxcalan Actas: A Compendium of the Records of the Cabildo of Tlaxcala (1545 – 1627)* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1986), 42.

<sup>186</sup> McAndrew specifically highlighted the similarities between the flattened-dome roof of the posa of San Francisco and a similar one at Huejotzingo; *The Open-Air Churches*, 328–329. See also, Perry, *Mexico's Fortress Monasteries*, 104; Morehead, “An Iconology of Architectural Ornament,” 24–25; Kubler, *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*, 16n2; McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 127.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 325, 336.

Iberian and Nahua alike.<sup>188</sup> And yet, were they truly based solely on European designs to begin with?

Lacking archaeological studies of the protected grounds of Calpan's convent and church, scholars have had to speculate on the likely antecedents of the conventual school. Archaeological surveys in the 1960s point to a preexisting temple complex under the stones of San Andrés Calpan. Its location and the traditional narratives of the valley embedded in the ornamentation of the architecture are both highlights of the site's significance to pre-contact education practices.<sup>189</sup> Spanish sources claim that the illustrious fray Juan moved the entire community of Calpan to the area of the present-day "old town," sometime in the 1540s. However, the convent's submerged courtyard exemplifies pre-contact structural design, not Iberian, and most likely a walled *cuicacalli* next to a pyramidal temple once stood in its place.<sup>190</sup> This is not to negate the contributions of fray Juan. Rather it is to note the importance of a style of architecture specific to a people, or their architectural vernacular, and the way that Nahuas and Nahua traditions shaped the contours of the convent. If the valiant fray Juan displaced an entire community, then the submerged courtyard signifies that the community did not come to settle the new site abandoning their past, but embracing it. Evidently the people of Calpan had deep connection to the valley; the new entered, rather than replaced, the old.

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<sup>188</sup> Kubler, *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*, 392-393.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>190</sup> Excavations in the 1990s revealed that the existing arcaded Zócalo (central plaza) of Mexico City is the most likely candidate for a pre-contact *cuicacalli* of Mexica Tenochtitlan.

## The Calpanecas: A People, Place and Time

According to regional Nahua traditions, Nahuas had been living in Calpan, (Nahuatl for “Place of Houses”) for a long time. In the late sixteenth century, the Tlaxcalan historian Diego Muñoz Camargo documented the founding of Calpan in the migration narrative of his Nahua ancestors.<sup>191</sup> According to oral traditions and local knowledge gathered from Nahua elders, before arriving at their final destination on the northern edge of the valley, the Tlaxcalans first crossed over the saddle-mountain pass separating the Valley of Mexico from the Puebla-Tlaxcalan Valley. Next, they stopped in “Tochimilco, Atlixco, Calpan, and Huejotzingo.”<sup>192</sup> From Huejotzingo, the ancestors moved on to the west, following a river that ran down the slope of Iztaccihuatl the inactive volcanic range that marks the western edge of the valley. The Tlaxcalans eventually settled on the eastern side of the valley, leaving behind Nahua-speaking kin in Calpan and Huejotzingo.

Spanish conquistadors first noted passing through the “ranchos of Yzcalpan” in the autumn of 1519, after the bloody battle for Cholollan, and in the days before they crossed over the mountain pass into the Valley of Mexico.<sup>193</sup> Francisco López de Gómara, writing much later as Cortés’ historian, noted that the conquistadors had “advanced but four leagues on that day [from Cholula], in order to sleep in some hamlets belonging to Huexotzinco[sic].” At the time, Calpan was considered a sub-*altepetl* to Huejotzingo, which lay to the northeast of Calpan, and gave tribute in the form of

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<sup>191</sup> Muñoz Camargo, Diego, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 1st ed. (Madrid: Historia 16, 1986), 82-87.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>193</sup> Díaz del Castillo, *The History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 149.

agricultural products and labor to the Huejotzingans. Though the exact location of Calpan at the time of contact remains obscure, the community most likely ranged roughly within its present boundaries.<sup>194</sup>

Significant to the outcome of conquest, “Caciques and priests of the towns of Huexotzingo which were nearby” advised the Spaniards that after crossing the mountain path into the Valley of Mexico, they should avoid taking the “well swept and cleared” route confronting them, one of the “two broad roads” leading to Tenochtitlan. According to the priests, Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin had laid an ambush for the conquerors along the “swept” path, anticipating that they would choose it over the other “closed up” road, blocked by “felled trees” making it impossible for the army’s horses and warriors to “march along.”<sup>195</sup> Bernal Díaz del Castillo noted that the Calpanecas offered to “send many men with [them] to clear [the road].”<sup>196</sup>

This act of fealty and service to the enemies of Tenochtitlan would stay in the memory of the Nahuas of the Valley of Mexico for a long time; seventy years after the conquest, the Mexica of Tenochtitlan reviled the priests of Calpan in song. Among the Mexica songs written down in the Franciscan school in Tlatelolco, we find untitled song “Eighty-eight.” The majority of the ninety-one songs consist of verbal attacks on the

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<sup>194</sup> The Nahuatl historian Chimalpahin, when re-writing Gómara’s history of the conquest, did not mention Calpan, instead listed a place “now called ‘Of the Ranchos,’ or Xalltzintli, meaning ‘Under the Sand.’” Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, Domingo *Chimalpahin’s Conquest: A Nahuatl Historian’s Rewriting of Francisco López de Gómara’s La conquista de México* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 175. Most likely, *Xaltzinli* (“Sandy Bottom,” translation provided to me by Robert Haskett) became San Nicolás de los Ranchos, a modern day community to the southwest of Calpan that grows maize on the fertile volcanic soil created by the lava flows from Popocatepetl. For more on the religious implications of volcanic sand of the region, see Doris Heyden’s examination of the religious significance of sand found in Sahagun’s work, specifically this type of dark and porous material; see, Heyden, “Sand in Ritual and in History,” in *Representing Aztec Rituals*, 175-196.

<sup>195</sup> Schroeder et al, *Chimalpahin’s Conquest*, 149–150.

<sup>196</sup> Díaz del Castillo, *The History of the Conquest of New Spain*, 149-150.

character of primarily Tlaxcalan and Huejotzingan warriors and priests. The songs describe the Tlaxcalans and Huejotzingans as ruthless fighters and the Mexica sing about the deceit of the priests who fought against them. Whereas the singers commonly refer to both warriors and priests from these regions simultaneously, song “Eighty-eight” is the only one that is directed solely at priests and it is the only one that makes reference to Calpan. We are told about a mischievous *tamacazqui* (“priest”) who comes to “settle down” in the court of the Mexica.<sup>197</sup> He attempts to lure the Mexica and their allies (“our loved ones, our comrades”) away from their court with “aromatic cherry seeds” (*texochicapolyollototoponi*) and other sweet words.<sup>198</sup> In the end, the Mexica and their friends are taken to Calpan. There the priest gives them drink and leads them into corruption.<sup>199</sup> Like a Nahuatl version of the legend of the Pied Piper leading the children into danger, this song admonishes the audience to be wary of people from Calpan. It demonstrates that not only were the Mexica aware of, and for that matter denigrating toward, Calpan’s powerful priests, but that the Mexica recognized that the Calpanecas evidently had a functioning temple and school. Though not very substantial, the Mexica song is one more bit of evidence supporting the idea that Calpan was known for having a school in the pre-contact period. We must keep in mind that this school could be a

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<sup>197</sup> Bierhorst, *A Nahuatl-English Dictionary and Concordance to the Cantares Mexicanos*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 339. The Florentine Codex, Book Three, describes the *tamacazqui* as a “middle-ranking priest; in this way, the priest in the Mexica song resembles a teacher from a *cuicacalli* or a priest from a *calmecac*; Sahagún, *General History of The Things of New Spain, Book Three*, 67.

<sup>198</sup> Bierhorst, *Cantares Mexicanos*, 408-409; *Texochicapolyollototoponi* can also be translated as pressed or “bursting” cherry fruit; the “loved ones” or “comrades” can also be translated as “precious” or “ancient relatives.”

<sup>199</sup> It is important to note that Bierhorst’s English translation of *tonCuecueci*, “O Ribald Parrot!” does not include the word “parrot.” Cross-referencing his transcription with the Nahuatl Online Dictionary leaves us with “little mischievous one.” Bierhorst noted the connotations of male homosexuality in this song in his commentary. Though it is certainly possible, we must be careful in imposing these assumptions on the song; Bierhorst, *Cantares Mexicanos*, 510.

*cuicacalli*, *calmecac*, or *telpochcalli*.<sup>200</sup> Regardless, we can assume that from the use of the submerged courtyard design, and other key non-European elements, that the builders of Calpan added their own architectural traditions to the layout of the convent.

### **A New Architectural Vernacular**

By the mid-sixteenth century the Franciscan missionaries and Nahuatl builders had developed a “scheme” or a basic blueprint for the Mexican monastery, which had “[t]hree major components... the *church*, the *monastery building* adjoining it, and the forecourt, patio, or *atrio* in front of it.”<sup>201</sup> For the Nahuatl, the atrium and the four decorated *posas* (chapels) gracing its corners probably had the most sacred significance, though architecture scholars have considered the church to be the “most important... element.”<sup>202</sup> McAndrew considered the plan a “Mexican creation or a synthesis made in Mexico. It could have been worked out for some of the first Franciscan houses, entirely or in part, by fray Martín de Valencia before he died in 1534.”<sup>203</sup> However, Valencia, leader of *Los Doce*, left no record of his architectural design plans. The mimicry found at Huejotzingo, Calpan, and the other two sites accredited to fray Juan complicates a solely Valencian model. And in either case the design fits much more comfortably within a Mesoamerican one. The architecture speaks to the fact that it was much less a top-down design, and more a pragmatic bottom-up reconstruction of certain aspects of the Nahuatl past to meet the needs of the devoted community that used these sacred spaces.

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<sup>200</sup> As to the type of school structure, the Mexic leave us with only *maçaçocuel nican*, or “Come on here!” Thus, Beirhorst may have inserted the word “court;” *Cantares Mexicanos*, 408-409.

<sup>201</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 131.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

The complex of San Andrés Calpan contained the key architectural elements of most sixteenth-century churches, but not all of these elements translated easily into the existing architectural vernacular of the Nahuas. It had “high walls” that enclosed the area where catechization would take place, defining the boundaries of sacred instruction.<sup>204</sup> In the medieval monasteries in Europe, the process of conversion was no less complex. The internal acceptance of Christian doctrine, even in cloistered monasteries, required regular memorization and ritual to maintain a Christian way of life, what one scholar called the “gradual process of conforming the will of the... believer to the will of a faithful and benevolent God.”<sup>205</sup> Clergy used the churchyard for sermons and the admonishment of heresy. Thus, the open-air space translated well with existing *cuicacalli* plazas where Mesoamericans participated in religious ceremonies, like dance and song rituals in the “outdoor precincts of sacred locations.”<sup>206</sup> Nahua builders, possibly under the guidance of fray Juan, built four *posas* in the atria.<sup>207</sup> Primarily, these small chapels functioned as stations in the story of Jesus’ journey from trial to crucifixion, in the Stations of the Cross. In the biblical narrative, set in the streets of Jerusalem, the procession stopped eight times, creating eight memorialized scenes of Christ’s journey. On Corpus Christi the parish community traditionally gathers to pay homage to Christ by staging a

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<sup>204</sup> Perry, *Mexico’s Fortress Monasteries*, 14.

<sup>205</sup> Leonard P. Hindsley, O.P., “Monastic Conversion: The Case of Margaret Ebner,” found in *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages* (1997), 45.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Spaniards did not lead every endeavor. At least in Tlaxcala, we know that on April 15, 1550, the *indio* “governor and ruler don Francisco de Mendoza” supervised the construction of the “church courtyard.” Lockhart et al, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 47.

procession that pauses for pious reflection at each station.<sup>208</sup> Sixteenth-century monasteries in New Spain have only four *posas*, but it is possible that murals were painted on the walls of the courtyards to fill in the other Stations of the Cross (though there is no hard evidence for this practice).<sup>209</sup>

Apparently Franciscan teachers segmented the atrium classroom by age and gender. According to fray Diego de Valadés, they instructed girls at the first *posa*, boys at the second, women at the third, and men at the fourth and final one.<sup>210</sup> Perhaps Spaniards adopted or adapted the procession and instruction to fit within existing Mesoamerican designs. Robert Mullen praised the open-air church and he emphasized Franciscan planners with their “innovative solutions” and “novel” designs that they devised by creating a “new form of architecture unique to the history of European ecclesiastical architecture.”<sup>211</sup> Furthermore, depending on the dating of the extant sixteenth-century corner chapels in Spain that have similar characteristics, the four-*posa* courtyard found only in the Americas might have influenced architecture across the sea. Thus, similar to the Christian adoption of the “sunburst” monstrance on a global scale, a trait Iberians brought back from the Americas, the open-air *posa* courtyard could have become another transatlantic religious hybrid.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Valadés specifically mentions the “Indios” attending the “chapels” in their towns for “Corpus Christi” (author’s translation from Spanish); see *Rhetorica Christiana*, 477.

<sup>209</sup> Robert Mullen noted that “No one has satisfactorily explained their origin, and added that it was the “friars [who] realized the importance of outdoor ceremonies to these peoples and wisely assimilated the custom of outdoor worship in a new form;” *Architecture and Its Sculpture in Viceregal Mexico*, 26.

<sup>210</sup> Valadés, *Rhetorica Christiana*, 481; Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 27.

<sup>211</sup> Mullen, *Architecture and Its Sculpture in Viceregal Mexico*, 25-26.

<sup>212</sup> The concept of a transatlantic exchange of religious motifs and designs is fully explored in Osvaldo Pardo’s *The Origins of Mexican Catholicism: Nahua Rituals and Christian Sacraments in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006). For example, Pardo traced the

As was common in the evangelization effort, the Franciscans would have initially had the Nahuas build an outdoor *ramada*, a wooden structure constructed as a semi-permanent place to sermonize and convert the masses of natives.<sup>213</sup> Shortly after, the priests would have a more permanent structure, a *capilla abierta*, or “open-chapel” constructed in its place.<sup>214</sup> At the time, the Spaniards called them *capillas de indios*, and they were designated as separate Christian spaces for Nahuas and other indigenous Christians.<sup>215</sup> Scholars have noted the widespread use of these structures, many of which are still visible in the courtyards of other sixteenth-century monasteries. The stone open chapel would therefore represent a more permanent place for conversion at the heart of an indigenous community, or an opening doorway for the Christianizing process.

The open-chapel was a Mesoamerican-Iberian hybrid structure, perhaps the result of a genetic mutation of pre-contact Mesoamerican sacred architecture, in which ceremonies conducted on the elevated platform of a temple or ballcourt combined with aspects of Iberian proselytizing from church steps in town squares.<sup>216</sup> The simple form, a three-walled structure with a partially covered roof thus amplifying the sound off the

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contemporary use of the sunburst monstrosity back to Mesoamerican worship of the sun in processions, and the transatlantic adoption of this custom in Europe (131-158). Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 19-24; there may be European precedent for the small chapels, see Mardith Schuetz-Miller, “Survival of Early Christian Symbolism in Monastic Churches of New Spain and Visions of the Millennial Kingdom,” *Journal of the Southwest*, (Winter, 2000), 783.

<sup>213</sup> McAndrew mentions that these “huts with thatched roofs” were called *xacaes* by the Spanish; *The Open-Air Churches*, 341; this is a corruption of the Nahuatl *xacalli*, “grass/thatch house.”

<sup>214</sup> In a letter dated February 15, 1552, Pedro de Gante told King Charles V that he had “instructed them day and night more than 30 years, in a *escuela* that is joined with this *capilla abierta* where they have been instructed to sing, play, and learn the doctrine; Kobayashi, *Educacion como conquista*, 270.

<sup>215</sup> Apparently Manuel Toussaint coined the phrase used today; McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 340.

<sup>216</sup> McAndrew explained that the open chapel’s “form had to be found” within the “architectural vocabulary,” and that communities in New Spain settled on, not European, but regionally diverse “provincial” designs; McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 343.

stone walls, projected the speaker's voice forward to the crowd. Perhaps in their first encounter with Christian evangelism and European instruction, a crowd of interested Nahuas—male and female, young and old—standing within audio range would find a preacher standing above them on some steps, with a wooden or stone backdrop, preaching to them in a foreign languages while an interpreter translated new concepts into an ancient language.<sup>217</sup> Aside from the linguistic challenge involved, this practice must have seemed very familiar indeed. If it ever existed (and this is unclear), Calpan's open chapel would have been situated on the east side of the courtyard where the church and convent stand today.

The monastery building, or *convento*, adjoining the church was another recognizable architectural design. *Cuicacalli* constructed next to temples had housed Nahua religious specialists who managed those schools in the public eye. Franciscans living next to the church, avowed mendicants who relied on the grace of others for their sustenance, immediately found a reciprocal exchange between rendering religious sustenance for food and drink. However, at first Calpan was a *visita* to the parish center, the *cabecera de doctrina*, of Huejotzingo. Therefore, the Franciscans remained in the larger city, only “visiting” Calpan's convent periodically, such as during important Christian Holy days.<sup>218</sup>

In between these visits, the convent of Calpan was most likely run by indigenous church officers called *fiscales de la santa iglesia*, some of whom would have been those

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<sup>217</sup> Perry noted that “in the early days of the Spiritual Conquest, ...the main focus [was constructing] a separate building—often the result of its being the first part of the monastery built. [Standing on] its raised steps... [Spaniards preached to the] multitudes of Indians below;” *Mexico's Fortress Monasteries*, 15.

<sup>218</sup> McAndrew believed that the *visita* monasteries “functioned like monasteries insofar as the native congregations were concerned,” yet he never addresses what their concerns might have been; *The Open-Air Churches*, 342.

male youths, sons of the noble class, who had returned from their education in the Franciscan *colegio* in Mexico City.<sup>219</sup> If so, this was nothing new for the local populace. The elite *calmecac* had drawn noble boys to core *altepetl* of the Aztec empire. After their training they would return to govern over the Nahuas. However, in the transition to a colonial institution, these elite boys may have noticed a glaring disjunction with their previous traditions. The military training offered in the *calmecac* (as well as in the school for commoner boys, called *telpochcalli*) would have threatened Iberian civil authority, and this aspect of these institutions was not replicated in the colonial schools founded by the clergy. Still, the kind of privileged students who had trained for administrative duties and the priestly life in the *calmecac*, would now learn Latin and Iberian customs in close proximity to Spaniards (only to find that their roles in the colonial government and Church would never reach the level of the Iberians, of course). The new Nahua male priests and education specialists were not ordained, but they returned to their communities as the primary agents of change, becoming managers of local events, keepers of the church finances and property, record keepers for the town council, and Christian instructors for the town.<sup>220</sup> They would instruct local males—most likely those who enjoyed some kind of elevated social status—in sacristan duties, and this larger group encompassed what Lockhart called “the church people.”<sup>221</sup>

And yet instruction included the sound of local musicians. As noted by Franciscan writers such as Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta, each convent had a group of

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<sup>219</sup> Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 211.

<sup>220</sup> Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, 99-100.

<sup>221</sup> Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 210-213; Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule*, 148-149; see also Robert Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers: An Ethnohistory of Town Government in Colonial Cuernavaca* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 16.

musicians (the *cantores*) who performed “Christian Doctrine... at sunrise and sunset” in the atria.<sup>222</sup> In the *cuicacalli*, Nahuas had played various percussion and wind instruments, and according to the priests they quickly added European ones to their repertoire.<sup>223</sup> Furthermore, as had been the case in the *cuicacalli*, in the colonial period songs were a crucial method of imparting sacred narratives to neophytes. As demonstrated by the post-conquest but pre-contact-style *Cantares Mexicanos* and song “Eighty-eight,” the persistence of memory attached to song contributed to the tenacity of local stories.<sup>224</sup> The Nahuas continued to use music in their Christian spaces with such zeal that in 1555 the Catholic Council in Mexico City decreed that musical “excess” had gotten out of hand, and that limitations needed to be placed on exuberant performance in Nahua churches.<sup>225</sup> While the Calpanecas did not leave us a collection of their songs, it is likely that musicians and singers performed in the sacred atrium of Calpan.<sup>226</sup>

In pre-contact times, in the local *cuicacalli*, the Nahua priests used the communal plaza to conduct religious education and ritual, but major life-events—birth, marriage, and burials—did not necessarily take place there. In the post-contact period, Franciscans seem to have intervened in these customs as a matter of course. For example, we can see this shift when we compare pre- and post-contact marriage practices through the lens

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<sup>222</sup> Found in McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 359.

<sup>223</sup> Among the many Nahua percussions were the *teponaztli*, a log drum played on the ground, and the *huehuetl*, a deerskin covered standing drum.

<sup>224</sup> McAndrew claimed that “converted Indians took to European music quickly,..while the unconverted clung for a while to their old music as a token of resistance;” *The Open-Air Churches*, 360. At the beginning of each song in Bierhorst’s collection we find a series of onomapoetic notes for drums that give the reader the cadence for the song; *Nahuatl-English Dictionary and Concordance*, 408-409.

<sup>225</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 365.

<sup>226</sup> This was the case for their neighbors in Tlaxcala, where “musicians of the Franciscan monastery church,” in 1549, received “twenty pesos”; Lockhart et al, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 40, 44.

