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# The *Convento* of Yanhuitlan and its Altarpiece: Patronage and the Making of a Colonial Iconography in 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Mixteca Alta

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The church and adjoining *convento* of Santo Domingo Yanhuitlan in Oaxaca, Mexico, is one of the most important missions built in Mexico during the sixteenth century (Figure 1). This is not only due its state of preservation, with its sixteenth-century



**Figure 1** The Church of Yanhuitlan. Photo by Alessia Frassani, 2005.

architecture and paintings and as many as thirteen lateral altarpieces from the later colonial period, but also because of the socio-political status the Mixtec town inherited, maintained and even enhanced throughout the region from pre-Hispanic times into the colonial period (Spores 1967, 155–88). The construction work, decoration and maintenance of the *convento*, as well as the sponsorship of the religious festivals that took place around it, were a major catalyst in the socio-economic life of Yanhuitlan.

Located on the Panamerican Highway in the mountainous region of the Mixteca Alta, Yanhuitlan lies on an ancient commercial route that became increasingly important in the colonial period due to the globalization brought about by the Spanish imperial system. The region was part of a larger trade network that included the lucrative commerce of cochineal dye and silk to Spain (Lee 1948; Borah 1943). While cochineal dye was an ancient indigenous industry, and the dye became highly prized in Europe after the establishment of the colonial system, silk raising was introduced by the Spaniards in the Mixteca, becoming the most important export to Spain through most of the seventeenth century (Borah 1943, 85–101; Rosquillas n.d.).<sup>1</sup> Despite the lack of data for silk production in Yanhuitlan, it may well be speculated that this export accounted for much of the financial revenue that was poured into the construction and decoration of the church and *convento*.<sup>2</sup>

This essay considers the *convento* of Yanhuitlan, especially its initial construction phase between 1550 and 1580, as a major agent—and not only a result—of the rapid changes and adjustments of the early colonial period in New Spain.<sup>3</sup> Spaniards as well as local patrons and artists created a truly cosmopolitan place, where Dominican friars, Mixtec caciques and Spanish *encomenderos* (former conquistadors who were given tribute privileges in the conquered territory) could meet, negotiate and define their positions. The article will first perform a documentary and chronological reconstruction of the erection and decoration of the church. This will serve to highlight the large and diverse participation in the process of construction, in contrast to most studies that tend to identify the friars as the sole and principal force behind the missionary enterprise.<sup>4</sup> The Renaissance bias of considering the *idea* or *inventio* as intellectually superior to the material execution of a work has invariably relegated New World's art to the realm of the provincial, derivative and even anonymous (Webster 2009). Following the obvious consideration that many native artisans *must* have built and decorated these *conventos*, due to lack of Spanish labor, indigenous agency is usually identified in the 'folk' manifestations found in architectural decorations and mural painting (Moreno Villa 1942; Neumeyer 1948). Contrary to this, archival research has largely revealed that Mixtec society was a complex one, and such complexity was not lost after the establishment of the colonial order (Terraciano 2001). As I will show, indigenous patronage was instrumental in financing and in deciding what and who would build its churches and *retablos* (multi-paneled altarpieces).

This essay, however, is not only concerned with historical reconstruction. Through a close analysis of the textual, visual and theatrical sources of the main altarpiece's

panels, it also enters into the complex relationship between indigenous (in this case Mixtec) religiosity, Dominican doctrine, and European art during the age of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. This consideration finally suggests that New World evangelization was an integral part in the sixteenth-century debate on the role of the visual arts in Catholic religion.

### Construction of the *Convento* at Yanhuitlan

Although the architects and planners of the *convento* at Yanhuitlan ultimately remain unknown, many documents relate the complex logistical and political labor that went into the construction of the site (Mullen 1975, 141–50).<sup>5</sup> According to the official records of the Dominican chapter meetings, Yanhuitlan's *doctrina* (a religious jurisdiction designed for the conversion and indoctrination of the local Indian population) was accepted in 1548 (Vences Vidal 1990, 119–80). On 15 March 1550, the Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza issued an order to divide money and ornaments that had been provided by the Crown to Domingo de Betanzos, the friar at the head of the Dominican mission in New Spain. Yanhuitlan figures among the establishments most in need of books and ornaments, together with other Dominican *conventos* in Mexico City, Puebla, Morelos and Oaxaca (O'Gorman 1939b, 276–80).

