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## *Art, Ritual, and Confraternities in Sixteenth-Century New Spain\**

### *Penitential Imagery at the Monastery of San Miguel, Huejotzingo\*\**

SCHOLARS OF SPANISH colonial history have often expressed astonishment at the remarkable speed with which the indigenous populations of New Spain were converted to Christianity, the huge numbers converted, and the extent of the territory covered during the period from 1524, when the first Franciscans arrived, to the end of the sixteenth century. While the depth of conversion is certainly open to debate, by the end of the century, a reportedly extensive number of indigenous people had been baptized,

\* Un breve adelanto de este trabajo fue publicado en *Laboratorio de Arte* (Sevilla), núm. 8, 1995, pp. 61-72 (N. de la R.).

\*\* Earlier versions of parts of this study were presented at the International Congress on Medieval Studies in 1994 and at a symposium held at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, "Cultural Transmission and Transformation in the Ibero-American World," in 1995. I am especially grateful to Eréndira de la Lama and Richard E. Phillips for their help in the early phases of this research, and to the Honorable Rosendo Huesca, Archbishop of Puebla, who facilitated my entry in to local archives. Travel grants from the University of Saint Thomas and the Program for Cultural Cooperation Between Spain's Ministry of Culture and United States' Universities allowed me to undertake archival research in Mexico.

knew or could recite the sacraments and Biblical episodes, and routinely practiced Christian ritual.<sup>1</sup>

When the mendicant friars first began the monumental task of christianizing the indigenous population of Mexico, they were confronted with a set of circumstances and problems that were entirely new and different. Not surprisingly, one of the most significant difficulties was the language barrier, for in order to convert the native people, they had to be made to understand the stories and beliefs embodied in the Bible.

The friars had several proven educational methodologies at their disposal; that allowed them to organize and indoctrinate the indigenous people and to transcend the language barrier—traditional methods that were also fortuitously parallel in many ways to pre-Hispanic practices. The traditional means that they employed were the use of visual images, religious drama, and the establishment of religious confraternities.

In a people already highly sensitive and attuned to the communicative power of visual images and to dramatic ritual enactments, the friars found a highly receptive audience. One sixteenth-century chronicler describes the integral didactic role that visual images played in early sermons in the following way:

On one cloth they had the Articles of Faith painted; on another, the Ten Commandments; and on another, the Seven Sacraments [...]. When the priest wanted to preach on the Commandments, they hung the cloth near him. He could point out whatever part he wanted with a staff, and thus he could expound the whole Doctrine clearly.<sup>2</sup>

Biblical stories, especially the central episode of Christ's Passion, were a staple of such visual sermons. Passion scenes were frequently represented as a series of pictures on a long canvas divided into squares that could be unrolled in narrative fashion.<sup>3</sup> Such visual aids were apparently quite effective, and one sixteenth-century chronicler observed: "It is a most apt and benefi-

1. See, for example, John McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches of Sixteenth-Century Mexico. Atrios, Posas, Open Chapels, and Other Studies*, Cambridge (Massachusetts), Harvard University, 1965, pp. 48-52.

2. Gerónimo de Mendieta, quoted by McAndrew, op. cit., p. 71.

3. See, for example, Diego Valadés, *Rhetorica christiana*, Perugia, 1579. This text is illus-

cial thing for these people, because we have seen from experience that in those towns where the Doctrine has been taught by pictures, the Indians are well-grounded in the essentials of our Catholic faith, and understand them well."<sup>4</sup>

Alongside the more portable works on canvas, the interiors of sixteenth-century monasteries and churches were decorated with mural paintings depicting scriptural scenes that had a similar didactic function. The native people were supposed to learn from these visual images, and they were also supposed to imitate what they saw in order to live a good Christian life. While European art had always functioned on a didactic level, in addition to embodying other levels of meaning, in the New World the didactic message of visual images and their role as models for behavior was paramount.

As effective as paintings may have been as didactic tools, the indigenous people developed an immediate and powerful affection for sculpted images. Sculptures of Christ, the Virgin, saints, and angels formed the primary images of the portals and altars of monasteries and churches, and the native people demonstrated their great devotion by showering them with offerings, flowers, and candles. As Juan de Grijalva observed, "Y es a saber, que un indio en su vestido y comida no tiene ánimo de gastar dos reales, gasta con gran generosidad mil en una imagen."<sup>5</sup> Specific sculptures were imposed by the friars or chosen by the people of each barrio within a town, and such images were so popular among the Indians that they commissioned or created their own sculptures for private domestic altars called *santocalli*.<sup>6</sup> Sculptures were the primary focus of public as well as private devotions and rituals, as they were carried in procession on feast days and used in a variety of liturgical dramas and representations.

Indeed, the performance of religious drama and other theatrical representations were another particularly effective didactic and evangelical method employed by the friars, since they also encouraged emulation and participa-

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trated with a well-known print that depicts a Franciscan friar preaching with the aid of a long canvas on which scenes of the Passion are painted.

4. Mendieta, quoted by McAndrew, op. cit., p. 71.

5. Juan de Grijalva, *Crónica de la Orden de N.P.S. Agustín en las provincias de la Nueva España*, Mexico, Porrúa, 1985, p. 162.

6. On *santocalli* see Serge Gruzinski, "Indian Confraternities, Brotherhoods and *Mayordomías* in Central New Spain," *The Indian Community of Colonial Mexico. Fifteen Essays on*

tion. Dramatic performances ranged from the ritual reenactment of Christian battle scenes and episodes from the Nativity and the Passion of Christ, using both sculpted and “live” actors, to simplified pantomime performances that dramatized Christian beliefs. To dramatically convey the nature of infernal punishments, for example, one inventive sixteenth-century friar is recorded to have

Made a deep pit like a furnace with a wide-spreading mouth in the patio of a church in Jalisco, and he had dogs and cats and other animals thrown into it; and when a fire was lit they howled fearfully, and the Indians were terrified by the horrible spectacle, and thereafter avoided offending God.<sup>7</sup>

Dating from the second half of the sixteenth century, pantomime representations of scenes from the Passion or dramatizations with minimal dialogue were performed on Fridays throughout the year in Mexico City.<sup>8</sup> Corpus Christi and Holy Week were often celebrated with numerous dramatic representations of Biblical episodes, and these performances reportedly drew huge crowds of spectators.<sup>9</sup> Many religious dramas were written and performed in Nahuatl, in which the indigenous people performed as actors and were also present in great numbers as spectators.<sup>10</sup> Thus, dramatic religious spectacles also encouraged native participation, and presumably fostered a greater understanding of Christian religious practices and beliefs.

One of the most significant but often overlooked early evangelical meth-

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*Land Tenure, Corporate Organizations, Ideology, and Village Politics*, edited by Arij Ouwennel and Simon Miller, Amsterdam, CEDLA, 1990 (Latin American Studies, 58), pp. 215-218.

7. McAndrew, op. cit., p. 73.

8. Othón Arroniz, *Teatro de evangelización en Nueva España*, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1979, p. 106.

9. Among several other chroniclers, Agustín de Vetancurt, *Chronica de la provincia del Santo Evangelio de México*, Mexico, Porrúa, 1982 (first edition, 1697), p. 42, describes the popularity of representations of events from the Passion (*Neixcuitiles*) performed during Holy Week in Mexico City, noting that “[...] à las demas representaciones tan grande concurso, que no hay lugar vacio en el patio, y azoteas [...].”

10. See, for example, Marilyn Ekdahl Ravicz, *Early Colonial Religious Drama in Mexico: From Tzompantli to Golgotha*, Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America, 1970, pp. 39 ff. and 82; Louise Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday. A Nahuatl Drama from Early Colonial Mexico*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, 1996; Max Harris, *The Dialogical Theatre. Drama-*

ods of the mendicant orders was the establishment of confraternities amidst the indigenous populations. In order to inspire devotion and loyalty among the newly converted, and to actively involve them in Christian devotional practices, the friars organized them into confraternal groups dedicated to specific patron saints or Biblical figures. The foundation of confraternities in New Spain began as early as 1526, and their numbers continued to grow, expanding dramatically in the last quarter of the sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth centuries.<sup>11</sup> By all accounts, confraternities were especially appealing to the indigenous population, and in some towns virtually all the Indians belonged to a confraternity.<sup>12</sup> By 1585, there were said to be over

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*tizations of the Conquest of Mexico and the Question of the Other*, New York, St. Martin's, 1993, passim, and Arroniz, op. cit.

