Sixteenth-century Mexican Architecture

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Sixteenth-century Mexican Architecture: Transmission of Forms and Ideas between the Old and the New World*

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This article deals with the subject of 16th century Mexican monastic architecture and its artistic embellishments. Its aim is to present the architecture and its decoration program within an appropriate historical context, putting a particular emphasis on the process of cultural transmission and subsequent changes between the Old and the New World. Some attention is also paid to the European art of the modern age with regard to the discovery of America and its impact on the western worldview (*imago mundi*). The article concludes that the Mexican culture represents an example of a very successful and vivid translation of Western culture (*translatio studii*) towards the America, albeit it stresses that the process of cultural transmission was reciprocal.

KEYWORDS:
New Spain; Monastic Architecture; Monastery; Evangelization; 16th Century; Transmission of Culture; *translatio studii et imperii*

This article addresses 16th century Mexican monastic architecture and its decoration, which originated from the need to evangelize the native populations of Mesoamerica. In the first part of the text I will introduce the readers to the historical context connected with the nascency of the architecture of conversion. Thereafter, I will provide them with an idea of the process of evangelization emphasizing its obstacles and missionary methods. This will allow me to approach the subject of Mexican monastic architecture, paying attention to the question of its Occidental roots and models and their transmission towards the West. Similarly, I will shed light on the related Mesoamerican traditions and the mingling of these two cultures within the given architecture and art. Afterwards, I will stress the phenomenon of cultural transmission between the Old and the New World employing the concrete examples of monastic and western art of early modern age.

In 1519 Hernán Cortés (1485–1547) — a capable politician and an excellent military strategist — reached the coast of modern-day Mexico. In only two years he conquered the vast area of the powerful Aztec Empire that was situated in Central and Southern Mexico (although, in fact, it did not have any exact borders).[1] The origins

* This paper was written with the support of a CEFRES grant project (USR 3138 CRNS — MAEDI) together with the Charles University Research Developments Schemes PRVOUK, No. 12.

1 For the Aztec Empire see Ignacio BERNAL (ed.), *Historia general de México*, México, D. F. 2009, pp. 183–192; Josef OPATRNÝ, *Amerika v proměnách staletí* [America through the Ages], Praha 1998, pp. 504–508. For Aztecs, their culture, religion and daily life see

of the Aztec Empire, which is also known as the Triple Alliance, (it was an association of three city-states: Tenochtitlan, Texcoco and Tlacopan), go back to the 13th century B.C. The center of Aztec Empire was one of the Aztec city-states, Tenochtitlan,[2] which was founded in 1325. Tenochtitlan was situated in the Valley of Mexico, built over an island in salty waters of the Lake Texcoco and criss-crossed by a network of canals. In one hundred years it became the capital of the permanently expanding Aztec state. At the time of the Spaniards' arrival, it was a densely populated city with over 250,000 inhabitants. This was, for that time, a considerably big population. (For example, Paris, Constantinople and Naples hardly reached the number of 100,000 residents.) And it was so beautiful that the Spaniards often compared it to Venice. In 1521 Tenochtitlan was captured by the Spaniards led by Hernán Cortés and razed to the ground. That meant the real end of the Aztec Empire.

In 1521 Hernán Cortés founded Mexico City (from Spanish, *Ciudad de México*),[3] a new capital city constructed on the ruins of Tenochtitlan [Fig. 1] and named in honor of the Aztecs, who referred to themselves as Mexica or Tenochca. Step by step, he gained control over the continental territory in North and Central America. Nevertheless, as time went by he lost his dominance over the overseas colony, which had been gradually substituted by a system of colonial administration subordinated directly to the Spanish Crown. Since 1524 there were present royal officials (appointed by Spanish Crown)[4] and they were tasked with inspecting the process of conquest[5]

George Clapp VAILLANT, *Aztékové. Původ, vzestup a pád národa Aztéků* [Aztecs of Mexico. Origin, Rise, and Fall of the Aztec Nation], Praha 1974.

2 J. OPATRNÝ, *Amerika*, pp. 392–395; David CARRASCO, *Náboženství Mezoameriky. Kosmovize a obřadní centra* [Religions of Mesoamerica. Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers], Praha 1998, pp. 62–63.

3 Alfonso TORO, *Compendio de historia de México. La dominación española*, México, D. F. 1967, pp. 197–199.

4 They were a treasurer (from Spanish, *tesorero*), an accountant (from Spanish, *contador*), a factor, who supervised the Indian tribute collection, and eventually an observer (from Spanish, *veedor*) who was in charge of *quinto* collection, i.e. the royal fifth of all gold and silver mined in the territory of the Spanish colony. See Josef OPATRNÝ, *Mexiko*, Praha 2003, p. 39; A. TORO, *Compendio*, p. 201.

5 According to most historians, the conquest of Mexico began in 1519 and it ended in the 1550s. However, certain historians think that the conquest of some Mexican territories only ended during the 20th century with the construction of modern roads in remote regions such as the Lacandon Jungle in Chiapas. Some of the classical works about the conquest of Mexico are represented by e.g. Pierre CHAUNU, *Conquête et exploitation des nouveaux mondes (XVIe siècle)*, Paris 1969; William HICKLING PRESCOTT, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*, Virginia 2001. For the course of the conquest see I. BERNAL (ed.), *Historia*, pp. 231–381; A. TORO, *Compendio*, pp. 63–188. For the conquest of Mexico from the point of view of its native population see Miguel LEÓN-PORTILLA (ed.), *Conquista pohledem poražených: vyprávění indiánů o dobytí Mexika* [The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico], Červený Kostelec 2013. Also Inga Clendinnen offers an interesting point of view on the Conquest of Mexico stressing the misinterpretation of natives' behaviour and Post-Columbian written sources caused by Eurocentrism, see Inga