On 14 May 1552, the people of Yanhuitlan were given permission to cut up to 400 *vigas* (wooden beams) from the hills of two nearby towns for the construction works of the church and *convento*, works that, according to the document, had just started (Ayer 1121, f. 33v; Gerhard 1992, 522). On 2 September of the same year, royal officials were ordered to pay the sum of 200 pesos for the Dominican monastery of Yanhuitlan, again mentioning the fact that the construction works at the site had newly begun (Ayer 1121, f. 106r; Gerhard 1992, 523). These documents help situate chronologically the first phase of the construction works, but do not account for the bulk of the financial expenditures needed for the completion of the *convento*. More substantial seems to have been the participation of indigenous people from nearby villages who were forced to contribute. In 1552, the Viceroy Luis de Velasco justified one such order with the argument that the villages fell under the same *encomienda* of Yanhuitlan belonging to the conquistador's son Gonzalo de las Casas, even though it was acknowledged that no service or tribute had been due to Yanhuitlan in ancient times. Furthermore, other subject towns had to provide a total of ten days of work toward the construction of the church in Yanhuitlan, receiving from the cacique the payment of a peso a day for the work (Ayer 1121, ff. 107v–108r; Gerhard 1992, 523). The following year, a number of unspecified subject towns refused to participate in the construction works of the *convento*, claiming an independent status from Yanhuitlan (Ayer 1121, f. 291r). The viceroy once again rejected the claim and obligated the *principales* and other officials of the villages to join forces with Yanhuitlan in providing for the friars of their *doctrina* on the basis that they fell under the religious jurisdiction based in the *convento* of Yanhuitlan. The fact that indigenous villages near Yanhuitlan were forced to contribute to church construction

because they belonged to the same *encomienda* or *doctrina* of Yanhuitlan reveals that the building of the *convento* was the result of an alliance between Yanhuitlan's caciques, the Spanish *encomendero* and the friars, who were able to create a virtual superimposition of three institutions according to a hierarchy that saw Yanhuitlan at the top.<sup>6</sup> Yanhuitlan monastery is again mentioned as being under construction in the following year and must have been very close to completion in 1558 when Yanhuitlan hosted the regional chapter meeting of the Dominicans (Vences Vidal 1990, 144, 163).

### Andrés de Concha, his Patrons and Activities in New Spain

Although the church continued to be the main focus of Yanhuitlan's artistic activities throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it seems that the first stage of construction culminated with the execution of the main altarpiece by the Sevillian artist Andrés de Concha, around 1579 (Figure 2). Considered today one of the most important European artists active in the New World during the sixteenth century, Concha was also praised by his contemporaries and, as a result, his activity in New Spain has consistently received scholarly attention since the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> It is commonly agreed that Concha traveled to the New World after being contracted by Gonzalo de las Casas, *encomendero* of Yanhuitlan, to paint the main *retablo* of the newly constructed church. Although a document referring to this event was located some time in the 1920s by the Sevillian archivist Celestino López Martínez in the Archivo de Protocolos Notariales of Seville, it was never transcribed or precisely located, and remains unknown to present-day scholars (Kubler and Soria 1959, 392 n24; Marco Dorta 1977, 343). Don Gonzalo de las Casas, a native of Trujillo in Extremadura, returned from the Indies in November 1566 (AGI, Contratación 710) and remained in Spain until January 1568 (AGI, Indiferente 2051, leg. 35, ff. 1–8; AGI, Contratación 5537). In December of 1567, he was conducting business in Seville (AHPSE, Protocolos 14.251). These pieces of circumstantial evidence may confirm a possible meeting between las Casas and Concha in the port city, right before their departure. The Sevillian master sailed for Santo Domingo, Hispaniola, on 22 February 1568, under the sponsorship of the Dominican friar Agustín Campuzano (AGI, Contratación 5537; Ruiz Gomar 1983, 66–67, 70).

Between 1570 and 1575, Concha's name appears several times in the records of the Cathedral of Oaxaca, as the recipient of the payments for a *retablo* (Berlin 1979, 310–11). In the second half of the 1570s, he and Simón Pereyans, a Flemish artist with whom he frequently collaborated throughout his career in New Spain, worked in Mexico City for the Confraternity of the Evangelists (*Cofradía de los Evangelistas*), executing the processional sculptures of the four tutelary images, and in the Dominican establishment in Teposcolula, where they were commissioned to make a *retablo* (Muñoz Rivero 1946; Tres pintores del siglo XVI 1942, 60). The main altar at Yanhuitlan appears to have been under construction in 1579, when local residents