Codex Mendoza.<sup>227</sup> On the same panel of the Codex that depicts young men entering the two variations of higher education (the *calmecac* and the *telpochacalli*), one finds the depiction of “legitimate marriages.”<sup>228</sup> The Nahua artist sketched outline of a domestic setting, glossed as the groom’s house. The walls of the groom’s house encapsulate a wedding party which consists of the bride and groom at center and two old men and two old women sitting in the corners of the groom’s house. Outside the house, we find the rest of the wedding party. Apparently, a group of four female Nahuas followed the procession of the bride, herself carried on the back of a female “physician.”<sup>229</sup> This is significant, considering that Franciscan priests required that the marriage ceremony take place in the public space of the atrium, the same courtyard where Franciscans held instruction for the community. Breaking with older customs, the private Nahua ritual of marriage now became the public display of proper Christian ethos. Furthermore, the role of female religious specialists such as the “physician” was supplanted by the male Catholic priest or sacristan. This is but one piece to the overarching transformation of Nahua society from gender parallelism to an unequal patriarchal hierarchy in the mature colonial era, a process that one scholar explained, led to the “rapid disappearance of the institutions [temples, *calmecac*, or *cuicacalli*] in which women had held power.”<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Berdan, Frances, and Patricia Anawalt *The Essential Codex Mendoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, p167 and Part II, p 127.

<sup>229</sup> Susan Kellogg studies aspects of the transformation of female Nahua specialization. She argues that before contact Nahua cosmology and therefore society was built around complementary gender roles, though males held a hierarchical position at the top. This was apparent in their deities and priestly agents; Kellogg, “From Parallel and Equivalent to Separate but Unequal: Tenochca Mexica Women, 1500-1700,” in *Indian Women of Early Mexico*, edited by Susan Schroeder et al. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 127-132.

<sup>230</sup> Kellogg noted that, though new laws and legal codes enhanced some aspects of female agency and rights, seemingly they could not participate directly in political or religious affairs; Kellogg, “From Parallel

The Christian atrium created a space for Franciscans (or in the case of Calpan, often the Nahuatl *fiscal* and sacristans) to oversee the activities of a proper daily life (at least those connected with the church and religious observance), and in the case of marriage the converted Nahuas would be inspected for the heresy of polygyny.<sup>231</sup> The clergy assumed that regular instruction about proper and improper forms of marriage would end this practice. As Church officials understood it, the communal ceremony of Christian marriage was therefore based on a proper education. In the atrium, as well, a new birth or a hunting party would be blessed, a marriage consecrated, and relatives buried with the community as witnesses. And yet group education took place more often than these community activities, as all members of the community—male and female, young and old, commoner and elite—would gather within its walls for daily instruction at sunrise and sunset all of which now included a Catholic priest, or more likely, the local *fiscal*, preaching the norms of the Iberian way of life.<sup>232</sup>

### **The Planned Curricula for Conventual Franciscan Schools**

Robert Ricard believed in the power of a Franciscan education: “Nothing is more evident than the importance of the school in the stabilization of the Church.” According to Ricard’s sources, which were mostly written by the friars themselves, the connections that developed between pupil and priest in the schools created the foundation of adopted

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and Equivalent to Separate but Unequal,” 135-136; that said, indigenous women did not simply sit by on the plaited braids. As Robert Haskett, among others, has demonstrated, women created “hidden political” and religious roles for themselves by interjecting through their participation in *cofradías*, local sisterhoods, even having unwanted Spanish priests removed from power; “Activist or Adulteress? The Life and Struggle of Doña Josefa María of Tepoztlan,” in *Indian Women of Early Mexico* (1997), 145-163.

<sup>231</sup> Further investigations into Calpan’s parish registers if available will help to add nuance to the participants of ceremonies; Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 255.

<sup>232</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 206–207.

Christianity. For “the members of the community” schools, especially primary schools, gave the students “a modicum of useful knowledge.” Even more, they “gave the young Christians the instruments necessary to carry forward the study of their religion, if they so desired.” Though he hinted at indigenous agency, explaining that the Nahuas might not desire to study “their religion [Christianity],” in the end Ricard believed that “[w]ithout primary schools...[the Church] would not have been based upon an organized society.” Clearly, the organization and structure of Christian conventual schools would maintain civil colonial society.<sup>233</sup>

In his prime, fray Diego de Valadés exemplified the top-down format approach of Christian education in the courtyards of New Spain. Yet his life is shrouded in conjecture, since much of it remains poorly documented. He was either the mestizo son of a conquistador by the same name, or a Spaniard who, at a young age, immigrated in or around 1533 to New Spain. Throughout his writings he identifies with the Spanish friars, and he regularly refers to Nahuas and other indigenous groups as *indios*. By 1549, at the age of 16 he had entered the *Colegio de Santa Cruz* in Tlatelolco, and by twenty-two, in 1555, he was ordained as a Franciscan priest.<sup>234</sup> When the young Diego was receiving ecclesiastical education in the *Colegio*, at least according to fray Pedro de Gante’s account, instruction was carried out in large classes of fifty students and one priestly teacher.<sup>235</sup> Fray Pedro and fray Jacobo de Testera had developed a pictographic

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<sup>233</sup> Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, 207.

<sup>234</sup> Valadés, *Rhetorica Christiana*, x; Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs*, 6.

<sup>235</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 372-374; for more on the Colegio de Santa Cruz Tlatelolco, see Mathes, Miguel, *Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco: La Primera Biblioteca Académica de las Américas* (1982); see also Gonzalbo Aizpuru, Pilar. *Historia de la educación en la época colonial: La educación de los criollos y la vida urbana* (1990).

catechism, later called Testerian codices, in an attempt to compete with the existing system of Nahua written communication. The young Diego studied directly under fray Pedro, and the innovation of instructing the indigenous through pictographs, in a sense maintaining the existing literacy of the Nahuas, was passed on to him. Perhaps in consequence to this focus on images as text, the future Franciscan developed into an accomplished artist of Christian doctrine. Utilizing these skills (and his fluency in three common indigenous languages, Nahuatl, Otomí, P'urhépecha), fray Diego eventually trained creoles, mestizo, and indigenous boys in iconography and art at Tlatelolco's Franciscan school.<sup>236</sup> Later in life, he preached among the Nahuas of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, and further north in New Galicia, working among the less sedentary Chichimecs. Throughout his interactions with Nahuas and other indigenous groups he became infatuated with their ability to maintain knowledge. In fact, he devoted chapters twenty-four through twenty-eight solely to what he called the "artificial memory" of the indigenous, a study of the inner workings of the Native American mind. He believed that the Nahuas' use of images and the landscape strengthened their ability to retain information, an important aspect of Nahua memory that will be discussed in the next chapter.<sup>237</sup>

No image is more cited regarding the "perfect classroom" of the Franciscan evangelization campaign than fray Diego de Valadés' "Illustration Eighteen." Furthermore, no sixteenth century manuscript tells us more about Franciscan educational philosophy and techniques than his *Rhetorica*. To construct the *Rhetorica*

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<sup>236</sup> Valadés, *Rhetorica Christiana*, ix; Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs*, 63-64.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, xxv-xxvi, and "Secundo Parte," Capítulos 24-28.

after he had relocated to Rome, fray Diego relied on his memories of and memoirs from his time evangelizing among the Nahuas, Otomies, and Chichimecas. Besides the obvious tools at his disposal (pen, parchment, and writing desk) we have no record of the items that the Franciscan took with him to Italy. Most likely, aside from his memoirs, he had personal sketches and notes from his many years of working as an educator among the indigenous American population. Whatever his source base—written on paper or etched in his mind—his work framed the process of conversion for teachers. He intended for educators to utilize his woodblock prints, which were inserted into the manuscript, as references, or perhaps to display the images to students to help facilitate the transference of knowledge.<sup>238</sup> Though we cannot speak to how effectively *Rhetorica* functioned as a pedagogical tool in the classroom, we do know that following its publication, prominent contemporary liturgists incorporated copies of his illustrations as part of their own works, which, in turn, circulated among the Christian educators of the day.<sup>239</sup>

Greco-Roman and Christian architecture is central to “Illustration Eighteen,” but it was not the primary focus of his work. For example, when examining it the eye is immediately drawn to the center of the image, where a group of priests stand in profile, their bodies facing to the right (Figure 8). On their shoulders they support a long litter, atop which rests fray Diego’s idealized representation of a Christian church. Within the church, framed by Greek columns and a semi-elliptical pediment, we see the Holy Spirit, a winged dove surrounded by brilliant rays of light. Above the church, a cloud contains

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<sup>238</sup> Valadés likely had the assistance of woodblock carvers working for Pedro Jacobo Petrutio; *ibid.*, xii-xiii.

<sup>239</sup> Most recognizable is the use and circulation of “Illustration Eighteen” by Mendieta in his *Historica ecclesiastica indiana* (1582); *ibid.*, xvi; see also, Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs*, 63-65, 67.

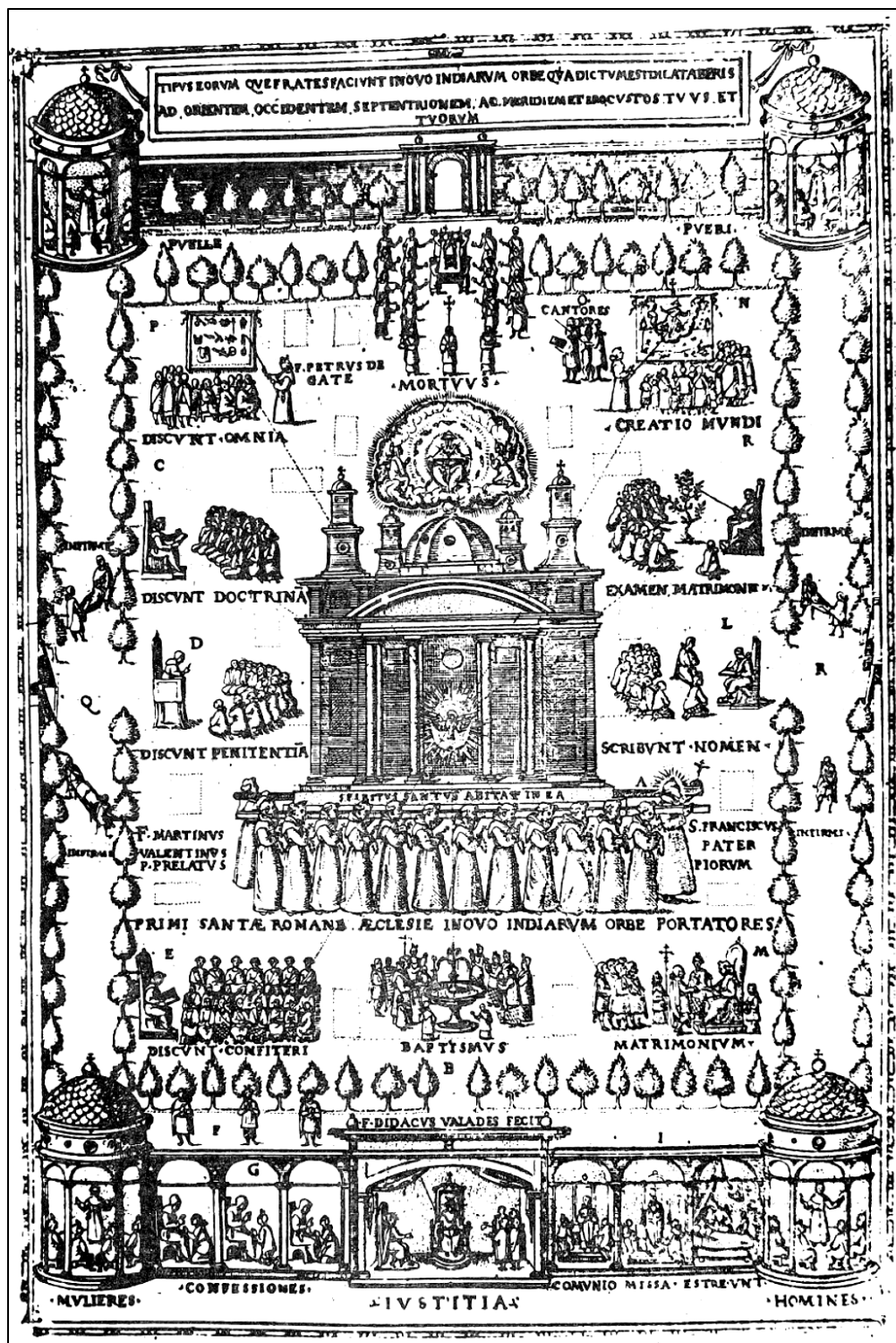


Figure 8: Illustration Eighteen, the perfect Franciscan classroom. Conventual education took place in courtyards like this one, and, according to Valadés' plans, friars would instruct their Nahua students in Christian doctrine, iconographic literacy, and Hispanic customs and hierarchy; from fray Diego de Valadés' *Rhetorica Christiana* (1579).

two angels witnessing Christ's transubstantiation after his crucifixion. The fourteen priests below represent the first colonial evangelizers, led by the thirteenth-century founder of the order, Saint Francis, and backed by the leader of the twelve, fray Martín de Valencia.<sup>240</sup> Thus, at the heart of the image, fray Diego has placed the friars as the foundation of Christianity in New Spain, as well as the bearers of Classic European and Christian architecture.<sup>241</sup> Fray Diego drew a chapel at each of the four corners of the idealized scene, anchoring the image in this way. Taken together, with its clean lines of trees and walls, and the tidy setting for each group of people, this open-air classroom certainly is an ordered environment demonstrating the logic of Franciscan pedagogy.

At the same time, with the centerpiece of the church complimented by the corner chapels fray Diego created a quincunx, or five cardinal points (four anchors with a central axis point) common to Christian and pre-contact cosmologies and religious iconography. For Christians, the quincunx is symbolically represented as a cross with Christ at its center. In Mesoamerican traditions, though variations certainly exist, a latitudinal and a longitudinal line cross at center, with each quarter represented by a color. And this distinction is important. In the Christian quincunx the spaces between the arms of the crucifix and the center post are empty. Therefore, the open-air courtyard with chapels filling the quarters of the sacred space cosmologically resembles a Mesoamerica design. Thus fray Diego may have been influenced by these concepts growing up surrounded by indigenous culture.

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<sup>240</sup> Valadés' accompanying text explains that "the first twelve brought the word of God and translated it into Nahuatl;" *Rhetorica Christiana*, 477.

<sup>241</sup> Lara has recently determined that Valadés may have witnessed the construction of this specific church in Rome. He believes that fray Diego created the likeness of the "new Saint Peter's Basilica" in his famous illustration while visiting Rome in the 1570s; *Christian Texts for Aztecs*, 67.

Though the layout of the open-air courtyard was a new tradition, it is important to note the circular design of each *posa* (Figure 9). These do not exist (or at least do not



Figure 9: Illustration Eighteen, circular corner chapel (up close) (Valadés, *Rhetorica Christiana*, 1579).

survive) in any of the sixteenth-century monasteries in Mexico, and scholars have claimed that fray Diego modeled these chapels on a design in Rome.<sup>242</sup> What is more, the *Rhetorica posas* do not have ornamentation or Christian didactic scenes depicted on them, unlike those that were built in Calpan. It is possible that fray Diego understood the importance of the four-*posa* courtyard without understanding the Mesoamerican tradition of decorating. Regardless, the ornamentation does not seem to be important to his version of the Franciscan lesson plan. Certainly, the

*posas* appear foreign, but it does not seem as if they are the focus of the illustration. The scenes of instruction are emphasized, rather than the *posas*. As a Franciscan educator creating a model for other Franciscans, fray Diego most likely ignored the significance of the *posas*, and instead highlighted the spaces of the school that priests utilized. He used the order of the courtyard and the boundaries of its walls to place Christianity inside the open-air courtyard. However, if he had based the layout of this drawing on an existing model open-air school, the convent of Calpan, or perhaps the one at Huejotzingo (both attributed to the architectural vernacular of fray Juan de Alameda), would have been a perfect example to follow.

<sup>242</sup> Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 27-30.

We may never know if fray Diego visited Calpan; however he was undeniably in the vicinity after its atrium was completed. In 1564, fray Diego facilitated architectural designs with the Huejotzingans. In a letter from Juan Gutiérrez de Bocanegra to Viceroy Luis de Velasco, the writer states that:

I wanted to gather the commoner Indians where they congregate to hear Mass and through the words of fray Diego Valadés, friar of the order of San Francisco, [who] made it clear to the commoner Indians that which your Excellency ordered. And [he asked] if they would like to proceed voluntarily with the said work. And everyone stood up and they said that they were obliged to go of their own will to [the place of] the said church because of the necessity that they have for it.<sup>243</sup>

Apparently fray Diego held an important place of distinction as an architectural intermediary between Church, Crown, and Nahuatl commoner. Further investigations into other Spanish sources might reveal the specifications of the “said work” that Gutiérrez de Bocanegra described, but it is sufficient to say that fray Diego was near Calpan after the Nahuas had built the courtyard, and the site is a prime candidate as the model for his “Illustration Eighteen.”<sup>244</sup>

The groupings of people in “Illustration Eighteen” indicate a different step in an indigenous education. The Nahuas would progressively learn to communicate through a

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<sup>243</sup> My translation, “A los indios macegales quise juntar adonde se congregan a oír misa y por lengua de frai diego Valades, friale de la orden de San Fran.co . . . Se les dio a entender a los macegales lo que vra exca por su mandamienot manda. E si querían ellos de su voluntad acudir a la dicha obra. E todos se levantaron e dixeron que se olgaban de ir de su voluntad (a) la dicha iglesia por tener la necesidad que tienen della.” The text is found in Salas Cuesta, Marcela, *La iglesia y el convent de Huejotzingo* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1982), 64-65. The background of Juan Gutiérrez de Bocanegra deserves further exploration. From preliminary findings, he may be the same Juan Gutiérrez Bocanegra that notarized the account of the New Mexico expedition led by Juan de Oñate conducted at the turn of the seventeenth century; Herbert E. Bolton, *Spanish Exploration in the Southwest, 1542-1706*, (Charles Scribner's Sons 1916), 267.

<sup>244</sup> The courtyard of the ex-convento de San Miguel Huejotzingo is another possible model. It is also a four-posed open-air courtyard with enough space for the groups of students that Valadés depicts. It is believed to have been under construction five years before Calpan, and thus construction of the latter fits more with the time that Valadés was in the area. In fact further comparative analysis of the ornamentation of both sets of posas and the local religious stories found in each, and the available church documentation, might highlight the differences between the *altepetl*, Huejotzingo, and its sub-*altepetl*, Calpan.

planned curriculum of Christian-themed iconography and verbal communication in the courtyard. Order was key. Franciscan instructors such as fray Diego relied on various devices to guide the Nahuas in Christian indoctrination. More than any other sixteenth-century liturgist, he stressed the use of visual aids to teach Nahuas. Fray Diego depicted nine specific settings, each with a new pedagogy in mind. For example, the top left setting is a group of Nahuas seated on the ground in front of an easel. Next to the easel fray Diego drew a figure glossed as fray Pedro de Gante (“F. PETRVS DE GATE”), and in the accompanying text he describes fray Pedro’s faith. Significantly, he drew fray Pedro before a glyphic representation of the alphabet that the friar is describing to the audience of Nahuas. Thus each small group was to be trained in lessons that included oral catechisms supported by pictographic texts, similar in spirit, at least, to pre-contact Mesoamerican writing styles. Other educational communicative devices used by the friars included: painted murals or large canvases depicting biblical scenes, large portable paintings on canvas that could be rolled and unrolled so that they could easily be brought along on trips to the *visitas*; the diptych, a pair of wooden slates hinged at one end containing visually didactic material; pictographic catechisms, such as Testerians; flora in the courtyard, such as trees; atrium crosses decorated with scenes from Christ’s Passion; and Nahuatl-language translations of doctrinal texts, many of which included ideograms.

But what good were these visual aids without the guidance from the teacher? In his illustrations, fray Diego documented one of the less studied Franciscan didactic tools, the *vara* (stick), or *puntero*, (pointer). A simple device, priests employed this thin, four-foot long, tapered piece of wood to highlight specific parts of murals and other visual tools in order to fully describe and give context to the pieces of a composition, thus

controlling the narration and tempo of Christian instruction. In Valadés' perfect classroom, we find a demonstration of the teaching stick in action (Figure 10). A priest standing to the left of an unrolled canvas wields a pointer, indicating that the lesson has begun. Fray Diego's accompanying text explains:

Here is where they inculcate them to the Christian doctrine by means of painted figures and forms on ample tapestries arranged conveniently, beginning from the articles of the Faith, the Ten Commandments of God's Law, and the deadly sins, and are made with great ability and care. In the sacred sermons these [things] are continually gone over... Thus, more easily it is engrained in the memory, as much because of the illiteracy of the *índios*, as because they are especially attracted to this genre of instruction.<sup>245</sup>



Figure 10: Illustration Eighteen, instruction (close up); Franciscan instruction using murals in the courtyard (Valadés, *Rhetorica Christiana*, 1579).

