

Synthesis and Survival

The Native Presence in Sixteenth-century Murals of New Spain

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IN THE AFTERMATH of the Conquest of New Spain (now Mexico) much of elite native culture was destroyed. That not all vestiges of pre-Hispanic civilization were eradicated has been the subject of recent scholarship that examines trends within the rich matrix of colonial society at the 'sub-imperial' level, to use George Collier's term. In spite of the overwhelming imposition of European institutions, native traditions in language, socio-political organization, and religion persisted. The tenacity of indigenous cultures is now becoming better recognized, and native components are being interpreted as having affected and at times having reformulated Euro-Christian concepts and values.

Less attention, however, has been paid to acculturation in works of art, notably those created in the sixteenth century under the supervision of the three mendicant orders, the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians. Early scholars in the field of colonial Mexican art were interested mainly in validating its European ancestry, and, for the most part, they either ignored or disparaged native features. In 1942, in an attempt to reintegrate colonial art under the rubric of Mexican studies, Jose Moreno Villa called for an end to its evaluation solely by analogy with European standards; and he set out to emphasize the unique aspects of *el arte mexicano*, coining the term *tequitqui* ('tributary' in Nahuatl, the Aztec language) for art created by native artisans under Spanish rule.¹ Several decades elapsed before serious attention was directed at the native components of early colonial architecture and monastic sculpture and painting.²

This paper briefly examines some of the pre-Hispanic expressive forms and accompanying beliefs that survived as viable entities in sixteenth-century mural painting. I draw from four mural cycles executed by teams of native muralists in Augustinian monasteries of central Mexico. My purpose is first to determine the degree to which pre-Columbian motifs in wall painting were meaningful, and thus, presumably purposeful, and second to understand the motivations of the Augustinian friars who allowed and even exploited the pre-Conquest features they recognized in the murals.

Although identifying and describing native style features in mendicant art are

necessary first steps (that is, questions of what was represented and where), more intriguing questions are those addressing issues of meaning and function (or how and why). In other words, did these native features serve a purpose? If so, for whom? Further, if they were recognized as indigenous, that is, potentially pagan, why were they permitted by the same friars who were intent on extirpating all that posed a threat to Christianity? Only in analyzing the mechanisms of continuity and transformation can we understand the dynamics of the interchange between native and European. Granted that a collaborative effort was required to produce the great corpus of mendicant art, the native artist emerges as an active participant with some degree of autonomy and creative freedom.

The Native Muralists

The importance of visual aids to the mendicants' ambitious program of indoctrination and conversion needs to be emphasized. Like the painted cloths used by the friars to illustrate doctrinal concepts, monastic wall paintings were primarily didactic. Since murals with public access were used as billboard-sized proclamations, they helped to communicate Christian doctrine and impart the required code of behavior.

However, the ornate churches and oversized cloisters, the settings of the mendicant program, were built, decorated, and maintained primarily by native labor and with native tribute monies.⁴ In their construction and decoration, friars relied on the sheer numbers and 'innate' ability of the Indians. They took particular pride in the quantity and quality of indigenous painting - the result of skills already evident in the rich pre-Conquest tradition of manuscript and wall painting. Of native talent, the friar-teacher, Diego Valades, wrote, "They also learn to paint and to draw in colors the images of things, and they arrive at doing it delicately." The success of these native artists can be measured by the ordinances of the painters' guild issued first in 1557, then again in 1586, to protect European professionals from their competition.⁵

To train their artists in Renaissance canons and Christian iconography, there were several options available to the regular clergy. In addition to using students trained in the curriculum of the well-known monastic arts and crafts schools, the Augustinians brought master artisans from Mexico City to their more rural houses or, alternatively, sent more promising Indian students to the capital to be trained 'under craft masters' (*maestros*).⁶ Muralists worked in teams ranked according to skill. The more highly trained members travelled from monastery to monastery, where local native artists served as assistants. The varied exposures of the muralists to the newly imported Euro-Christian styles is manifest in the unorthodox interpretations and hybrid traits of some monastic murals.



Figure 1. Drawing of 'bee' and song scroll. Note glyph-like symbols in the scroll (see inset, from left to right): *ilhuitl*, shell, and flower. Detail of vault frescoes (south side), lower cloister, Malinalco, Mexico.

Apparently, the affiliation between certain of the mural painters and the profession of scribe-painter, *tlacuilo*, persisted into the colonial period. *Tlacuiloa* means both to paint and to write in Nahuatl, and *tlacuilo*, if not modified, means painter or scribe, that is, painter on paper. Style and iconographic evidence from the lower cloister murals in the Augustinian monastery of Malinalco (State of Mexico) confirm the familiarity of the muralists with the pre-Conquest conventions followed by the *tlacuilos*. The vault frescoes, for example, are characterized by stylistic features common to native style pictorial manuscripts, such as the even distribution of isolated motifs and their relative flatness against a solid background. Further, some symbols incorporated into the vault designs would have been known only to native *tlacuilos* well versed in the pre-Hispanic hieroglyphic or picture-writing system of central Mexico. These abstract, glyph-like elements include flanged song scrolls, trilobed symbols that refer metaphorically to 'preciousness,' and celestial symbols (figure 1). One of the so-called celestial symbols is in fact an *ilhuitl*, a symbol that identifies the profession of *tlacuilo* in several manuscripts where the *ilhuitl* is inscribed within the block of writing on which the scribe is working. In the sixteenth-century *Historia*



Figure 2. Tlacuilot ecatl, 'Place of the Painter.' After Paul Kirchhoff, *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* (Mexico, 1976), folios 54-58.