**Figure 2** Main altar, church of Yanhuitlan. Photo by Gerardo Hellion, 2007.

requested permission to cut wood for the *retablo* (AGN, General de Parte 2, Exp. 187–88, ff. 37v–38; Spores 1992, 65–66; Tovar de Teresa 1992, 83). In the following year, Concha was still in residence in the village, when he signed a contract for the apprenticeship of Diego de Montesinos, a resident of Yanhuitlan who would work with him for a period of five years (Romero Frizzi 1978, 6–8). Diego de Montesinos may have been the first of a family of local artists initially trained by the Sevillian master, who continued to work in Yanhuitlan in the following centuries. The second largest altarpiece in the church, dedicated to the Virgin of the Rosary, and today still found *in situ* on the south side of the church next to the main altar, was executed by an artist named Pedro de Montesinos in the early 1690s (AGN, Indios 32, Exp. 14, ff. 13v–15v). In the late 1720s Miguel de Montesinos was responsible for the reconstruction of Concha's altarpiece, badly damaged after an earthquake hit the region in 1710s (AHJT, Criminal 21, Exp. 11, f. 77r). In 1581, Concha, together with Pereyns, was again in Teposcolula, providing wooden doors for the *retablo* of the *convento's* open-air chapel (Romero Frizzi 1978, 9–11). In 1582, he was again contracted to work in the cathedral of Oaxaca to make two lateral altars (Romero Frizzi 1978, 12–14). In the document detailing that contract, the *retablo* of Yanhuitlan is taken as a point of reference for what would be executed in Oaxaca, an indication that the work in the village must have been concluded by that time.

After collaborating with Pereyns in 1584 on the decoration of the main altar of the Franciscan mission in Huejotzingo, Puebla (Berlin 1958), in 1587 Concha was again in the Mixteca, working in two important Dominican *conventos* in Achiutla and Tamazulapan (Romero Frizzi 1978, 15–26). In 1589, a criminal suit filed in Yanhuitlan, involving 'Juan mulatto, a gilder, slave of Andrés de Concha,' mentions the artist only in passing, but nevertheless attests to the involvement of mulatto slaves in skilled craftsmanship (AHJT, Criminal 3, Exp. 15).<sup>8</sup> We do not know what Concha and his assistant may have been working on. The main altar of Coixtlahuaca, Concha's only complete extant work in the region other than Yanhuitlan's, remains undocumented and has been attributed to him on the basis of stylistic evidence (Tovar de Teresa 1979, 410). As late as 1608, Concha was back in the city of Oaxaca, where he signed a contract for the main *retablo* in the church of Santo Domingo (Esparza 1996, 121), a work that he left unfinished at the time of his death. Interestingly, exactly during the same period (1607–1609), eighty Yanhuitecos were co-opted to work in the same Dominican monastery in the city. It may be that they were contracted because Concha had previously collaborated with them and trusted their work (AGN, Tierras 2952, Exp. 51, f. 126; AHJT, Criminal 07, Exp. 46). Aside from his career as a painter, we know that Concha worked as an architect and designer in Mexico City, where he was mentioned as *obrero mayor* or *maestro mayor* for the works in the Cathedral, the Convento del Carmen, the Convento Real de Jesús María and in the Hospital de San Hipólito and the Hospital del Jesús (Castro Morales 1976; Fernández 1985, 69–76 and 343–45; Marco Dorta 1951, 145–52).<sup>9</sup>

This brief survey of Andrés de Concha's activities in New Spain, especially in Oaxaca and for Dominican foundations, shows his great versatility: he was a painter,

sculptor, architect and designer. It also points to extended and intersecting networks of patronage that were connecting Spain, the colonial metropolitan capitals, and indigenous towns. Since Concha's connection with Gonzalo de las Casas, *encomendero* of Yanhuitlan, remains ultimately unproven, his travel to the New World under the auspices of Dominican friars helps explain why, once in the Mixteca, he could be redirected to work in Teposcolula, where the construction of the church was more advanced than at Yanhuitlan.<sup>10</sup>