The group of Nahuas some standing, others kneeling, appear to be looking at the biblical scene painted on the tapestry in front of them. From our vantage point it is hard to make out where the priest is directing the students' gaze, or what lesson they might be hearing at that time. Had we been standing in the back of the courtyard of Calpan surrounded by a large crowd of Nahuas in the sixteenth century, we might find it equally difficult to interpret the

<sup>245</sup> "Aquí se trata de inculcarles la doctrina cristiana por medio de figuras y formas dibujadas en muy amplios tapices y dispuestos muy convenientemente, dando comienzo desde los artículos de la fe, los Diez Mandamientos de la Ley de Dios, y los pecados mortales, y esto se hace con grande habilidad y cuidado. En los sermones sagrados se repasa continuamente algo de ellos... Así, más fácilmente se les graba en la memoria, tanto por las pocas letras que los indios tienen, como porque ellos mismos encuentran especial atractivo en este género de enseñanza." My translation; Valadés, *Rhetorica Christiana*, 501.

message of a visiting priest with a canvas and pointer. We can imagine the implications here. Though priests believed they imparted a whole or true Christianity, their reliance on visual communication to tell stories allowed for a measurable “wiggle room” with the distance from the subject and the viewer. Even more, by relying on Nahuatl for instruction, as was the custom, the visiting teacher encouraged pre-contact connotations of the sacred paired with images that could be understood in unorthodox ways. As students ourselves, perhaps a closer look will help to better understand this important point.

Fray Diego left us with a larger version of the didactic scene with “Illustration Nineteen,” a scene taking place in a monastery atrium in front of a larger-than-life-sized Christian scene depicted on either a canvas or a courtyard wall (Figure 11). In the image of the mural, we witness the canonical scene of Christ and two thieves crucified on crosses. To the left, a Roman soldier can be seen riding below, piercing Jesus with a lance. On the ground in front of the Roman’s horse the Virgin Mary has collapsed in dismay, embraced by two women. At lower center, Mary Magdalene clings to the base of the wooden cross, looking up to the Savior, her right hand extending upward toward his nailed feet. Holding plain goblets, four winged angels collect the blood flowing from Christ’s nailed hands and feet, as well as the lance wound in his side. Charging into scene at the right side of the mural are the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. A couple of kneeling Nahuas have been illustrated at the lower center of the mural, an instructional exemplar of reverence for the scene at hand.



Figure 11: Illustration Nineteen, Valadés' *Rhetorica Christiana* (1579); Franciscan teachers relied on the vivid murals to demonstrate the power of Christ's sacrifice.

In the illustration, fray Diego sketched a group of Nahua parishioners—some standing clustered together in the lower right, others kneeling before the image—and a priest caught in the middle of his instruction. Fray Diego treated him with more care than most of the Nahua parishioners; his profile is finely detailed, and we can even make out the wrinkles on his stern face. The priest's left hand is extended and in it he

grasps a rosary. His posture implies that he is in the midst of gesturing, since he holds a long teaching stick in his extended right hand. In pre-contact times staffs had been a common identity marker of elite status for sedentary peoples on both side of the Atlantic, thus Nahuas may have taken easily to instruction with the pointer.<sup>246</sup> Here, both the instructor and the students understand the power imbued in the teaching stick.

For those Nahua students paying attention to the story and following the teaching stick, the priest explains the narrative of the mural. At the moment of fray Diego's illustration, the priest describes the flow of blood from the five wounds of Christ. He is using the teaching stick to point directly at the angel using a goblet to catch the blood of Christ at the Saviors' feet. The attentive Nahuas stand together enraptured with the priest's description. For fray Diego, the teaching stick separated a good and bad instruction in Christianity. His illustration not only captures the power of a Christian education and the ability of the teaching stick to direct a discussion, but it also highlights a significant bicultural moment that would have resonated (unintentionally as far as the clergy were concerned) with Christian converts whose memories may still have been laced with trenchant Mesoamerican cosmologies: the flow of sacred blood to the earth and the containing of that blood because of its valuable sacred symbolism.

Two Nahua women crouch to the right of the priest, beneath his outstretched arms. Though their faces are obscured, they have the traditional two plaits of bound hair that Nahua women wore, resembling horns. These two are directing their gaze away from the teaching stick and toward the spurred horses of the Apocalypse. One of

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<sup>246</sup> Staffs of office continued to be used in the colonial period. Valadés regularly depicts noble and elite Nahuas with staffs, especially in the foreground of scenes of instruction, as well as in his didactic expositions on socio-political and ecclesiastical hierarchies.

them has raised her hands in a defensive posture. The women are not following along with the rest; they are overcome by the power of Christian visual stimuli. Though Valadés may have wanted to highlight the importance a proper Christian education with attentive students, which would prepare them for the coming End of Days, by including the pair of distracted students in this scene, he depicted a crisis in early colonial education.<sup>247</sup> Certainly, the teaching stick helped the priest set the tone of instruction, but it, and the instructor wielding it, could not stop the students' minds from wandering.

Therefore even in the images and text of an evangelical master craftsman we can find the flaws inherent in the top-down education of the Nahua public. Though they had numerous devices at hand, including powerful painted scenes and the dominant position necessary to guide discussions, when Franciscans were present in the less than perfect classrooms of colonial New Spain they were constrained by the interests, background, and nature of their student body. Iberian teachers, and for that matter Nahua *fiscales*, were forced to make instruction relevant and understandable to indigenous audiences. As they had done previously with the adoption of pictographic writing for Testerian catechisms, and before that the topping of indigenous sacred spaces, teachers would need to allow a measure of preexisting Nahua cosmology to seep into their didactic presentations.

After the initial Christianization (or perceived Christianization) of the community, the friars and their indigenous assistants settled into patterns of religious

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<sup>247</sup> It is also possible that fray Diego de Valadés chose women as the distracted students to emphasize their gender as weaker than the male Christians, this aspect of patriarchy and paternalism seems likely, however, further translations of his work will help to corroborate this hypothesis.

instruction in the courtyard much like those described by fray Diego. However, it is not until *Rhetorica* that we find a comprehensive manual instructing clergy on how to maintain a proper teaching environment with his key teaching topics. With regimented lessons twice daily, first in the morning and then in the late afternoon, instructors believed they could hold back the tide of heresy and stave off the evil return of idolatry.<sup>248</sup> In the decades leading up the Valadés' publication, we find Mendieta's description of the process Franciscans followed to gather the students into the atrium:

Assembled by four o'clock at the latest, [the Nahuas] start out for the church, all on order as though in a procession, the men in one row and the women in another. They are guided by an Indian who goes in front with the standard of each barrio, made of red silk with the insignia of whatever Saint the barrio has taken for patron... [After] kneeling in front of the church door... [t]hey seat themselves in rows, the men squatting on their heels in their customary way (on the Evangel side) and the women apart by themselves (on the Epistle side).<sup>249</sup>

Though Mendieta did not mention it, this pattern of collection for instruction mimicked the *cuicacalli* pattern of assembly, with one telling divergence. Certainly, the morning and evening assemblies were not really new, since rising to greet the sun and, later, helping it into the underworld were very old customs. And the segregation of the sexes, in the form of a male and female processional line, was not new either. But one possible change found in Mendieta's description is that, now, instead of male and female elders leading each half of the twin procession, only a single "Indian" (we are not given the sex, but most likely a male church officer such as a *fiscal*), assembles the community. Certainly, Mendieta might have failed to note the persistence of both male and female

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<sup>248</sup> Mendieta and Valadés mention daily Masses; Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 21; apparently the town council of Tlaxcala enforced daily attendance, see "Cabildo Session 101, July 14, 1550," in Lockhart et al., *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 49.

<sup>249</sup> Mendieta, *Historia eclesiástica indiana*, 209–210.

line leaders, the *teananqui* (male) and *cihuatepixqui* (female) of *cuicacalli* tradition, since such people would have blended into their respective crowds. But if the “Indian” was male, perhaps this means that concepts of Christian male hierarchy had entered into educational ritual. If so, this was certainly a transformation, but it grows increasingly clear that Franciscans were not actually leading the lessons.

After a town built a church, the priests and the town council designated a single *fiscal de la santa iglesia* to manage the property along with a notary, a constable, and other *teopantlaca*, or “church people.”<sup>250</sup> James Lockhart tracked the duties of the *fiscales*, whom he called the “most visible figure” of the local church staff, and he determined that they often were called to monitor the last will and testament of dying community members.<sup>251</sup> Like many people, the Nahuas found spiritual security in defining how the community would recognize them in public religious displays of wealth and piety after death.<sup>252</sup> The fiscal frequently became a testator’s executor, following through with the collection of property or debts owed as spelled out in the will by the presiding notary. The church people benefited through the accumulation of properties and moneys left to the church by testators, but most importantly from the financial offerings given to them for burial rites.<sup>253</sup> Furthermore, testators relied on the fiscal and other

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<sup>250</sup> “Church people,” or *teopantlaca*, were elite males who managed church property, finances, and leading the community in religious instruction and song. He could not find evidence that this term was used before the 1560s, though “church people” of some sort must have been active before this time; Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 210-211, 215-216.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-215; *fiscales* may have let their occupation go to their head. For example, in the statement of a fiscal, don Baltasar Valeriano, manager of the church of Cuernavaca, Robert Haskett noted this tendency of the *fiscales* to “personify the entire community” through the multitude of duties he performed. These included instruction in Catholic doctrine, ecclesiastical judge doling out punishments for sinners, and supervision of the church properties and its sacristans; *Visions of Paradise*, 262-264.

<sup>252</sup> Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 213-214.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

sacristans to find their mortal remains a satisfying resting place in the church grounds. As seen in the wills of Nahuas living in the Valleys of Mexico and Toluca, these burial sites were regularly in the courtyard, at the portals of corner chapels, and entryways to such structures.<sup>254</sup> Keeping their remains close to the sacred grounds of the courtyard, Nahuas expressed local spiritual ownership over the church.

Apparently, regardless of Spanish influence, the Nahuas felt as if they owned the church grounds.<sup>255</sup> Since Nahua teachers and their assistants actually conducted their daily religious interactions with the Nahuas in Nahuatl, this practice facilitated not the defeat of their culture, but instead the formation of a viable “dialogical frontier.”<sup>256</sup> Louis Burkhart’s valuable contribution to the study of Christian doctrine, *The Slippery Earth*, problematized the relay of information between evangelizer and convert. Burkhart examined the ways that Nahua and Christian cosmologies were negotiated in a “moral education,” especially themes such as sin, good and evil, and demons.<sup>257</sup> For example, though priests spoke of good and evil as absolutes that were diametrically opposing choices, Nahua cosmology was based on the difference between an ordered center and a

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<sup>254</sup> According to early-seventeenth century Nahuatl testaments from Toluca, Calimaya/Tepemaxalco, and Culhuacan, burial location was extremely important to the testator; for example, of the ninety-eight testaments from Toluca and Calimaya/Tepemaxalco forty-seven stated that they want their body interred specifically in the grounds of the local courtyard or church; some specifically mention “the chapel of San Francisco;” *Testaments of Toluca*, ed. and trans. by Caterina Pizzigoni (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 16-17, 53, 58, 60, 62, 65, 67, 69, 74, 78, 80, 82, 84, 86, 89-91, 97, 99, 101, 104, 106, 108-109, 113-115, 121, 123 137, 141, 145, 148, 55, 157, 160, 162, 164, 191-192, 194, 199, 203, 214, 220, 224, and 246-247. In comparison, only five of the remaining testaments mention specifics: three “outside the church grounds (207, 211, 217),” two “under (92)” or “next to the copal tree (95).”

<sup>255</sup> Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers*, 70-71; *Visions of Paradise*, 202; Lockhart noted the tendency of local elites and lords to claim ownership of specific property on church grounds; *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 229-232; Wake, *Framing the Sacred*, 130.

<sup>256</sup> Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*, 188.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

chaotic periphery. *Teotl*, the ambivalent, solar sacred-energy that animated the world of the Nahuas, was most powerful in the ordered environments and towns of the people, and less so in the disheveled periphery.<sup>258</sup> Entropy, not evil, threatened the order of things.<sup>259</sup> The quincunx layout of the courtyard and the implied similarities between the positioning of the church and the sun would resonate on some level with colonial Christian and non-Christian viewers alike. However, the Nahua quincunx, their cosmological ordering of center-periphery, included “slippery” nuances and complex deities that Christian good-bad moralizing failed to embrace.<sup>260</sup> She found that the reliance on Nahuatl for instruction and the flexibility of both Christianity and “Teoyoism” allowed for the persistence of Nahua culture. The priests’ rhetoric inevitably attempted to reduce and simplify Nahua religious knowledge, and it was left to the Nahuas, as Burkhart explains, to pick up the “threads with which to mend the fabric, torn by the Conquest, of their own belief system.”<sup>261</sup>

Thus, we must re-examine common “Christian” zones of cultural domination to find the nuances of Nahua order and chaos in them. For example, when the town council of Tlaxcala ordered the community to build contributions to their Corpus Christi procession in the summer of 1555, community members constructed platforms with mannequins designed to look like “angels” and the “demons.”<sup>262</sup> And yet, “demons” or *tlacatecolotl*, the Nahuatl word selected by the clergy to stand for Satan and his minions,

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 58-60.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 188, 190.

<sup>262</sup> Lockhart et al., *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 56, 94-95.

did not simply mean “the devil” as far as Nahuas were concerned (though over time the idea that the devil was a kind of *tlacatecolotl* stuck). Instead, *tlacatecolotl*, which literally translates to “human horned-owls,” had traditionally referred to the sorcerers that affected the environment and had the ability to shape-shift. Though malevolent, they were still more complex than this, for they could exist in both the ordered places and the dangerous places of chaos.<sup>263</sup> Therefore, without having any images of the Tlaxcalan “angels” and “demons,” we must keep in mind that other kinds of Nahua interpretations might have been possible alongside the narrative of Christ’s Passion as the procession passed by. When the “human horned-owl” moved around the atrium, the Nahuas who remembered or knew about other kinds of *tlacatecolotl* could tell a richer story, perhaps touching on the dangers of leaving the ordered environment of the town, or for that matter, on elements of a still remembered non-Christian lifestyle. Yet just because the Nahuas understood past narratives, they were not necessarily non-Christian. Instead, they were bi-culturally lingual because the complexity of language and Nahua cosmology confounded the easy imposition of Iberian culture. Furthermore, Nahua communities were simply not ready to give up the control of their religious affiliations.

### **Colonial Community Construction Projects**

As described in the previous chapter, Nahua communities actively participated in the construction or re-construction of colonial churches and convents. Pre-Hispanic forms of construction had relied on what one scholar termed “communal undertakings,” and architectural historians believe that the Spanish appropriated and formulized the process in the decades following the conquest. Writing in the 1530s and 40s, Motolinía described

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<sup>263</sup> Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*, 44.

communal construction efforts he witnessed as involving “all the Indians..; they carry the stone; they make the lime, adobe, and bricks; they make the walls, square the beams, and carry the boards.”<sup>264</sup> In the 1550s, Mendieta noted the powerful community effort expressed by the Nahuas when “even the women and children attending to the carrying of the building materials” would organize to “build churches in all their towns.”<sup>265</sup> He also described regional competitiveness, “one group trying to get ahead of the other by making their church bigger and better, and ornamenting it as much as possible.”<sup>266</sup> Certainly, as explained in chapter two, these are the musings of a priest pushing the triumphal church narrative; however, it is significant that Mendieta explicitly described Nahuas autonomously taking charge of construction, without, it seems, a Spaniard directing their endeavors.

Even if Spaniards did direct most construction efforts, there are documented cases in which new schools and church properties were begun through indigenous agency without the priests being present. For example, on June 6, 1548, the Tlaxcalan *cabildo* (town council) appear to have been the decision makers when it came to the construction of a “school to teach small boys” connected to the existing Franciscan monastery.<sup>267</sup> Nearly two years later, on April 15, 1550, they specifically designated their “governor and the ruler don Francisco de Mendoza” to supervise “building the church courtyard.”<sup>268</sup> In another example from México-Tenochtitlan in the 1560s, the building of the College

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<sup>264</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 128–129.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> Lockhart et al, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 39.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

of Santa Maria de Todos Santos began without the intervention of a Spanish professional; “only *after* the materials had been brought to the site and the building had already been begun was it decided [by the Indians] to ask for the assistance of an architect.”<sup>269</sup> With these cases in mind, it is safe to say that the town council and perhaps the entire Nahua population of San Andrés Calpan contributed to the construction of their monastic school, and thus influenced its architectural layout and iconographic narrative.

Competition over access to workers and resources was certainly an issue for the Tlaxcalans. At the time, their *cabildo* enacted a restrictive pay scale for Tlaxcalans arrested for “drunkenness and hired out as punishment.”<sup>270</sup> The Tlaxcalans planning to build homes, schools, or other structures would be paid less than Spaniards living in the city, or those Spaniards living in nearby Puebla. If they employed “skilled” laborers (be they masons, carpenters, or painters), those “hired by Tlaxcalan employers” received only 4 *tomines*, while those “hired by Spaniards” received 6 *tomines*; however, both were outdone by those workers “hired by Spaniards in Puebla,” who received 1 peso.<sup>271</sup> By forcing the Spaniards to pay more for laborers, at least in this single example, the Tlaxcalans would be able to financially compete with Spaniards, and limit those non-Tlaxcalan groups’ access to their available work force. And the Tlaxcalans apparently competed with Cholula over access to firewood to produce resources, like lime—the essential ingredient in concrete and especially the final white coating of the courtyards.<sup>272</sup> Certainly labor, lime, and layout were issues that Calpan’s *cabildo* also would have dealt

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<sup>269</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 128.

<sup>270</sup> Lockhart et al, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 35.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 43, 60.

with when constructing their convent and courtyard, but most important was a sense of community pride associated with the construction, maintenance, and worship in their churches.<sup>273</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The power of the “dialogical frontier” and the discursive space created by Nahua communities must not be ignored.<sup>274</sup> Christian paternalism most assuredly restricted female access to religious specialization in the mid-sixteenth century, and the repercussions of the shift from complementary dualistic spirituality to a masculine dominated hierarchy greatly diminished the public role of female priests and education specialists. Imported dogmas such as “sin” or Manichean ideals such as “good” and “evil” attempted to simplify the complex network of Mesoamerican monism. And Franciscan top-down education techniques, creatively engineered by priest like fray Diego de Valadés and fray Pedro de Gante, coopted indigenous communication systems and grafted Christian concepts onto them. But in the end, another Franciscan, fray Juan de Alameda, did not build the convent of Calpan; Nahua citizens did. Franciscan priests alone did not attend to their spiritual lives; Nahua *fiscales* did, too. And though a man now stood where a priestess once led female worshipers to temple or *cuicacalli*, women continued to participate in religious instruction, though now relegated to the status of students rather than teachers. If fray Diego’s depiction of the distracted women holds an ounce of reality in thin ink, those uninterested women may have been living repositories of other stories that were more important to the community.

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<sup>273</sup> Haskett, *Indigenous Rulers*, 85.

<sup>274</sup> Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*, 188.

Indeed, Nahua architects wrote narratives in two languages in these architectural dialogues, creating (consciously or otherwise) the spatial and subtextual messages and double mistaken meanings carved into the atrium of San Andrés Calpan.<sup>275</sup> These can be termed “visual bilingualisms” that remain discernible in *posa* ornamentation. Art historian Cecelia Klein defined visual-bilingual communication as the process of determining the colonial “dialogue” found in visual devices (e.g. paintings, sculpture, structures) produced by both the colonizer and the “dispossessed” culture in the post-contact era.<sup>276</sup> In a sense, she argued that the visual communication devices (murals, paintings, sculpture, and architecture) produced during periods of colonization express the designs of a middle group adopting parts of each culture. Recently, Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn argued that both groups participated in “hybridity” a process where “particular kinds of things and practices [were] brought together that in some way challenge[d] presumptive norms.”<sup>277</sup>

Certainly, the material culture that Nahuas and Spanish priests “brought together,” included both Ibero-Christian and Nahua-Teoyoism designs that challenged the

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<sup>275</sup> I am following Elizabeth Hill Boone’s understanding of writing: “Most written histories, with which we are familiar, are ordered by events” in sequence, “helps to establish consequential actions, cause and effect; the participants, the location, and the time are then discussed within the framework of the action and are adjusted to it;” “Aztec Pictorial Histories: Records without Words,” in *Writing without Words*, 54; later, in the same anthology, John Monaghan wrote, “Mesoamerican languages commonly mark geographical and physical location, or ‘locatives,’ with terms derived from body parts. According to Monaghan the Nahua neighbors to the south, the Mixtecs, “recognized homologies between the body and the world... for spatial relationships in general, for the individual’s orientation in space, and even for the composition of objects,” Monaghan, “The Text in the Body, The Body in the Text,” in *Writing without Words*, 95-96. For “double mistaken identity,” see, Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 442–446.

<sup>276</sup> Klein noted that these acts of material cultural agency on the part of the colonized group, took place within a colonial power paradigm, “[m]any ‘postcolonialized’ people continue to be deprived of equal access to resources and the fruits of their own labor—and indeed of control of their own bodies and even their lives;” “Depictions of the Dispossessed,” 106.

<sup>277</sup> For more on visual “hybridity,” see Chapter I; also Dean, Carolyn, “Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America,” *Colonial Latin American Review*, 12:1 (June 1, 2003), 6.

normative narratives of both traditions, such as the Franciscan adoption of or adaptation to the open-air courtyard. However, most art and architecture historians have analyzed the sixteenth-century convents blind to Nahua traditions, normative or otherwise, and their resulting understanding of these educational environments remains only half informed. In an attempt to better understand the ways that the community of Nahuas and Europeans visually-communicated with each other in the educational environments of sixteenth-century New Spain, it is necessary to examine examples of visually bilingual Nahua architects.