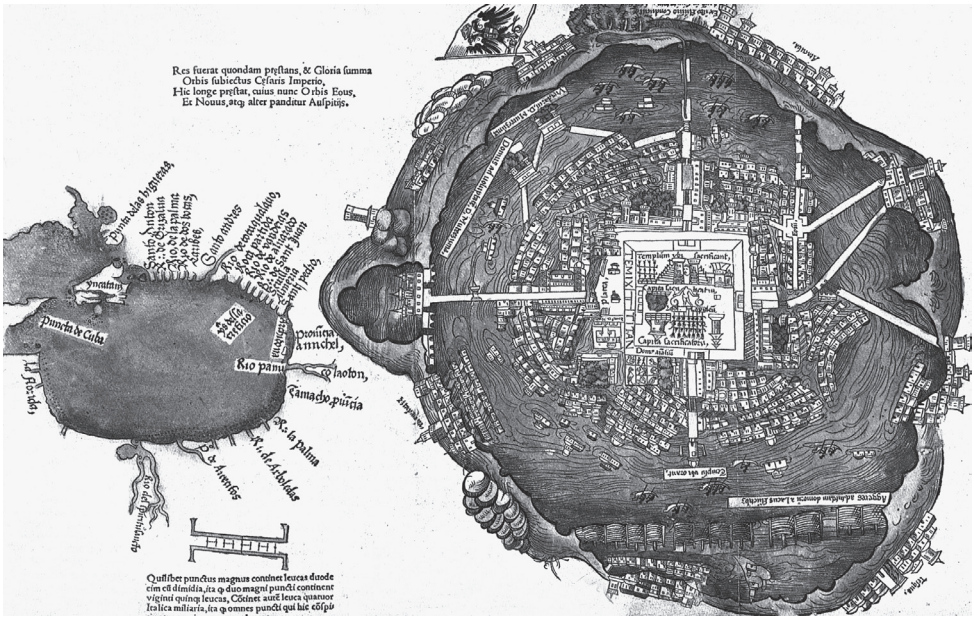

FIG. 1: 1524 Nuremberg map of Tenochtitlan. This map is believed to have been drawn by Cortés himself or by someone from his entourage. Colorized woodcut, printed in 1524 in Nuremberg, Germany with a Latin edition of his second letter (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_Tenochtitlan,_1524.jpg).

and colonisation of Spanish territories. However, the initial system of colonial administration was seen very soon as insufficient and the Crown of Spain decided to replace and reinforce it. Eventually, after the foundation of the Viceroyalty of New Spain in 1535, Cortés decided to return home and leave Mexico for good.

The Viceroyalty of New Spain (1535–1821)[6] formed till the 18th century one of two territorial administrative units — together with the Viceroyalty of Peru (1542–1824) — of the Spanish overseas territories in America. Its territory included North and Central America, Caribbean Islands (Cuba, Hispaniola, Jamaica) and the Philippines. It was governed by viceroys elected by the Crown of Spain and its territory was divided into provinces and General Captaincies (from Spanish, *Capitanía general*).

The Aztecs formed together with the Maya the most advanced pre-Columbian cultures of the Mesoamerican cultural area.[7] At the time of arrival of the Spaniards, Me-

CLENDINNEN, *Cortés, Signs, and the Conquest of Mexico*, in: Ann Blair — Anthony Grafton, The Transmission of Culture in Early Modern Europe, Philadelphia 1990, pp. 87–130.

6 See J. OPATRNÝ, *Amerika*, pp. 392–395.

7 In cultural anthropology, the notion of a cultural area refers to a geographical area with a relatively homogenous human, i.e. cultural activity. The concept was developed mainly by Clark Wissler and Alfred L. Kroeber. Alfred L. KROEBER (ed.), *Anthropology Today. An Encyclopedic Inventory*, Chicago 1965, pp. 66–67, 262–263, 320–323, 477–479. Mesoamerica

soamerica was characterized not only by an unusual ethnic groups (Mixtec, Nahua, Otomi, Zapotec, Maya, Tzeltal and Tzotzil) and linguistic diversity (Zapotec, Purepecha, Nahuatl, and Mayan languages Yucatec, Chontal and Huasteco), but also by a set of common cultural elements such as agriculture based on the cultivation of corn, pumpkins and beans, pictographic, hieroglyphic writings and cyclical time accompanied by an exhaustive study of celestial bodies and their motions related to a complex calendar system,[8] construction of the temple-pyramids[9] and human sacrifices.[10]

The process of conquering, colonization and evangelization of America required the movement of men (missionaries, conquerors, colonizers and other explorers and adventurers), ideas (for example: Catholic religion, western morals or western law) and forms (architecture and arts), crafts (smithery, carpentry or masonry), plants (wheat, vine and olive), domestic and farm animals (cows, sheep and pigs) and agriculture (fertilization, sowing, ploughing and harvesting). Nevertheless, the Spaniards obstinately refused to adapt to the local customs and way of life. They kept wearing hot continental clothes made from heavy and often sumptuous fabrics, which they preferred to local costumes made of light airy cotton. The same goes for food, as they continued to eat solely meat, wheat flour, wine and olive oil while the indigenous people lived on corn, beans, pumpkins and chili peppers. Despite the fact

is an anthropological concept designating the region of North and part of Central America (Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras and Costa Rica) where an array of advanced civilizations (Aztec and Maya civilizations) with common cultural elements was formed. For the notion and description of the Mesoamerican cultural area see D. CARRASCO, *Náboženství*, pp. 11–14; J. OPATRNÝ, *Amerika*, pp. 340–341. The notion of Mesoamerica comes from a Mexican anthropologist with German origins Paul Kirchhoff, who introduced it in 1940s. Paul KIRCHHOFF, *Mesoamérica: sus límites geográficos, composición étnica, y caracteres culturales*, Acta Americana 1, 1943, pp. 92–107.