11. One of the earliest confraternities was that of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, which founded the hospital of Jesús Nazareno in Mexico City. Hernán Cortés wrote of the existence of this confraternity in 1529. See Adolfo Lamas, *Seguridad social en la Nueva España*, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1964, pp. 140-141. According to Alicia Bazarte Martínez, *Las cofradías de españoles en la ciudad de México (1526-1860)*, Mexico, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1989, pp. 34-35, the earliest documented confraternity is that of "Los caballeros de la Cruz," founded by Hernán Cortés in 1526. Although not all scholars believe that confraternities were established during the early phase of missionary activity, most agree that they began to proliferate in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. See, for example, Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule*, Stanford, Stanford University, 1964, pp. 127-133; James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, Stanford, Stanford University, 1992, pp. 218-219 and 538, note 63; John K. Chance and William B. Taylor, "Cofradías y cargos: una perspectiva histórica de la jerarquía cívico-religiosa mesoamericana," *Antropología* (Mexico), vol. 14, 1987, p. 7; Ernesto de la Torre Villar, "Algunos aspectos acerca de las cofradías y la propiedad territorial en Michoacán," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* (Cologne), vol. 4, 1967, pp. 418-419; Murdo J. MacLeod, "Papel social y económico de las cofradías indígenas de la colonia en Chiapas," *Mesoamérica* (Antigua Guatemala), vol. 4, no. 5, 1983, pp. 67-68; Gruzinski, op. cit., pp. 206-207, and Bazarte Martínez, op. cit., pp. 45-46. If accounts of missionary expansion on the northern frontier during the mid-sixteenth century are any example, confraternities, and especially penitential confraternities, were established almost immediately in the new cities and towns; see William Wroth, *Images of Penance, Images of Mercy. Southwestern Santos in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Norman-London, University of Oklahoma, 1991, pp. 23-26. According to Wroth, confraternities of the Vera Cruz were the first to be established: in 1551 in Guadalajara (p. 23), and in the same year in Zacatecas (p. 26).

12. See Gruzinski, op. cit., p. 206.

300 Indian confraternities active in Mexico City alone.<sup>13</sup> The institution of confraternities provided the local populace with group identities similar to pre-Hispanic *calpulli*, or extended kin groups, and offered them a communal ritual role and dedication that accorded well with many earlier forms of indigenous ritual practice.

During the sixteenth century, confraternities founded by the mendicants maintained cult images in local monasteries and were often responsible for the decoration and upkeep of the *posá* chapels located in the spacious atrium of each monastery. The *posá* chapels were used as stops or pauses in processions held in the enclosed atrium. The confraternities also celebrated their saint's days and other feast days with ritual public processions and performances in the open air of the atrium. Thus, at least during the first century of evangelization, native confraternities served as instruments of acculturation through which Christian beliefs and practices could be disseminated and the indigenous people could be organized and controlled.<sup>14</sup>

Among the most popular types of confraternities were the penitential groups dedicated to specific aspects or episodes of the Passion of Christ, which celebrated Holy Week with elaborate rituals and flagellant processions. The earliest documented penitential confraternity is that of the Vera Cruz of Mexico City, which, in 1527, petitioned for two plots of land on which to construct a hospital and chapel.<sup>15</sup> In 1538, Franciscan friar Toribio de Benavente, Motolinia, described the elaborate penitential processions held by a Vera Cruz confraternity in Tlaxcala: "veinte mil hombres, e mujeres, e mochachos, cojos y mancos [...] se disciplinaban con disciplinas de sangre, y los que no alcanzan ni pueden haber estrellitas, azótanse con disciplinas de cordel [...]." <sup>16</sup> In 1541, Motolinia devoted several pages in his *Histo-*

13. Numbers cited by the Third Mexican Council of 1585. Quoted by Gruzinski, op. cit., p. 207.

14. Although native confraternities may at first have been instituted as instruments of acculturation, there is further evidence to suggest that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries native confraternities enjoyed a far greater degree of autonomy, and may have turned the *cofradías* to their own benefit. See, for example, Bernardo García Martínez, *Los pueblos de la Sierra*, Mexico, El Colegio de México, 1987, pp. 273-278; Gibson, op. cit., pp. 131-132; MacLeod, op. cit., pp. 68-75, and Gruzinski, op. cit., pp. 206-208.

15. Lucas Alamán, *Disertaciones*, Mexico, Jus, 1942, vol. 2, pp. 259-260.

16. Toribio de Benavente, Motolinia, *Memoriales*, edited by Edmundo O'Gorman, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1971, p. 93.

*ria de los indios de la Nueva España* to a description of the impressive numbers of penitents that participated in the Holy Week processions in Mexico City and to the variety and vigor of the acts of self-mortification performed by the participants, especially the native groups.<sup>17</sup> Writing at the end of the sixteenth century, Franciscan friar Gerónimo de Mendieta repeatedly marveled at the great devotion of the indigenous confraternities to penitence and to the Passion of Christ.<sup>18</sup> According to Mendieta, during the 1595 Holy Week in Mexico City,

El Juéves Santo salió la procesión de la [confraternity of the] Veracruz con mas de veinte mil indios, y mas de tres mil penitentes, con doscientas y diez y nueve insignias de Cristos y insignias de su pasión. El [Good] viérnes salieron en la procesion de la [confraternity of] Soledad mas de siete mil y setecientos disciplinantes, por cuenta, con insignias de la Soledad.<sup>19</sup>

The popularity of flagellant processions among the Indians prompted Mendieta to remark that, “Entre ellos [the Indians], parece [that] no es cristiano el que no trae rosario y disciplina.”<sup>20</sup> Augustinian friar Juan de Grijalva, writing in the early seventeenth century, lauded the intense devotion of the Indians to the penitential processions of Holy Week, declaring that they far exceeded the Spaniards in their numbers and in the fervor of their self-mortification.<sup>21</sup> The native predilection for flagellation and other acts of self-mortification is not surprising in view of the variety of pre-Hispanic traditions of ritual auto-sacrifice. For example, alongside the more well-known pre-Hispanic forms of self-mortification, public “penitential processions” are recorded in which the population of entire towns lashed themselves with knotted ropes.<sup>22</sup>

17. Toribio de Benavente, Motolinia, *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*, edited by Edmundo O’Gorman, Mexico, Porrúa, 1990, pp. 55-56.

18. Gerónimo de Mendieta, *Historia eclesiástica indiana*, Mexico, Porrúa, 1980, pp. 286, 429, 433, and 435-437. See also Motolinia, *Historia de los indios*, pp. 55-56 and 64.

19. Mendieta, op. cit., p. 436.

20. Ibidem, p. 429.

21. Grijalva, op. cit., pp. 161-162.

22. Joseph de Acosta, *The Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, edited by Clements R. Markham, New York, Burt Franklin, 1964, vol. 2, p. 339.

The penitential processions were not the only rituals of Holy Week in which the confraternities participated. They also witnessed and contributed to important forms of liturgical drama and representations of the Passion, such as the *Lavatorio* or *Mandato* (Washing of the Feet), *Descendimiento* (Descent from the Cross), and *Encuentro* (Encounter of the Virgin and Christ). Such liturgical dramas enjoyed a long tradition in Spain, where they were often performed by confraternities associated with monasteries.<sup>23</sup> Unlike the full-fledged theatrical performances and *autos sacramentales* performed in sixteenth-century New Spain, for which some texts and detailed descriptions often remain, there is relatively little documentary evidence that might illuminate the nature and appearance of the liturgical dramas and representations of Holy Week. Although a few of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century chroniclers note that such ceremonies were performed, most do not describe their nature, participants, and performance structure in any detail.<sup>24</sup>

### *The murals of San Miguel, Huejotzingo*

At the sixteenth-century Franciscan monastery of San Miguel, in Huejotzingo (Puebla), archival and historical evidence concerning confraternities, penitential processions, dramatic representations of the Passion, and visual images provide an intriguing image of ritual life in early colonial New Spain. Because the monastery of San Miguel, Huejotzingo, was one of the first four Franciscan establishments in New Spain, the strategies that were employed

23. The *Descendimiento* and the *Encuentro* were closely associated with confraternities, while the *Lavatorio* was generally organized by priests or friars. For the *Descendimiento*, see *infra*, notes 45 and 49, and for the *Encuentro*, Gabriel Llompart, "La llamada 'Procesión del Encuentro' en la isla de Mallorca y la filiación medieval del folklore postridentino," *Revista de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares* (Madrid), vol. 23, 1967, pp. 167-180.