Tolteca-Chichimeca a similar compartmentalized scroll containing *ilhuítl* symbols is used together with a man's head as a toponym for the place Tlacuilotecatl, 'Place of the Painter' (figure 2). At Malinalco I have interpreted the painted *ilhuítl* as a 'signature' of the tlacuilo-artisan. Further stylistic and iconographic evidence for the affiliation of muralists and scribes is evident in other Augustinian murals, as will be seen.

Processes of Acculturation

Painting, as the art that best approximates representation of the visible world and, therefore, the most vulnerable to error, was diligently supervised by the friars. However, because the chroniclers inflate the mendicant contribution, crediting themselves with an inordinate amount of the building and decorating of the monasteries, it is not always clear to what degree, if at all, they were directly responsible for the work itself. Although the residing prior of each monastery probably dictated the general compositional format, style, and themes of monastic murals, the contribution of the native artisans was substantial, clearly going beyond that of mere technicians and copyists. An examination of the processes of acculturation in murals reveals that the preponderant process

was the wholesale adoption of Euro-Christian imagery. At times, imported artistic traditions were imitated so closely that wall paintings are merely monumentalized versions of European sources. In particular, the scenes from the Passion of Christ, which were intended for the meditation and prayers of the friars in the more private sectors of the monastery, reproduce with great fidelity their graphic prototypes.¹

The focus here will be on the survivals of pre-colonial imagery that did occur in mural painting, both co-existing and fusing with European conventions. The inclusion of these indigenous elements was in some cases covert (executed without the knowledge of the friars), and in others, fully sanctioned. A broad range of acculturative solutions can be loosely organized into two categories, those of juxtaposition and convergence or syncretism.

Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition implies that the indigenous motifs were allowed to co-exist side by side with Euro-Christian subjects, with both left relatively unaltered. However, when native style features are isolated within an otherwise European artistic context, it is often not possible to assess whether there was a continuity or disjunction of meaning. For instance, symbols for *chalchihuitl* (jade) that are depicted as concentric circles are frequently included in sixteenth-century murals; studied alone, we are unable to determine whether these symbols held any value beyond that of ornamental devices. These fragmentary 'pre-Columbian motifs' have led some art historians to dismiss the survival phenomenon in colonial art as rare and insignificant. " Yet, many painted toponymic glyphs rendered in the pre-Hispanic manner are recognized as intact in form and meaning, as legible to the modern-day viewer as to the colonial one. At the Augustinian monastery of Malinalco, Mexico, for example, the town's pre-Hispanic place sign is prominently included around an eagle-pelican image used as a christological emblem (figure 3). Within the circular frame are the interlaced strands for the glyphic sign of *malinalli*, 'twisted grass,' the Nahuatl root for the toponym of Malinalco, 'Place of Twisted Grass.' "

Convergence or Syncretism

When assimilated into Euro-Christian imagery, pre-Hispanic visual conventions display a complex range of acculturative solutions, often producing synthetic new statements. In a limited, but significant, number of cases native traits retained their original form and meaning, particularly when that meaning did not, at least overtly, conflict with Catholic ideology. The frequent inclusion in colonial mural painting of speech scrolls, comma-like glyphs emanating from the



Figure 3. Drawing of medallion fresco with eagle-pelican motif in center.
Note *malinalli*, 'twisted grass,' glyph as toponym for Malinalco within inner frame.
Cloister stairwell ceiling mural, Malinalco.

mouths of humans or animals, is instructive. At times, pre-Hispanic speech scrolls are incorporated into an ornamental border where they lose an identifiable meaning. In other instances, speech scrolls are used in a manner that coincides with the European tradition of phylacteries or inscribed scrolls, emerging from the mouths of evangelists or friars, and thereby maintaining their original function in both traditions. The retention of native meaning and function can only be firmly established when speech scrolls are incorporated into a complex of imagery known to have pre-Conquest importance.

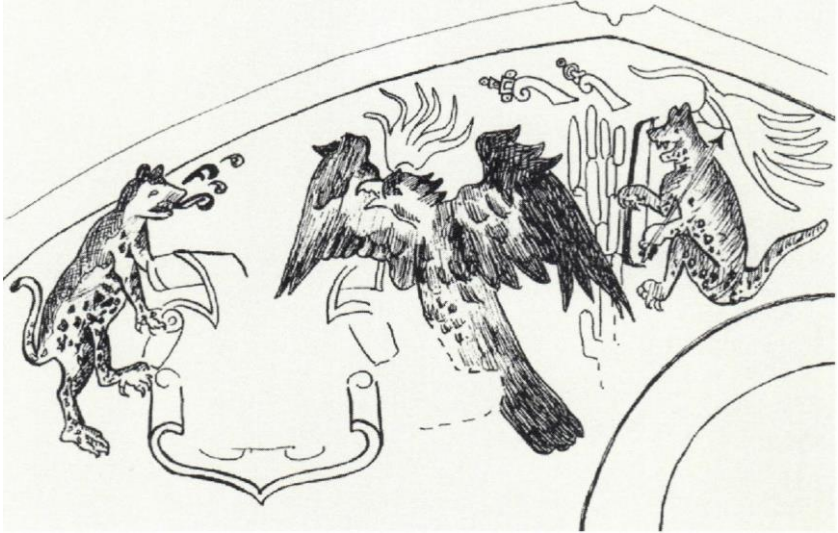


Figure 4. Drawing of two heraldic jaguars and an eagle.