Once in Teposcolula, Concha and Pereyns also had direct contact with local authorities. Indigenous contractors specified that they required twelve canvases measuring three by one and a half *varas* (roughly 2 × 1 meters), to be painted with colors from Castile, on cloths supported by wooden racks provided by the patrons. The work had to be completed by Christmas Day 1581 (Romero Frizzi 1978, 10). In the Mixteca, the network of Dominican *conventos* was financially and logistically tied to the constant input of Mixtec caciques, *principales* and their people. In Achiutla, where Concha worked in 1587, a commission was made by Miguel de Guzmán, husband of Doña María de Guzmán, daughter of don Gabriel, cacique of Yanhuitlan (Romero Frizzi 1978, 15). She was in fact the *cacica* of Achiutla, while don Miguel co-ruled as her husband (AGN, Tierras 400, f. 14; see also Paillés H. 1993, 42). Dominican friars are explicitly mentioned as translators (*lenguas*) and intermediaries between Concha and Mixtec and Chocho *principales* of the barrios and *sujetos* in the contract for the *retablo* of Tamazulapan (Romero Frizzi 1978, 21). This agreement also reveals the opposition of the local *encomendero*, Luis Suárez de Peralta, who later in the same year filed a petition against the cacique and friars. He accused them of charging the people of Tamazulapan large quantities of tribute and revenues from silk raising and channeling them into the unnecessary luxury of decorating the church (AGN, General de Parte 3, Exp. 107, f. 57r–v).

Many commissions in the cities of Oaxaca and Mexico were largely based on the reputation Concha had built in the Mixteca. When contracted to carry out several works in the cathedral of Oaxaca, Concha, who was temporarily residing in Teposcolula, committed himself to execute, among other things, 'a tabernacle of the same size, shape and design as the one executed in Yanhuitlan' (Romero Frizzi 1978, 12–14).<sup>11</sup> The Mixtec commission evidently was considered fitting for an urban and Spanish audience as well. His prestigious appointment as *maestro mayor* of the Mexico City cathedral was decided on the basis of his accomplishments as a painter and sculptor, as it was acknowledged that he had no design experience (Fernández 1985, 344).<sup>12</sup> Finally, Concha's intense activities in Central and Southern Mexico appear to be as part of a team, for he readily collaborated with or orchestrated a number of indigenous, mulatto and Spanish painters, sculptors and guilders. This is worth mentioning, because, although such collaboration was common practice throughout the Iberian world in the early modern period, Renaissance art theory, as it was developing in those years in Italy, was based on the preeminence of the *idea* over execution; it tended, therefore, to overestimate the role played by the 'masters' in what was in fact a communal effort.



The Mixteca Alta of Oaxaca boasts among the most magnificent *conventos* erected once it was part of New Spain. Although the extant documents from the Mixteca reveal a primary interest on the part of local clients in the amount of gold and gilded sculptures that needed to be part of the final work (Romero Frizzi 1978), certain specific aspects of the contracts also show similarities with the incipient idea of the genius and artistic uniqueness typical of Renaissance Italy. In the contract for the *retablo* in Huejotzingo, for example, the clients detailed the decoration of the *retablo* itself, while no mention is made of the subject matter and treatment of the paintings, other than that Concha and Pereyans were specifically contracted to execute them, and no other artist was to replace them (Berlin 1958, 71). These elements of the contract are similar to the ones highlighted by Baxandall in his classic study of fifteenth-century Italian art patronage. Specifications on the amount of costly material and labor went hand in hand with the 'equally conspicuous consumption of something else—skill' (Baxandall 1972, 15). Equal to Piero della Francesca and Filippino Lippi in central Italy, Andrés de Concha and Simón Pereyans were the most famous painters active in New Spain at the time. It can be argued that their fame (along with the established late-Renaissance canons of religious and narrative paintings) was considered enough of a credential that no further specification was needed (Baxandall 1972, 24–25). This further hints that Mixtec patrons were fully engaged in the most pressing issues regarding the artistic production of Catholic imagery, as we will see now.

### Another Type of Source: Don Gabriel de Guzmán's Testament and Inventory

All the documents mentioned so far are quite explicit on the political implications of artistic patronage and the complex rules of coexistence among friars, Spaniards and local indigenes, while they remain silent on the cultural practices and religious behaviors that were affected by such close interaction. If no document has been retrieved so far that specifically deals with the iconographic choices for Yanhuitlan's altarpiece, the testament and inventory of goods pertaining to don Gabriel de Guzmán, cacique of Yanhuitlan during the years of construction of the *convento* and execution of Concha's *retablo*, reveal clues to Catholic practices in the late-sixteenth-century Mixteca that may be directly related to the main altar in the church.