8 The Mesoamerican cultures knew and used two calendars. The Nahuas used a ritual calendar called *tonalpohualli* and a solar calendar known as *xiuhpohualli*. While the *xiuhpohualli* calendar was based on the solar cycle (and as such it had three hundred and sixty-five days), the ritual calendar *tonalpohualli* was based on the lunar cycle (and it had only two hundred and sixty days) and regulated the agricultural, social as well as religious life of the Nahuatl speaking cultures. Furthermore, every 52nd year the Aztecs celebrated the end of a cycle with a New Fire ceremony called *xiuhmolpilli*, which was conceived as a symbolic restoration of time and thus also as a beginning of the next calendar cycle. See Paul GENDROP, *Diccionario de arquitectura mesoamericana*, México, D. F. 1997, p. 40; G. C. VAILLANT, *Aztékové*, pp. 121–122.

9 A temple-pyramid has the form of a stepped pyramid on top of which stood a small temple, hence the term. Thus, in contrast to the Egyptian or Mesopotamian pyramids, the main function of the Mesoamerican ones was not sepulchral but religious. Although, one of the most famous Mesoamerican stepped pyramids, the Temple of the Inscriptions at the Maya site of Palenque, was conceived as sepulchral. See P. GENDROP, *Diccionario*, pp. 160, 197; G. C. VAILLANT, *Aztékové*, pp. 134–143.

10 For human sacrifices see Zuzana Marie KOSTIĆOVÁ — Markéta KŘÍŽOVÁ — Sylvie KVĚTINOVÁ, *Krvavé rituály střední a jižní Ameriky* [Bloody Rituals of Central and South America], Praha 2011.

that the Spaniards pretended during the whole colonial period living on the Old Continent, the process of cultural exchanges was reciprocal. Each idea or category was transformed after crossing the boundaries of the American continent and acquired a new form after being enriched with new cultural and symbolical features of the strong and vivid Mesoamerican traditions, as shown in the Mexican monastic architecture. This transfer of animals, plants, cultures, peoples, technologies and ideas between the American and Eurasian continents in the 15th and 16th centuries is known as the Columbian or Grand Exchange. This term, introduced to the western historiography in 1972 by the American historiographer Alfred W. Crosby, was quickly adopted by other historians and became widely known and used.[11]

Evangelization[12] accompanied the process of conquering the overseas territories from its very beginning. Its aim was the salvation of Indian souls, the integration of natives into the colonial society and the legitimization of armed occupation of a foreign territory. After all, the fact that it was termed "spiritual conquest", speaks volumes about the close and mutual relation between the military conquest of America and the efforts to Christianize its native population. Ultimately, the reality that contemporary Mexican society rests on the Catholic religion and the official and main language is Spanish, is a cogent reason for claiming that the process of military and spiritual conquest was successful. It implies that the process of Christianization of Amerindians can be rightfully conceived as the process of cultural translation (*translatio studii*), which was accompanied and supported by the translation of the imperial power (*translatio imperii*) represented by the Monarchy of Spain.[13] However, as stated below, the strong syncretism of Mexican culture, which is deeply rooted in pre-Columbian times, shows that the process of cultural transmissions was not unidirectional, but reciprocal.

The mission of Christianization of the aboriginal population of New Spain was entrusted to three missionary orders: Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians.[14] It should be noted that the process of evangelization wasn't initially successful because the mendicant orders had to face various problems such as a significant dispersion

11 Alfred W. CROSBY, *The Columbian Exchange. Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Contributions in American Studies 2), Westport 1973.

12 For the evangelization of Mexico see a seminal monograph by Robert RICARD, *La conquista espiritual de México. Ensayo sobre el apostolado y los métodos misioneros de las órdenes mendicantes en la Nueva España de 1523–24 a 1572*, México 1947. Or later works Lino GÓMEZ CANEDO, *Evangelización, cultura y promoción social*, México 1993; IDEM, *Evangelización y conquista. Experiencia franciscana en Hispanoamérica*, México 1977; José María KOBAYASHI, *La educación como conquista. Empresa franciscana en México*, México 1996.

13 Jacques LE GOFF, *Kultura středověké Evropy* [Time, Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages], Praha 1991, p. 55.

14 Until the arrival of the Jesuits in 1566 which the Spanish Crown also considered a missionary order from 1568. Pedro BORGES, *Religiosos en Hispanoamérica*, Madrid 1992. For the missionary labour of the Jesuits see John Augustine DONOHUE, *After Kino. Jesuit Missions in Northwestern New Spain 1711–1767*, Rome 1969; Charles W. POLZER, *Rules and Precepts of the Jesuit Missions of Northwestern New Spain*, Tucson 1976.

of the indigenous population (living mainly in the mountains), language barriers, or simply a lack of missionaries[15] and European architects and craftsmen who could have helped with the construction of the architecture of conversion.

These problems led the representatives of the missionary orders to join forces within the so-called "Holy Union" (from Spanish, *Unión Santa*)[16] which, in collaboration with the first viceroy Antonio de Mendoza (1490–1552), created a complete system of missionary methods based on the study of the indigenous languages, resettlement of the Indians from the mountains to the fertile agricultural areas, and on the integration of selected elements and practices from the indigenous cultures.[17] In addition, they designed a so-called "moderate plan" (from Spanish, *Traza moderada*).[18] That was a simple monastic ground plan which made the process of construction of monasteries become considerably easier and faster. Thus, in a few decades, the missionaries succeeded in covering the whole territory of New Spain by a web of monasteries, *visita*[19] churches and chapels (structures founded in villages attended by monks according to a regular schedule but not inhabited) and roads, which enabled a small number of missionaries to evangelize an incomparably larger number of natives [Fig. 2]. The agreement was made in 1541 and became crucial for the process of evangelization of Mexico, since it facilitated the unification and standardization of missionary methods and hence it contributed to the acceleration of the process of conversion of the Indians to the Catholic faith.