24. See, for example, Vetancurt, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43, and Mendieta, *op. cit.*, pp. 435-436. For the text of a drama performed on Holy Wednesday, see Burkhart, *op. cit.* One notable exception is Agustín Dávila Padilla, *Historia de la fundación y discurso de la Provincia de Santiago de México, de la Orden de Predicadores*, Mexico, Academia Literaria, 1955, pp. 563-568, which provides a lengthy description of a ceremony of the Descent from the Cross and penitential procession performed in the sixteenth century by a confraternity of the *Descendimiento y Sepulcro de Cristo* in Mexico City.



Figure 1. Penitential procession. South wall mural, church of the monastery of San Miguel, Huejotzingo (Puebla). Photo: Susan Verdi Webster (hereafter S.V.W.).



Figure 2. Golgotha with Descent from the Cross. North wall mural, church of the monastery of San Miguel, Huejotzingo (Puebla). Photo: S.V.W.

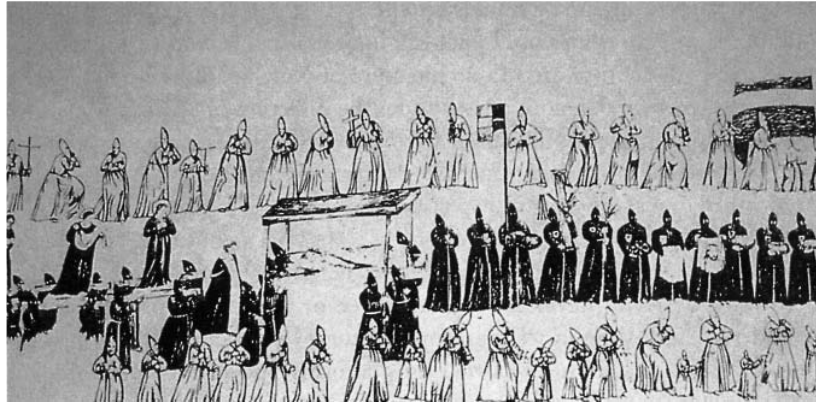


Figure 3. Reconstruction drawing of the mural of the penitential procession. After José Alberto Vázquez Benítez, *Historia de un convento*, Puebla, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1990, pp. 26-27.

there may help to illuminate practices in other mendicant, and especially Franciscan monasteries during the sixteenth century.<sup>25</sup>

In the course of restoration at the monastery church of San Miguel during the early 1980s, conservators uncovered two extensive murals along the north and south walls of the nave (figures 1 and 2). The murals had been covered by layers of whitewash, except for small areas protected by side altars. Close inspection reveals that they were not painted in grisaille, for vestiges of colors—especially red, green, and ochre—are visible in certain areas. Although the murals are un-dated, they are generally believed to have been painted during the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century.<sup>26</sup> If this

25. For the history of San Miguel, Huejotzingo, see especially Rafael García Granados and Luis MacGregor, *Huejotzingo, la ciudad y el convento franciscano*, Mexico, Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1934; Marcela Salas Cuesta, *La iglesia y el convento de Huejotzingo*, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1982; José Alberto Vázquez Benítez, *Historia de un convento*, Puebla, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1990; Mario Córdova Tello, *El convento de San Miguel de Huejotzingo, Puebla. Arqueología histórica*, Mexico, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1992.

26. Elena Estrada de Gerlero, "El programa pasionario en el convento franciscano de Huejotzingo," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas*

dating is correct, then these murals are the earliest depictions of the penitential processions and rituals of Holy Week in the Hispanic world.<sup>27</sup> Like much of the sixteenth-century art and architecture of New Spain, the murals were likely executed by indigenous artists under the direction of Spanish friars.

The mural on the south wall of the nave represents a penitential procession composed of black and white hooded figures, some of which are flagellants, scourging themselves in expiation of their sins (figures 1 and 3). The participants in the procession are clearly members of a penitential confraternity. They are certainly not, as some have suggested, Franciscan friars, since there were typically never more than three or four friars present at the monastery at any time in the sixteenth century.<sup>28</sup> At the rear of the procession is a series of sculptures carried on platforms, including a dead Christ, the Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist, and Mary Magdalen.

The penitential procession is given a place of great prominence and importance: it is painted inside the church, and extends along one of the

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(Cologne), vol. 20, 1983, p. 655, wherein she proposes that the murals were likely painted between 1582 and 1640. See also Salas Cuesta, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

27. The earliest Spanish depictions of penitential processions of which I am aware were painted by Francisco de Goya in the early nineteenth century. Goya's depictions are in the collections of the Real Academia de San Fernando and the Museo Lázaro Galdiano in Madrid. For sixteenth- and seventeenth-century visual images of Spanish flagellants, see Gabriel Llompart, "Desfile iconográfico de penitentes españoles (siglos XVI al XX)," *Revista de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares* (Madrid), vol. 25, 1969, pp. 31-51. The murals of a penitential procession and Descent from the Cross inside the *portería* at the Dominican monastery of San Juan, Teitipac (Oaxaca), which are discussed below, may date from around the same time as those at Huejotzingo. The murals of a penitential procession of flagellants that decorate the side walls of an altar alcove in the upper cloister of the Franciscan monastery of San Martín, Huaquechula (Puebla), are clearly later than those at Huejotzingo and Teitipac. The very fact that penitential processions were painted in sixteenth-century Mexican monasteries suggests that they have a didactic function for natives unfamiliar with the rituals; however, they simultaneously glorify as well as document the penitential acts performed by local, native confraternities.

28. McAndrew, *op. cit.*, p. 206. Documentary evidence does indicate that Huejotzingo may have had more than three or four friars present during some periods. See, for example, Gerónimo de Mendieta, Pedro Oroz, and Francisco Suárez, *Relación de la descripción de la Provincia del Santo Evangelio que es en las Indias Occidentales que llaman la Nueva España*, introduction by Fidel de Jesús Chauvet, Mexico, Fray Junípero Serra, 1975, p. 213, in which six *religiosos* (four of them *predicadores*) are recorded as residing in the monastery of Huejotzingo in 1584.

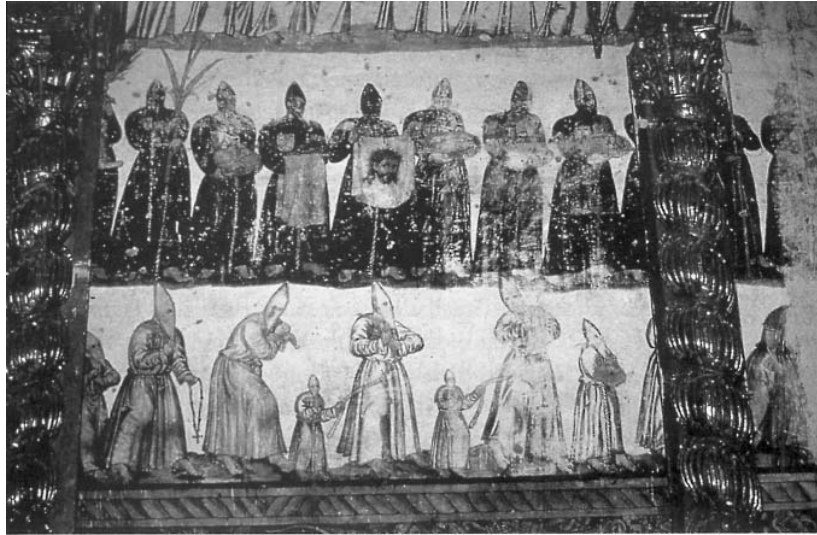


Figure 4. Detail of the central section of the penitential procession. Photo: S.V.W.

central sections of the south wall, occupying fully one-quarter of the nave. Directly opposite, on the north wall of the nave, another mural depicts a scene of Golgotha (figure 2). In the center of this mural, located above the north doorway, or *porciúncula*, appears a scene of the Descent from the Cross, which is flanked by the two thieves and attended by numerous hooded penitents. The two murals occupy the same respective space in the nave, and are clearly contemporaneous.