Note pre-Hispanic speech scrolls in upper right. South wall mural in narthex of the Augustinian monastery of Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo . After Constantino Reyes-Vale rio, *Arte indocristiano* (Mexico, 1978), color photograph after 222.

Such is the case in the Junette mural on the south wall of the Ixmiquilpan church narthex, where an eagle and a jaguar flank a coat of arms and a second jaguar on the upper right holds a bow and arrow; feathered headdresses are indications of the prominence of these animals as Aztec emblems of warrior orders and symbols of the celestial and underworld spheres (figure 4). This eagle and jaguar pair would have recalled to the native viewer traditional aristocratic prestige and supernatural powers. The glyph-like speech scrolls over the heads of the jaguars, two of which are topped with the concentric circle symbols of jade or preciousness , emphasize the importance and wisdom of pronouncements made by these venerable metaphoric animals. At the same time, the parallelism with Old World symbols of royalty, the eagle and the lion , also facilitated the convergence of heraldic meanings in the colonial period."

In the end , enough of the mural must remain intact to reconstruct the composition and theme of the entire wall painting and, thereby, reconstitute the meaning of the component survival. For this reason four complete mural cycles in Augustinian establishments best illustrate native survivals and syntheses - those at Ixmiquilpan , Actopan , Santa Maria Xoxoteco, and Malinalco.

Ixmiquilpan

As was the case with all native artists working under the Augustinians, the muralists at Ixmiquilpan were permitted and, I believe, encouraged to draw from their own heritage. In order to make the Christian faith and the Spanish way of life more relevant, the regular clergy sought to relate their teachings to many facets of the lives of local congregations. The well-known battle scene murals on the church walls of Ixmiquilpan depict, on one level, a moral struggle between the forces of good and evil." On another level, as Elena Estrada Gerlero has suggested, they depict one in a series of historical conflicts known as the Chichimec Wars (about 1569-72)." Donna Pierce has identified the figures and beasts, through their distinct pre-Hispanic dress and weaponry, as two local sixteenth-century Indian groups living in the Hidalgo region.¹ The centaurs and the native warriors who wear little clothing and carry bows and arrows are identified as the hostile, pagan Chichimecs. In contrast, those natives who wear elaborate warrior dress and wield *macanas* (obsidian-edged 'swords' associated with the Aztecs), are the more pacific, Christianized Otomi. While the allegorical allusions of the battle scene painted on the Ixmiquilpan church walls may have escaped the native, whose own world view was not dominated by the Christian dichotomy of good and evil, the recasting of the moral in the guise of the long-standing animosity between Chichimecs and Otomi would have sent a clear message. The victory of the civilized Otomi over the barbarian Chichimec served to dramatize the benefits of living in a Christian, Hispanicized state.

Actopan and Santa Maria Xoxoteco

A second example of syncretic imagery, using native images for Christian purposes, is evident in two cognate mural cycles in the State of Hidalgo: in the open chapel at the monastery of Actopan and at Santa Maria Xoxoteco, a *visita* of Metztitlan. In her iconographic study of these murals, Gerlero concludes that both Actopan and Xoxoteco depict the Seven Deadly Sins set against a background of the Last Judgment.¹ On the east or apse wall of both chapels are portrayed the Genesis stories of Creation and the Fall of Man, with the devouring maw of Hell given a prominent position. On the side walls of both chapels are panels representing the seven sins or temptations and their consequences in terrifying forms of corporeal punishment.

I will discuss only one of these panels, best preserved at Xoxoteco, the panel representing the transgression of drunkenness as portrayed by a *pulque-drinking* scene (figure 5). *Pulque, octli* in Nahuatl, is the native alcoholic drink obtained by fermenting the sap of the maguey. In the mural, a native woman in a wrap-around skirt and *huipilli* (tunic with decorated neck panel) is shown in a traditional