## CHAPTER IV

### READING SCHOOLS: INTERPRETATIONS ON THE ALTAR NARRATIVES OF THE POSAS OF SAN ANDRÉS CALPAN

It is that which is guarded, that which is bound; the secret knowledge that the old men, the old women, those who go white-haired, those who go white-headed, those who go emaciated with age, our forefathers, left as they departed. For they came to live on earth; for they came to live with others. And they came to occupy position and authority among the people.

*Huehuetlatolli*: Nahua elders' admonishment to Nahua youths<sup>278</sup>

Then the second Sun or age was founded... In this Sun giants lived. The old ones said the giants greeted each other thus: "Do not fall down," for whoever falls, he falls forever.

Nahua creation narrative, "*Teotlatolli, Teocuicatl*:"<sup>279</sup>

The Franciscan evangelical experiment of the sixteenth century found fecund soil for education in the courtyard of Calpan; however, it was a shared educational environment pregnant with multiple outcomes. A World Heritage Site today, the Catholic Church and Convent of San Andrés Calpan sits quietly at the heart of the "old city" as Mexican construction workers chisel and hammer into the old concrete across the street, noisily transforming a sidewalk into parking spaces to accommodate the ever-increasing number of parishioners, tourists, and community events.<sup>280</sup> Today, guests usually enter the atrium through the western gates from the new strip of parking stalls running along the west side of the complex. Walking under the three grand arches, a structural

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<sup>278</sup> "Elders' Wisdom;" León Portilla, Miguel, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality: Ancient Myths, Discourses, Stories, Doctrines, Hymns, Poems from the Aztec, Yucatec, Quiche-Maya and other Sacred Traditions* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1980), 72–73.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 138; "Divine Words, Divine Songs"

<sup>280</sup> I visited the convent in August of 2011.

intervention from the 1940s, guests are presented with a spectacular view of the expansive atrium and church façade.<sup>281</sup> According to the groundskeepers, visitors arriving during the patron saint's festival celebration of San Andrés in November see the atrium covered with a colorful carpeting of thousands of amber marigolds endemic to the countryside, as well as the community's arrangement of multicolored flags strung over the courtyard and numerous floral decorations placed in front of the church doors.<sup>282</sup> In ancient times, Nahuas held the image of the marigold in high regard, and archaeologists have found sculpted marigold "stamps" in the ruins of sites such as Teotihuacan.<sup>283</sup> In the courtyard of Calpan, similar circular marigold stamps trace the edges of the carved ornamentation on the *Posa de la Asunción*. The presence of ancient marigold icons in the atrium of the church, combined with the fact that Saint Andrew's celebration is, to this day, at the same time as the blooming of the marigolds, is a spiritual phenomenon that must have facilitated a spiritual connection forged between colonial Nahuas and the visiting Franciscan priests from Huejotzingo. Christian architects placed these icons for Christian purposes and they determined the patron saint of the church. Or at least that is the story we read in Spanish-language texts as we walk through the courtyard today.

For visitors, explanatory information written on blue plastic placards describes in detail the Spanish-Christian religious ornamentation of the convent with little reference to the students that once walked its grounds, nor the possibility that they could have

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<sup>281</sup> Standing under the arches, looking into the submerged courtyard towards the east, the viewer can distinguish two of the four corner chapels, or *posas*; a simple fountain a yard southeast of the center of the atrium; and the massive church façade with a convent attached to it on the south side. At the time of my visit, in August of 2011, the dark-green foliage of trees blotted out some of the façade and parts of the *posa* (corner chapel) of the Asunción in the northeast corner.

<sup>282</sup> Nahuatl: *cempohualxochitl* "twenty flower;" Latin: *Tagetes erectas*.

<sup>283</sup> Morehead, "An Iconology of Architectural Ornament," 95-105, 162-165.

interpreted such symbols in ways in keeping with their own traditions (Figure 12).

Though the efforts of indigenous builders are mentioned, we read more about the top-down transformative process of fray Juan de Alameda's program (described in Chapter III). We learn about Catholic education and the relevant Christian themes of a few of the *posas*. Facts regarding the deep history of Nahua heritage remain unwritten. Today the embracing walls of the courtyard offer a peaceful place to be, and though concerted surveys of the churchyard have never been conducted, most likely the interred bodies of long-dead Nahua students and community members rest at peace in the holy soil below.



Figure 12: Information placard, the Convent of San Andrés Calpan; this banner explains fray Juan de Alameda's role in the convent's construction, and the building phases (Photograph by the author, August 2011).

Though Franciscan friars had their own designs of how best to utilize this space, in the end Calpan's Nahua builders and citizens created their own curriculum in the courtyard. It was a local Nahua school that had adapted to Christianity. The builders adopted Iberian iconography, legible to the priests *and* the community, to tell stories familiar to both. We could certainly let these Nahua stories languish beneath the dominant Christian ones that greet visitors today, but then how do we explain the all-encompassing persistence of living Nahua traditions? Every year, weeks before the celebration of San Andrés, the community cuts a vast assortment of marigolds to

line their altars for the Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead). During the fiesta, faithful

Catholic Mexicans, young and old, munch on skeleton-shaped cookies decorated with sugary marigold designs. Nearly five centuries ago, Nahua elders told the Franciscans about their ancient Feast of *Mictlancihuatl* (Lady of the Underworld), held at the end of summer (Figure 13). Faithful Nahuas draped marigold wreaths over the altar of Mictlancihuatl. On her altar they placed a mannequin representing the skeletal goddess shaped out of dough from crushed amaranth seeds, and then they began to dance and sing to honor her. All the while, they ate amaranth dough cookies shaped like the bones of the dead. At some point in the evolution of Mexican spirituality and religious observance, Mexican Catholicism fused the bones of the Nahuas with the bones of the Church. It was in places like Calpan, during regimented Catholic instruction, that modern Nahua Christianity first began to emerge.

By examining the physical iconography of the courtyard and its connection to the surrounding landscape, and by comparing all of this with pre- and post-contact Spanish and Nahuatl sources, this chapter reads other kinds of “written” histories of San Andrés Calpan that have been kept out of the existing historical narrative.<sup>284</sup> Art historians and religious scholars have traditionally squinted when interpreting the ornamentations of Calpan; their narrow view and interpretation of Christian iconography has produced a one-sided, partially-blind understanding of the dialogues written in stone on its *posas*. In the opinion of art historian Elizabeth Hill Boone, writing is “the communication of relatively specific ideas in a conventional manner by means of permanent, visible marks.”<sup>285</sup> The *posa* ornamentation, part of the early-colonial cultural dialogue of

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<sup>284</sup> Gordon Brotherston called for academia to begin “entering the history” of non-literate societies of the past; see, *Book of the Fourth World*, 45.

<sup>285</sup> Boone, “Introduction: Writing and Recording Knowledge,” 15.



Figure 13: *Mictlancihuatl* (Lady of the Underworld). She was the Mesoamerican deity honored traditionally in the late summer with the fiesta for the dead. Note the marigold wreath. The contemporary Mexican Catholic celebration for Día de los Muertos (The Day of the Dead) follows similar patterns of devotion (Codex Magliabecchiano fol., 37r, Loubat Codices Collection, © Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org)).

colonization, is just such a vital “memory that can be inspected by others.”<sup>286</sup> As we re-read the visible marks in the ornamentation of Calpan, we can reaffirm traditional Nahuatl narratives, which coexisted alongside Christian doctrine of the supposed “spiritual conquest.”

Recently, Jaime Lara and Eleanor Wake have explored the *posas* of Calpan, though with mixed results. Wake carefully examined the processional path connecting Calpan’s *posas*, and Lara compared the architectural layouts of ceremonial spaces such as

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<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

the Calpan's atrium with fray Diego de Valades' illustrations.<sup>287</sup> However, both scholars focus more on the concept of the Christian monastic church as a symbol rather than as a school. For instance, in one example of a missed opportunity, when Lara identifies *how* Nahuas may have read the ornamentation of Calpan, he ignores indigenous texts and existing colonial pictographic references completely; as such, the educational space of Calpan continues to be explored only within a dominant Christian narrative.<sup>288</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to decode other visual components and other possible readings of "Christian" images fashioned into the ornamentation and architecture of the Church of San Andrés Calpan and its *posas* that might have been called up by the memory of traditional Nahua sacred narratives. The Nahua people of Calpan left us with few instructions as to how we should "read" the ornamentation of their church and atrium. Yet there is a wealth of colonial period Nahua pictographic works from the surrounding region available in print. By examining these valuable sources (*mapas*, *lienzos*, and pictorial manuscripts) we can see how Calpan's neighbors communicated their ideas in images and begin to read them ourselves.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> For Wake on processions, see, *Framing the Sacred*, 118.

<sup>288</sup> According to Lara, the "cosmic battle between good and evil" on the *posa* of San Miguel is "final," which ignores Nahua concepts of cyclical time. He also believes that it only refers to "the two foundational sacraments of the Church;" *Christian Texts for Aztecs*, 245-246.

<sup>289</sup> Colonial civil and church records have not been published, so that in the future I intend to carry out more extensive archival research that may provide more details. Furthermore, oral accounts from Nahuas living in San Andrés Calpan, San Nicolás de los Ranchos, and Huejotzingo will provide another layer of local memory to be added to a later, more expansive study of these topics.

## Reading Materials and Mountains of Memory

Around the time that the Calpanecas were building their convent, their neighbors to the southeast, the Nahuas of Cuauhtinchan, were in the process of defining their place on the colonial map.<sup>290</sup> The *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2* was part of that endeavor. Created out of traditional Mesoamerican *amatl* (wood pulp) paper and measuring 109 x 204 centimeters, the *Mapa*'s detailed illustrations define the creation and migration story of Cuauhtinchan, their cosmology, and aspects of their political ideology. This was a time when their Nahua neighbors and Iberian colonizers challenged the local lord's territory, and the *Mapa*, in a truly Nahua method of communication, asserted their primordial claim to the altepetl and its territory at this time.<sup>291</sup> The narrative takes place over the course of centuries, long before Iberian contact. Beginning on the left side of the *Mapa*, we follow the migrants' journey from their departure from the mythical Chicomoztoc (Seven Caves), down into the Valley of Mexico. As is common to Mesoamerican migration narratives they peregrinated through the wilderness, finally crossing into the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley and the religious capital of Cholollan. This significant moment is painted at center of the *Mapa*, and it signifies the recognition of their legitimacy as an autonomous people. It is after their ancestors passed through Cholollan that they begin to define the order and boundaries of their religious and political identity.

Four successive turns along the migration route create cardinal points on the *Mapa*, and each is connected to a sacred mountain. First they turned right (toward the

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<sup>290</sup> This *mapa* was created between 1534 and 1555 by one or more unknown authors/artists. Elizabeth Hill Boone claims that "indigenous lords" directed its construction; "The House of the Eagle," in *Cave, City Eagle's Nest*, 27.

<sup>291</sup> Wake, "The Serpent Road," in *Cave, City, and Eagle's Nest*, 207–209.

bottom of the *Mapa*), continuing on until they establish Popocatepetl as their first mountain marker. They turned left again, and after walking to Coixtlahuaca, a mountain to the town's southwest, they turn left again. Now walking toward the top of the *Mapa* they reach Orizaba, a mountain to their southeast and turn left again, heading onward to the northeast until they reach the southern side of mountain Matlalcueitl (an image of the goddess Matlalcueye can be seen next to a sacred structure at the base of the volcano). From here the people of Cuauhtinchan move into the center, reaching their destined place, signified by a cave set into an *altepetl* glyph within which we see an eagle and a jaguar. By anchoring their boundaries with mountains in the four cardinal directions, the Nahuas of Cuauhtinchan defined their legitimate place in the center, the fifth cardinal direction, in relation to the world around them.<sup>292</sup> Thus they highlighted their religious and political connections with references to regional *altepetl*, especially the important sacred center of Cholollan.<sup>293</sup> Similar to the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*, Calpan's architectural program, the designs of the ornamentation of the church, defined local and regional religious and political landscapes. Nahua architects at Calpan hoped to document their claim to the landscape alongside other historical data.

One reads the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2* in a counter-clockwise fashion, especially when the migrants have exited Cholollan and begin to circle the site of their future home.<sup>294</sup> From Cholula they begin a journey around the valley, establishing a sacred cosmogram, a readable cosmic design. At religiously significant sites along the

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<sup>292</sup> Ann Seiferle-Valencia, "Representations of Territorial Organization in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*," in *Cave, City, and Eagle's Nest*, 86.

<sup>293</sup> Seiferle-Valencia believes they, "legitimize their authority... suggest[ing] a strong local identity centered in a regional context;" *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>294</sup> A drawing of the map and significant landscape identity markers can be found in *Ibid.*, 35.

way, the Nahuas of Cuauhtinchan stop to honor cardinal points in the cosmogram. Eleanor Wake highlighted this same kind of “anticlockwise” directional engagement of the *posas* at Huejotzingo and other sixteenth-century convents. She also highlighted the depictions of *posas* in numerous colonial-era Nahuatl maps, specifically noting the directions in which the doors face and their counter-clockwise layout in the atria, for example on found on the 1580 map of Huapalalteopan.<sup>295</sup>

Though we cannot determine exactly how the Nahuas of Calpan walked the *posas* of their convent, Mexican Catholic custom dictates that processions move within the courtyard in a counter-clockwise procession, too (though this may have been an outgrowth of the colonial education period) (Figure 14). One of our earliest accounts of the use of a four *posa*-like setting in a procession comes from Motolinia. While attending a 1538 “Corpus Christi” celebration in neighboring Tlaxcala, led by neophytes, he described a quincunx layout in the scenery that the Nahua participants had constructed. Apparently, the Tlaxcalans built four artificial stages, each with a small mound or mountain, near the four corners of the atrium. According to Motolinia, the neophytes moved from mountain to mountain enacting dialogues and speeches in their native

Nahuatl, all of which was part of a processional route where each mountain was dedicated to a different “Christian” theme.<sup>296</sup> For the friar the event symbolized an inventive tactile way for the neophytes to demonstrate their adoption of Christianity.

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<sup>295</sup> Wake, *Framing the Sacred*, 117–118.

<sup>296</sup> Motolinía, *Motolinía’s History*, 62; Wake, *Framing the Sacred*, 117. Artificial mountains were a common Iberian creation at the time of contact, which is possibly why the Franciscans did not recognize the pre-contact significance of the mounds created at Tlaxcala. Art historian Alessandro Nova described the interactive “Sacro Monte” with mannequins displayed in biblical scenes, all of which was founded by the Franciscan fray Bernardino Caimi in the Milanese town of Varallo in the late-fifteenth century; see “‘Popular’ Art in Renaissance Italy: Early Response to the Holy Mountain at Varallo,” in *Reframing the Renaissance*, 113-126.

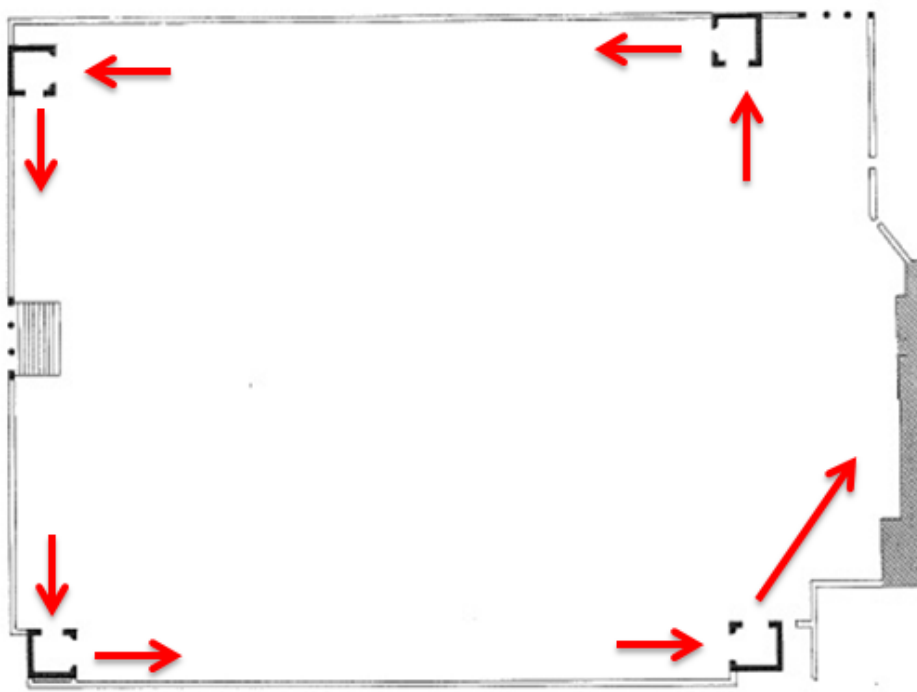


Figure 14: Counter-clockwise “reading order” of San Andrés Calpan (Image modified from Kubler, *Mexican Architecture* (1948), 265.

Unfortunately he did not record the direction of the procession, but it is important to emphasize the fact that the Tlaxcalans built their own understandings of Christian stories, within an ancient Mesoamerican cosmology.

In Mesoamerican myth-history four “worlds” or eras existed before the current one, and at the end of each world a supernatural event transformed the landscape and its occupants, thus heralding the next world.<sup>297</sup> According to Muñoz Camargo, Nahuas believed that at the end of the first world, the giants who had ruled the land suddenly fell victim to strong winds and hurricanes but “that they escaped [death by] remain[ing] buried in some mountains and hidden cliffs.”<sup>298</sup> Tlaxcalan elders looked to these sacred

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<sup>297</sup> Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and The Irony of Empire*, 93-94.

<sup>298</sup> Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 170.

mountain tombs as reference points to remember their deities, especially their patroness, the goddess Matlalcueye, and her home in the volcano Matlalcueitl.<sup>299</sup> In pre- and postcontact pictography and drawings Nahuas defined their place in the world with mountains, or mountain-like structures.<sup>300</sup> Accordingly, Muñoz Camargo explained that “to eternalize their memories, [the elders] left [the gods and goddesses] names in the well-known mountains, calling them by the proper names. Even today, many hills and mountains are still called by these names.”<sup>301</sup>

Such landmarks of identity establish the boundaries of a community as well as socio-political and religious legitimacy and significance.<sup>302</sup> Though they hoped to demolish the Nahuas’ connections to the pre-contact sacred, Mesoamerica’s Iberian spiritual colonizers ignored the landscape as a factor in the scaffolding of Native American memory and the transference of indigenous forms of education.<sup>303</sup> If the mountains housed the giant ancestors of the Nahuas, and those giants kept knowledge for the elders of the community, then by aligning each *posa* with a mountain marker,

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<sup>299</sup> Alan Sandstrom noted the persistent recognition of the “living” landscape of the contemporary Nahuas of Amatlán; *Corn is Our Blood*, 78, 238-239, 241; see also, Haskett, *Visions of Paradise*, 142.

<sup>300</sup> For colonial Nahuas, see Haskett, *Visions of Paradise*, 142-143. Brotherston expands on this notion to look at the broader Native American cosmology of “mountain guardians,” specifically the dry paintings of the Diné (Navajo) Night Chant and Blessingway ceremonies; *Book of the Fourth World*, 93-94.

<sup>301</sup> “para eternizar sus memorias, dejaron puestos sus nombres en sierras muy conocidas, llamandose de sus propios nombres. Aun si, muchos cerros y sierras hoy en día se llaman con estos nombres.” My translation, Muñoz Carmargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 172.

<sup>302</sup> Haskett, *Visions of Paradise*, 141-145.

<sup>303</sup> Keith Basso, Keith, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 119-123; Though separated by time and space, it should be noted that Apache’s also consider mnemonic placenames as grandparents that remind them of the proper behaviorisms and community traditions. Perhaps Nahua painters associated these customary figures with the cardinal directions, which in turn could be superimposed on the landscape.

anchoring it with a mnemonic device, the builders of Calpan “wrote” local knowledge into the layout of the courtyard.

Since both Nahuas and Europeans relied on a five-point image, or quincunx, to define sacred space, it is no surprise to find that Gordon Brotherston found that colonial Nahua artists used quincunxes to denote scenes of conquest and battle, something that is especially evident in Muñoz Camargo’s *Historia de Tlaxcala*.<sup>304</sup> Though Brotherston did not mention it, Muñoz Camargo also used the quincunx when depicting religious conversion and evangelization. In one scene, the Tlaxcalan historian depicts a Franciscan priest at the center of a courtyard with four buildings located in the corners of the space surrounding him.<sup>305</sup> Two groups of male Nahuas kneel on either side of him, listening to the priest speak. On the lower portion of the page, Muñoz Camargo placed a nun who is speaking to a group of males to her left and a group of female Nahuas behind her. We cannot be certain as to where this scene may have taken place exactly (if it ever took place at all); however, Muñoz Camargo explains that it was “in the house of the lords.” The Nahuatl gloss does not include references to *cuicacalli*, *calmecac*, or *telpochcalli*. And yet, his drawing does resemble a courtyard, with the four corner buildings containing seats of authority, or possibly altars.<sup>306</sup> Perhaps Nahuas employed the five-section layout in their pictography and iconography to connote a moment of great change.

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<sup>304</sup> Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 151–175; Brotherston, *Book of the Fourth World*, 92-93.

<sup>305</sup> Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, fol. 238 v.