Although the mural of the penitential procession is badly damaged in some areas, and in other parts obscured by side altars, a close inspection of the procession reveals its composition and performance structure. The procession is headed by confraternity officials, accompanied by a friar and figures bearing elaborate candle holders and large black banners with crosses. Behind these figures, the procession breaks into three rows of hooded penitents (figure 4). These figures are barefoot, and their tunics are belted with the distinctive knotted cord of the Franciscan order. The two outer rows of penitents dressed in white tunics are flagellants, and they engage in acts of self-mortification with whips of cord. Some members of the upper row of flagellants carry crosses, while several of those in

the lower register carry rosaries (figure 3). Because New World processions were typically divided according to gender, with males on one side and females on the other, separated by friars or priests in the center, this distinction suggests that those in the upper register are male, while the lower register is comprised of females.<sup>29</sup> In both registers, diminutive figures, also engaged in flagellation, grasp the knotted cords of the larger penitents. These figures are undoubtedly children, since many of the chroniclers record that men, women, and children participated equally as flagellants in penitential processions in New Spain.<sup>30</sup>

The figures occupying the central register are clothed in black hooded tunics. They do not engage in flagellation, but carry the instruments of the Passion, the *arma Christi*: the nails, the dice, the tunic, the dinars, the veil of Verónica, etc. They are followed by black-robed, hooded figures bearing the sculpted images on platforms. The dead Christ is carried beneath a black baldachin, followed by a friar and the images of the two Maries and Saint John the Evangelist consoling the sorrowing Virgin (figure 3).

At first glance, this appears to be a procession of the Santo Entierro, a reasonable assumption, owing to the fact that Spanish confraternities of this advocacy traditionally carried sculptures of the dead Christ and the sorrowing Virgin (among other subsidiary figures) in their penitential processions on Good Friday. Moreover, the mural on the north wall of the nave depicts the Descent from the Cross, which was a liturgical drama traditionally performed with sculpted images by Spanish confraternities of the Santo Entierro immediately before going out in procession.<sup>31</sup>

Spanish Abbott Alonso Sánchez Gordillo, in an account of a penitential

29. Mendieta, op. cit., p. 430. The cross was traditionally associated with Christ, and the rosary with the Virgin. A document of 1592 pertaining to membership requirements for the Vera Cruz confraternity at Huejotzingo designates those men *and women* that wish to enter the confraternity as flagellants must pay one *peso de oro*: Archivo Diocesano de Puebla (hereafter ADP), *Gobierno* (1570-1599), box 42, n.p.

30. See, for example, Motolinia, *Memoriales*, pp. 55-56, and Motolinia, *Historia de los indios*, p. 93. See also the descriptions cited by Robert Ricard, *La conquista espiritual de México*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986, p. 288. In contrast, in sixteenth-century Spain, women were prohibited from engaging in flagellation in the penitential processions. They were also forbidden to process in the hooded garb of the penitent.

31. See, for example, Alonso Sánchez Gordillo, *Religiosas estaciones que frecuenta la religiosidad sevillana*, edited by Jorge Bernal Ballesteros, Seville, Consejo General de Hermandades y Cofradías, 1983, pp. 164-165.

procession of the Santo Entierro confraternity in Seville in the late sixteenth century, describes many of the same elements found at Huejotzingo: the *mayordomos* and candle bearers, the banners, standards, and crosses, and the ten priests bearing the symbols of the Passion who walk side by side with the flagellants—although at Huejotzingo, the figures in black are more likely the members of the confraternity's governing board. In Seville, the dead Christ was carried by priests under a black baldachin, followed by sculptures of the Virgin, Saint John, and the Three Maries. The procession went out the main door of the confraternity's chapel and through the city, terminating at the Dominican monastery of San Pablo, where it entered the church through the main doors, and exited through a side door to the cloister. In the cloister garth was a sepulchre into which the body of Christ was placed. On Easter Sunday the image of Christ was placed upright in the sepulchre, and the confraternity came and joyously reclaimed it, carrying it in triumphal procession back to their chapel.<sup>32</sup>

To date, the only detailed scholarly study of the murals inside the church at Huejotzingo was written by Elena Estrada de Gerlero in 1983.<sup>33</sup> She identifies the procession as that of the Santo Entierro because of the inclusion of the elements mentioned above, which she surmises was performed by a local confraternity of the same name, and she relates the diffusion of the ritual to Dominican influences. As supporting evidence, Estrada de Gerlero cites a description of the sermon of the Descent from the Cross and the procession of the Santo Entierro written in Mexico at the end of the sixteenth century by Dominican friar Agustín Dávila Padilla, which corresponds in many respects to the form and appearance of the procession depicted in the mural at Huejotzingo.<sup>34</sup>

Dávila Padilla carefully records the rituals and penitential procession performed by the recently established penitential confraternity of the Descendimiento y Sepulcro de Cristo in the monastery of Santo Domingo in Mexico City in 1582.<sup>35</sup> Early membership in the confraternity consisted of Mexico City's elite, but quickly burgeoned to include "the majority of the city's population."<sup>36</sup>

32. Ibidem, pp. 165-167.

33. Estrada de Gerlero, op. cit., pp. 642-662.

34. Dávila Padilla, op. cit., pp. 563-568.

35. Ibidem, pp. 561-568.

36. Ibidem, p. 563.



Figure 5. Penitential procession and Descent from the Cross. Mural inside the *portería* of the Dominican monastery of San Juan, Teitipac (Oaxaca). Photo: James B. Kiracofe (hereafter J.B.K.).

Estrada de Gerlero's association of Santo Entierro or Santo Sepulcro confraternities with the Dominican order is understandable, for there is visual evidence to further support her thesis. For example, at the sixteenth-century Dominican monastery of San Juan, Teitipac (Oaxaca), a far more elaborate and opulent mural painting depicting a procession of the Santo Entierro covers one of the long side walls inside the *portería* (figure 5). The murals are quite detailed and are painted in a refined style that suggests some measure of formal European training.

The procession at Teitipac is organized in two registers that are joined on the far right. In the upper left, the head of the procession is about to enter a portal, led by two young boys and several black-garbed penitents carrying banners and standards. They are followed by rows of penitents, arranged in groups of three, that carry the *arma Christi*, and are guided by a friar. None of the penitents in this mural appear to be flagellants—they do not engage in any type of self-mortification.

The second half of the procession continues on the lower register, where



Figure 6. Descent from the Cross. Mural over portal to cloister in the *portería* of the Dominican monastery of San Juan, Teitipac (Oaxaca). Photo: J.B.K.

it has just exited a portal. Groups of secular figures bring up the rear of the procession, and before them appear people dressed as the Virgin, Mary Magdalen, and, seemingly, Saint John the Evangelist. These figures are preceded by eight rather opulently attired friars carrying a bier on which is placed a sculpture of the dead Christ wrapped in winding cloths. Another group of friars lead the platform, one of whom swings a censer, sanctifying the space through which the image of Christ will pass.

On the back wall of the *portería*, abutting the wall with the procession, is a portal that leads to the cloister, the form and appearance of which is quite similar to the portals depicted in the murals. Directly above this portal is a scene of the Descent from the Cross, performed by Dominican friars (figure 6). This scene is actually the origin of the procession, for after Christ was lowered from the Cross, the procession with the sacred body—known as the procession of the Santo Entierro—traditionally took place.

Despite the wealth of evidence that suggests a relationship between Dominican practices and the murals at Huejotzingo, Estrada de Gerlero's thesis is contradicted, at least in part, by both visual and documentary evidence strongly suggesting that the penitents depicted in the murals at Huejotzingo are members of a confraternity of the Vera Cruz, that was established by the Franciscans at Huejotzingo during the sixteenth century.<sup>37</sup>

In Spain and in the New World, confraternities of the Santo Entierro or Santo Sepulcro were typically associated with the Dominican order, while confraternities of the Vera Cruz were traditionally founded by Franciscans.<sup>38</sup> The vast majority of Spanish confraternities of the Vera Cruz were directly associated with the Franciscan order, and maintained chapels or side altars in

37. Writing at the end of the seventeenth century, Vetancurt, *op. cit.*, pp. 58–59, notes the existence of a confraternity of the Santo Sepulcro at Huejotzingo in addition to numerous other confraternities including that of the Vera Cruz. It is likely that the growth in number of confraternities by the end of the seventeenth century resulted in a division of advocations relating to the Passion; thus, the ritual activities of Good Friday and Easter Sunday may, by the time, have been shared by several confraternities.

38. Dávila Padilla, *op. cit.*, p. 569; J. Meseguer Fernández, "Las cofradías de la Vera Cruz. Documentos y notas para su historia," *Archivo Ibero-Americano* (Madrid), nos. 109–110, 1968, pp. 1–15, and José Sánchez Herrero, et al., "Los cuatro tipos diferentes de cofradías de Semana Santa, desde su fundación hasta la crisis de finales del siglo XVIII en Andalucía bética y Castilla," in *Actas del Primer Congreso Nacional de Cofradías de Semana Santa*, Zamora, Diputación Provincial, 1987, pp. 259–297.