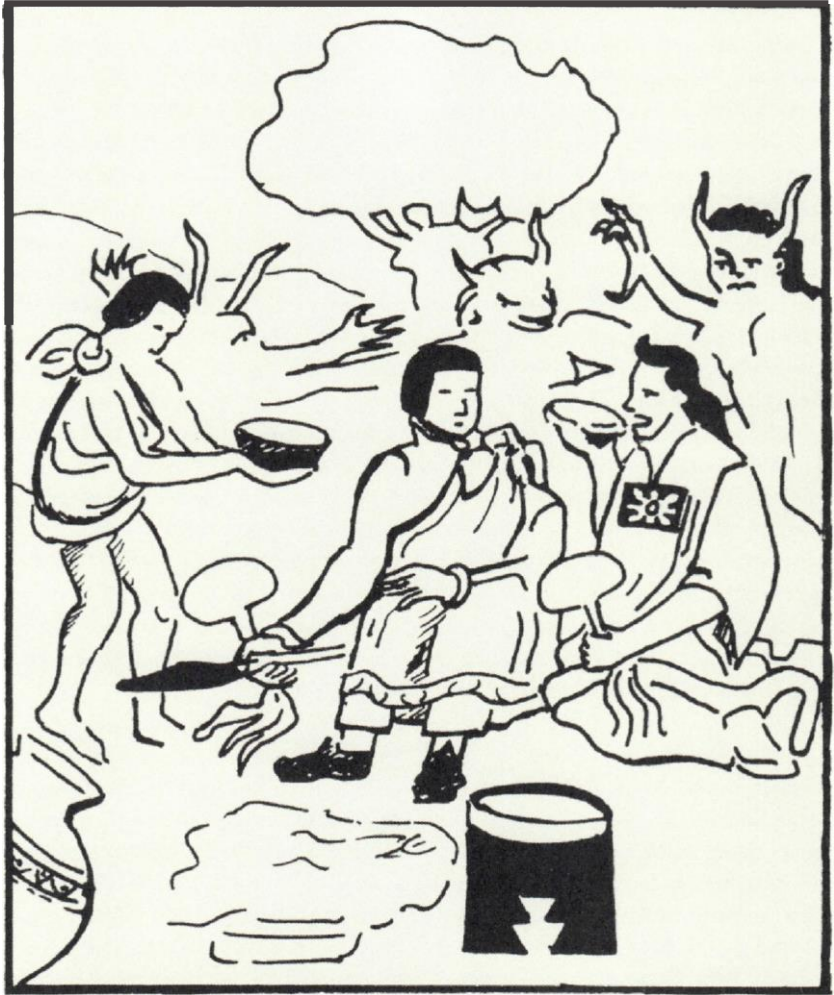


Figure 5. Drawing of mural panel depicting *pulque* drinking.
Church wall painting, Augustinian visita of Santa María Xoxoteco, Hidalgo. After Juan B. Artigas, *La piel de la arquitectura* (Mexico, 1979), figures 39 and 44.

kneeling pose, drinking *pulque* from a *dish*. On the left a man who is barefoot and wearing a common man's *tilmatli* (cape knotted at the shoulder) is bringing another bowl of *pulque* to a more Hispanicized Indian wearing Spanish shoes, shirt, and pants and the longer *tilmatli* of the elite.

The three homed devils behind the drinkers, as traditional Christian symbols for temptation and sin, leave no doubt as to the friars' intent to sermonize on the overeating and excessive drinking that constituted the sin of gluttony. However, a far more ambivalent meaning is conveyed by the two pre-Conquest objects in the foreground. To the left is visible a portion of a large earthen jar, *tinajón*, used to store *pulque* and at the center is a vertical drum, *huehuetl*. Sixteenth-century accounts of Aztec rituals at which *pulque* was served describe the large open jars overflowing with *pulque* as well as the song and dance accompanied by musical instruments, such as the drum." Similar *pulque-drinking* scenes can be found in sixteenth-century manuscripts such as the Codex Mendoza (figure 6), in which the reader is warned that 'the vice of drunkenness sometimes leads people to become thieves.'¹⁹ The figural composition as well as the ritual drum and jar suggest that the source for the frescoes was a native style pictorial manuscript, or that the muralists and illustrators were one and the same, or both.²⁰

The fans and smoking cane held by the Xoxoteco drinkers, as well as the cape of the man, identify them as members of the upper class. It was the native aristocracy that was singled out by the friars to set examples of good conduct. Yet in Aztec society it was precisely the Aztec lords, seasoned warriors, and old men and women who had been allowed to drink *pulque* at certain ritual and social occasions. According to pre-Conquest proscriptions, drinking was prohibited to some and allowed, even in excess, to these others. Thus the very imagery the Spanish friars permitted at Xoxoteco in their campaign against alcoholism effectively neutralized and even subverted the message for the native viewer; the depiction of a traditional ritual drinking scene would have condoned acceptable limits to imbibing rather than condemning it altogether.

In addition, although both Christian and Nahua cultures viewed drunkenness as disruptive and dangerous, as Burkhart points out, drinking had its place in Aztec society as one of life's pleasures and, although punishable if abused, excess *did* not affect an individual's destiny in the afterlife.²¹ Only the Catholic church censured drunkenness as a sin of the flesh leading to eternal damnation. Both in the imagery selected as well as in the meaning, therefore, this mural scene is a composite of native and Euro-Christian conventions. Ironically and tragically, one of the consequences of the Conquest was to disrupt pre-Hispanic proscriptions against excessive drinking.



Figure 6. *Pulque-drinking scene.*

From *Codex Mendoza*, commentary by Kurt Ross (Fribourg, 1978), n5.

The difficult task of instilling foreign concepts of reward and punishment necessitated that the mendicant clergy forcefully recreate Heaven and Hell in words, theater, and art. " Among the forms of demonic punishment graphically illustrated in the Actopan and Xoxoteco murals are some modes of death that were unique to native American cultures, as suggested by Gerlero." A reference to Aztec ritual cannibalism is made through the depiction of a butcher 's shop where devils behead, dismember, and disembowel their victims. Another hellish 'punishment' includes a figure being positioned spread-eagle against a wooden scaffolding as in the pre-Conquest arrow or scaffold sacrifice (*tlacacaliztli*). All sacrificial practices were so abhorrent to the friars that these acts were meant to connote the fearful tortures of Hell. Adopting these indigenous images, however, may have failed to instill the same degree of horror in the native viewer. Prior to the Conquest, neither ritual cannibalism nor sacrificial death in general had punitive connotations;" sacrifice, in fact, was one of the modes of death rewarded by Aztec society with the promise of a positive celestial afterlife. The message conveyed by the 'hellish' imagery to the native viewer then may have subverted its intended function of deterrence.



Figure 7. Detail of Paradise Garden murals. Lower cloister wall (east side), Malinalco.