<sup>306</sup> In Nahuatl, above the image, is written, *Teccalco* [Tecalco] *yc temachtiaya teopisque* (“In the sacred-force house the priests teach/preach”) In Spanish, at the base of the page, we find, *Predicación del sancto[sic] evangelio en las casas de los caciques y señores de Tlaxcala y cómo la oyan[sic] de buena gana* (“The preaching of the sanctified Gospel in the houses of the caciques and lords of Tlaxcala and how they listened well to it”), Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, fol. 238 v.

This iconographic style is evident at Calpan, just as it is apparent in pre-contact manuscripts produced by Nahua religious specialists.

As mentioned before, Calpan is located below the mountain pass that leads into the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley. To the north of the pass lies the snow-capped inactive volcano Iztaccihuatl (White Lady). Looming in the southwest, Popocatepetl (Smoking Mountain, or “the mountain smokes”) rises in the distance above the walls of the courtyard, a volcano that regularly sends forth a hot cloud of ash into the atmosphere. Triangulating with the two volcanoes that Wake called “the great guardians of the Cholula plain,” Calpan rests just to the east, on the northern side of valley, the perfect stopping site for weary travelers as they climb to the top of the pass.<sup>307</sup> In the other direction, to the northeast, sits Matlalcueitl; Tlaxcala lies at the base of this third geographic locator.<sup>308</sup> Finally, to the south of Matlalcueitl and southeast of Calpan, is the man-made mountain, the great *Tlachihualtepetl*, the central pyramid of Cholula.<sup>309</sup> Though we cannot account for the view at the time of construction, today, atmospheric pollution blocks observers in Calpan from the two eastern mountains from sight. Satellite images demonstrate this larger five-point geomorphic cosmology (Figure 15).

Looking west from the façade of San Andrés Calpan’s church, one clearly sees the courtyard symmetrically laid out in a rectangular shape with the two western *posas* matching with the mountains Iztaccihuatl and Popocatepetl (Figure 16). Wake, among others, has noted the existence of “sight lines,” or visible landmarks on the horizon

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<sup>307</sup> Wake, “The Serpent Road,” in *Cave, City, and Eagle’s Nest*, 206.

<sup>308</sup> This long dormant volcano is also called Malintzin, or La Malinche, the name of the indigenous female translator who assisted the conquistadors, known to them by her baptismal name, doña Marina.

<sup>309</sup> From *tlachihualli*, “creation/created”, and *tepetl*, “mountain/mound.”

connected with the placement and orientation of colonial church architecture.<sup>310</sup> For a Calpaneca standing in the walled-courtyard it would have been impossible to see the remaining two geographic locators, Matlalcueitl and *Tlachihualtepetl*. Knowing that the ancestral mountains are off in the distance, even if all of them cannot be seen from ground level in the atrium, the informed viewer would understand that all four *posas* are aligned with these four physical features on the horizon.



Figure 15: Topography of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley. The four mountain memory triggers highlighted with arrows. Following the reading order of the previous image they are: Matlalcueitl (far right), Iztaccihuatl (top left), Popocatepetl (bottom left), and the man-made mountain *Tlachihualtepetl* (bottom right). Each *posa* in the courtyard is aligned with a specific mountain. Thus, the Nahuas of Calpan might have used these mountains to remember pre-contact sacred knowledge and orient themselves in the courtyard. © 2012 Google, modified from Google Earth, Accessed 04/05/2012).

<sup>310</sup> Wake, *Framing the Sacred*, 130–137; Wake’s map cuts out Calpan; for Tichy’s original sightlines map, see Broda, Johanna, *Arqueoastronomía y etnoastronomía en Mesoamérica* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1991), 447–459.



Figure 16: *Posa de San Francisco* alignment with Iztaccihuatl (White Lady); off to the viewer's right (north) an old road leads to a colonial cemetery and beyond that, a spring (Photograph by the author, August 2011).

Nahuas considered the mountains to be gendered, similar to the deity that was associated with them. For instance, when we compare the image from the Codex Mendoza describing a traditional marriage in the groom's house with the layout of Calpan's atrium, we find a possible form of mistaken cultural collusion between Nahua tradition and Christian custom.<sup>311</sup> The wedding party inside the walls of the house is arranged with two elder women to the right of the newlyweds and to elder men to their left. In Iberian churches and monasteries, Christian customs had traditionally delineated spaces for women to the north (right of the priest) and men to the south (left of the

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<sup>311</sup> Berdan, *The Essential Codex Mendoza*, Part I, p167 and Part II, p 127.

priest).<sup>312</sup> Facing the courtyard from the church doors of San Andrés Calpan we find that the two *posas* associated female gendered mountains are on the Epistle, or north side of the atrium, and the two *posas* with male gendered mountains are on the Evangel, or south side of the atrium. Thus the Nahuas had created in Calpan's atrium a gendered arrangement similar to that depicted in the Codex Mendoza. Marriages, though public and conducted by males in this more patriarchal society, would still hold true to Nahua (and Iberian) customs.

Seemingly, the Spanish understood the centrality of the mountain-pyramid to indigenous cosmologies.<sup>313</sup> According to John McAndrew, the ornamental program and systematized doctrine represented in Calpan's atrium exemplified the character of Christian acculturation, regardless of the landscape. Highlighting the ornamentation work, McAndrew noted that the Spanish architects of Calpan chose the "themes and saints... not casual[ly] or unsystematic[ally]" in fact they "may be the clearest instance" of "affiliations with late medieval art."<sup>314</sup> Certainly, the "topping" of existing structures and the fact that Nahuas did all of the work must have had some influence on the project. But architecture historians laud fray Juan for the design of the work and its implementation.

Perhaps then, by coopting this sacred space, the Spaniards attempted to create a coherent methodology and Christian pedagogy for the neophytes. According to Wake, the colonizers in fact looked to "neutralize the sacredness of certain topographical features by obstructing them," presumably with the high walls of atria, and the roofs of *posas* and

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<sup>312</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 210.

<sup>313</sup> Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 25–27, 107–109.

<sup>314</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 332.

churches. However, in so doing, Spaniards neglected Nahua understandings of the sacred landscape and “the presence of a *permanent* sacred force [that Mesoamericans] recognized,” as well as their tradition of creating artificial representations of gendered sacred mountains.<sup>315</sup> So while many scholars have examined the *posas* of San Andrés Calpan for their Christian themes, few have attempted to connect them to the traditional landscape and possible pre-contact Nahua narratives.<sup>316</sup> For example, when investigating Calpan, McAndrew detected few “specific preconquest models,” noting that the ornamentation was an example of “simply persistent Indian aesthetic preferences” without mentioning aesthetic connections to the pre-contact sacred landscape.<sup>317</sup> Franciscans (and the Nahua students they trained to be teachers) referred to the ornamentation of the four *posas* to describe four to six key events in Christian epistemological narratives: first, the Assumption, or the moment when Mother Mary rose to her place in Heaven; second, the Annunciation, or the moment that she received word that she would bear the Christ child; third, Christ’s Five Wounds, or the wounds that Christ received at his Passion—most likely linked to Saint Francis’s miraculous stigmata; fourth, the triumph of the Archangel Michael over Satan; fifth, the Final Judgment, the millennial moment when Christ would sit in judgment over sinners; and, sixth, the spreading of the gospel by Saint John the Evangelist and the Apostles. When conducting lessons in the atrium, twice daily and especially during processions, they might direct their pupils’ eyes to the *posas* and explain the meanings of these sacred Christian

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<sup>315</sup> Wake, *Framing the Sacred*, 105.

<sup>316</sup> With the exception of Wake, *Framing the Sacred*, 2010, 121, 130–137; and perhaps Franz Tichy’s study of sight lines; in Broda, *Arqueoastronomía Y Etnoastronomía en Mesoamérica* (1991) (447–459).

<sup>317</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 327; George Kubler also looked for Christian/European antecedents; *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*, 392–393.

narratives. But what about the myriads of stories told by the people of Calpan when the Franciscans were away?

***Posa de Asunción, or Xochiquetzal, Matlalcueye, Matlalcueitl, and the Spring***

Beginning our journey from the Church doors of San Andrés, we find the *Posa de la Asunción*. From the south-facing side we see the iconography of the moment that the Virgin Mary learned of her burden as the mother of the Christ Child (Figure 17). Mary receives the Crown of Heaven as she ascends upward surrounded by a U-shaped border of clouds or possibly flowers. After passing through the small chapel and out to the left (west), turning back to face the west face of the *posa*, we find the scene of Mary's Annunciation. Mary, sitting on a chair to the left, holds a book and awaits the messenger angel Gabriel. He is depicted to the right, carrying a cross. A vase full of flowers separates the two, and a bird (possibly a dove, and therefore the Holy Spirit) flies toward Mary sending forth either rays of sunshine or drops of rain (Figure 18).<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Morehead, "An Iconology of Architectural Ornament," 86-109.



Figure 17: *Posa de la Asunción* (south façade); Mary, the Mother of Christ, ascending into the heavens. Winged angels lower a crown to her head. Note the cloud or possibly floral “U” shaped boundary. From this position the viewer is facing to the north and an ancient spring some distance behind the courtyard walls (Photographed by the author, August 2011).



Figure 18: *Posa de la Asunción* (west façade); the Anunciación (announcement) of Mary’s divine pregnancy. Mary sits to the left. The Angel Gabriel stands to the right, bringing her word of the Christ child. At center we see a potted bouquet of what look like lilies, and above the flowers we see a bird (possibly a dove, indicating the Holy Spirit). Rays of light, or possibly drops of rain, project from the bird toward the expectant Mary. The viewer is facing east, in the direction of the mountain Matlalcueitl, and the *altepetl* Tlaxcala (Photographed by the author, August 2011).

Reading the Nahua iconography of the *posa* we come away with a more complicated narrative. Scholars commonly note the pre-contact marigold symbol that runs along the borders of the Christian scenes (Figures 19–20). Morehead called these reoccurring border stamps “adjectival borders,” and she noted how the symbols emphasized concepts of both Christian and Nahua femininity.<sup>319</sup> She also linked the



Figures 19–20: Marigold stamps of the *Posa de Asunción* (at a distance and close up); these “adjectival borders” of marigold stamps outline the biblical scenes depicted on the façades. The iconography of the marigold has been found in pre-contact ruins of Mesoamerica, and it is believed that it signifies creation and fertility, and thus, the deities Xochiquetzal and Matlalcueye. At contact, they were also associated with the festival for the dead (later known as *Día de los Muertos*) and the flowers of the Mictlancihuatl (Photographed by the author, August 2011).

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 109.

marigold stamps with the flowers that grow in the courtyard. But she stopped short of investigating the other creation narratives of the *posa*, which become apparent by locating it within the landscape and its sacred history.

Muñoz Camargo included the story of the goddess of all the winds and new skies, of creation, flowers, and fertility, Xochiquetzal, (Flower Precious-Feather), in his *Historia*. According to Muñoz, she entertained herself in the cosmos with artistic rigor, tying and threading “beautiful and curious things,” as well as painting for the Nahuas “such pretty and beautiful things that through her work no man would be able to be more enraptured.”<sup>320</sup> Muñoz Camargo’s informants remembered that she was seated “en asiento del arbol florida” (on a throne of a flowering tree).<sup>321</sup> In *Codex Vaticanus 3738*, we find a colonial-era illustration of her falling to the earth (Figure 21).<sup>322</sup> She pulls down a row of flowers in each hand, creating a “V” shape with her downward facing head at the vertex of the V. Three figures await her, each holding a banner and a group of flowers, most likely marigolds. These figures are most likely dancers, for according to Muñoz Camargo, to please her Nahua devotees she would ritualistically dance with great musical performances in a fashion similar to the Tlalhuica dances for their idol-text of Xochipilli in the *cuicacalli* of the “hot lands” to the south of the Valley of Mexico.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Muñoz Carmargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 171.

<sup>321</sup> My translation; *ibid.*, 171.

<sup>322</sup> Accessed online at the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies Incorporated (FAMSI) website, [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org) (spring 2012).

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

Xochiquetzal was the second wife of Tlaloc the god of rain and fertility, who, as it happens, was also married to Matlalcueye the namesake of the mountain Matlalcueitl.<sup>324</sup> Matlalcueye was the goddess of lakes and springs and creation.<sup>325</sup> Traditionally, Nahuatl manuscripts depicted Matlalcueye kneeling with the sacred spring of life pouring forth beneath her. Oftentimes, as is the case with the codices, the first man and first woman are shown swimming along this sacred stream of water (Figures 22–23). Behind Mary's *posa*

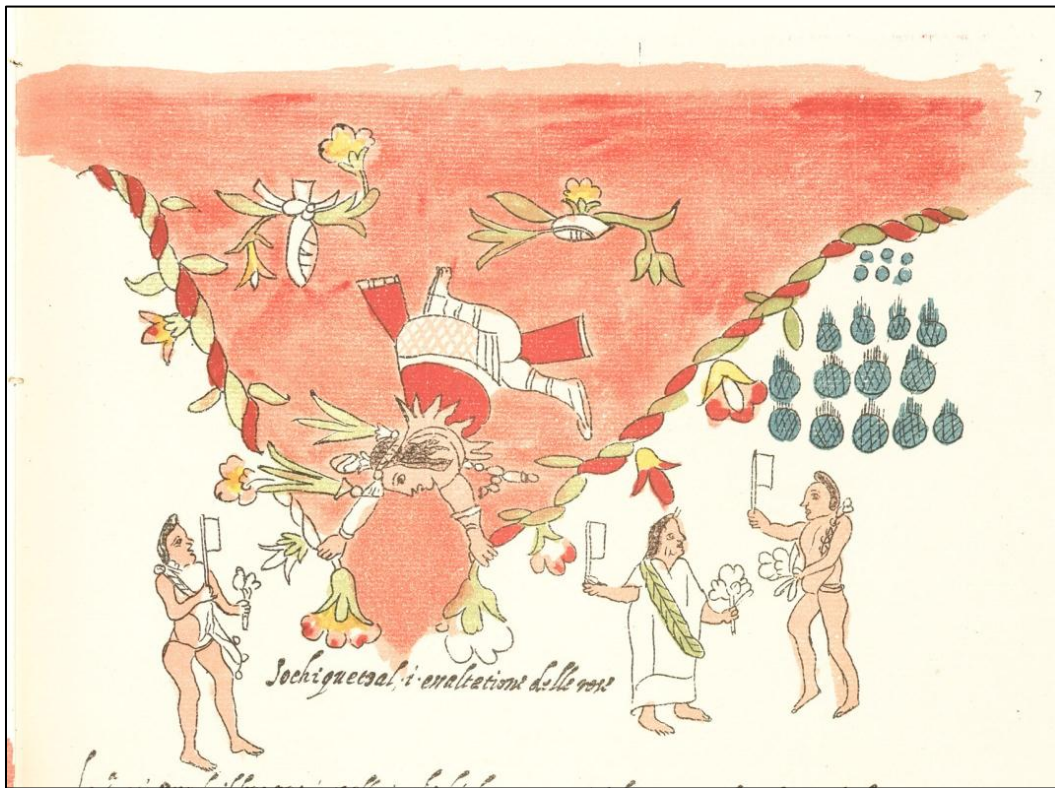


Figure 21: Xochiquetzal, Codex Vaticanus 3738, folio 7 recto. She descends to earth, dragging cords of flowers (marigolds and others) to the three dancers below (Loubat Codices Collection, © Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org)).

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>325</sup> Matlalcueye was also known as Chalchiutlicue.



Figures 22–23: Matlalcueye (Codex Borbonicus, folio 5 [left] and Codex Vaticanus 3738, folio 17 recto [right]). She was also known as Chalchihuitlicue, both names refer to her “green skirt,” and she was the goddess of creation, lakes and springs (Loubat Codices Collection, © Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org)).

at Calpan, the atrium's northern wall intersects directly with a road leading to the north, a short and ancient road that leads past the site of a pre-Hispanic market to the west and the eighteenth-century colonial parish to the east. This old road ends at a colonial-era cemetery, and walking past it, we reach a ravine and river stream that runs down the skirt of Iztaccihuatl. Though no spring-head is apparent, the location of the stream and the placing of the *posa* reinforce the metaphor of Matlalcueye's role in the Nahua cosmos.<sup>326</sup> Consequently, as we make our way through the *posa* arches and turn back to examine its west face (the biblical scene of the Annunciation), we are facing the direction of that very mountain. Here we find engravings that resemble the painted images and narratives of Matlalcueye sitting on a flowering maguey plant (Figure 24).<sup>327</sup> Instead of a seated Mary awaiting the Holy Spirit (the dove) and Saint Gabriel, colonial Nahuas might recognize Matlalcueye seated on a "flowering maguey plant," awaiting the fertilizing "rain" of Tlaloc—the landscape would help them remember.

Certainly, Muñoz Camargo's Nahua informants tied the landscape and mountains to the creation story surrounding two female deities Xochiquetzal and Matlalcueye, with the male deity Tlaloc.<sup>328</sup> Though beginning their journey with creation narratives seems plausible enough, they may have wanted to teach their community their relationship with other Nahuas of the valley. By telling the story of Matlalcueye, by referring to her mountain, Calpan's colonial Nahuas might have been reminded by the builders of their political connections to her patrons the Tlaxcalans. They had after all fought together as

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<sup>326</sup> This stream is still used today by people for drinking water and washing clothes.

<sup>327</sup> Codex Vaticanus 3773, from the Loubat Codices Collection, FAMSI, accessed online (April 2012).

<sup>328</sup> Muñoz Carmargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 171n237.



Figure 24: Matlalcueye on her flowering maguey throne; Matlalcueye (right) welcomes a man (left) with a cup full of pulque, the mildly-alcoholic drink made from fermented maguey juice. The sacred vessel at center overflows with the liquid, which was her gift to the Nahuas. Significantly the layout of this folio shares similarities with the scene of the *Anunciación*, see Figure 18 above (Codex Vaticanus 3773, fol. 57, Loubat Codices Collection, © Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., www.famsi.org).

allies of the Spaniards against the Aztecs. Furthermore, less than a decade after the construction of Calpan’s atrium and *posas*, the *cabildo* of Tlaxcala borrowed 400 pesos of gold from Calpan, attesting to their continued relationship, if only financial.<sup>329</sup> If

<sup>329</sup> Lockhart et al, *The Tlaxcalan Actas*, 62, 118-119. We can find some evidence of the persistence of pre-contact stories about Matlalcueye in the Nahuatl-language historical annals of Puebla and Tlaxcala. Apparently, in August of 1691, the Tlaxcalans reported that “[t]he wind could not blow strong” and then an eclipse caused by a “black” creature blotted out the moon. Then, according to the Pueblans, “everyone saw” the black object leap from the surface of the moon, and then “falling on Matlalcueye” (possibly referring to her mountain). The association with the coming winds of Tlaloc and an object falling down to a female deity demonstrates this persistence; see, Townsend, *Here In This Year*, 154-155, 188-189.

Tlaxcalan elders used the landscape to remember pre-contact narratives, then most likely the Calpanecas would find similar stories in vagaries of *posa* iconography.

It becomes increasingly apparent, then, that the builders of Calpan had, in effect, tied female gendered mnemonic devices and their association with Tlaxcala to the Christian iconography and positioning of the *Posa de la Asunción*. Facing the *posa* from either side orients the viewer to feminine topography, and the association with Matlalcueitl emphasized their neighbors to the east. By combining the landscape with the iconography of the *posa*, the Calpanecas pegged a point on their quincunx to the people and mountain of Tlaxcala. Standing in the center of the courtyard, Calpan citizens would become the central cardinal point, and the creation story, or other narratives that they might read in the ornamentation would revolve around them. As Muñoz Camargo's informants noted, Nahuas encoded stories in the mountains, and though the Spanish friars relayed Christian dogma by emphasizing imagery from books, murals, and possibly the ornamentation of the *posas*, the Nahuas could simultaneously remember familiar characters from their traditional stories, such as the creation myth involving the goddesses Xochiquetzal and Matlalcueye. The two narratives shared the same location in this educational space.

With each "Christian" procession, Nahuas remembered Xochiquetzal "seated on the flowering tree," which could be read into the Virgin on her U-shaped throne of flowers of the Assumption. The Nahua concept of Xochiquetzal's "beautiful paintings" coincided well with the depiction of Mary seated with the book. Though the spine-bound book is European in construction, Nahuas had a long tradition of pictographic screen-folded *tlacuillo*, like the *Codex Borgia*. The angel Gabriel, preceded by the rains and the

bird, would seem familiar to the story of Tlaloc, the god of water, coming to take his second bride Xochiquetzal. By incorporating the landscape into the architectural program of San Andrés Calpan, Nahuas maintained their traditional knowledge, in this instance, the creation narrative, right alongside depictions of Christian doctrine about the life of the Virgin Mary. For the Nahuas, Mary would take on a complex role in this hybrid educational space, not only the mother of Christ and the recipient of his miraculous birth, but also the fertility goddess responsible for their creation.

### ***Posa de San Francisco, or Huejotzingo, Camaxtli, and Iztaccihuatl***

Walking west, toward the *posa* of San Francisco, Nahua students confronted reminders of the sacrifice of Saint Francis and the fealty of their new *encomendero* (tribute grant holder) don Diego de Ordaz. This *posa* is different than the others because its Nahua builders attached the likeness of both men as statues, one-third life-size, kneeling at the corners on the roof of the northwest face. On the east-facing side, the Christian ornamentation references two female angels in profile with a circular engraving of the symbol of the Five Wounds (Figure 25). The south face consists of a larger forward-facing female angel holding a shield with a larger version of the Five Wounds (Figure 26).<sup>330</sup> According to Franciscan lore, the blood of Saint Francis pours fourth from five holes centered in the shield, which are the wounds of his miraculous stigmata. On the southeastern corner, Saint Francis kneels at the historical moment of receiving the stigmata: his arms are raised, palms facing outward, and he directs his body and eyes toward Iztaccihuatl (Figure 27).