Don Gabriel de Guzmán succeeded to the *cacicazgo* of Yanhuitlan in 1558, inheriting the rule from his uncle don Domingo, brother of Doña María, Gabriel's mother, who temporarily ruled while don Gabriel came of age. The uncle and nephew, however, could not have been more different from one another. While don Domingo had to face the Inquisition and was tried and jailed between 1544 and 1546 for opposing the Dominican presence in the village (Jiménez Moreno and Mateos Higuera 1940; Sepúlveda y Herrera 1999), his nephew, in just a generation, had seemingly absorbed the dramatic political, economic and religious changes brought about by Spanish colonization. Don Gabriel could appropriate and display Spanish customs, language and religion with great confidence, without experiencing the

cultural trauma that characterized his uncle's life and rule. Whether or not he was educated by the friars, don Gabriel came to embody the perfect Catholic and ladino (Spanish-educated) cacique.<sup>13</sup> Comfortably sitting in the middle ground between Spanish authorities (both *encomendero* and Dominicans) and Mixtec subjects, he enjoyed the best of both worlds. Consistently referred to as '*cacique y gobernador*,' he was the head of the traditional rulership system (the *cacicazgo*) and the newly introduced representative assembly of the *cabildo*, also referred to as the *República de Indios*. As such, he is a unique figure, and probably the most powerful cacique Yanhuitlan ever had. In the middle of the eighteenth century, when the *cacicazgo* came to an end, he was regarded as the founder of Yanhuitlan's ruling dynasty (AGN, Tierras 400, f. 3).

In 1591, after thirty-five years in power, don Gabriel wrote his testament, leaving the *cacicazgo* of Yanhuitlan to his son, don Francisco (AGN, Tierras 400).<sup>14</sup> His inventory of goods shows that he owned over a hundred plots of land (indicated by the Mixtec word *ytu*) and over a thousand goats, common property of an indigenous of high nobility at the time. He also owned a horse, a stallion and a colt, all items the possession of which required permission from Spanish authorities. Among his precious belongings, such as gold and silver plates, vessels and goblets, was a varied collection of pre-Hispanic and colonial artifacts: icons of the Virgin, Jesus, and saints appear together with effigies of a crocodile and an eagle with golden and jade pendants. According to the brief descriptions, the indigenous practice of adorning objects with little bells was transferred to Catholic icons such as images of the Virgin, Santiago, and a Spanish Coat of Arms.<sup>15</sup> Among don Gabriel's religious belongings were also two rosary necklaces with eighty and seventy-nine beads.

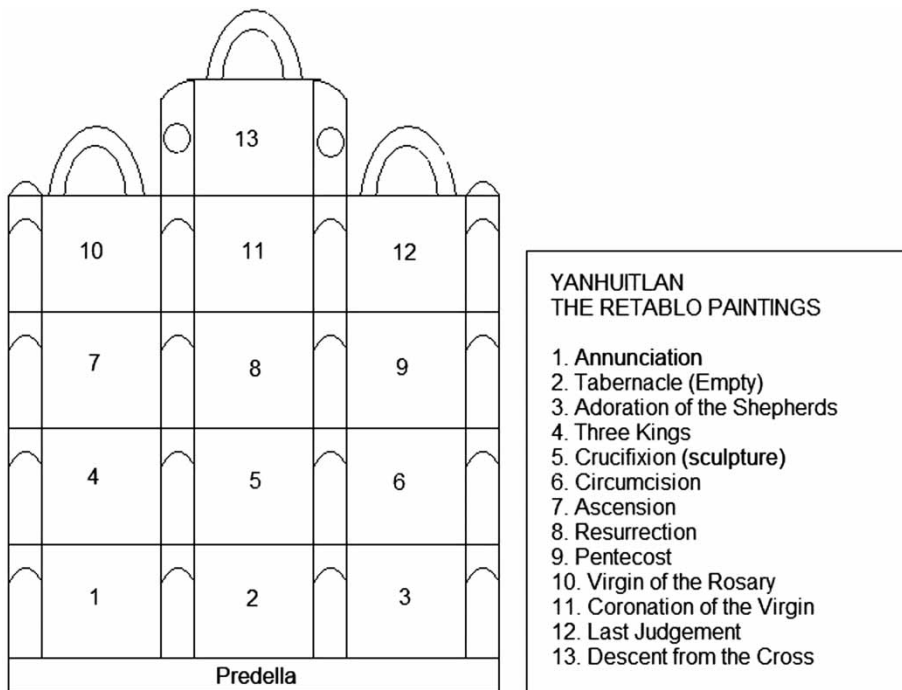
Don Gabriel's library comprised two books, *Flos Sanctorum* and *Contemptus Mundi*, which could as well be found in the library of a devout Spaniard in Castile.<sup>16</sup> The former contains popular stories of the saints derived from the medieval *Legenda Aurea*. The latter is briefly described in the inventory as a 'very small book,' the size hinting at strictly private use. The Latin expression *contemptus mundi* is usually translated in English as 'contempt of the world' and indicates a state of detachment and even disdain for the material world. Since early Christian times, a strain of religious literature was devoted to the cultivation of this rather reclusive and stoic spiritual attitude. In early modern Spain, *De Contemptu Mundi* was the Spanish translation of *Imitatio Christi* written by the Dutch Thomas à Kempis, done by the friar-theologian Luis de Granada in 1536.