Franciscan monasteries. Franciscans were devotees of the True Cross, protectors of monuments in the Holy Land (such as the Holy Sepulchre), and practiced an extreme devotion to penitence and the Passion of Christ. These characteristics are reflected in the nature of the penitential confraternities they fostered, such as the Vera Cruz. The oldest confraternity in Seville, for example, is that of the Vera Cruz, established in the monastery of San Francisco in 1380.<sup>39</sup> The traditional escutcheon of confraternities of the Vera Cruz is a green cross atop a hill on a white or ochre field.<sup>40</sup> Of no small importance is the fact that the confraternity members depicted in the murals at Huejotzingo wear this traditional escutcheon: a green cross atop a hill, set against an ochre or white field (figure 7). The artist of these murals obviously took great care to represent the escutcheons clearly and in detail. The colors are discernible upon close inspection of the murals, but are too faded to be visible in photographs.

The most compelling evidence for the identification of this confraternity, however, is found in local archives in Puebla and Huejotzingo. Two documents, dated 1592 and 1593 respectively, establish the existence of a confraternity of the Vera Cruz active at Huejotzingo.<sup>41</sup> One of the documents, dated September 16, 1593, is a petition from the Vera Cruz confraternity at Huejotzingo to Canon Maldonado, of the city of Puebla de los Ángeles, in which the confraternity asks to be provided with a copy of the indulgences conceded to confraternities of the Vera Cruz by Pope Paul III. The document provides important information about several of the *mayordomos* or *diputados* of the confraternity, as it begins: “Bernaldo de Montesinos, Mateo Evangelista, Juan Davila, yndios principales de la cibdad de guaxocingo por nos e por los demas hermanos de la cofradia de la sancta vera cruz questa fundada en la d[ic]ha cibdad en la yglesia del convento de san fran[cis]co.”<sup>42</sup> Both docu-

39. Juan Carrero Rodríguez, *Anales de las cofradías sevillanas*, Seville, Hermandad y Cofradía de Nazarenos de Nuestro Padre Jesús de las Penas y María Santísima de los Dolores, 1984, pp. 636.

40. See, for example, the earliest extant Rule Book of the confraternity of the Vera Cruz of Seville, which contains numerous illuminations depicting the escutcheon: Biblioteca Universitaria de Sevilla, “Regla de la Cofradía de la S[anti]s[i]ma Vera Cruz (1631),” mss. 331/224, fols. 1v, 2v. The Sevillian confraternity also expresses its close link to the Franciscan order by including the symbol of the Five Wounds on one half of its escutcheon.

41. ADP, *Gobierno* (1570-1599), box, 42, n.p.

42. *Ibidem*.



Figure 7. Detail of penitential procession showing escutcheons. South wall mural, church of the monastery of San Miguel, Huejotzingo (Puebla). Photo: S.V.W.

ments imply that the confraternity was already in existence by the 1590s, and clearly state that it was founded in the monastery of San Miguel, and that it was apparently headed by local Indian nobility.

Among the documents preserved in the parish archive at Huejotzingo are numerous rule books, inventories, and account books that belonged to local confraternities during the colonial period. Several books were the property of a confraternity of the Vera Cruz, which was founded in the church of the monastery of San Miguel. The books indicate that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Vera Cruz confraternity was composed primarily of Indians, and many of the entries are written in Nahuatl.

At some point in the early seventeenth century, the Vera Cruz confraternity moved its residence to the parish church at Huejotzingo, and apparently merged with the local confraternity of San Diego, for after 1649, the belongings of both confraternities are recorded in the same inventories. The two confraternities may have formally joined forces in order to more effectively pool their limited resources. In an abbreviated inventory of 1649, the following items pertaining to their processional activities are listed: "[...] dos guiones chicos uno morado y otro negro [...] tres estandartes uno grande y dos chicos negros [...] otro estandarte morado [...] dos caxas donde se guardan las ynsinias y sera [...]." <sup>43</sup> A more extensive inventory of 1663 lists the following:

[...] dos Guiones Bordados uno blanco y otro negro [...] cinco estandartes los quatro negros con cruces y el uno morado y de los negros el uno es nuevo con su fleco de ceda [...]. Dos Guiones Pequenos de Tafetan negro y morado Pintados [...]. Todos los atributos e Ynstrumentos de la Pacion de n[uest]ro S[eñor] que salen en la proçesion del Viernes S[an]to [...] un San Juan Ebanxelista de Bulto echo de gonses pendiente en sus andas con su abua y capa colorada de seda y su [?] cauellera con su frontal negro [...]. <sup>44</sup>

The coincidence of the objects listed in the inventory with those present in the mural indicates that this confraternity of the Vera Cruz is the one depicted in the painted procession. The absence of the more sacred images of the Virgin and Christ in the confraternity's inventory suggests that these

43. Archivo Parroquial de Huejotzingo (hereafter APH), "Libro de la Cofradía de la Vera Cruz," n.p.

44. Ibidem.

sculptures must have been maintained in the monastery, where they served as devotional images throughout the year. Indeed, a 1663 inventory of articles in the monastery of San Miguel lists a sculpture of “[...] un santo cristo con su baldoquín o dosel que está en la celda de los padres guardianes [...].”<sup>45</sup>

It is interesting, however, that this confraternity of the Vera Cruz is depicted enacting a procession of the Santo Entierro: carrying a sculpture of the dead Christ in penitential procession accompanied by the instruments of the Passion. In all likelihood, the Vera Cruz confraternity simply extended its role from that of carrying the crucified Christ in procession, to include the following processional sequence of carrying the dead Christ. This was not at all unusual in Spain, especially in smaller communities where one or two confraternities would enact several related processional sequences of the Passion during Holy Week. In smaller Andalusian towns, for example, confraternities of the Vera Cruz often staged two processions during Holy Week: one on Maundy Thursday, in which they carried an image of the crucified Christ, and one on Good Friday, in which a sculpture of the dead Christ was carried.<sup>46</sup> The close correspondence between the imagery of the penitential procession at Huejotzingo and the objects in the confraternity inventory suggests that the mural painting actually chronicles or documents the specific activities that were performed by the Vera Cruz confraternity at the monastery during the sixteenth century. Similarly, the mural directly opposite, depicting the Descent from the Cross (figure 8), suggests that this ritual was also performed during Holy Week.

In addition to illuminating their processional activities, the inventories confirm that the Vera Cruz confraternity at Huejotzingo was intimately involved in the extra-liturgical representation of the Descent from the Cross. The inventory of 1663 also lists the following:

Prim[er]a[men]te el S[an]to Sepulchro del S[an]to Christo del desendim[ien]to [...] dos Cauelleras del Santo Sepulchro una que lo tiene puesto y otra que esta entre los d[ic]hos bienes [...]. Vna toalla grande con que se deçiende el S[an]to

45. Unpublished manuscript by Guillermo Tovar de Teresa, “Noticias sobre el convento de Huejotzingo en los siglos XVII y XVIII,” in “Recopilación de ponencias sobre Huejotzingo” (1987), Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia-Centro Regional de Puebla, p. 7. Tovar de Teresa cites the following source for the documentation: Biblioteca del Museo Nacional de Antropología, *Fondo Franciscano*, vol. 37, fols. 320-324v.

46. See, for example, Sánchez Herrero, et al., op. cit., pp. 278-279.



Figure 8. Descent from the Cross. Central section of north wall mural, church of the monastery of San Miguel, Huejotzingo (Puebla). Photo: S.V.W.

Xpo el Viernes S[an]to de ruan florete con sus trapaselos [...] una toalla de linse-suelo desilada co[n] que se sine el S[an]to Xpo [...].<sup>47</sup>

The mural of the Descent from the Cross (figure 8) depicts four Franciscan friars—their tonsures and knotted cord belts clearly visible—lowering the body of Christ from the Cross. To assist the descent, a long cloth is wrapped around the waist of the figure of Christ, and a friar at the base of the ladder in the lower right wears a long strip of fabric draped around his shoulders, which is likely the winding cloth in which the body of Christ will later be wrapped. At the base of the cross, figures of the sorrowing Virgin, Saint John the Evangelist, and the two Maries are partially visible. Directly beneath them, the grassy hill of Golgotha is converted to jagged rocks which continue within the deeply recessed doorway of the *porciúncula*. To either side of the hill, files of hooded confraternity members in white tunics scourge themselves with corded whips. Below and flanking the scene of Golgotha are the crosses with the two thieves, surrounded by hooded confraternity members, also engaged in flagellation. The correspondence of numerous features of the mural with the items listed in the confraternity inventory indicates that the confraternity was intimately involved in this ritual, and that the mural is a visual chronicle of that association.