Malinalco

The positive alternative, the rewards of a Paradise Garden, is the message conveyed by the monastic murals of Malinalco." The central register of the garden murals on the lower cloister walls recreates a luxuriant array of flora and fauna with three medallions that enclose the sacred monograms of Jesus Christ and Mary as Queen of Heaven and the Augustinian emblem (figure 7). The sources for the garden frescoes are predominantly European, most likely a combination of graphic and tapestry designs. However, despite a degree of stylization, I have identified as native twenty-four plants, thirteen of the forty-eight birds, and all but one of the twenty-one animals represented. The symbolic importance of a particular species to either the European or indigenous cultures is determinable on the basis of its geographical distribution at time of contact. Some of the plants and animals carry traditional Christian symbolism associated with the church, the Passion of Christ, or Marian iconography. Such specimens are the domesticated grape vine, acanthus, thistle, and certain birds, including the heron, sparrow, and dove. The pomegranate and rose, unknown in Mexico prior to contact, cannot have held any meaning for native Americans; they were symbols

of the 'New Life' in Christianity with paradisiacal implications. Similarly, the dolphin, without argument, is traced to its European source, where it was important as 'King of Fishes' and, frequently, as a christological symbol.

Yet, within the over-all Renaissance design scheme the muralists who worked at Malinalco were given the freedom to select native flora and fauna that had continuing importance in post-Conquest Mexico. Among the twenty-four native plants identified (including five tentative possibilities) nineteen were endemic only to the Americas the year 1519. Many of the native flora depicted in the murals, such as the *huacalxochitl*, 'basket flower', were held in high esteem by the Aztec culture as prestige and ceremonial items. Most are documented as having medicinal value in the sixteenth century and continue in use to the present-day, like the hallucinogenic *ololiuhqui*, morning glory. Some were selected for their resemblance to other critical elements of native life, as was true of the *xiloxochitl*, 'corn-silk flower.' The *yolloxochitl*, 'heart flower' (figure 8), is an excellent example with multiple associations: it was one of the most important flowers offered to the Aztec patron deity by the ruler Motecuhzoma II, and it was also a classic example of the correspondence between therapeutic plants and the body parts they resemble. The *yolloxochitl* is still considered a potent medicine, stemming in part from its resemblance to both an egg and the heart. Flowers such as these, which alluded metaphorically to power and life-sustaining functions, were often appropriated by the ruler and upper classes in Aztec society.

There are also species of fauna depicted in the garden frescoes indigenous only to the Americas, such as the coyote, the *chachalaca* (a pheasant-like bird), and the tree opossum or *tlacuache*. Like the plant life depicted, many of the animals related to some aspect of the political hierarchy, supernatural beliefs, or pharmacopoeia of the Aztecs. Certain of these represented aspects of the cosmos and the deities that controlled natural forces and were adopted by the Aztec ruling hierarchy. The snake became associated with both the fertile and fatal aspects of the earth, the hummingbird with renewal and birth, and the *tlacuache*, that indispensable component of the native curer's medicine chest, with the female principle of fertility.

Where certain flora and fauna were common to both continents, they often shared a bicultural importance that can be traced to pre-Conquest as well as to Euro-Christian sources. The owl's nocturnal lifestyle, for example, made it a feared omen of death in both native American and European cultures. Where each culture brought a different set of associations to the painted image, we can speculate that the sixteenth-century native viewer, whether aware or not of the European meaning, retained an interpretation derived from his heritage. In both



Figure 8. *Yollox ochitl*, 'heart flower.'
Detail of the garden murals. Lower cloister wall (south side), Malinalco, Mexico.

cultures the falcon and eagle-hawk were birds associated with kingship and the highest deity; interesting in the murals is the fact that they are represented eating their prey. Here the falcon's consumption of blood was probably being compared to the Aztec tribal god Huitzilopochtli's need for blood sacrifice.⁹ The emphasis on the rapacious aspect of the birds as hunters in the murals appears to underscore pre-Hispanic more than European connections.

Thus, while important species in the native cultures were used to convey Christian themes, they must have also retained their older meanings of long-established usage. In his study of persistent Nahua practices and concepts, Lockhart has called the resulting mutual miscomprehension by native and European viewers of such motifs 'double mistaken identity.'¹⁰ Other examples are found in plant representations. The white sapote tree painted on Malinalco's east wall played a central role in Aztec ritual life and was prized for the narcotic capabilities of its leaves, branches, and fruit. Sixteenth-century accounts, however, stress the resemblance of the fruit of the sapote to that of the apple tree.¹¹ And this sapote-apple tree functioned within the overall Augustinian mural program as the Tree of Life or Knowledge located to the east in the Garden of Eden.¹² Yet, the use of a native fruit tree with narcotic properties instead of an apple tree could not have been accidental; it would be naive to assume that the sapote ceased to hold its older, indigenous importance even after decades of Christianization.

The monkey's role in the frescoes, as interpreted here, is another example of divergent meanings dependent on associations brought to the motif by different viewers. Although for both cultures the monkey symbolized over-indulgence in physical appetites (sexual excess and drunkenness), the positive, valued connotations of the monkey for the Nahuas is underscored by its pictorial context (figure 9). Two monkeys are seated in and dangling from tree branches situated on the east wall (the upper monkey is only partially visible due to the deterioration of the mural). The placement of the monkeys in a cacao tree linked two exotic and prized Aztec tribute items, the cacao (or chocolate) pod having been used as both currency and an elitist beverage. This conjunction would have had little relevance for the Augustinian friar. Instead, according to prevailing Christian iconography, the monkey signified devilish vices, and particularly, original sin.¹³ Although a single apple-eating ape was the most commonly used metaphor for the temptation of Adam, a variant using paired monkeys appears in a 1533 engraving by the German artist Erhard Altendorfer, where two monkeys are seated in the tree behind Adam and Eve.¹⁴ One monkey is reaching for an apple being offered by the other while Eve points to this exemplar of man's temptation and fall.