The inventory of don Gabriel's goods lists other objects as well, among which were 'two jewels that are two golden bells used for dancing belonging to the community of Achiutla.'<sup>17</sup> Theatrical paraphernalia such as rattles and feathers were transmitted from pre-Hispanic to colonial religious theater.<sup>18</sup> The fact that the Mixtec cacique owned such a wide range of ritual objects further points to the complementarity of different aspects of religious practice: the meditation on the life of Christ in a fashion common among the learned classes of Europe coexisted with the participation in communal dancing and celebrations, religious expressions more typically associated

with popular culture and, in the case of the Mixteca, indigenous practices. Images and objects, along with their symbolic meaning, traveled across different social, ethnic and cultural classes.<sup>19</sup> The eclectic array of religious and social stances that characterized don Gabriel's life finds a compelling expression in the variety of sources of Yanhuitlan's *retablo*, suggesting a pragmatic approach in the creation of a common religious language.

### Yanhuitlan's Main Altar: Iconography and Context

Yanhuitlan's main altarpiece comprises thirteen panels (Figures 2 and 3). The *predella* at its base depicts Mary Magdalene and Saint Jerome, as female and male examples of Christian penitents, which can be paired with three small rounded panels depicting friars and nuns on the very top. Painted panels are typically located at the intersection of vertical and horizontal registers (called *calles* and *cuerpos*, respectively, in Spanish) with sculptural and architectural elements (such as images of saints, columns, pilasters or entablatures) serving as dividing and structural elements in between. The central *calle* typically contains a niche where the monstrance with the Sacrament is placed during mass. A carved relieved sculpture, rather than a painting, often



**Figure 3** Diagram of Andrés de Concha's main altar in the church of Santo Domingo Yanhuitlan. Drawing by Jaime Andrés Martínez Ramírez.

occupies the middle register. In Yanhuitlan, the central sculpture represents a *Crucifixion*.<sup>20</sup>

There are just a few extant late Renaissance *retablos* in New Spain. For the most part they show a remarkable coherence in their content (Bargellini 1998, 128–29). The main altarpieces at Huejotzingo, Puebla (Pereyns, 1584), Coixtlahuaca, Oaxaca (attributed to Concha) and Xochimilco, Federal District (Baltazar Echave de Orío, early seventeenth century), for example, are cognate to Concha's. They all consistently refer to a narrative template constituted by episodes of the lives of the Virgin and Jesus, often juxtaposed and roughly placed in chronological order bottom to top, but with some noticeable exceptions. This pattern is repeated regardless of the saint to whom the mission was dedicated (Saint Dominic, in Yanhuitlan) or the religious order (the Franciscan San Miguel Huejotzingo, for example).

The altarpiece is crowned by a *Descent from the Cross* (Figure 4), depicting Jesus's followers Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus carefully taking his dead body down from the cross with the help of a cloth. The body of Jesus is stiff and his rigid arms remain straight even after removal from the beam. Below, female followers hold Jesus's feet, and Mary, overwhelmed with grief, collapses in the foreground. The overall composition, and the treatment of the body of Jesus in particular, can be compared to a painting of the same subject, now in the main cathedral of Seville, executed around 1546–47 by the Flemish artist Peter Kampeneer, also known by his Hispanicized name of Pedro de Campaña (Figure 5).<sup>21</sup>