In sixteenth-century Spain, liturgical drama of the Descent from the Cross was traditionally performed by penitential confraternities using life-size sculptures of Christ, the Virgin, Saint John the Evangelist, and the two thieves, among other images.<sup>48</sup> The sculpture of Christ was equipped with articulated limbs, so that when it was descended from the Cross the arms

47. APH, "Libro de la Cofradía de la Vera Cruz," n.p.

48. On the Descent ceremony in Spain, see especially Sánchez Gordillo, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165; Rafael Martínez González, *La Semana Santa*, Palencia, n.e., 1984, pp. 24-53; *Dramas litúrgicos del siglo XVI: Navidad y Pascua*, edited by Jaime Moll, Madrid, Taurus, 1969, pp. 19-20 and 95-114; Antonio Cea Gutiérrez, "Del rito al teatro: restos de representaciones litúrgicas en la provincia de Salamanca," in *Actas de las Jornadas sobre Teatro Popular en España*, edited by Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos and Antonio Cea Gutiérrez, Madrid, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1987 (Biblioteca de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares, 22), pp. 33-37; Sánchez Herrero, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 279 and 295; Rafael Martínez, "La función y paso del descendimiento de Cristo de la cofradía de San Francisco de Palencia," in *Actas del Primer Congreso Nacional de Cofradías de Semana Santa*, Zamora, Diputación Provincial, 1987, pp. 679-686, Wroth; *op. cit.*, pp. 21-23, and Susan Verdi Webster, "The Processional



Figure 9. Detail of articulated sculpture of the crucified/dead Christ below mural of penitential procession. South wall, church of the monastery of San Miguel, Huejotzingo (Puebla). Photo: S.V.W.

could be moved down to its sides when it was later carried in procession as the dead Christ. The articulated shoulders of these images were often covered with leather to hide the hinges.

These sculpted, articulated images of Christ are ubiquitous in Mexico. Not surprisingly, one such image is located in the church of the monastery of Huejotzingo in a glass sepulchre, appropriately placed directly below the penitential mural on the south wall (figures 1 and 9). The shoulders of the

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Sculpture of Penitential Confraternities in Early Modern Spain," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1992, chapter 3. See also *infra*, note 49.

49. The neighboring Franciscan monastery at Tlaxcala still maintains a sculpture of an articulated Christ that dates from the sixteenth century. The Descent ceremony is still performed with sculpted, articulated images in many of the smaller towns in the Valley of Puebla, notably Tlacotepec. On the Descent from the Cross, see Susan Verdi Webster, "The Descent from the Cross in Sixteenth-Century New Spain," *Early Drama, Art, and Music Review* (Kalamazoo), vol. 19, no. 2, 1997, pp. 69-85. In 1996, I wit-

sculpture display obvious articulations. The sculpture has been repainted so many times that, without closer analysis, it is difficult to determine its date.<sup>49</sup> However, if this sculpture was not the one used by the Vera Cruz confraternity during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, another very much like it must have been employed.

In Spain, the Descent ceremony was typically, though not exclusively, performed by confraternities of the Santo Entierro. Abbot Sánchez Gordillo has left a marvelously detailed description of a descent ceremony performed by the Santo Entierro confraternity at Seville during the late sixteenth century, which is worth transcribing at length:

[...] cada año, día de Jueves Santo a la hora de media noche, ponía en medio de lo alto de aquel collado, donde está el oratorio de Colón, la imagen de Cristo Nuestro Señor crucificado, acompañado de los dos ladrones en alto, y al pie de la cruz, [they placed] las imágenes de María Señora Nuestra y San Juan Evangelista, la Magdalena y las dos Marías con algunas luces, que con el silencio y la oscuridad de la noche, cuando a hora competente la gente acudía a ver tal espectáculo, les ponía notable reverencia y devoción la vista de aquel paso que de lejos y aun de cerca tenía representación viva y daba genero de pavor y respeto a cuantos le veían, pues volvían devotos y compungidos; [the tableaux] estaba así hasta la hora de las tres de la tarde [... when was] predicaba el misterio de la Cruz y el descendimiento que de ella se hizo del cuerpo de Jesucristo benditísimo por aquellos santos varones Nicodemo y José de Arimatea; y al tiempo que llegaba el predicador, se levantaban de entre el auditorio cuatro sacerdotes que estaban apercebidos y vestidos con albas y estolas de ornamentos de color negro, y levantaban unas escaleras y las arrimaban a la cruz y los dos de ellos, uno de una parte y otro de otra, subían por ellas, a hacer el Descendimiento del Cuerpo de Cristo

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nessed a ceremony of the Descent from the Cross performed with sculpted images in Antigua Guatemala, at the Franciscan establishment of the Escuela de Cristo. The entire ceremony was performed by members of the confraternity of the Escuela de Cristo. The sculptures used in the performance are said to have belonged to the nearby hermitage of the Vera Cruz in early colonial times (see Elizabeth Bell, *Lent and Easter Week in Antigua*, Antigua Guatemala, Antigua Tours Publications, 1995, p. 74). After the ceremony, the sculpture of the dead Christ is carried in a penitential procession which includes images of the Virgin and Saint John, and people dressed as archangels carrying the instruments of the Passion. When the procession returns to the church, the sculpture of the dead Christ is placed in a sepulchre located in a special room just off the cloister.

Nuestro Señor, que estaba en ella y con la forma conveniente, dando golpes a los clavos, ciñiendo el cuerpo con toallas curiosas y apropiadas [to support it], con mucha devoción y reverencia bajaban el cuerpo bendito y los otros dos que habían quedado abajo lo recibían y llevaban el Santo Cuerpo, y lo ponían en los brazos de la imagen de la Santísima Virgen, y de su compañía [...]. Amortajábanle allí los clérigos, con que lo llevaban luego los cofrades desde el lugar del Calvario al oratorio de su cofradía, el cuerpo e imagen de Cristo en unas andas muy compuestas y aderezadas preciosamente y desde allí [the chapel] se disponía [the procession of] el entierro en esta forma [...].<sup>50</sup>

This account clarifies several important aspects of the ceremony: it took place in an outdoor location near the confraternity's chapel (the oratory of Colón), the descent was performed by priests, and the procession took place soon afterwards, departing from the chapel of the confraternity. Many of the same elements present in this description appear in the mural of the Descent from the Cross at Huejotzingo, although it is clear that at the latter location, Franciscan friars performed the Descent ceremony.

Although this ritual was traditionally associated with confraternities of the Santo Entierro, there is ample evidence that confraternities of the Vera Cruz performed the ceremony as well. For example, an inventory of 1587 of a Sevillian confraternity of the Vera Cruz lists a sepulchre and two thieves, and notes that the remainder of the images are kept by a Franciscan friar.<sup>51</sup> Spa-

50. Sánchez Gordillo, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165. Sánchez Gordillo goes on to describe in great detail the penitential procession of the Santo Entierro that followed this representation. It is worth noting that, as Sánchez Gordillo reports, the Descent ceremony was prohibited in Seville by the Synod of 1604 because of "[...] algunos inconvenientes y errores por la malicia de los tiempos, pues lo que con simplicidad y devoción cristiana se hacía, lo han depravado los herejes, pretendiendo mostrar y dar a entender que los católicos daban a las imágenes el ser vivo de su representación figurativa; y que la imagen de Jesucristo que se descendía de la cruz, era el verdadero Jesucristo y que la imagen de su Santísima Madre que representaba en buscarla, era la verdadera Virgen María; y otros errores semejantes, y así se prohibieron estas representaciones en el sínodo referido de 1604 [...] y sólo ha quedado la forma y procesión del entierro quitando lo demás [...]": *ibidem*, pp. 167-168. Similar prohibitions were enacted in eighteenth-century Mexico. See "Las representaciones teatrales de la Pasión," *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* (Mexico), vol. 5, 1934, pp. 332-356.