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<sup>330</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 328.



Figure 25: *Posa de San Francisco*, west façade; the viewer is facing Iztaccihuatl. The statue of Saint Francis kneels at top right. Before it was removed, a figure of the *encomendero*, don Deigo de Ordaz knelt at top left (Photographed by the author, August 2011).



Figure 26: *Posa de San Francisco*, southern façade; an angelic figure carrying a shield with the symbol of Five Wounds. Note also the remnants of paint on the face (photographed by the author, August 2011).



Figure 27: Statue of Saint Francis, *Posa de San Francisco*; he was the mendicant founding friar of the Catholic Order of the Friars Minor (O.F.M.). The statue is located on the southeastern corner of the *posa*. He kneels at the moment of receiving the stigmata. His palms may have been embellished with red paint, symbolic of his sacrifice and two of the Five Wounds he received during his hierophany (Photographed by the author, August 2011).

In 1520, Cortés allocated Huejotzingo and Calpan, along with three other communities, as tributaries for don Diego. To honor him, or possibly his nephew don Diego de Ordaz Villagómez who inherited his uncle's grants after his death in 1536, the Nahuas of Calpan memorialized his likeness in stone.<sup>331</sup> Today, his statue is missing though we have photographic evidence that it was still atop the *posa* in the 1980s.<sup>332</sup> From earlier photographs we can see that the *encomendero* prays with hands together, and that his head and gaze are directed toward a now missing cross that once topped the peak of the domed chapel roof, as well as toward Iztaccihuatl, beyond. The *encomendero*, don Diego, and later his nephew, found privilege and prestige by maintaining production and labor resources in the regions they were assigned.<sup>333</sup> The two *posa* statues, when present, physically and metaphorically connected spiritual devotion personified by St.

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<sup>331</sup> Himmerich y Valencia, *The Encomenderos of New Spain*, 208; see also Hugh Thomas, *Who's Who of the Conquistadors* (London: Cassell, 2000), 102–105.

<sup>332</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 329.

<sup>333</sup> Morehead, "An Iconology of Architectural Ornament," 110-122.

Francis and the hierarchy of tribute collection and Spanish authority symbolized by don Diego to a pre-Christian memory anchor.<sup>334</sup>

Running along the edges of the *posa*'s roof we see fist-thick rope cords (Figure 28). Symbolically, the cordage refers to the Franciscan Order, whose priests wore dark brown or grey habits, with a long, thick white cord cinched at the hip. This cord theme is present in the ornamentation of the façade of the church of both Calpan and Huejotzingo (framing the doors and windows), and the design reinforces an attempt to capture the movement and flexibility of the cord. These repeated designs in the borders of the church façades and the *posa* of San Francisco, a Christian signature of the Spanish architect fray Juan perhaps, visually and spiritually tie Calpan to Huejotzingo and the statues of Saint Francis and don Diego.<sup>335</sup>

Yet both the cord and the figures on the roof had more traditional symbolic significance for the Nahuas, too. As seen in many pictorial manuscripts, the Nahuas tracked descent through both the paternal and maternal lines, with connecting yellow cords that Elizabeth Hill Boone calls “umbilicus,” which visually linked family lineages together so that the descendants could defend their legal access to or control of land or people.<sup>336</sup> By carving out the cords to look as though they are running from the base of

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<sup>334</sup> Robert Haskett explored the “positive validating role” that incorporating Spaniards, especially Franciscans and secular authorities (Spanish officers), had in primordial titles from Cuernavaca. He proposes that the Nahua authors emphasized connections between themselves and the friars to establish local authority and legitimization; see *Visions of Paradise*, 210-216.

<sup>335</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 332–333; Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, 215.

<sup>336</sup> *Tlacamecayotl*, “human cordage” for lineage, Nahua Dictionary Online, Wired Humanities Projects (Accessed, winter 2012). Nahua pictographic writing used wavy yellow cords to represent an umbilicus; see Boone, *Stories in Red and Black*, 55, 72-73, 76, and 100-106. Also, they regularly depicted the dead bundled-up with rope that resembles the stone-cord carvings of the *posa* of San Francisco at San Andrés Calpan; *Stories in Red and Black*, 55-57, 60, 68, 200-202, 205, and 236. Though the meaning may have changed over time, it is important to note that early-seventeenth century testators from Toluca and



Figure 28: Cord molding, roof of the *Posa de San Francisco*; these cords represent one symbol the Franciscan Order of the Friars Minor. Pre-contact and colonial Nahuatl artists also used cord-like imagery to denote lineage as well as the binding cordage around burial shrouds. (Photographed by the author, August 2011)

each statue toward Iztaccihuatl, perhaps the Nahuatl intended to draw a genetic link between their new religious and political patrons and this ancient locus of sacred influence. From an Ibero-Christian perspective, the *posa* of San Francisco directly tied the symbolic image of the first Franciscan to the first Spanish *encomendero*, legitimizing both while at the same time standing for the intertwined relationship between the Church and the privileged laity, between church and state, that at base legitimized the colonial enterprise.<sup>337</sup> The Nahuatl (or at least some of them) probably understood this message, too, but for them the arrangement of umbilical lineage cords, quasi-ancestral figures, and

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Calimaya/Tepemexcalco commonly request being buried wrapped in a shroud that girds them “with the rope of my precious San Francisco;” see Pizzigoni, trans. and ed., *Testaments of Toluca*, 15-17.

<sup>337</sup> Lockhart explained how the Nahuatl quickly identified with specific orders. For the Calpanecas, the Franciscans became their “religion,” as he puts it, adding more weight to the idea that they wanted to physically and metaphorically tie preexisting religious affiliations to the new ones; *The Nahuatl After the Conquest*, 208-209.

sacred mountains taught a different kind of Christianized, but still completely “indigenous,” lesson.

Veneration of another pre-contact divinity, the god Camaxtli, was an old tradition associated with Calpan’s northern allies in Huejotzingo. Huejotzingans honored Camaxtli, the witty and cunning Lord of the Chase and the Hunt, with a *teocalli*, or sacred house situated at the top of a tall temple. According to the Dominican chronicler fray Diego Durán, the Nahuas of Huejotzingo had sculpted a “clay monkey done in realistic style” that topped the chamber on the summit Camaxtli’s pyramid.<sup>338</sup> As far back as the Classic Period, the peoples of central and southeastern Mesoamerica had associated monkeys with scribes, teachers, and keepers of sacred-knowledge. As the new teachers, the Franciscans would likely have taken on a similar identification as monkey-scribe icon in the minds of Calpan’s Nahuas. Thus the statues of Saint Francis, symbolizing the *altepetl*’s new teachers, and don Diego, a new kind powerful Huejotzingan lord, may have served to invoke memories of Calpan’s reciprocal relationships with Huejotzingo and its patron, Camaxtli.

Camaxtli is a conspicuous presence in Nahua pictographic texts thanks to his “candy-cane” striped skin of red and white, and because of his patronage of the ritualistic-sacrificial exchange between man and animal during the hunt. It is probably no coincidence that the *posa* of San Francisco is the only one of the four with remnants of red paint still visible over the remaining lime surface (Figures 29–31). Of course, human intervention or time and weather may have worn heavily on the other three *posas*, removing their paint, so we must take care in speculating without scientific evidence.

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<sup>338</sup> Durán, Fray Diego, *Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, trans. and ed. by Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 143.

However, it is significant that the *posa* that boasts what seem to be references to Huejotzingo would mimic Camaxtli's characteristic coloration.<sup>339</sup>



Figures 29–31: The painted *posa*; three examples of the remnants of visible paint on the Posa de San Francisco, the only painted *posa* of the four at Calpan (see also the red painted skin of the angel on Figure 26). The red and white paint hints at a possible connection to the god Camaxtli a locally venerated deity (photographed by the author, August 2011).

Though not a hunter like Camaxtli, Saint Francis was and is widely known as the patron saint of animals and nature; his great spiritual devotion allowed him to enjoy a unique closeness with flora and fauna. Medieval poets and troubadours memorialized a

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<sup>339</sup> Similar to projects conducted on Van Gogh's or da Vinci's work, electron microscopic analysis, pigment scrapings, and other studies might reveal what the original painted *posas* looked like.

supposed sermon he gave to a flock of doves. In this tradition, Saint Francis is said to have called the birds to him with song and when a flock had encircled him, he spoke to the birds about the grace of God. Perhaps more carnal in nature, when the Nahuas of Huejotzingo honored their patron Camaxtli, they sang and sacrificed humans dressed as animals in his honor so that they would have greater success on the hunt. As one scholar noted regarding this ceremony, the sacrificial victim was ritually hunted like game. In the end, “symbolically people were animals and animals were people.”<sup>340</sup> We cannot assume that the same songs devoted to Camaxtli echoed off the courtyard walls of colonial Calpan, but the Nahuas could surely have found similarities between the sung narratives of Camaxtli’s links to nature and stories about Saint Francis’ spiritual closeness to animals.

Sacrifice, as describe in the previous chapter, resonated with Iberians and Nahuas in constructive though discordant ways. Gazing at the *posa* we see numerous iconographic references to the Five Wounds of Christ crucified, which at the same time refer to the five stigmata wounds received by Saint Francis that marked him as one of Christ’s elect. The fact that don Diego, after he received his *encomienda* grant, placed an image of Popocatepetl on the lower quarter of his coat-of-arms highlights his claim to a connection with the place. Perhaps by inscribing a coat-of-arms with symbols of the Franciscan Order below the statue of don Diego was the Nahua builders’ way of asserting their claim to the religious and political legitimacy embodied in the patronage of don Diego and the Franciscans.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Heyden, “Sand in Ritual and in History,” in *Representing Aztec Ritual*, 183-184.

<sup>341</sup> The Iberian legend of the Five Wounds commemorates the first Portuguese king in 1139, King Alfons Henriquez. Apparently Christ promised the king that he would win the battle of the plains of Ourique, if he

When described to the Nahuatl students assembled before this *posa*, the bleeding stigmata wounds on Saint Francis' hands (particularly prominent if they had been painted red), the story could well have called up pre-contact Mesoamerican concepts of blood sacrifice, understood as providing a reciprocal payment of nourishment to Iztaccihuatl and the earth in return for their sustenance of humankind.<sup>342</sup> By their placement and the orientation of the cords linking them, the statues of the friar and the *encomendero* seemed to pay homage to the sacred mountain. In this way, Nahuatl builders constructed an understandable present out of their past, and the Spaniards, both priest and *encomendero*, were acknowledged as being significant characters in both times in the history and life of the community. Yet the Calpanecas maintained their traditional cosmologies, as well. We must ask which metaphor would be most significant to the Nahuatl community: the abstract sacrifice and fealty of good Christians to God, or the age-old sacrifice given to the earth that produced life-sustaining sustenance?

We could assume that fray Juan de Alameda, or even don Diego or his nephew, might have imposed the designs on the Saint Francis *posa* to express their shared dominance over their Nahuatl "vassals." However, this line of thinking robs the Nahuatl builders of Calpan of their political and spiritual agency. At this time, both groups—Iberians and Nahuats—were learning to use the others' recognizable symbols in an effort to communicate their understanding of the world, in this particular case several kinds of hierarchy. The cosmic and political roots of authority embodied in the *altepetl's* sacred

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put the symbol of the five wounds on his coat of arms. Franciscans associate the symbol with Saint Francis' stigmata. Lara details the account of the Five Wounds but then associates them with the Last Judgment, even referring to an image of Christ in Judgment on the east face of the *posa* of San Miguel Huejotzingo. One wonders why he did not connect the story of the Five Wounds with the *posa* of San Francisco at Calpan and the engraving of the Five Wounds on its coat of arms; *Christian Texts for Aztecs*, 236.

<sup>342</sup> For more on "blood sacrifice" see Chapter II.

atrium, according to either Christian or local dogmas, would represent a vitally important story to Calpan's Nahuatl teachers, students, and leaders.

### ***Posa de San Miguel, or Quetzalcoatl, Miclantecuhtli, and Popocatepetl***

Turning to the south and following our counter-clockwise journey through the atrium we find the third *posa*, dedicated to San Miguel, behind which is the volcano Popocatepetl (Figure 32). As with the second *posa*, religion and politics were certainly at play on the walls of San Miguel's chapel. Here Nahuatl Catholics encountered a Christian exposition on the potency of God's angels. Saint Michael the Archangel and his fellows from the Book of Revelations 12:7 are posed above the north portal. Michael stands in his moment of triumph, sword raised in his right hand, left arm clutching the stunted cross of the crucifixion, above the prone and defenseless Satan, whose scales make him look like a man-serpent (Figure 33).<sup>343</sup> To Michael's right is Saint Raphael, and to his left is Saint Gabriel.

Beginning by reading the "adjectival borders" of this *posa*, consisting of shell and heart shapes, Morehead explained that they mimicked both Christian and ancient Mesoamerican religious themes (Figures 34–35).<sup>344</sup> The scalloped seashell symbol refers to baptism, as the cup from which baptismal water poured forth onto the heads of the

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<sup>343</sup> Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 166.

<sup>344</sup> Here, I offer Lara's interpretation of how Nahuatl might have read the *posa* of San Miguel: "In the public space of the conversion corral, on the two facades of processional chapels, [the heart and shell icons] must have been noticed by the indigenous population and recognized for their cardiological references. On this *posa*, related to the final cosmic battle of good and evil, the shell and the heart are ingenious and multivalent symbols. The key to the interpretation is found in the angel on the opposite *posa* who hold a parchment or shield with Christ's five wounds. From four of the wounds blood flowed, but from the fifth both blood and [Christ's womb] water flow... Hence the shell and the open heart at Calpan must refer to the two foundational sacraments of the Church, which itself is symbolized in this *posa* chapel by the papal tiara that crowns the roof;" *Christian Texts for Aztecs*, 245-246.

newly converted. The bisected four-chambered heart seems to connote the divisions made by a cross, though in her study of Old World woodblock prints, Morehead found “no obvious European source.”<sup>345</sup> However, she did find iconography of four-chambered bisected hearts in the murals at the ancient Mesoamerican sites of Teotihuacan, Tula, and Mayan Chichen Itza.<sup>346</sup> This heart icon emphasized the blood sacrifice offered to the gods in ritual public displays. Morehead interpreted the scallop shell to be a “complex, multivalent symbol” of the Mesoamerican *spondylus*, orange-red colored spiny oyster shells, which have been found among offerings in elite tombs.<sup>347</sup> The murals of Teotihuacan also have borders featuring painted conch shells. The conch shell is one of the prominent icons associated with Quetzalcoatl (Figure 36).

At Calpan, these heart and shell borders continue around to the other side of the *posa*. Passing through its arches, and turning back to read the east side, Nahua students found depictions of the Last Judgment. Christ sits as a judge above a field of the dead arising out of square portals that lead into Hell (Figure 37).<sup>348</sup> Art and architecture historians have described these forms as “the most remarkable feature” and the *posa* as the most “impressive” of the lot.<sup>349</sup> Joseph Baird, Jr., suggested that the relief of the enthroned Christ in Judgment, with his arms raised and his palms facing the viewer “could possibly be interpreted as... Quetzalcoatl, in his muscular power of body and

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<sup>345</sup> Moorhead, “An Iconology of Architectural Ornament,” 134.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-137.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>348</sup> As far as I can tell, Kubler was the first (besides the original architect) to connect this image to an original woodcut from the *Flos Sanctorum*; *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*, 391–394.

<sup>349</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 330; Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 166.

gesture,” though he does not explain why he thought this.<sup>350</sup> As Lara noted, from this vantage point the people of Calpan could have watched the sunset over the *posa*. With sunbeams seemingly streaming from his head, Christ truly must have looked like the powerful judge of the final reckoning.<sup>351</sup>



Figure 32: *Posa de San Miguel*, southwest corner, north façade. The active volcano Popocatepetl is off in the distance to the viewer’s right (Photographed by the author, August 2011).

<sup>350</sup> Baird, Jr., *The Churches of Mexico*, 85.

<sup>351</sup> Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, 166; Morehead, “An Iconology of Architectural Ornament,” 129-146.



Figure 33: *Posa de San Miguel*, north façade; the triumphal San Miguel standing atop a scaled Satan (Photographed by the author, August 2011).



Figures 34-35: Heart and shell “adjectival borders,” *Posa de San Miguel* (at a distance and up close). Nahuas might have used these icons, similar to bisected hearts and conch shells found on pre-contact murals, as a way of remembering the narrative of Quetzalcoatl’s journey into the Underworld to meet Mictlantecuhtli (Photographed by the author, August 2011).



Figure 36: Quetzalcoatl, Codex Magliabecchiano, folio 61 recto. This is most likely a priest dressed in the regalia of Quetzalcoatl. Note the bisected conch shell over his chest. Quetzalcoatl blew into this type of shell in the Underworld (Loubat Codices Collection, © Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org)).



Figure 37: *Posa de San Miguel*, east façade. In this engraving of the Last Judgment Jesus sits on a throne at center. His head is surrounded by a radiant sunburst. Two messenger angels descend from his side toward groups of dead spirits arising out of Hell. Mary and Saint Andrew pray on either side of the seated Christ. From this viewpoint, friars and students could watch the sunset behind the *posa* and the volcano Popocatepetl beyond (Photographed by the author, August 2011).

From this position the Nahuas could also witness the sun fall behind the *posa*'s and into Popocatepetl. The roof itself confused architectural historian John McAndrew. He could not determine a precedent for the “angles [of the pyramidal roof] edged with a torus [ring-like molding]” and its “curiously disposed... [though] generally original... [design that] perhaps comes from a misunderstanding of some badly transmitted gothic model” (Figure 38).<sup>352</sup> McAndrew's confusion might have been cleared up had he investigated Nahua pictography connected with of serpent spines. Such a motif is characteristic of the edging on the serpent “house” of Quetzalcoatl found on the Codex Borgia (Figure 39).<sup>353</sup> In this image Quetzalcoatl is placed in the top right of a quincunx. He is surrounded by a rectangular serpent with spines protruding from its back. Though we cannot assume that the builders of Calpan used this specific sacred book as a reference in creating the *posa* (though they may have had access to a similar, locally produced codex of some kind), the similarities to the serpentine shapes common to Mesoamerican iconography, usually called the “blue serpent mark,” demands further investigation. Nahua painters depicted calendrics and as well as rituals devoted to the deities in each corner all on this single folio. Perhaps the Nahuas read the four courtyard *posas* like the painters would read the icons in each corner of pages like this. But the

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<sup>352</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 330; he did believe that the “papal tiara” that tops the *Posa* of San Miguel “might perhaps refer then to Saint Peter... as the keeper of the gates of Heaven, to which the blessed are rising (331).”

<sup>353</sup> In Plate 26 of the reproduction of the *Codex Borgia*, believed to be one of the few extant Mexican manuscripts painted in the Puebla-Tlaxacala Valley before the Spanish invasion, the quincunx depicts “The four directions with plumed serpents and deities.” We see four deities—three males and one female—each surrounded by a serpent with feathers and other pre-Columbian symbols of power, all four of which center on a “black spider” at center. According to Borgia specialists, the image represents the “entire knowledge of the priesthood... summarized in this picture;” and Karl Nowotny, *Tlacuilolli : Style and Contents of the Mexican Pictorial Manuscripts with a Catalog of the Borgia Group* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 39; see also Diaz, Gisele, and Alan Rodgers, *The Codex Borgia: A Full-Color Restoration of the Ancient Mexican Manuscript*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1993), 6; also, accessed online at FAMSI.

iconographic connection between this *posa* and the people of the valley reaches even further back in time, painted on the murals of ancient ruins.

Taking an hour car ride northeast from San Andrés Calpan, toward Matlalcueitl and Tlaxcala, the intrepid historian will arrive at Cacaxtla, the eighth-century ruins of one of the Classic states of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley. Famous for its two massive pyramidal temples, Cacaxtla is even better known for its murals. A particularly striking figure is the Eagle Warrior guardian painted on the entry portal of an elite chamber (Figure 40). He wears a helmet shaped like a bird and he stands with his arms embracing a large tubular spear or staff surmounted with a serpent head, whose mouth is extended to swallow the



Figure 38: Roof embellishment of the *Posad de San Miguel* (Photographed by the author, August 2011).



Figure 39: Quincunx of four Mesoamerican deities, Codex Borgia, folio 26; a black “spider” or “sun” creates the fifth cardinal point, at center. Each deity is surrounded by a serpent with different iconographic attributes. The one surrounding Quetzalcoatl (top right) has spines that resemble the curved molding of the *Posa de San Miguel*. (Loubat Codices Collection, © Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org)).



Figure 40: Cacaxtla murals, Tlaxcala, Mex. Painted in the late Classic Period (~700), these murals decorate a chamber on the north eastern corner of what is called the “Great Basement” site (Photographed by the author, August 2011).

head of a feathered-serpent located below it. The tubular object might also be an artistic rendition of a *coa*, the traditional Mesoamerican staff-like digging stick used for centuries to puncture the earth so that seeds could be planted. Read this way, the Eagle-warrior would be fertilizing the ground beneath him (Figure 41).