Figure 9. Monkeys and *cacao* (chocolate) pods.

Detail of the garden murals. Lower cloister wall (east side). Malinalco, Mexico.

At Malinalco the Christian Paradise theme reflected the mendicants' broader utopian aspirations in their New World mission. The message of the Paradise Garden was also reinforced by parallels with the Aztec celestial 'House of the Sun,' a convergence that enhanced the promise of an anticipated afterlife for the native population. But why were the muralists allowed to select specific plants and animals from their own environment that had continuing associations with ancient cults, the elite class, and curing? Did the friars not suspect their enduring relationship with the older way of life? These questions can be answered on two levels, the clandestine and the authorized. On one level, the friars were simply not conscious of the degree to which some of the species in the garden frescoes were still affiliated with the ancient civil and supernatural structure. This was not always strictly a function of mendicant ignorance, but rather a form of self-deception. Even those friars who were aware of the important roles of certain flora and fauna denied this knowledge, along with that of many other persisting practices that were almost impossible to control."

On another level, perhaps the official level, mendicant friars and Spanish authorities in general felt that the depiction of flora and fauna was 'safe' subject matter for native artisans. In the hierarchy of sacrilegious possibilities, the painting of plants and animals was considered relatively harmless compared to the potential irreverence of misrepresenting holy figures."

Although these reasons help to explain native intrusions into Malinalco's imagery, what of the figural work at Ixmiquilpan, Actopan, and Xoxoteco? The fact remains that native muralists were prominently involved with every type of mural painting including the depiction of holy figures, and the various edicts prohibiting figural work and intended to placate anxious European painters, in actuality were never enforceable. More importantly, the use of figures in the murals dressed in pre-Hispanic garments, using pre-Conquest ritual paraphernalia and weaponry, and at times even involved in activities associated with their ancient society, was not only self-consciously selected by the native artist but also eminently useful to the Spanish patrons. It is best understood in light of the entire mendicant program to Hispanicize as well as evangelize the native peoples.

Conclusions

In spite of the divergent imagery, the mural programs that we have examined have many aspects in common.

1. *All four programs have irrefutable evidence of Indian workmanship closely tied to sixteenth-century manuscript paintings.*
2. *They are all located in the public or semi-public areas of the monasteries, accessible to, and primarily intended for, the neophyte Christians and native community (the open chapel or *capilla abierta*, the church nave walls, and the lower cloister walls).*
3. *They are propagandistic in intent, as their subject matter makes obvious.*

The four cycles are related, directly or indirectly, to eschatological themes, including the Last Judgment, Hell, and the Paradise Garden. These themes set in the context of the mendicant program were to inculcate a Christian and distinctly Spanish way of life. At Ixmiquilpan, the battle to win over the pagan segment of the native population painted in large-scale murals was intended not only to save souls, but also to promote the stability and success of the new Spanish colony. Pierce has hypothesized that a Last Judgment scene, similar to those at Actopan and Xoxoteco, may have been found in the apse of Ixmiquilpan, endowing the battle scene with an eschatological imperative." An essential part of the mendicant program included the reinforcement of behavioral patterns with forceful demonstrations of the wages

of sin. The murals of Actopan and Xoxoteco re-enacted, with grotesque vividness, the demonic punishment awaiting transgressors, just as the rewards of a celestial heaven were recreated in the appealing garden scenes of Malinalco.

4. *These four murals represent a range of acculturative solutions.*

Elements that were strongly pre-Hispanic in flavor persisted undetected or were allowed because they were not recognized as impinging on the Christian belief system. Convergence of meaning, and occasionally of form, occurred where interpretations by native and European cultures coincided. There were also examples of co-existence, or of 'double mistaken identity,' where each culture brought its own interpretation to the image. Although appropriated for Christian duty, the very use of ancient pictorial forms recast and thus reformulated the Christian message in a distinctly native mode.

5. *Finally, almost all murals with overt native features have been uncovered in Augustinian monasteries.*

This reflects, in part, the Order's liberality, their confidence in the spiritual capacity of the native population, and their broad exposure to humanist thought. Although they maintained strict paternalistic control, the Augustinians, more than the other orders, trusted the Indians' ability to absorb religious instruction and were the most liberal in allowing their participation in all the sacraments.³⁶ Thus, they permitted greater flexibility in choice of subject matter. The Augustinians, for example, allowed classical themes, as in the wall paintings of the ancient Greek philosophers at Atotonilco el Grande, Hidalgo. It was this more tolerant outlook that gave the native muralist working under the Augustinians the leeway to draw from his own artistic idiom and cultural experience. Given this freedom, artists fulfilled their own hidden agendas, which at times opposed or, at the very least, neutralized the Christian intent. Certain Augustinian murals offer the strongest evidence for the active involvement of the native in choices that sustained pre-Conquest patterns into the last decades of the sixteenth century.