15 According to R. Ricard, in 1559 there were 380 Franciscans, 210 Dominicans and 212 Augustinians in New Spain. According to an exhaustive study by Sherburne Cook and Woodrow Borah, by 1518 the Indian population of Central Mexico stood at 25.2 million people. However, during the 16th century the number of the native population declined sharply. Woodrow Wilson BORAH — Sherburne F. COOK, *The Aboriginal Population of Central Mexico on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, Berkeley 1963, pp. 88, 157; R. RICARD, *La conquista*, pp. 180–184.

16 Ibid., p. 232; Gloria ESPINOSA SPÍNOLA, *Arquitectura de la conversión y evangelización en la Nueva España durante el siglo XVI*, Almería 1999, pp. 16, 44, 80.

17 The missionary methods used by regular clergy to evangelize the native population of New Spain can be divided in the following manner: Catechism, preaching and religious literature in native languages, Catalan and Latin; fine arts with didactic purposes used as *Biblia pauperum*; religious theatre in native languages, Catalan and Latin; and eventually, European music (e.g. choral music) often mixed with pre-Columbian dances (especially in the case of the Franciscans). See Pedro BORGES, *Métodos misionales en la cristianización de América. Siglo XVI*, Madrid 1960; Monika BRENIŠÍNOVÁ, *Význam představ o konci světa v procesu dobývání a kolonizace Ameriky* [The Significance of Ideas about the End of the World in the Process of Conquest and Colonization of America], Praha 2009, pp. 28–36.

18 For the "moderate plan", see ibid., pp. 58, 62; Rafael CÓMEZ RAMOS, *Arquitectura y feudalismo en México. Los comienzos del arte novohispano en el siglo XVI*, México 1989, p. 79; Christian DUVERGER, *Agua y fuego. Arte sacro indígena de México en el siglo XVI*, México 2003, p. 54; G. ESPINOSA SPÍNOLA, *Arquitectura*, pp. 17, 74.

19 It is a term of Mexican history and history of art, used in American historiography, similar to vicarage.

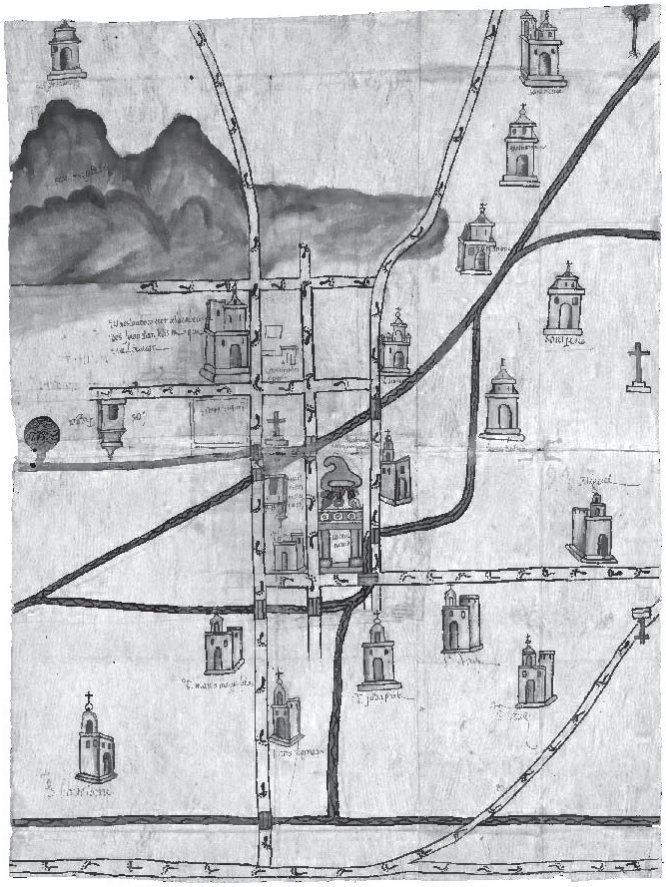

FIG. 2: Map of Culhuacan. On this map we see a web of monasteries and ***visita*** churches and chapels. It forms part of ***Relaciones geográficas*** (1578–1586, written by René Acuña), 1580 (https://www.wdl.org/es/item/457/).

Despite the fact that the "moderate plan" has not survived up to the present, we can reconstruct it on the basis of the monastic architecture, which still remains there [Fig. 3]. A Mexican monastery can be divided into two parts: external enclosure and internal enclosure. While the outside enclosure was dedicated to the evangelization of indigenous people, the inner space served for the needs of the proper order and thus it didn't vary from the Western monastic architecture. In general, the internal enclosure housed a single-nave monastery church and a simple two-storey convent. Thus the external enclosure is more interesting from the western point of view, since its layout is innovative and not commonly known in Europe.[20]

20 For the 16th century New Spain monastic architecture and its features, see Gauvin Alexander BAILEY, *Art of Colonial Latin America*, London 2005, pp. 217–224; M. BRENIŠÍNOVÁ, *Význam*, pp. 61–71; Carlos CHANFÓN OLMOS (ed.), *Historia de la arquitectura y el urbanismo mexicanos*, México 1997, pp. 283–359; R. CÓMEZ RAMOS, *Arquitectura*, pp. 79–82; Ch. DUVERGER, *Agua*, pp. 102–219; Pablo DE CEULENEER DE GANTE, *La arquitectura de México en el siglo XVI*, México 1954, pp. 71–152; John McANDREW, *The Open-Air Churches of Sixteenth-*

FIG. 3: Monastery of San Francisco. In the photograph we see a small monasterial church, cloister and open chapel within the monastery building. Tlahuelilpan, Hidalgo, 16th century (© Daniel Pajas).