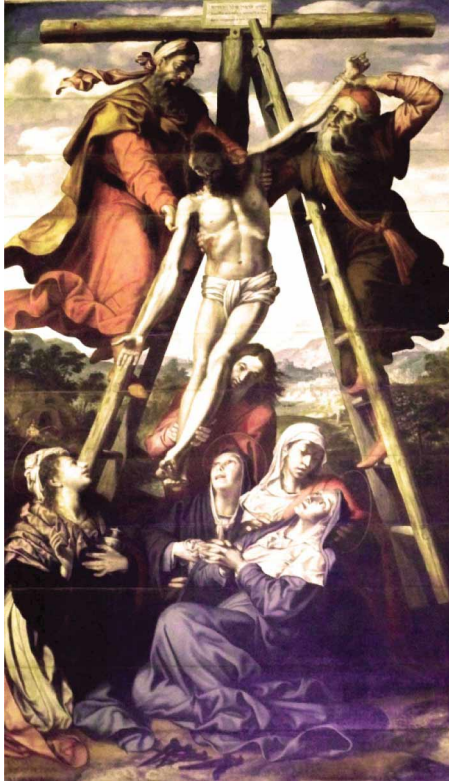
The composition is characterized by a very high placement of the crossbeam and by solid diagonals created by the lateral ladders. Mural paintings from other *conventos* of New Spain, most likely executed prior to Concha's painting, help illuminate the significance of the composition and its placement within the *retablo*. In the church of San Miguel Huejotzingo, Puebla, a Holy Friday procession is painted around the north and south walls of the nave. The *Deposition* is found above the north door.<sup>22</sup> In the Dominican *convento* of San Juan Teitipac, in Oaxaca's Central Valleys, the *portería* (a porticoed entrance to the main *convento*) is decorated with murals of Dominican friars and indigenous people participating in a Holy Week procession. The *Descent* is again found on top of a door, this time at the entrance to the cloister (Figure 6). I would argue that both examples, very close to Yanhuitlan's chronologically, constitute a typological equivalent to Concha's *Descent*. These pictures are cognate in their placement of the Descent in a crowning position, indicating that the reenactment of the Deposition from the Cross was a dramatic climax in Holy Friday services (Escalante Gonzalbo 2005, 228). The use of a white cloth to wrap the body of Jesus before burial was a Jewish custom documented in the Gospel. In medieval Christian times, the descent was routinely enacted in paraliturgical rites during Holy Week, giving rise to a more complex scene. The cloth is used to take down the body by passing it under the arms of Jesus while holding it from above. Jesus is eventually presented to the Virgin before being placed inside the coffin (the Holy Sepulcher).<sup>23</sup> In 1582, Dávila Padilla (1955, 563) described this procedure as it was carried out in Mexico City's Dominican convent and referred to the image 'as if it were a real body'



**Figure 4** Andrés de Concha, *Descent from the Cross*, church of Santo Domingo Yanhuitlan. Archivo Fotográfico Manuel Toussaint, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Printed with permission of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

(*como si fuese de cuerpo natural*) because of its movable limbs. I witnessed the reenactment of the descent from the cross in Yanhuitlan, and it is quite an emotional moment when the nails are removed and the image paradoxically ‘comes alive’ to signify Jesus’s death.

Theatrical representations are among the most cited references in contemporary interpretations of missionary arts (Edgerton 2001). Such interpretations follow closely the accounts given by friars, who were themselves fully immersed in the European culture of the passion plays (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2009, 143–49).<sup>24</sup> However, I think that the friars often overstate the indigenous inclination towards performative practices to demonstrate the supposed impressionable nature of the New World natives. In the friars’ chronicles, written with the clear intent of justifying their continuous presence in the indigenous territory, childish mimicry, rather than mature appropriation and interpretation, seems to be the preferred response of the indigenous to Catholic indoctrination (Trexler 1984). Contrary to this, as we have seen in the case of don Gabriel, the cacique of Yanhuitlan during the years of Concha’s presence in the village, Catholic practices and beliefs were transmitted, received and reinvented in a varieties of ways and coexisting simultaneously in



**Figure 5** Pedro de Campaña, *Descent from the Cross*, 1547. Cathedral, Seville. Photo by Michaël Martin, 2007.

Yanhuitlan. What I propose in the following pages, therefore, is another possible layer of meaning to the external, public and communal practice of the theatrical experience, one that conversely emphasizes internal and private knowledge.