Notes

r. 'In the Shadow of Empire: New Directions in Mesoamerican and Andean Ethnohistory,' in *The Inca and Aztec States, 1400-1800*, edited by George A. Collier, Renato I. Rosaldo, and John D. Wirth (London, 1982), 1-20. A few of the most recent studies on the persistence of native customs, institutions, and ideas in sixteenth-century Mexico are James Lockhart's 'Views of Corporate Self and History in Some Valley Towns, Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,' in Collier and others, *Inca and Aztec States*, 367-93; Lockhart's 'Some Nahuatl Concepts in Postcolonial Guise,' *History of European Ideas*, VI (1985), 465-82; J. Jorge Klor de Alva's 'Spiritual Conflict and Accommodation in New Spain: Toward a Typology of Aztec Responses to Christianity,' in Collier and others, *Inca and Aztec States*, 345-66; Louise M. Burkhart's 'Moral Deviance in Sixteenth-century Nahuatl and Christian Thought: The Rabbit and the Deer,' *Journal of Latin American Lore*, XII (1986), 107-39; and Burkhart's *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-century Mexico* (Tucson, 1989).

2. *La escultura colonial mexicana* (Mexico, 1942).

3. John McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches of Sixteenth-century Mexico* (Cambridge, 1965); Constantino Reyes-Valerio, *Arte indocristiano* (Mexico, 1978); and Reyes-Valerio, *El Pintor de conventos: Los murales del siglo XVI en la Nueva España* (Mexico, 1989).

4. For a discussion of the native contributions to the mendicant building program, see George Kubler, *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*, I (New Haven, 1948), 134-

86; Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810* (Stanford, 1964), 122-27, 224, 246; Reyes-Valerio, *Arte indocristiano*; Jeanette F. Peterson, *The Paradise Garden Murals of Malinalco: Utopia and Imperial Policy in Sixteenth-century Mexico* (Austin, 1993), chapters 2 and 3.

5. Quoted from Diego Valades, in Esteban J. Palomera, *Fray Diego Valades, OFM: Su obra* (Mexico, 1962), 276. Positive evaluations of native painting abilities can also be found in Toribio de Benavente or Motolinia, *Memoria les e historia de los indios de la Nueva España* (Madrid, 1970), 104; Geronimo de Mendieta, *Historia eclesiastica indiana*, III (Mexico, 1945), 75; Alonso de Zorita, *Life and Labor in Ancient Mexico: The Brief and Summary Relation of the Lords of New Spain*, translated by Benjamin Keen (London, 1963), 173.

6. Francisco Barrio Lorezot, *Ordenanzas de gremios de la Nueva España* (Mexico, 1921), 21-25. Although the ordinances ostensibly closed the advanced ranks of the craft guilds to non-Spaniards, these discriminatory policies were unenforceable. See Francisco S. Cruz, *Las artes y los gremios en la Nueva España* (Mexico, 1960), 36; Gibson, *Aztecs Under Spanish Rule*, 397-402. Documented references to native muralists in the colonial period are limited; historical records have substantiated by name only one native muralist, Juan Gerson (Rosa Camelo Arredondo, Jorge Curria Lacroix, and Constantino Reyes-Valerio, *Juan Gerson, tlacuilo de Tecamachalco* [Mexico, 1964], 13-35).

7. The best known art schools were established by the Franciscans in the capital of Mexico City at San José de los Naturales and

Santiago Tlatelolco. The Augustinians also had a well-developed arts curriculum at their monastery of Tlaxiaco, Michoacan. See P. Diego Basalencque, *Historia de la Provincia de San Nicolas de Tolentino de Michoacan* (Mexico, 1963), 68; Matias Escobar, *Americana tebaida*, second edition (Mexico, 1970), 75; Esteban J. Palomera, *Fray Diego Valades, OFM: El hombre y su epoca* (Mexico, 1963), 57-72; McAndrew, *Open-Air Churches*, 368-74. The Augustinian chronicler Escobar (109-10) stresses that painters, unlike stone masons, were trained in Mexico City where there was a concentration of talent; on this, see Basalencque, *Historia*, 60; Juan de Grijalva, *Cronica de la Orden de NPS Agustin en las provincias de la Nueva Espana, 1533-1592* [1624], second edition (Mexico, 1924), 223; Toribio de Benavente or Motolinia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, translated by E.A. Foster (Westport, 1950), 241.

8. *Ilhuítl* is a Nahuatl word meaning 'day,' 'ceremonial day,' or 'sun's orb.' Although it may have astronomical significance, H.B. Nicholson ('The Temalacatl of Tehuacan,' *El Mexico Antigua*, VIII [1955], 95-132) also relates the *ilhuítl* to the painter-scribe or *tlacuilo*. On the glyph-like symbols in the Malinalco murals, see Peterson, *Garden Murals of Malinalco*, chapters 3 and 6.

9. *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, commentary by Paul Kirchhoff (Mexico, 1976), 129.

10. Ideas about the reliance of colonial muralists on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century European graphics have been refined in recent studies, as in Camelo Arredondo and others (*Juan Gerson*) on Tecamachalco, and Donna L. Pierce on Ixmiquilpan (*The Sixteenth-century Nave Frescoes in the Augustinian Mission Church of Ixmiquilpan*, Hidalgo,

Mexico, PhD dissertation [University of New Mexico, 1987], chapter 5). The Crucifixion scene painted in Malinalco's upper cloister is visually close to the woodcut of the Crucifixion found in a widely distributed Spanish theological text of 1535 titled *Epistolas i evangelios* (Peterson, *Garden Murals of Malinalco*, chapter 4).

11. See George Kubler, 'On the Colonial Extinction of the Motifs of Pre-Columbian Art,' in *Essays in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology*, edited by Samuel K. Lothrop and others (Cambridge, 1961), 14-34. Although negating the significance of native survivals in art, Kubler was the first to systematically characterize different types of survivals (convergences, juxtapositions, fragments, and so forth).