The mythic history of the Nahuas features other stories about the exploits of divine warriors. According to *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* and other sources, when Quetzalcoatl (Plumed Serpent) went into the underworld, he was transformed into



Figure 41: Reproduction of the Cacaxtla murals, Museo Sitio de Cacaxtla. The winged figure clutches a staff with a serpents head. Beneath this figure is a bearded, feathered-serpent. Notice also the sea creature icons in the border beneath the feathered-serpent, especially the white conch shell on the lower left. When compared with the iconography of Saint Michael standing over Satan (see Figure 33), the root metaphors of each cosmology most likely facilitated mutual misunderstandings to take place in the educational spaces shared by Spanish priests and Nahua students of the Puebla Tlaxcala Valley (photographed by the author, August 2011).

*Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli* “the lordly one, of the house of the light of the dawn,” the god of Venus or the Morning Star, often depicted with wings.<sup>354</sup> In the *Codex Borgia*, *Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli* can be seen moving about the underworld in various scenes attacking deceased persons and objects with a traditional Mesoamerican weapon the *atlatl*, a dart or spear-thrower that was slung in a whipping motion over the wielder’s head. But Quetzalcoatl’s relationship with death, specifically the Lord of the Underworld, goes deeper than his transformation into *Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli*.

Mesoamerican religion dictated that for the universe to persist, the sun must be born anew in an eternal cycle. Tradition held that the sun crossed the underworld only through the power gained from the daily blood offerings of faithful Mesoamericans. As the sun ventured down into the underworld on its nightly journey, Nahuas believed that it had to travel among the endlessly journeying dead in a “very bad place, a great abyss, it stands wide. It is a very frightening place, it is filled with fire, it is very dark, a very gloomy place where the darkness can be held, can be touched. And it stinks so much, it is a repulsive place.”<sup>355</sup> Both of these concepts were, in turn, tied to the fuming, living volcano Popocatepetl and its cave-portals into the underworld, a mountain that loomed behind the *posa* as the sun sank beneath the serpentine embellishments on the roof.<sup>356</sup>

Pre-contact-style colonial pictorial manuscripts sometimes depict Quetzalcoatl and Mictlantecuhtli with their backs fused together. Nahua authors commonly depict Mictlantecuhtli, the Lord of the Underworld, as a skeletal figure, usually with bulging

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<sup>354</sup> Miller, *An Illustrated Dictionary*, 166; León Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*, 42–43.

<sup>355</sup> Burkhardt; *The Slippery Earth*, 55.

<sup>356</sup> Burkhardt described the “animate character [of] Mountains, bodies of water, the wind, the moon, stars, sun, and the heavens, as well as the earth itself;” *ibid.*, 48.

eyes and protruding bones. He was the spiritual partner to Mictlancihuatl (Lady of the Underworld, and patroness of the pre-contact Festival of the Dead) and the male-female dual deity shared the lowest of the nine levels of the Underworld. Fusing Quetzalcoatl to Mictlantecuhtli told a story of life and death and the sun. In one example of this scene found in the *Codex Vaticanus B* the two gods, backs fused, are crouching over an inverted mountain shaped like a skull (Figures 42-43).<sup>357</sup> The Quetzalcoatl figure on the right holds a sinuous snake-headed staff that is similar to the tubular baton in the mural at Cacaxtla. In the sixteenth-century, indigenous elders told the Franciscans that Quetzalcoatl had journeyed into the underworld to take the “precious bones” of people who had lived in previous Suns (world ages) held by Mictlantecuhtli and use them as the raw material for the humans who were to populate the new Fifth Sun, the one that would be inhabited by the Nahuas.<sup>358</sup> Before acquiescing, Mictlantecuhtli ordered him to “blow [his] conch and carry the bones four times round [Mictlantecuhtli’s] jade circle.” When Quetzalcoatl blew the conch, the “sound reache[d] the Lord of Mictlan,” and he received the bones.<sup>359</sup> Thus, we have a heroic enterprise on the part of Quetzalcoatl to confront the underworld and by blowing the conch he created (or possibly renewed) life with the bones of Nahua ancestors.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> A digital version of the Vaticanus B is currently available online at the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, INC. (FAMSI), website; <http://www.famsi.org/research/pohl/jpcodices/index.html>, (accessed April 2012).

<sup>358</sup> Brotherston, *Book of the Fourth World*, 272.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 272-273.



Figures 42–43: Gods of Life and Death, Codex Vaticanus 3773 fols. 75 and 76; these colonial period manuscripts depict pre-contact associations between Quetzalcoatl (right) and Mictlantecuhtli (left). The two deities appear fused at their backs. Above, we can discern the symbol of an inverted *altepetl* with iconography of a skull, which most likely represents Mictlan (the Underworld). When “reading” the *Posa de San Miguel* we find narratives of life and death “fused” on either side of the posa in a similar fashion (Loubat Codices Collection, © Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc., [www.famsi.org](http://www.famsi.org)).

At Calpan, it seems as if the Nahuatl sculptors may have created a visually conflated *Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli*/Quetzalcoatl and Mictlantecuhtli with Saint Michael and Satan, and Judgment Day.<sup>361</sup> If the Calpanecan builders remembered these religious and cultural figures, then the depiction of Saint Michael and Satan on the *posa* could have provided another conveniently “worded” root metaphor for visually bi-literate indigenous Catholics. Saint Michael’s winged figure, his staff-like weapon (perhaps recalling the *atlatl*, as well as Cacaxtla’s warrior figure with his serpent staff), and the serpent (often equated with the devil, and hence Mictlantecuhtli in colonial Christian didactic texts) below, and even the conch-shell border might have seemed like Christianized versions of these much older kinds of pre-contact metaphorical art and history.

In the decade before the Nahuas began construction of the atrium and *posas* of San Andrés Calpan, the sacred volcano Popocatepetl definitely reminded them of its enduring power. In 1540, according to the Spanish chronicler Francisco López de Gómara and the Nahuatl annalist Chimalpahin, the volcano violently erupted.

[I]t flared up again, creating so much noise that it frightened all the inhabitants at a distance of four leagues, and even farther. The smoke it gave off was so thick that no one recalled seeing anything like it. The fire it expelled was so intense that the ashes reached Huexotzinco, Quetzalcoapan, Tepeyacac, Quauhquechollan, Cholula, and Tlaxcala, more than ten leagues away. Some say the ashes extended for fifteen leagues, covering the fields and burning the crops and trees and even people’s clothing.<sup>362</sup>

By situating the third *posa* in southwest corner in line with the active volcano, Nahuatl architects connected pre-contact stories of the Quetzalcoatl’s journey into the underworld

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<sup>361</sup> Miller, *An Illustrated Dictionary*, 166.

<sup>362</sup> Chimalpahin not only re-wrote López de Gómara’s account, but also visited many of the sites described in the Spaniards book to verify his accuracy; Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, *Chimalpahin’s Conquest*, 172.

and his heroic rebirth (as Saint Michael) across the chapel's walls, creating another bilingual Nahua cosmic "text" by this visual linkage of worked and natural environments.

Scholars often comment on the artistic capabilities of the carvers who worked on this third *posa*.<sup>363</sup> It boasts the deepest reliefs, allowing the images to rise further and more dramatically out of the stone. Along with the *Posa de la Asunción*, with its many Nahua-Iberian icons, and the *Posa de San Francisco*, still covered with bits of red pigment atop the cracking and worn lime, the San Miguel chapel reminds us that each of them would have been even more visually striking when in use during the sixteenth century. Painted in vivid colors with local and regional significance, dressed with feathers and flowers, the *posas* would be embellished far beyond what we see today. This tradition was very old by the time the people of Calpan set to work on their new church. Pre-contact Nahuas created even deeper marks in the jutting sculptures that still grace the ruins of Teotihuacan. Three-dimensional and intricately carved idols, such as the highly decorated statue of Xochipilli, demonstrate the great care that had always been taken by the Nahuas to emphasize the sacred ornamentation of temples, images, and schools. So the nature of the fourth *posa* in Calpan's courtyard, the dark and deemphasized chapel dedicated to San Juan Evangelista, seems in comparison to be a stark departure from this norm, a real oddity in the atrial classroom.

***Posa de San Juan Evangelista, or Cholollan, Tlachihualtepetl, and the Tlacatecolotl***

The *Posa de San Juan Evangelista* might be described as boring and neglected compared to the other three. At this last stop in the processional itinerary of the atrium,

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<sup>363</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 330; unfortunately, though a photograph of the Last Judgment from the *Posa* of San Miguel (discussed in Chapter IV) is on the cover of his recent work, Reyes-Valerio does not describe the iconography in the body of his important critique on art history studies of Mesoamerican contributions; see cover of *Arte indocristiano* (2000).

parishioners are confronted with what McAndrew described as “run-of-the-mill tequitqui work,” which seems to be the product of the labor “of a different and less skilled carver or carvers.”<sup>364</sup> McAndrew’s derision aside, the fourth *posa* gives the observer much to puzzle over. It is the least ornamented and least studied of the four. Specialists agree that the surfaces of this *posa* show no signs that it was ever covered in lime plaster, especially its upper portion.<sup>365</sup> If this is true, the anomaly would have drastically changed the character of the courtyard. In the sixteenth century, two of the other three *posas* and the church façade would have been coated in bright white lime, and the *posa* of San Francisco in red and white. Every time people entered the atrium they would have had a physical reminder of the apparent poverty of information conveyed by this fourth *posa*.

As we walk toward its west face, the viewers’ eyes are drawn to the four small medallions that create a quincunx around an inset niche with a relief of the apostle Saint John the Evangelist (Figure 44). Each medallion contains an image of an animal with human-like qualities, with a Latin gloss indicating the saint each represents.<sup>366</sup> Scholars occasionally note the anthropomorphs when describing the indigenous tradition of transmogrification and shape-changers, the *naguales* (a corruption of the Nahuatl work, *nahualli*), that Nahua informants described to Franciscan priests, but they leave it at that. Morehead interpreted the scrollwork of the glosses to represent speech scrolls, thus resonating with the Mesoamerican symbols that denoted “sacred speech,” evident in pre

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<sup>364</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 332; The derogatory term “tequitqui art” is described in detail in Chapter I; see also Reyes-Valerio, *Arte indocristiano*, 160.

<sup>365</sup> McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches*, 332.

<sup>366</sup> Morehead, “An Iconology of Architectural Ornament,” 148-149.



Figure 44: The supposedly under-embellished *Posa de San Juan Evangelista* (east façade). Four medallions and the center statue of Saint John the Evangelist create a quincunx on this side of the *posa*. The Nahuatl builders most likely aligned this *posa* with *Tlachihualtepetl*, the “artificial mountain” of Cholula (photographed by the author, August 2011).

and post-contact Nahuatl pictography.<sup>367</sup> This makes sense, given that even fray Diego de Valadés used speech scrolls to indicate characters speaking in his illustrations for *Rhetorica christiana* (Figure 45).<sup>368</sup> Historians of architecture usually note that the lower right medallion contains an eagle, the symbol of Saint John; the coinciding Latin gloss is carved backwards (Figure 46). According to Morehead, either the Nahuatl ornamentalist used the “wrong side of a woodcut printed on thin paper, or perhaps suffered from dyslexia.”<sup>369</sup> Certainly, dyslexia or the misguided hands of an “Indian servant” not being

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 150-153.

<sup>368</sup> Valadés, *Rhetorica Christiana*, Illustration Sixteen.

<sup>369</sup> Morehead, “An Iconology of Architectural Ornament,” 156.

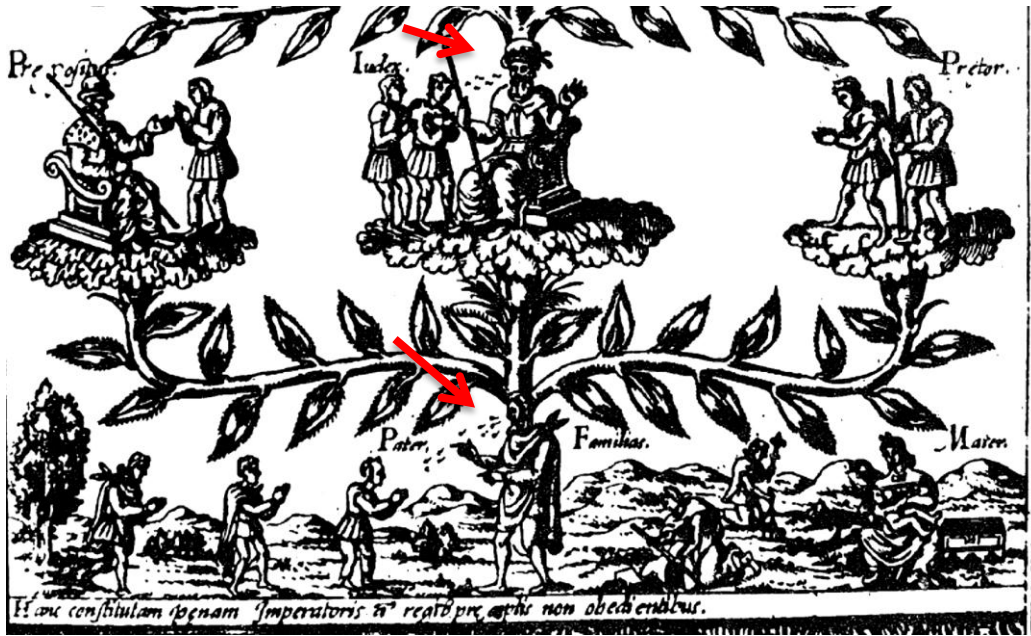


Figure 45: Illustration Sixteen, Valadés, *Rhetorica Christiana* (1579). Though this excerpt is taken from a larger illustration on proper colonial social hierarchy, by examining the work closely, we can find evidence that the artist-priest fray Diego was influenced by Mesoamerican iconographic conventions. Speech-scroll designs project from the mouth of the *Pater*, or “Father,” depicted at center, at the base of the tree, and also from the mouth of the seated *Judex*, or “Judge,” on the branch directly above.



Figure 46: San Juan the eagle, *Posa de San Juan Evangelista*. Though it remains a mystery, the Latin text carved along the scroll is carved backwards (Photographed by the author, August 2011).

watched closely enough by his Spanish-architect overseer could be the reason behind this mistake. But what if it was not a mistake?

The prominent border icons are, on the top border, winged heads blowing trumpets, and then running along the base we find horned heads with some sort of matter either entering into or emitting from their mouths. Morehead briefly spent time interpreting the top row of adjectival borders on this *posa*, locating their angelic features to early-sixteenth-century woodblock prints from Europe (Figure 47). She then discussed the possible connections between Mesoamerican iconography of “speech scrolls,” linking the ornamentation back to Teotihuacan’s murals and the story of Quetzalcoatl blowing his conch shell in underworld. This seems likely enough; however, when we reconsider the animal iconography paired with the horned figures below we see possibilities for an



Figure 47: Angelic “adjectives,” upper border of the *Posa de San Juan Evangelista*. Note the two trumpet-like objects that the winged-figure blows, producing floral patterns. Scholars have connected the angelic sounds to the sacred speech scrolls (Photographed by the author, August 2011).

even more complex narrative. Thinking back to Burkhart's examination of *tlacatecolotl*—a compound of “human” and “horned-owl,” which meant a malevolent type of sorcerer—they were known to possess the powers to change shape, taking on the characteristics of animals (Figures 48–49).<sup>370</sup> Whereas Franciscans adopted the term and the image of the horned-owl man to parallel Satan or the word “devil,” Nahuas understood the power these sorcerers had in their ability to interact with the animated cosmos.<sup>371</sup> In pre-contact tradition, the *tlacatecolotl* were not simply evil incarnate, but mediators with the chaotic aspects of life and death. Embodying their *naguales* (animal spirit guides), they communicated with those less orderly creatures to gain access to the talents of those spirits. Furthermore, it is believed that part of the Nahuatl term *tecolo*, derived from the sound that owls made.<sup>372</sup> If we then add in Morehead's assumptions about the iconography of speech scrolls, we find that the borders of this *posa* speak to sorcery, spirit animals, and spiritual power through vocalizing. For Nahua viewers, these themes add greater emphasis to the animal medallions above, with their speech scrolls, and furthermore, these concepts are not that far removed from the Christian story of Saint John the Evangelist spreading the word of God. They are simply more local and more complex.

The Nahua builders also seem to have embedded political messages referring to the ancient city of Cholula. As discussed in the second chapter, *Tlachihualtepetl* long framed the socio-political and religious landscape of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley. Known

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<sup>370</sup> Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*, 40.

<sup>371</sup> Burkhart noted that the friars may have purposefully chosen this term “to express basic Christian moral concepts [which] fostered continuity between traditional religion and the Nahuas' version of Christianity,” *ibid.*, 44.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.



Figures 48–49: Demons of the base borders, *Posa de San Juan Evangelista* (at a distance and up close). In a dogmatic Christian reading of these diabolic icons, friars might have highlighted aspects of sin and Satan. Adding in the Nahuatl stories that describe *tlacatecolotl*, (the “horned-owl men,” or shape-shifting sorcerers) the icons would have been given spiritual complexity, possibly emphasizing the anthropomorphic creatures in the medallions above (Photographed by the author, August 2011).

at the time to be “a route to the underworld and the world of Tlalocan,” *Tlachihualtepetl* had been a pilgrimage site devoted to Tlaloc’s watery underworld perhaps as far back as 400 CE.<sup>373</sup> Certainly, Calpaneca builders could not ignore the ancient “centripetal power” that in times past had been the supernatural hub for Nahua kings and commoners.<sup>374</sup> Thus, they tied the fourth *posa* to the god Tlaloc and the Cholollan mountain-pyramid that was the “cultural crossroads” of the pre-Columbian era.<sup>375</sup>

Equating post-conquest Nahua narratives only with pre-contact traditions limits our understanding of their active engagement with early colonial politics, society, and religion. According to Christian doctrine, Saint John journeyed to Ephesus where he was challenged to drink poisoned wine. But by making the sign of the cross over his cup, the poison turned into a snake and slithered away.<sup>376</sup> Besides rain and lightning, Tlaloc was also connected to frogs and snakes. Therefore the Christian narrative of Saint John reinforced a connection to Motolinia’s triumphal story of the planting of the cross on *Tlachihualtepetl* (as described in Chapter II), in which Tlaloc’s lightning was ultimately powerless against this symbol of the “only true Faith.” There are also similarities between this metaphor and the biblical tradition found the books of Mark and Luke, that Saint John and his evangelist brother, James, were nicknamed the *Boanerges*, or the “Sons of

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<sup>373</sup> David Carrasco and Scott Sessions, “Middle Place, Labyrinth, and Circumambulation,” in *Cave, City, and Eagle’s Nest*, 438; Carrasco and Sessions note the modern presence of a “small Christian shrine on the side of the pyramid” and connections between Cholula and the entrance to Tlaloc’s underworld, though they neglect to mention that its location compares nicely with the only depiction of water emitting from the Cholula complex on the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan, which flows from the south side; the spring is still used today by faithful praying in the small chapel shrine on the south side of the pyramid that contains a well, personal visit August 2011.

<sup>374</sup> Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and The Irony of Empire*, 134–135; Carrasco et al., “Middle Place, Labyrinth, and Circumambulation,” 434, 438.

<sup>375</sup> Carrasco et al., “Middle Place, Labyrinth, and Circumambulation,” 440.

<sup>376</sup> Morehead, “An Iconology of Architectural Ornament,” 153.

Thunder.”<sup>377</sup> Perhaps by limiting the decorative aspects of the *posa* (no lime and less ornamentation), the Nahuas of Calpan used religious icons from both cosmologies to create a spiritual and political statement. Deemphasizing political opponents was a common practice in other Nahuatl documentation.

Scholars researching the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan* traced the contours of the geographic and peregrination landscapes of the Puebla-Tlaxcala and Cuauhtinchan valleys. Ann Seiferle-Valencia argued that the people of Cuauhtinchan, in order to lay a greater claim over the mountain Matlalcueitl, “deemphasized” Tlaxcala by painting it “almost on the margins of the document, literally peripheral to Cholula, and... surrounded by a prominent amount of blank space.”<sup>378</sup> Whereas their allies in the city of Cholula took center stage, the *Mapa* painter in fact relegated Tlaxcala to the shadows.<sup>379</sup> Peter Gerhard noted that around the same time that the Calpanecas built the *posas*, a struggle for political control of Calpan was developing. Beginning in the 1540s and lasting into the 1550s, Huejotzingo and Cholula fought for the control of access to Calpan’s tribute.<sup>380</sup> As traditional subjects of Huejotzingo, Calpan’s Nahuas may have created a narrative of solidarity through exclusionary decorative tactics. By embellishing the *posa* of San Francisco with paint, while simultaneously leaving the *posa* of San Juan

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<sup>377</sup> Mark 3:17; Luke 9:54, Catholic.org, (accessed 04/10/12), [http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=67](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=67).

<sup>378</sup> Seiferle-Valencia examined concepts of “proximity” and “belonging together;” Siferle-Valencia, “Representations of Territorial Organization in the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No.2.,” in Carrasco, et al., eds. *Cave, City, and Eagle’s Nest*, 83-83, 86.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.* 86-88.