51. Archivo de la Cofradía de la Santa Vera Cruz de Sevilla, "Quentas de maiordomos desde 1579 hasta 1589 y ymbentarios de vienes," n.p.

nish confraternities of the Vera Cruz in Andalusia, Córdoba, Málaga, and Castile performed the ceremony of the Descent during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and they possessed articulated sculptures of Christ, which were carried in procession, accompanied by the *arma Christi*, on Good Friday.<sup>52</sup> This tradition was continued among many New World confraternities of the Vera Cruz, and is documented among confraternities founded by the Franciscans in Nueva Galicia in the sixteenth century.<sup>53</sup>

The ceremony of the Descent from the Cross was thus the point of departure for the Good Friday rituals of confraternities of the Vera Cruz, and this traditional sequence of events was also undoubtedly followed in New Spain. In her discussion of Huejotzingo, Estrada de Gerlero attempts to link the murals in a ritual sequence, stating that the events “begin” on the south wall with the penitential procession and “end” on the north wall above the *porciúncula*, where the Descent from the Cross is depicted.<sup>54</sup> In terms of the narrative and ritual sequence, this reading does not make sense, since the Descent from the Cross must occur *before* the dead body of Christ is carried in procession. Estrada de Gerlero explains this temporal disjunction by viewing the murals in symbolic rather than literal terms.<sup>55</sup> However, the close

52. See, for example, many of the studies published in *Las cofradías de la Santa Vera Cruz. Actas del I Congreso Internacional de Cofradías de la Santa Vera Cruz*, Seville, Centro de Estudios e Investigación de la Religiosidad Andaluza, 1995, especially Juan Aranda Doncel, “Las hermandades de la Vera Cruz en Andalucía oriental durante los siglos XVI al XVIII,” pp. 163-181; Juan Aranda Doncel, “Las cofradías de la Vera Cruz en la diócesis de Córdoba durante los siglos XVI al XVII,” pp. 615-640, and César Jordá Sánchez, “La cofradía de la Vera Cruz de Requena,” pp. 761-771.

53. Wroth, op. cit., pp. 23-26. The tradition was brought to the northern frontier by the Franciscans, and the confraternities that they established (the *penitentes*) in the regions of present-day New Mexico and Colorado continue to perform the Descent from the Cross and its related penitential procession. For further information, see William Wroth, *Christian Images in Hispanic New Mexico*, Colorado Springs, Taylor Museum, 1982; Marta Weigle, *Brothers of Light, Brothers of Blood: The Penitentes of the Southwest*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico, 1976, and Dorothy Woodward, *The Penitentes of New Mexico*, New York, Arno, 1974.

54. Estrada de Gerlero, op. cit., pp. 647-648.

55. Ibidem. Despite minor misinterpretations, Estrada de Gerlero is the only scholar to recognize a relationship between the murals and the ritual activities performed at the monastery, and her important contributions to this and other aspects of colonial Mexican art must be recognized.

correspondence between the images and objects depicted in the murals and those recorded in the confraternity's inventories indicates that the relationship between image and ritual may have been far more concrete than Estrada de Gerlero allows. In fact, the relationship of the murals to the architectural spaces of the church and atrium suggests that the painted images actually formed one aspect of a larger, coherent iconographic program that was designed to reflect and reinforce the rituals of Holy Week.

Furthermore, the decoration of certain areas of the monastery appears to be organized in a logical sequence that mirrors the specific order in which the ritual activity occurred. This ritual sequence of events is reflected and informed by the pictorial and sculptural decoration of three major public areas of the monastery: the murals inside the church, the *porciúncula*, and the *posa* chapels in the atrium. The formal and iconographic relationship between these three areas suggest that they are functionally linked in terms of ritual.

Based on Spanish accounts of the Descent ceremony and its related penitential procession, together with evidence that they were practiced at Huejotzingo, it seems possible to suggest a reconstruction of the ritual sequence of events that occurred at the monastery during Holy Week, or more specifically, on Good Friday.

The iconographic and ritual sequence begins on the north wall, and the location of the mural of the Descent from the Cross above the *porciúncula* serves as a marker of ritual activity. It is surely no accident that the mural of the Descent from the Cross frames the *porciúncula*, and that elements of the doorway's exterior decoration also include Passional imagery (figure 10). The Descent ceremony was likely performed outside of the monastery, on the north side of the church beyond the *porciúncula*. The mural of the Descent ceremony, located inside above the north doorway acts as a visual marker, reflecting and reinforcing the ritual that took place immediately beyond.

This proposed location is logical, since the north side of a monastery was often reserved for the cemetery, an appropriate setting for the ritual.<sup>56</sup> However, recent archaeological discoveries at Huejotzingo have unearthed the existence of buildings constructed between the atrium wall and the

56. Inquisition documents from the eighteenth century confirm that cemeteries were typical locations for the ceremony of the Descent from the Cross in many areas. See "Las representaciones teatrales...", pp. 347 and 350.

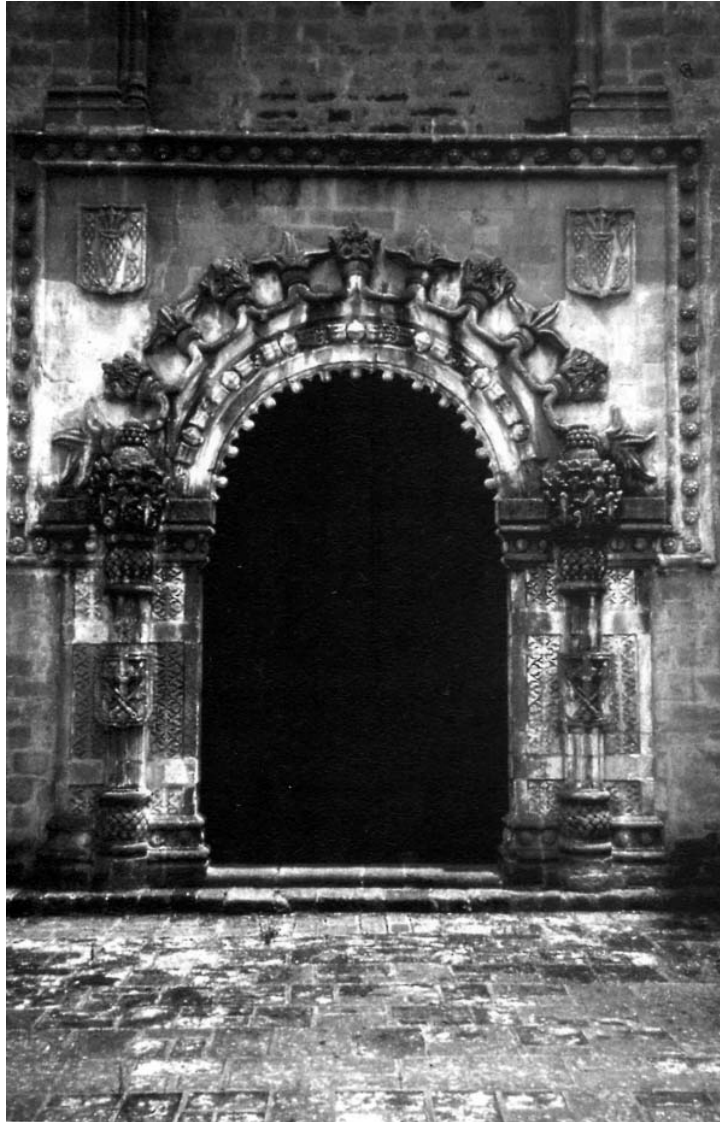


Figure 10. *Porciúncula*, church of the monastery of San Miguel, Huejotzingo (Puebla). Photo: S.V.W.

north side of the church, including a three-arched open chapel set on an elevated platform.<sup>57</sup> Constructed between 1530 and 1545, the open chapel was immediately adjacent to the north wall of the church, set back just to the east of the *porciúncula*. If the open chapel was still extant in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the area immediately before it would have made an excellent setting for the ritual, and the open chapel would have been an appropriate location for the reading of the sermon of the Descent.<sup>58</sup>

The Descent ceremony was performed by friars and attended by confraternity members, as depicted in the mural, while a sermon of the Descent was read. After being wrapped in a winding cloth and placed in the arms of the sculpture of the Virgin, the image of the dead Christ was then carried in procession by the friars into the church—through the *porciúncula*—which is apposite, since it is decorated with Passional iconography and represents the gateway to the Heavenly Jerusalem. Above the portal are two Franciscan shields of the five wounds, and flanking the portal are two large shields depicting crosses ringed by crowns of thorns and pierced by nails. Crossed keys, symbolizing the keys to the Heavenly Jerusalem, are superimposed on the shields that flank the portal. Smaller shields at the base of each column depict the cross and nails within the monogram of Jesus (figure 10).

The linked floral crown of the architrave corresponds to contemporary descriptions of ephemeral triumphal arches created by native confraternities for their processional routes.<sup>59</sup> Significantly, elements of the linked floral

57. Córdova Tello, op. cit., pp. 62-101.

58. It is worth mentioning, in this regard, that the hexagonal "open chapel" at Tlaxcala, whose function has been the subject of much scholarly discussion, was identified by Vetancurt, op. cit., p. 54, in the late seventeenth century, as an "hermita del Santo Sepulcro." Moreover, a plan of the Franciscan establishment at Tlaxcala executed before 1581 by Diego Muñoz Camargo, *Descripción de la Ciudad y Provincia de las Indias y del Mar Océano para el buen gobierno y ennoblecimiento dellas*, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México-Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, 1981, shows three crosses directly atop the hexagonal "open chapel." The three crosses themselves are set atop three hills of earth, and clearly are meant to represent Golgotha. Both Vetancurt's identification of it and Muñoz Camargo's association of the chapel with Golgotha suggest that it may have served as a stage for representations such as the Descent ceremony and the entombment during Holy Week.