12. On the form and function of the *malinalli* glyph, see Jeanette F. Peterson, 'Sacred Earth: The Iconography and Function of Malinalli Grass in Aztec Culture,' in *Flora and Fauna Imagery in Precolumbian Cultures: Iconography and Function*, edited by Jeanette F. Peterson (Oxford, 1983), 43-48. Other toponyms in sixteenth-century sculpture and painting are discussed by Reyes-Valerio (*Arte indocristiano*).

13. Pierce (*Frescoes of Ixmiquilpan*, 106-13) identifies the origin and local bearer of the coat of arms; she further suggests that the speech scrolls may indicate a discussion related to the Chichimec war campaign between the eagle, as symbol of the Spanish, and the jaguar, representative of the Otomí, with the second jaguar with bow and arrow, signifying the Chichimecs.

14. Abelardo Carrillo y Carie!, *Ixmiquilpan* (Mexico, 1961).

15. 'El friso monumental de Ixmiquilpan,' *Acts of the XLII International Congress of Americanists, Paris, 1974*, X(1976),9-19.
16. Donna L. Pierce, 'Identification of the Warriors in the Frescoes of Ixmiquilpan,' *Research Center for the Arts Review*, number 4 (1981),1-8;and Pierce, *Frescoes of Ixmiquilpan*.
17. The murals of Xoxoteco were first described by Juan B. Artigas (*La piel de la arquitectura: Murales de Santa Maria Xoxoteco* [Mexico, 1979]) and analyzed by Elena Estrada Gerlero ('Los temas escatológicos en la pintura mural novohispana del siglo XVI,' *Traza y Baza*, VII[1978],71-88).
18. For ritual drinking, see Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, translated by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, 1950-82, Book I, 33, 35, 48-49; Book II, 36, 148, 153-54; Book IV,17, On the Aztec denunciation of drunkenness which is compared to over-eating, the taking of hallucinogens, and in discriminate sexual activity, see Sahagun, Book I, 26; Book VI, 68-71; Book X, 16, 20, 37, 46, 49, 56.
19. *Codex Mendoza*, commentary by Kurt Ross (Fribourg,1978), r4-15.
20. For a similar view, see Gerlero, 'Temas escatológicos,'83.
21. Burkhardt, *Slippery Earth*,159-69.
22. Heaven and Hell were also reenacted for the natives through edifying morality plays and street theater; on this, see Grijalva, *Cronica*, 229,322,333; Motolinia, *History*, m3-09, 119; Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, translated by Lesley B. Simpson (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966),m4.
23. 'Temas escatológicos,'80-82.
24. Burkhardt ('Moral Deviance,' 120), however, suggests that shooting victims with arrows was a pre-Columbian form of punishment for moral deviance, in which case a row sacrifice would have been jointly viewed by Christian and Nahuas as punitive and appropriate to Hell.
25. The subsequent information on Malinalco's lower cloister Paradise Garden murals is derived from the author's analysis of the iconography, meaning, and function of the frescoes within their historical context (Peterson, *Garden Murals of Malinalco*).
26. Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, Book XI,44.
27. 'Double mistaken identity' occurs when a group thinks a given form or concept is operating in the way familiar within its own tradition and is unaware of or unimpressed by the other side's interpretation' (Lockhart, 'Some Nahuas Concepts,'477).
28. Francisco Hernández, *Historia natural de Nueva España*, I/III of *Obras completas* (Mexico, 1959),92.
29. Genesis 2:8-10. The apple came to be favored as the tree with the forbidden fruit because of the Latin etymology of apple from *malum*, meaning both apple and evil.
30. H.W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London, 1952),107-44.
31. Engraving titled 'Adam and Eve,' illustrated in Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore*, plate XIXa.
32. The friar-chronicler Diego Duran (*Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, translated and edited by Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden [Norman, 1971], 121) shows himself vulnerable to this form of 'wishful thinking,' describing the practice of decorating the churches with 'bouquets, flowers, and grass,' which is now permitted

since it is not a superstition but simply an ancient custom.' Yet Duran (238-39, 290) himself also warns the reader of the Indians' 'ancient blindness' or pagan reverence for all plants and animals.

33. Native depictions of flowers, animals, and other design elements always drew unreserved praise from the friars. 'There were good artists who painted from nature, especially birds, animals, trees, greenery, and such things ... But people they did not paint beautifully' (Mendieta, *Historia*, III, 55). The mendicants' reservations about native figurative work were colored by their moralistic stance and paranoia concerning heretical beliefs. Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana*, V [Mexico, 1975], 313).

34. According to the guild ordinances of 1557, native painters were allowed to paint

'flowers, animals, birds, *romanos* [that is, 'grotesque' designs] and other such things to avoid the problems caused by bad painters of saints (Barrio Lorentzot, *Ordenanzas degremios*, 23).

35. Pierce, *Frescos of Mexico*, 170-71.

36. On this, see Richard E. Greenleaf, *Zumarraga and the Mexican Inquisition, 1536-1543* (Washington, 1961), 28-29; Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest*, 107-08, 125-27. The writings of St Augustine were used in support of the spiritual capabilities of all men (Grijalva, *Cronica*, n 3). The chronicler Escobar (*Americana tebaida*, 355) implies that Augustinians allowed native believers to be initiated into the contemplative life. On the humanist education of the regular orders, see Peggy K. Liss, *Mexico Under Spain, 1521-1556* (Chicago and London, 1975), 15-17.