This space consisted of a walled courtyard called atrium (from Spanish, *atrio*; originally it was called "patio", the term "atrio" became common in the early 17th century) and adjacent farm buildings. The atrium was usually accessible through three arched gates. It featured four corner chapels called posa (from Spanish, *capilla posa*). These architectonic structures were mainly used during religious processions for resting. In the heart of the atrium stood a monumental stone atrial cross (from Spanish, *cruz atrial*) that was frequently carved with the Instruments of Passion (*Arma Christi*).[21]

Century Mexico. Atrios, Posas, Open Chapels, and Other Studies, Cambridge 1965, pp. 121–597; George A. KUBLER, *Arquitectura mexicana del siglo XVI*, México 1983, pp. 349–437; G. ESPINOSA SPÍNOLA, *Arquitectura*, pp. 59–111.

21 For iconography of the Instruments of Passion see Jan BALEKA, *Výtvarné umění. Výkladový slovník. Malířství, sochařství, grafika* [Monolingual Dictionary of Art. Painting, Sculpture, Graphics], Praha 1997, p. 223; Udo BECKER, *Slovník symbolů* [Dictionary of Symbols], Praha 2007, p. 187; James HALL, *Slovník námětů a symbolů ve výtvarném umění* [Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art], Praha — Litomyšl 2008, p. 295; Luis MONREAL Y TEJADA, *Iconografía del cristianismo*, Barcelona 2000, pp. 505–506.

Then there was an open chapel[22] (from Spanish, *capilla abierta*) — a religious structure which was opened to the atrium and which represented the dominant feature of the whole area.

In 16th century New Spain monastic architecture represents a remarkable example of translation of Occidental culture from the Old to the New World, as it sparks a spirited and long-running debate among historians and art historians concerning the possible roots and models of the Mexican architecture of conversion. One of the most open-ended questions is the phenomenon of fortification. Actually, this architecture is also known as "fortified monasteries" (from Spanish, *conventos-fortaleza*).[23] In general, we divide the existent opinions into three groups. First, some scholars assert that this architecture served for defense (M. Toussaint, R. Ricard, L. Mac Gregor). Second, it had a simple decorative function (G. Kubler, G. Tovar y Teresa). Third, the function of the fortification is symbolic as it represents the power of the Spanish Empire (J. McAndrew, R. Cómez) or New Jerusalem (S. Sebastián). Personally, I think that the third statement applies primarily to the Franciscan order, whose mentality was showing significant marks of millenarianism.[24]

In this manner we could proceed with each individual element of this architecture. For example, the researchers who are concerned with the Mexican monastery atriums mention not only the early Christian architecture, but also the Muslim one. They speak about the early Christian basilicas with atriums designated for pagan neophytes and catechumens and the Muslim hypostyle mosques, which had open façades and colonnades added to accommodate the growing congregations that were formed in medieval Spain. Furthermore, some of them, in the context of the three arched gates, which served as the main entrances to the monasteries, convey the ancient idea of the triumphal arch.

Now, let's turn our attention to this unique architecture from the perspective of the native Mesoamerican culture. Before the Spaniards' arrival, the religious life of the Mesoamerican civilizations was lived in the open air. A typical Mesoamerican cult complex[25] consisted of a temple-pyramid built on a large platform, several other

22 The typology of Mexican open chapels differs. Probably, the most complete distinction is offered by the Spanish art historian Gloria Espinosa Spínola. She proposes a typology based on the ground plans: 1) a one-room chapel built on a square or rectangular ground plan (e.g. Actopan); 2) a chapel of polygonal ground plan (e.g. Huejotzingo and Tlaxcala); 3) a chapel as part of a cloister (e.g. Huaquechula and Tecamachalco); 4) an open chapel which is supplemented by another space such as sacristy, baptistery or a whole presbytery (this arrangement is characteristic of the vicarage); 5) a chapel consisting of two rooms, one of them serving as a presbytery and the other as a transept; 6) a chapel on a centralized plan with several naves (e.g. Cholula). G. ESPINOSA SPÍNOLA, *Arquitectura*, pp. 31–36, 99–102.

23 Comp. Richard PERRY, *Mexico's Fortress Monasteries*, Santa Barbara 1993.

24 Regarding the millenarian mentality of the Franciscan Order see John Leddy PHELAN, *The Millenial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World. A Study of the Writings of Gerónimo de Mendieta (1525–1604)*, Berkeley 1956.

25 For the definition of the Mesoamerican cult complex see D. CARRASCO, *Náboženství*, p. 223. Some of the most important cult complexes of Mesoamerica are described in Enrique FLORESCANO, *Memoria indígena*, México 1999, pp. 79–216.

houses of gods, palaces of priests and nobility, and, in general, four small shrines situated in the corners of the sacred precinct. This architectural arrangement comes from the organization of the Mesoamerican society. Thus the Aztecs (and the majority of Nahua peoples and other ethnic groups subordinated to them) were originally divided into four clannish villages called *calpulli*[26] according to the four cardinal points [Fig. 4]. In the course of time the *calpulli* became not only the units of the Aztec social organization, but also the units of the Aztec city-states called *altepetl*[27] in the manner of urban wards. Each *calpulli* was responsible for different religious tasks and had its own temple within the complex. And at regular intervals, they made religious processions between them with the purpose of the ritual world renewal.[28]

The construction of atriums allowed the missionaries to follow in some way indigenous traditions, such as processions, ritual dances called *mitote*, markets termed *tianguis*, and other outdoor rituals. The aim of such a practice was to facilitate the conversion of indigenous people by the assimilation of selected features of their old religious tradition and to foster the appreciation of the Christian faith. Thus, in times of conquest and evangelization of Mexico, the Indians attended Catholic sermon and liturgy in the atrium, while a missionary preached and celebrated mass from the outdoor chapel. Imagining a Mexican monastery as a church, we can thus compare an atrium to a nave and an open chapel to a presbytery. In due course we realize how greatly the western monasteries built on the territory of the former Aztec Empire combined the Occidental and Mesoamerican ideas and forms.