<sup>380</sup> Gerhard cited evidence found in administrative documentation; *A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 56–57. Kubler noted that Spanish sources describe how, “[t]he rapid creation of this ordered polity was beset by factional disputes, contradictory methods, and the familiar struggle for power;” *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*, 1.

blank, the community could instruct their children on where their loyalties should lie. This is, however, very speculative research at present. There is the possibility that something far more benign was at work with the limited ornamentation and lack of decoration on the final *posa*. The builders may have simply run out of lime, assuming that they were built in order from Asunción to San Juan Evangelista.<sup>381</sup> The Spanish architect might have been in a hurry when *he* assigned the few pieces of ornamentation to this last *posa*. That interpretation assumes the story of a Spanish-driven placement model, one that restricts the amount of local agency on the part of the Nahua builders. And yet we do have the mutual misunderstandings inherent in the iconography of the borders and the animal medallions. Neophytes reading the ornamentation might find pre-Christian stories living right alongside the Christian ones.

### **Closing (Re)Marks**

We can now view the Nahua architects and builders of Calpan in a new light. They and their counterparts in the region crafted architecturally and stylistically similar structures at Huejotzingo, Calpan, Tochimilco, and Huaquechula; they deserve as much or more credit as fray Juan de Alameda. Their creation of conventual education spaces, which was also a re-creation of older Mesoamerican-style pedagogical arenas, is freighted with broader kinds of social statements. The construction projects established four permanent public spaces along a line running from Huejotzingo in the north to Huaquechula in the south. Nahua interpretations of Christian iconography and beliefs in light of local indigenous traditions and histories found in the decorative architecture of these convents could reveal patterns of political cohesion or disruption in the Puebla-

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<sup>381</sup> Deeper archival research and local oral history will help to clear up the building order of the *posas* and the convent complex in general.

Tlaxcala region during the spiritual conquest. So we must ask, if the work at each of these courtyards embodies the detailed cultural narratives of the builders, what was the overarching metanarrative?

The courtyard of San Andrés Calpan continues to function as an educational space, though the stories told there today are primarily triumphal Christian ones. Significantly, in 1994, nearly four hundred and fifty years after the first stones were set in place in Calpan, the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) conducted a survey of what was later termed the “earliest sixteenth-century monasteries on the slopes of Popocatepetl.” The convent of San Andrés Calpan and thirteen other sixteenth-century monasteries would be covered under the protective umbrella of World Heritage Sites, and UNESCO would provide financial support to Mexican preservation efforts carried out by organization like the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). By highlighting the volcano Popocatepetl, the language of the UNESCO title gives credence to one of the most important colonial teaching tools of Calpan. Whether they intended to or not, the UNESCO petition connected these 14 convents with a symbol of the Mexican landscape, in a similar fashion to the way that the Nahuatl builders of Calpan tied each *posadita* to religious and political ideologies important to their community.

The Calpanecas told a complex story with the landscape and ornamentation of their courtyard. Walking the *posadas* helps us imagine how they situated themselves at the center of their own colonial and spiritual world, incorporating Christian themes into their local beliefs. Linking the Virgin Mary with creation and fertility, like the people of Cholollan may have done with Virgen de los Remedios, the Calpanecas honored both

traditions with added complexity. Tying the statues of Saint Francis and don Diego de Ordaz with cords to the veneration of Iztaccihuatl and the old god Camaxtli, they legitimized their place at the center of the pre-Christian hierarchy and the Christian one. Watching the sun sink behind the chapel of San Miguel/Quetzalcoatl, the Calpanecas connected the pre-Christian cyclical journey into the Underworld, with Christ sitting on his final throne. And by deemphasizing the people living near *Tlachihualtepetl* with Christian icons, they asserted their ability to communicate in a visually bilingual mode. Each cardinal point on the quincunx, with themselves at center, delineated the corners of the schoolyard and the lessons that they could teach to the next generation of Calpanecas. And it was not a Christian or non-Christian lesson plan. It was a local one.

By reconstructing their schools following traditional methods, aligning iconography and architecture to their mnemonic devices, Calpanecas reasserted their identity through Christian convents, the very structures that was meant to transform their pagan cosmology. In the end, I argue that the decipherable alternative narratives that Nahuatl builders inscribed into the surfaces of Calpan adds to the growing evidence that at the height of the Franciscan “spiritual conquest” of Mesoamerica, Nahuatl preserved their histories in the very places that evangelizers devised to destroy them. Regular instruction in the community-owned courtyards of local conventual schools, perhaps built out of the stones of the *cuicacalli*, but certainly at least partly in its image, preserved aspects of local customs and identity that can still be seen in the present. Like the persistent marigolds of the fall, these stories come back to us over time.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION: COLONIAL SCHOOLS CONFOUNDED

In 1739, one hundred and thirty years after the death of Motolinia, another Franciscan, fray Francisco de la Rosa, documented the laborious renovations of the “crumbling” sixteenth-century church of Nativitas Tepetlacingo.<sup>382</sup> The local Nahuas had neglected the sacred space, and the responsibility fell on his shoulders to fix the church and make it wholly Christian again. His journal entries contrast sharply with the inspirational optimism and transformative zeal of Motolinia’s *Historia*. According to fray Francisco, only through divine intercession of the cherished Holy Virgin was he able to make it through the process of interior renovations.<sup>383</sup> Fray Francisco believed that it was his faith alone—not the reluctant help he received from his disinterested native construction crew—that produced the reconstruction effort; the Nahuas of Tepetlacingo stood by skeptically “watching stupidly without offering help.”<sup>384</sup> In a sense, fray Francisco’s words harken back to the paradoxical paternalistic ideologies of previous Franciscans and their “strengthening” of the spiritual “softness” of the Nahuas through toppling and topping Christianization projects of the sixteenth-century, like the church on top of *Tlachihualtepetl*.<sup>385</sup> And yet fray Francisco’s writings also reveal a tangible sense of disdain for surviving local superstitions in the mature colonial period.

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<sup>382</sup> William Taylor, “Between Nativitas and Mexico City: An Eighteenth-Century Pastor’s Local Religion,” in *Local Religion in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 92-93.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.* 94-101.

<sup>384</sup> Talyor’s translation; *Ibid.* 101.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.* 102-103.

According to William Taylor, over the course of two centuries the romanticized potential of a complete conversion of the indigenous to Christianity had corroded into the apathetic voice of Franciscans such as fray Francisco. Motolinia's proud description of the fervent converted Nahua hands dismantling and then refashioning the diabolic temple of Cholollan into a new Christian church had been replaced by fray Francisco's "feeble Christianity," practiced by a group of neglectful, "ignorant, lazy, truculent, and superstitious" Nahua locals.<sup>386</sup> Nahuas also had a say in how their religious specialist imparted the sacred. Even more telling than fray Francisco's story are the reactions of Nahua Christians to improper priests. For example, in 1631, the Nahuas of Analco, Cuernavaca, demanded the removal of an unnamed Spanish fiscal who, as they claimed, "really makes us suffer all the time." Apparently, besides their explanation of physical abuse and imprisonment of community members, the friar had neglected even his religious duties, for when he led "Mass, it [was] just gibberish." Their petition called for his removal and the authority of community members to replace the Spaniard with a local member of the elite: "This is how in your regal presence we petition, your vassals/commoners... and the Spanish Fiscal... may he leave it, the fiscal, for there are the nobles: let one of them become the fiscal, admirable our ruler."<sup>387</sup> In another petition from the same year and region regarding abuses exacted by another unnamed Spanish priest, the women of a Nahua community claim that their priest, instead of teaching the "maidens" of the community, actually "fornicates" with them on church grounds. They

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 100-103.

<sup>387</sup> "Petition concerning an abusive friar and the Taxco *repartimiento*, Analco, Cuernavaca, 1631" (translated and provided to me with permission by Robert Haskett), Archivo General de la Nación, Hospital de Jesús Collection (AGN-HJ), Mexico City, Leg. 59, exp. 3, Fols. 17r-18v.

clearly state that with the non-local priest as fiscal, “nothing good comes out of it at the church.”<sup>388</sup> Though it is disingenuous to assume that these abuses were taking place solely on the account of a few petitions, it is still apparent that Nahuas were dissatisfied with the priests only for far more sinister reasons than superstition.

This paradigmatic shift from a view of religious contention and Franciscan expectant triumphalism to one filled with mutual disappointment coincided with the period of Franciscan decline. For centuries, Franciscans had been at the forefront of religious education and acculturation in the schools of the Americas. At its zenith, their educational enterprise reached into the far north imperial periphery in the Spanish missions in modern day California.<sup>389</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century, regular orders on the whole were losing ground to secularization, and the Spanish authorities began to remove mendicant orders from participating in the Christianization and Hispanicization efforts in the entirety of the colonies. Franciscan education in New Spain began with paternalistic intentions to tutor Nahuas into civilized Christians, but it ended with friars broken and exhausted by what they perceived to be persistent heretical superstitions.

But what did the Nahuas understand about their local faith? In Lockhart’s study of Nahuatl titles from the mid-seventeenth century, he found community pride in the acceptance of Christianity, but also “the merest hint of what we know from many contemporary Spanish report to have been a widespread survival of relatively unchanged

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<sup>388</sup> “Petition from several women about the abuses of a friar and the Taxco mine repartimiento, Cuernavaca, 1631” (translated and provided to me with permission by Robert Haskett), AGN-HJ, Leg. 59, exp. 3, Fols. 15r-v.

<sup>389</sup> The ethnohistorical/architectural study of Spanish missions in California, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and those in the Mexican border states is another area that needs further exploration. My preliminary studies on the Chumash have shown similar contestation over architecture and educational spaces, and scholars, like Samuel Edgerton have begun the process of deconstructing religious art in these zones; see, *Theaters of Conversion*, Chapters 10, and 11.

and unintergrated indigenous religious beliefs.”<sup>390</sup> They cherished their churches, but held onto aspects of pre-contact beliefs that were non-Christian at their core. In the mid-eighteenth century in Tepetlacingo, for the renovation effort to work, Taylor argued, it would have required numerous participants and, in turn, mutually acceptable acts of faith for the Nahuas and priest alike.<sup>391</sup> It was not fray Francisco’s faith alone. They found a meeting ground in the complexity of the Virgin Mary. Apparently, since contact the Tepetlacingans honored the female saint. They revered the altar statue of the Virgin and carried her in ritualized community processions, a form of Mesoamerican religious practices hybridized with Marian Christianity.<sup>392</sup> Marian cults had functioned in similar ways in the Iberian Peninsula, after all. And yet, we must ask: why had the interior structure of the church been left in disarray? Though more research needs to be conducted on the architecture of the church of Nativitas, I would wager that local religion persisted in the exterior educational spaces of Tepetlacingo. It was a common practice in the sixteenth century, and most likely before. Through open-air public ritual the Nahuas constructed their own understanding of Christianity, while simultaneously maintaining the beneficial aspects of local pre-contact belief systems. They contributed their voices to the spiritual dialogue. And ironically, this dialogue found fecund discursive space in the supposedly “perfect classrooms” for Christian conversion in the mid-sixteenth century.

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<sup>390</sup> Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 257; for more on the “integration” of saints, see Crucio-Nagy, “Native Icon to City Protectress to Royal Patroness,” 187-190.

<sup>391</sup> Taylor, “Between Nativitas and Mexico City,” 97-100.

<sup>392</sup> Marian cults dedicated to specific localized guises of the Virgin had begun to develop in Iberia by the sixteenth century. William Christian, Jr., explores this phenomenon as a transition from specialized saint-devotions and venerations to a “renovation” of sorts, with the replacement of the more generalized worship of compassionate Virgin Mother and Jesus cults; *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain*, 177-180.

The study of colonial Latin American art and architectural ethnohistory remains barebones at present. Rather, by scholars' persistence in neglecting the remains of indigenous influence on art and architecture produced during Spanish imperial rule, they leave out an important voice of colonial society. As we have seen, Iberian-Mesoamerican spiritual and cultural contact functioned on two levels. First, control of regional and later global systems of power—exchange of goods, social and political hierarchy, and cultural norms—rested in the hands of administrators of larger institutions, who regulated these systems in the most efficient manner at the time. Second, and more pragmatically, on the local level, elders of the community maintained local knowledge and religious beliefs and customs of their past, which were tied to a specific place and people. These two forces, one caging from the top down the other bubbling from the bottom up, met in a place in between created by the spiritual dialogue of colonial New Spain, at the crossroads of two distinct cultures and their cosmologies, in conventual schools.

In pre-contact Mesoamerica, the Triple Alliance, led by the Aztec regime and backed by the ancient religious city of Cholula, managed a vast empire throughout central Mexico, while regional micropatriotic city-states, such as Tlaxcala and Huejotzingo maintained autonomy in the pockets of the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley. As they added new polities under the military and political “umbrella” of the Triple Alliance, imperial leaders expected (following much older traditions) the now subjected group to incorporate the pantheon of the empire alongside their local cosmology, while, in turn the Aztecs incorporated the subjected community's local deities into the temples in the city center.<sup>393</sup> Though often coerced by larger polities in an effort to maintain imperial

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<sup>393</sup> For more on pre-contact forms of socio-political adoption and cooptation of what have been called Mesoamerican “Hero cult” icons, such as Quetzalcoatl, see John Pohl, “Creation Stories, Hero Cults, and

control, these cosmological inclusionary tactics actually fostered local pride and local religion—the subject *altepetl* or sub-*altepetl* maintained a spiritual connection to place. The hierocratic layer of Mesoamerican societies functioned like a thin permeable film between local religion and imperial or city-state religion. Each *cuicacalli* supported local rituals, while each *calmecac* trained a new layer of priesthood in the religion of the state. As long as local rituals included the hierocracy’s cosmology in their religious practices while producing goods for the state, then the nobility, who were tied to a divine bloodline, could maintain their higher social status, while local educators and religious specialists maintained their place in the community managing the temple grounds and lessons in the schools.

Similarly, institutional Christianity supported imperial and state designs on the Iberian Peninsula with one major divergence: monotheism. Whereas the state maintained divine right to rule through an open and changing pantheon in Mesoamerica, the Catholic monarchs and their state apparatus of control rested on the support of a hierocracy of a single God and the spiritual hub in Rome. By the sixteenth century, rigid institutional Christians had learned to adapt to local complexity, as state religions often do, and it added local “elements of the sacred” thought to have been cleansed of their “diabolical” pre-contact meanings under its larger umbrella. Saint worship persisted even as the state attempted to regulate its nonconforming constituencies. This was allowed and even reinforced by monarchs worshipping at sacred sites; thus the representatives of the

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Alliance Building: Confederacies of Central and Southern Mexico,” in *The Postclassic Mesoamerican World*, edited by Michael E. Smith and Frances F. Berdan, University of Utah Press, 2003.

institutional Church conveyed “information about the political arrangements” it desired to emphasize, while maintaining “an aura of the sacred” and control.<sup>394</sup>

In Iberia it was brotherhoods and sacred sites that directed the spread of institutional Christianity. The Spaniards, venerating a miraculous site not on the spiritual map, required a religious specialist or lay brother to manage the site. In fact, William Christian, Jr. recently went even further in this regard, demonstrating how the top-down model of education and Christianization was shaped by forces from the bottom up. He explained this process as one of “catholic” (universal) accommodation. As opposed to the “complete disengagement [of]... the use of shrines, images, and relics,” the pattern that Protestants expected of indigenous peoples. According to Christian, Jr., Franciscans, especially those instructing Nahuas, actually harbored local customary rules and practices in their tendency toward “systemic foot-dragging entropy in Catholicism” and they actually acted “as a long-term impediment on central authority and its efforts to standardize and purify the religion of local variation.”<sup>395</sup> Local customs and the inefficiency of institutional agents confounded institutional plans. Nahua traditions found a kind of safe passage underneath the guise of Christianity in educational spaces like Calpan, and the local variant of Christianity included the marrow of its people.<sup>396</sup> However, whereas Christian, Jr. emphasized the “foot-dragging” of priests, my research has demonstrated the agency on the part of local Nahua elders, at the height of the

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<sup>394</sup> Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire* (1992), 106-107.

<sup>395</sup> Christian, Jr., “Catholicisms,” found in *Local religion in Colonial Mexico*, edited by Nesvig, University of New Mexico (2006), 260-261.

<sup>396</sup> Lockhart noted the gradual seepage of Spanish religion as an outgrowth of “ordinary Spaniards... as happened with material objects, crafts, and economic dealings;” *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 244.

Franciscan spiritual conquest, to adapt Christianity to fit their needs. And local schools would have been central in this regard.

Conventual schools allowed for local, community-level religious practices and beliefs, both Iberian and Mesoamerican or Christian and non-Christian, to persist against the constant pressure of institutionalized religious hierarchy and its policy decisions.<sup>397</sup> This spiritual process of resistance began with contact in the 1500s, and it was shaped by violence, dislocation, and disease, but also by persistence on the local level. Ecclesiastical education in Franciscan schools was supposed to function “like conquest,” shattering the nonconforming, non-Christian activities of the subjects of the Crown and making them into Hispanic fountains of change. Though the conquest exposed, cracked, and carved into the bones of Nahua sacred spaces—temples, schools, and the landscape—in the end, it was Nahua communities who reconstructed the structural “skeleton” of local religion.<sup>398</sup> As Christian evangelizers spread into new localities, they introduced religious concepts full of mutual misunderstandings, and the locals adopted those traditions that made the most sense to them. Applying introduced pieces of Christian traditions, the Nahuas rebuilt around the marrow of their existing cosmology as they grafted the old with the new to form colonial churches and places of sacred learning. As James Lockhart poignantly explained the “general principle” of this spiritual dialogue, “wherever the two

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<sup>397</sup> Carlos Eire synthesizes and compiles the previous theories of what exactly distinguishes “local” and “popular” Christianity. Eire traces the complexities of both Christian and Scribner’s theories in a concise package; Eire, “The Concepts of Popular Religion,” in *Local Religion in Colonial Mexico*, 1-35.

<sup>398</sup> Robert Scribner developed a theme of a Christian “skeleton” that what he called “popular” religious practices were constructed around; see, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (Ronceverte, WV: Hambledon Press, 1987), 23.

cultures ran parallel, the Nahuas would soon adopt the relevant Spanish form without abandoning the essence of their own form.”<sup>399</sup>

As this study has demonstrated, the best place for these two cultures to “run” parallel was in the courtyards of open-air churches. Remarkably, this occurred under the supervision of skilled Franciscan architects, like fray Juan de Alameda, and driven evangelizers like Motolinia and the master educator fray Diego de Valadés. Their best laid plans for the perfect enculturation environment fell victim to the pragmatism and conservatism of local religion, an institutional ecclesiastical education converted. In these reused sacred spaces, we see places for slippages, creases in the stone allowing for interpretation, and especially Louis Burkhart’s metaphorical discursive space, the *nepantla* (the middle place), where locally-educated Nahuas influenced Christian doctrine and transformed it gradually.<sup>400</sup> The flexibility of local religion on both sides of the Atlantic propelled mutual Nahua and Spanish misunderstandings into full-blown adoptions of Christian saints, rituals, and cosmologies—a Mesoamerican Mother Goddess or Xochiquetzal’s spring grafted onto the worship of Christian Marian cults. Whereas priests took comfort in the Nahuas’ quick adoption of procession in Corpus Christi celebrations, the Final Judgment, and notions of Hell, Nahuas may have found comfort in the ability to orient themselves with sacred mountains and traditional foundation stories, now with the added complexity of a new face for Quetzalcoatl as he continued his daily journey into the Underworld. In the Nahua re-fashioning and then “framing of the sacred” within familiar spaces, new visually bilingual communication

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<sup>399</sup> Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 243.

<sup>400</sup> Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*, 188.

devices were needed, and it was the local community who created them, or more importantly, created the stories they saw fit to tell around them.<sup>401</sup> Not those only found in Christian texts, but also those kept in the landscape and read by community elders. That knowledge is still kept today.<sup>402</sup>

Therefore, in the constructed zones of visual and material communication and the stories that Nahuas maintained there, sixteenth-century convents in New Spain functioned as cultural and religious middle ground between indigenous and European concepts. Instead of an immediate toppling and topping of space and form, Iberians and Mesoamericans constructed a physical space for the spiritual dialogue to take place, and over time, slippages and seepages had a gradually wearing effect on the surfaces of Nahua traditions. Institutional Christianity simply formed around local traditions, and policymakers simply simplified the complexity of old rituals into a universal message.

The architectural vernacular of the Nahuas speaks to this theory. Community elders and town council members assisted in the construction of the convent.<sup>403</sup> Their tradition of toppling sacred structures in order to renovate them with new concepts facilitated community cohesion. Adapting their educational spaces to incorporate regional politics while maintaining local identity, the Calpanecas participated in a process that they had grown accustomed to, and the perpetuation of the open-air school is one example of this gradual change. The iconographic dialogue that they chose to display in the courtyard meant more to them than it did to any visiting priest. The very mountains

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<sup>401</sup> Wake, *Framing the Sacred*, 8.

<sup>402</sup> Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood*, 78, 238-239, 241.

<sup>403</sup> Whereas Scott determined the existence of a “private sphere” that complicated the high-modernist state, I find that the micropatriotic communal aspects of colonial New Spain allowed for private communities to maintain boundaries of institutional interference; *Seeing Like a State*, 101-102.

speaking to this fact. An ever-thickening skin of stories and rituals developed around these stone schools. In the mid-sixteenth century, in places such as the convent of San Andrés Calpan, a hybrid educational space existed, but the curriculum is currently lost to us. These were spaces toppled, rebuilt, and inhabited by Nahuas all for their own local designs. But this is not the story that these religious institutions tell us on their banners and placards. Their story is far simpler, much more efficient, and less likely to complicate a coherent spiritual conquest of the Nahuas that never was.

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