59. See, for example, Richard Trexler, "We Think, They Act: Clerical Readings of Missionary Theatre in 16th Century New Spain," in *Understanding Popular Culture*, edited by Steven L. Kaplan, Berlin-New York-Amsterdam, Mouton Publishers, 1984, p. 206; Ricard, op. cit., p. 288, and Mendieta, op. cit., p. 430.

crown of the *porciúncula* once also crowned the top edges of the four *posa* chapels in the atrium, though much of this decoration has been damaged and is no longer in place.<sup>60</sup> It is also worth noting that the *alfiz* that surrounds the portal is adorned with precisely fifty-two rosettes, a number which is likely significant, since it corresponds to the number of years in the Mesoamerican calendar round.<sup>61</sup> Each fifty-two year period constituted a Mesoamerican “century,” and the transition from one round to another was understood by native people as a traumatic time of death and rebirth. Thus, the resonance with the Christian belief in the death and resurrection of Christ would be appropriate.

Passing through the *porciúncula*, the procession then moved into the church and to the altar, where the body of Christ was placed, and a sermon was likely delivered. A seventeenth-century version of the rules of the Vera Cruz confraternity at Huejotzingo suggests that a sermon is exactly what took place at this time. The section regarding the penitential procession specifically states that, “[...] porque se acuda al consuelo espiritual de los naturales [among us] pedimos se les exorte antes de salir en la lengua mexicana con una platica como siempre se a echo y que por el trabajo se de al P[adr]e predicador algun regalo de colasion [...].”<sup>62</sup>

This pause at the altar inside the church would be the first of five stations made in honor of the five wounds, the traditional processional format for confraternities of the Vera Cruz.<sup>63</sup> Inside the church, the procession was then formally organized in the manner depicted on the south wall mural and, mirroring the directional movement of the penitents in the mural, it proceeded out the main door of the church and into the atrium.

The four *posa* chapels that occupy the corners of the atrium must have been used as processional stops, since their decoration is almost uniformly

60. For this correspondence, see the early drawing of one of the *posa* chapels in García Granados and MacGregor, op. cit., p. 122.

61. I am grateful to Phyllis Messenger for bringing this to my attention.

62. APH, “Libro de la Cofradía de la Vera Cruz,” n.p. The phrasing in the Rule Book suggests that by the seventeenth century the membership of the confraternity included both Spaniards and natives.

63. See, for example, María Antonia Carmona Ruiz, “La cofradía de la Vera Cruz de Baeza. Siglos XVI-XVII,” in *Las cofradías de la Santa Vera Cruz. Actas del I Congreso Internacional de Cofradías de la Santa Vera Cruz*, Seville, Centro de Estudios e Investigación de la Religiosidad Andaluza, 1995, p. 664.



Figure 11. *Posa* chapel in the atrium of the church of the monastery of San Miguel, Huejotzingo (Puebla). Photo: S.V.W.

Passional in nature: each chapel has two façades decorated with angels carrying the *arma Christi* (figure 11). One of their functions must have been related to the commemoration of the Passion celebrated during Holy Week. Their use as processional stops for the sacramented body of Christ during Corpus Christi is well-documented, and, given the nature of their decoration, they must also have been used for the procession of the physical body of the dead Christ on Good Friday.

The *posa* chapels are equipped with visual cues that mark the direction of processional approach. Only on one side of the pyramidal top of each of the *posa* chapels does there appear the skull and crossbones (figure 12). Not only an appropriate funereal symbol, it is also a symbol of the Passion, for it represents the bones of Adam that often appear at the foot of the Cross in traditional scenes of the crucifixion, referring to Christ as the redeemer whose death on the cross provides salvation from the curse of original sin. Each of the *posa* chapels is topped by a cross, making the relationship to the crucifixion more explicit.

The presence of this motif on only one side of the *posa* chapels suggests

that the procession must have approached from that direction. The procession thus exited the church and turned right to move counterclockwise around the atrium. As the procession paused inside each chapel, the body of Christ would likely have been laid on the interior altar block and incensed, in the same way that the Eucharist was incensed and adored during Corpus Christi processions. Prayers or psalms might have been said, and then the procession would continue to the following *posa*, where the ritual would be repeated. The similar treatment of both the sacramental and the corporeal body of Christ would have made the symbolic relationship between the two abundantly clear for indigenous participants.

Passing through the following two *posa* chapels, we are only left to conjecture as to what might have occurred next. The sculpture of Christ was undoubtedly deposited in a sepulchre, since the confraternity listed one in its inventory. It is likely then, that following the tradition described by Sánchez Gordillo, the sepulchre was erected in the cloister garth. Several of the *testera* niches in the walls of the cloister walk are decorated, like the *posa* chapels, with angels holding the instruments of Passion. It is also worth recalling that the penitential murals at Teitipac are linked to a portal in the *portería* that leads from the atrium to the cloister, above which a scene of the Descent from the Cross is painted. Teitipac also has four well-preserved *posa* chapels. Thus the penitential procession likely terminated in the cloister with the placement of the dead Christ in the sepulchre.

The evidence confirms that a penitential confraternity of the Vera Cruz, comprised primarily of natives, was fostered by Franciscans friars at Huejotzingo in the sixteenth century, and that their ritual activities during Holy Week were reflected and informed by the sculptural and pictorial decoration of the church, *porciúncula*, and *posa* chapels. Counter to previous assumptions then, the evidence demonstrates that these spaces served multiple ritual functions, and that one of their most important roles, at least in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was the celebration of Holy Week. The decoration of these three areas of the monastery was not only iconographically appropriate, but it was also purposefully didactic—it was intended to instruct and reinforce ritual activities performed by a local confraternity comprised primarily of native members. The correspondence between the imagery of the murals and the inventories of the Vera Cruz confraternity indicates that the painted images are, to a great extent, a visual chronicle of the ritual activities performed by the confraternity at the monastery



Figure 12. Detail of *posa* chapel roof showing skull and crossbones. Photo: S.V.W.

during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What is both interesting and significant about the form and imagery of the murals, *porciúncula*, and *posa* chapels is that they have no direct Spanish prototypes. It was the great contribution of both the friars and the indigenous people to create this innovative and iconographically linked processional arena in response to specifically New World circumstances and requirements.

#### *Final considerations*

The documentary evidence regarding the Vera Cruz confraternity at Huejotzingo allows a time frame for the dating of the murals to be proposed, for it is probable that they were painted around the time of or shortly after the foundation of the confraternity, not only as models for conduct and appearance and as visual guides, but also to honor and document the rituals performed by that confraternity. Thus, we might hypothesize that the murals were painted sometime between 1571, when the church was comple-

ted, and 1592, the date of the earliest known document pertaining to the confraternity.

Social and economic reasons appear to support this hypothesis. Although Huejotzingo was reportedly a relatively impoverished area during pre-Hispanic times, by the last quarter of the sixteenth century the cochineal trade had made it a wealthy community.<sup>64</sup> After 1600, however, its fortunes declined dramatically with the cessation of cochineal production. The prosperous economic situation of the community in the last quarter of the century makes the period between 1571 and 1592 the most plausible time for the murals to have been undertaken. Moreover, the devastating effects of the plague, especially the severe outbreak of 1576, may also have encouraged the establishment of the penitential confraternity of the Vera Cruz (if it was not already extant), for epidemics were perceived as divine retribution for community transgressions.<sup>65</sup> During a period of local prosperity, a heightened awareness of sin and mortality resulting from the plague of 1576, and the need for expiation and penance in the form of flagellant processions,<sup>66</sup> created ideal conditions for the establishment of a confraternity of the Vera Cruz and the undertaking of an extensive mural program that recorded and honored their activities. ❀

64. McAndrew, op. cit., p. 511, and Raymond L. Lee, "Cochineal Production and Trade in New Spain to 1600," *The Americas* (Bethesda), vol. 4, no. 4, 1948, p. 465.

65. See, for example, Serge Gruzinski, *The Conquest of Mexico*, translated by Eileen Corrigan, Cambridge, Polity, 1993, pp. 81-86 and 241.

66. The standard European example in this regard is Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena After the Black Death*, Princeton, Princeton University, 1951.

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