The uniqueness of the Mexican monastic architecture consists not only in the standardized moderate plan, which makes a more compact impression than those that we are used to in Europe, but primarily in the use of the atrium, which is based on both traditions as we have just seen. This mixing of cultures is evidenced by the fact that many monastery buildings were constructed on the ruins of pre-Columbian cult complexes on former temple-pyramid platforms, which can be frequently seen up to the present. An interesting example of this cultural mingling is provided by a sculptural relief depicting a pre-Columbian warrior [Fig. 5], which makes part of the Huaquechula church's masonry and demonstrates that this monasterial church of San Martín was built directly on a site of a pre-Columbian cult complex.

Besides the architecture, the monastic art represents another example of the circulation of ideas and forms between the New and the Old World. During the 16th century

26 The term *calpulli* means in Nahuatl "large house". It designates an Aztec society organization unit, which refers to a city quarter, land holding or group of craftsmen. It comes from the original clannish organization of Mesoamerican societies. For the definition of the notion see Yólotl GONZÁLEZ TORRES, *Diccionario de mitología y religión de Mesoamérica*, México 1995, pp. 33–34.

27 The world *altepetl* (from Nahuatl, *atl* — water and *tepetl* — mountain) means in Nahuatl "mountain full of water" and it denotes Aztec city-states, towns or villages. For the definition see D. CARRASCO, *Náboženství*, p. 221.

28 The tradition of processions has existed both in the West and in the Mesoamerican world. Thus we can meet with some pre-Columbian motifs within the Catholic processions up to the present. Ibid., pp. 116–19, 194–201.

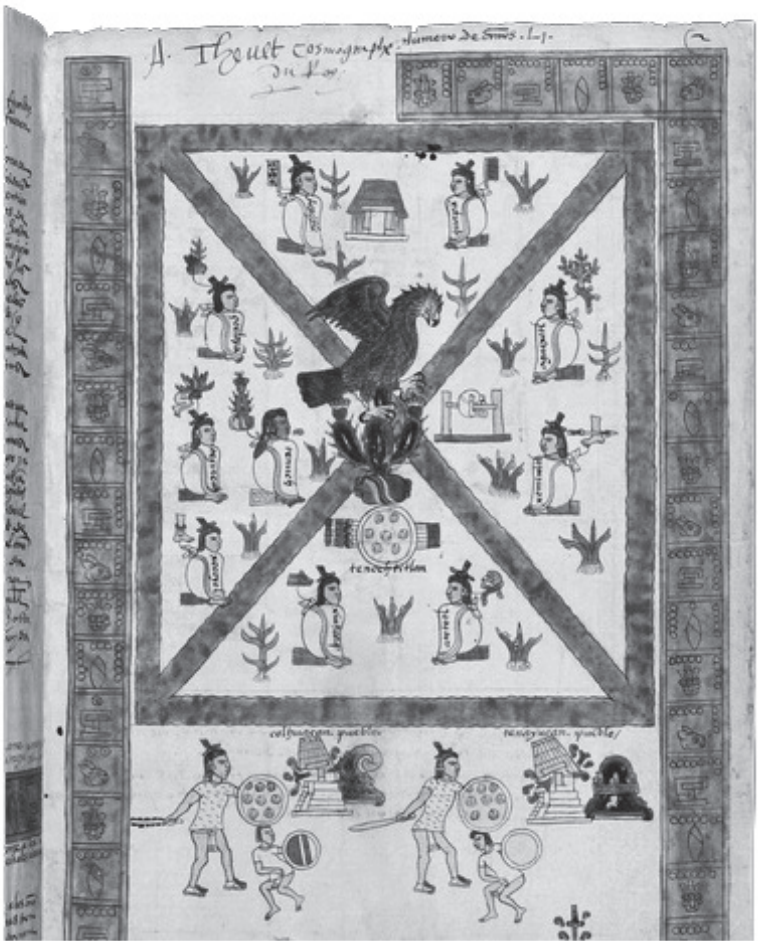

FIG. 4: *Codex Mendoza*, Fol. 2r. On the first page of this Aztec colonial codex we see Tenochtitlan divided into four parts (Teopan, Moyotlan, Cepopan, Atzacualco). Mexico City, 1535 (http://codicemendoza.inah.gob.mx).

the missionaries founded a number of monastic schools with the aim to train young Indians in a variety of crafts, professions and arts in order to construct evangelical architecture and provide it with art decoration. One of the most famous monastic schools was the School of San José de los Naturales, which was established in México by the promoter of the artistic training in New Spain, a Flemish missionary Pedro de Gante.[29] Young Indians learned there under the guidance of missionaries western artistic techniques (linear perspective and realism), which they often combined with pre-Columbian ones (native pigments, mordants and planiform relief sculpture), symbols (e.g. human feet signifying roads) and glyphs (e.g. the glyph *altépetl* representing a town or village, *calli* symbolizing a house and speech scrolls). This Mexican colonial style, meaning art which reflects or preserves the Mesoamerican aesthetics while communicat-

29 Concerning the personage of Pedro de Gante and his educative work see Ramón CRUCES CARVAJAL, *La obra educativa de Pedro de Gante en Tezcoco*, México 1980; Ernesto TORRE VILLAR, *Fray Pedro de Gante. Maestro y civilizador de América*, México 1973.

FIG. 5: A pre-Columbian relief depicting a warrior with a mask of a Tlaloc divinity. The fighter is holding in his right hand a war shield called ***chimalli*** pierced by four arrows and in his left hand he is wielding a spear. The relief was made ca. 1200–1500 BC. Monasterial church of San Martín, Huaquechula, México, 16th century (© Monika Brenišínová).

ing Christian concepts, has been variously labeled as "tequitqui" (from Spanish, *arte tequitqui*), Indochristian art (from Spanish, *arte indocristiano*) or simply mestizo.[30]

As an example of the Indochristian artistic production we can take a comparison of the Last Judgment[31] depiction in 16th century New Spain and in the Old

30 The term "tequitqui" art refers to the work of Indian artists under Spanish rule and it was introduced by a Mexican historian and essayist, José Moreno Villa in 1947. It is composed from Spanish term art (*arte*) and Nahuatl world for a payer of tribut (*tequitqui*). The term is translated as vassal art and it was created by analogy with the term Mudéjar art, which refers to Christian-Arab art of medieval Spain. José MORENO VILLA, *La escultura colonial mexicana*, México 1986; *Vocabulario arquitectónico ilustrado*, México, 1975, pp. 416–417. The term "arte indocristiano" was coined by the Mexican historian Cristiano Reyes-Valerio in 1978. For the Indochristian art and the discussion about the appropriate terminology see G.A. BAILEY, *Art*, pp. 79–97; Pablo ESCALANTE GONZALBO (ed.), *El arte cristiano-indígena del siglo XVI novohispano y sus modelos europeos*, Cuernavaca 2008; Constantino REYES-VALERIO, *Arte indocristiano*, México 2000.

31 For the iconography of the Last Judgement see J. BALEKA, *Výtvarné umění*, p. 283; Danielle FOUILLOUX et al., *Slovník biblické kultury* [Dictionary of Biblical Culture], Praha

World.[32] It is particularly interesting that the New Spain Last Judgment iconography lacks always the same motifs, e.g. the figure of Saint Michael the Archangel[33] with a set of scales or the image of Satan. The reality that the monastic orders abandoned the image of Saint Michael the Archangel with a set of scales can be explained by the fact that the Indians didn't know it, at least at the time of the Spanish arrival. The image of Satan was probably left out in an effort to underpin the monotheistic form of the Christian faith while the anonymity of demons and other infernal creatures could serve for the "demonization" of the pre-Columbian deities. Nevertheless, the monastery artistic decoration included also images and elements originated from the Mesoamerican culture such as the images of Indians distinguishable because of their dark pigmentation and traditional clothes, Mexican flora and fauna (cactuses, magueys, jaguars, eagles), symbols (the Sun and the Moon), and glyphs as we have just seen. The purpose of this practice was to capture their attention, draw them into the story and bring them to the conversion. Although the content of the Indochristian art was Christian, in reality the process of cultural changes was more intricate and reciprocal as Serge Gruzinski, a French historian, pointed out in his famous works *La colonización de lo imaginario* and *La guerra de las imágenes*.[34] The complexity of mutual exchanges between America and Europe is demonstrated by the cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe (from Spanish, *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*) — a young mestizo Virgin Mary that has become the patroness of the Mexican nation.[35] Her original representation in oil painting that was allegedly made on an Indian traditional coat called *tilma*, which was made from *ixtle*, an agave fiber, is to be seen at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Basilica, which is situated in the north of Mexico City, has always been one of the most frequented place of religious pilgrimage in Mexico. This fact is of particular interest when we take into consideration that it was built directly on the ruins of Aztec temple of the mother goddess Tonantzin, which had been destroyed by the Spaniards soon after their arrival. It is evident that the pre-Columbian foundation of this cult has contributed to a large degree to its immense popularity maintained up to the present.

1992, pp. 184–185; Rosa GIORGI, *Angels and Demons in Art*, Los Angeles 2005, pp. 206–213; J. HALL, *Slovník*, pp. 363–366; L. MONREAL Y TEJADA, *Iconografía*, pp. 509–511; Jan ROYT, *Slovník biblické ikonografie* [Dictionary of Biblical Iconography], Praha 2006, p. 239.

32 M. BRENIŠÍNOVÁ, *Význam*, pp. 86–140.

33 For the iconography of Saint Michael the Archangel see J. BALEKA, *Výtvarné umění*, pp. 27, 223; D. FOUILLOUX et al., *Slovník*, p. 139; R. GIORGI, *Angels*, pp. 61–62; J. HALL, *Slovník*, pp. 271–272; L. MONREAL Y TEJADA, *Iconografía*, pp. 357–360; J. ROYT, *Slovník*, pp. 22–24.

34 Serge GRUZINSKI, *La Colonización de lo imaginario. Sociedades indígenas y occidentalización en el México español. Siglos XVI–XVIII*, México 2013; IDEM, *La Guerra de las imágenes. De Cristóbal Colón a "Blade Runner" (1492–2019)*, México 2006.

35 For the history of the cult and representation of Our Lady of Guadalupe see Radoslav HLÚŠEK, *Nican mopohua. Domorodý príbeh o zjavení Panny Márie Guadalupskej* [Native Story of the Apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe], Bratislava 2014; Karel Pavel MRÁČEK, *Zjevení Panny Marie v Mexiku* [Apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico], Olomouc 2000. For its iconography see L. MONREAL Y TEJADA, *Iconografía*, p. 163.

Not only the Mexican Indochristian artistic production but also the European early modern art bear witness to the reciprocity of the process of cultural transmission between the Old and the New World. As an example we can take the graphics of Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) and the canvases of later European masters such as Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) and Maarten de Vos (1532–1603), whose paintings were alive with the pictures of parrots,[36] those beauteous birds with extraordinary colored feathers which became by dint of their playful character a new symbol of paradise[37] and exotic fruits (maracuja, known also as passion fruit, pineapple) of every extravagant taste and every color of the rainbow representing fruits of paradise and life in affluence. These pieces of art show that America was during the 16th and 17th centuries conceived as heaven on earth.[38] Nevertheless, the discovery of America did not begin only the quest for earthly paradise and exoticism; the overseas discoveries led also to the development of technologies and hence to the growing importance of science and observation as such. Well-educated and wealthy men founded so-called cabinets of curiosities (from German, *die Wunderkammer*), which soon became popular subjects of paintings. In these paintings we can observe cabinets full of curious objects, exotic flora and fauna, sea shells and conches of all sorts of shapes, maritime instruments (e.g. astrolabe and sextant) and, of course, the globe which became the universal symbol of the "globalization". These examples of European art remind us how the discovery of America changed not only the Occidental vision of Paradise, but the whole world, upholding such new values including direct observation, technologies, traveling and exoticism. Nevertheless, the last point is rather problematic, because the vision of America as an exotic continent shows that at least some part of the Western world has always perceived it as a barbarian territory, whose population needs to be civilized.

In conclusion, the Columbian exchange, whose impact we are experiencing up to the present, is living proof of the fact that the transmissions between the Old and the New World were mutual. The successful process of evangelization shows that the Indians were during the 16th century — the times of conquest and colonization

36 The parrot has borne a variety of different meanings. Generally, it alludes to inane chatter or it can symbolize the purity and innocence of Virgin Mary. J. BALEKA, *Výtvarné umění*, p. 263; Lucia IMPELLUSO, *Nature and Its Symbols*, Los Angeles 2004, p. 302; J. ROYT, *Slovník*, p. 130.

37 Even if we can meet with the parrots in the Christian art from its very beginning (the western authors know Indian and African parrots), their increased presence in European paintings is related to the discovery of America, where they were very numerous. An example of these paintings represents a canvas by Peter Paul Rubens representing Adam and Eve (1628–1629) in Paradise, where we can see a parrot sitting on a tree branch in contemplation. For the symbolism of the parrot see Jan ROYT — Hana ŠEDINOVÁ, *Slovník symbolů. Kosmos, příroda a člověk v křesťanské ikonografii* [Dictionary of Symbols. Cosmos, Nature and Human in the Christian Iconography], Praha 1998, p. 130.

38 For the phenomenon of discovery of America and its impact on the Old Continent see Jean DELUMEAU, *Dějiny ráje. Zahrada rozkoše* [History of Paradise. The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition], Praha 2003, pp. 118–125.

of America — obliged to change their ideas about space and time and to adapt them to the western image of the world and way of life. On the other hand, the Mexican monastic architecture and its art demonstrate that these two cultures, Western and Mesoamerican, mingled and went through the process of mutual exchange. Moreover, the example of European contemporary artistic production shows that the discovery of America had a considerable influence on the Occidental imagery and ideas that the people of that time had about the outside world. After all, the contemporary form of Mexican society based on the Catholic religion, whose syncretism is symbolized by the cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe, testifies that the Old and New World coming led to such a degree that it became virtually impossible to separate the constituent elements of each culture. At the same time, speaking about contemporary Mexican society, we have to take into consideration that it is a mestizo society with a significant Indian minority, which relies up to the present not only on the Western Catholic culture, but also on the Mesoamerican one. In my opinion, Mexico ranks — due to its Indian substrate — among the most complex Latin American societies, which means that it will not be pinned down with any simplistic views or explanations. This is also evidenced by the words of one of the most famous Mexican writers, the poet and essayist Octavio Paz (1914–1998), who compared the Mexican society and culture and its different layers to a pyramid with steps. Paz worked with the idea of juxtapositions and super-positions of these layers and put particular emphasis on the opinion that some of these layers are hidden and will always remain undiscovered.[39] The intricate juxtapositions and super-positions of Occidental and Mesoamerican forms and ideas, which are so characteristic of Mexico to this day, are shown in the famous Festivals of Reconquest (also known as Festivals of the Moors and the Christians), during which the Indians have played the role of the Moorish pagans defeated by Spaniards during the Reconquest of Spain.[40] We could hardly imagine another example that would so clearly express the complexity of the cultural transfers between the Old and the New World.

RÉSUMÉ:

The topic of the paper is the 16th century Mexico monastic architecture and its artistic embellishments. The author pays a particular attention to the process of cultural exchange between the Old and the New World, emphasizing the uniqueness of this architecture and its decorations, which are presented and interpreted in an appropriate historical context, under the circumstances of the conquest and colonization of ancient Mexico and the evangelization of its native population.

The text begins with a short historical overview in which the readers are introduced to the basic historical terms and data related to the conquest and colonization of the Aztec Empire and the process of evangelization of the native population of Mesoamerica. They are also familiarized with the Mexican monastic architecture, its development, appearance, and main features and functions.

39 Octavio Paz deals with the idea of superposition within the Mexican culture and society in Octavio PAZ, *El laberinto de la soledad*, Madrid 2001.

40 Max HARRIS, *Aztecs, Moors, and Christians. Festivals of Reconquest in Mexico and Spain*, Austin 2000.

Special attention is paid to the question of the European models and roots of this architecture and Mesoamerican traditions, ideas and forms related to it. Furthermore, the text deals with the phenomenon of transmission of culture, forms and ideas between the Old and the New World, which is illustrated with two examples: Indochristian art; the European artistic production of modern times. Finally, the author states that Mexican society and culture represent one of the most striking and successful examples of cultural transmission as it is demonstrated by the contemporary Mexican culture based on the syncretic form of Catholicism. At the same time, the author admits that the Mexican culture is so complex and the process of cultural transmissions between Western world and the Mesoamerican world has been so complicated that it resists any endeavors to conceive and interpret it in depth.

The paper contains a pictorial supplement consisting of three maps and two photographs. It was written on the basis of field research conducted by the author of the text, Monika Brenišínová, in Central Mexico in 2013.

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