The dramatic climax suggested by the crowning position of the *Descent* indicates that the mere chronological retelling of the story of Mary and Jesus was not the rationale of the overall composition of the *retablo*'s scenes. Figure 3 further shows that while the lower registers follow a linear chronological order, beginning in the bottom left with the *Annunciation*, and followed by the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, the *Adoration of the Magi*, and the *Circumcision*, the top two registers with the events that followed the death of Christ on the Cross (depicted as a carved relief in the central panel of the second register), present a more complex disposition. In the third *cuervo*, the *Ascension of Christ* precedes the *Resurrection*, followed by the *Pentecost*. In the fourth register, the *Virgin of the Rosary* breaks the narrative flow altogether. The rationale of such choices seems to distance itself from a simple and direct idea of indoctrination to enter into more sophisticated ways of looking at and referring to images.<sup>25</sup>



**Figure 6** Portería, *Convento* of San Juan Teitipac. Photo by Alessia Frassani, 2005.

Both the *Ascension of Christ* (Figure 7) and *Pentecost* in Concha's Yanhuitlan altarpiece derive from Albrecht Dürer's treatment of the same subjects in the *Small Passion* (Figure 8). A large and ambitious work created by the German master in 1511, the *Small Passion* comprises thirty-six pictures that illustrate the Passion of Christ within a larger evangelical and biblical scheme (Arnulf 2004). Dürer's unusual inclusion of the first episodes (*The Fall of Man* and *Expulsion from Paradise*), *Veronica's Veil*, and the concluding *Pentecost*, *Ascension* and *Last Judgment* can be traced to broadsheets, leaf prints and Lenten cloths that widely circulated in Germany by the end of the fifteenth century (Hass 2000). These cheap and popular media are tied to forms of lay devotion and religious practice, including indoctrination and public preaching during specific liturgical times of the year, a function similar to that of much early colonial art in Latin America.

The image of the disappearing Christ in the *Ascension* (Figures 7 and 8) derives from illuminated manuscripts and is typical of book illustrations since the High Middle Ages, while only rarely appearing in painting (Schapiro 1979). One such example, which surely circulated in the Mixteca, comes from the *Doctrina Cristiana en Lengua Mixteca*, written by the Dominican friar Benito Hernández in 1567 (Figure 9).<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 7** Andrés de Concha, *Ascension of Christ*, church of Santo Domingo Yanhuitlan. Photo by Alessia Frassani, 2011.

In New Spain, however, it also became a painting prototype for other artists who followed suit after Concha: Pereyns adopted it at Huejotzingo and Echave Orio at Xochimilco. This original depiction of the Ascension, where only the feet of Christ are to be seen, as if the viewer were witnessing the act together with the Apostles kneeling on the ground, has been interpreted in divergent ways in art-historical scholarship. While Schapiro (1979) and Mâle (1984, 267–87) interpret it as a realistic, dramatic reenactment of the event in early medieval and Gothic art respectively, Deshman (1997) argues for a contemplative meaning. On the one hand, scholars point to the subjective and personal engagement experienced during Passion plays and pilgrimages to the *loca sancta* in the Holy Land. On the other, the stress is placed on monastic reforms in tenth-century England that promoted an ideal contemplative life. In the latter case, images of the disappearing Christ served as a reminder of the limitation of sensorial vision, while paradoxically the viewer gazes at a picture. What

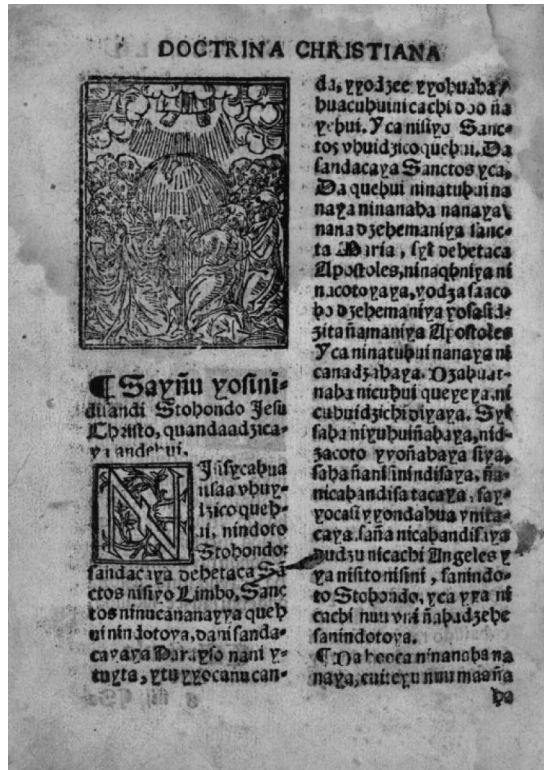




**Figure 8** Albrecht Dürer, 'Ascension of Christ,' from the *Small Passion*, 1511. The British Museum, London.

it means is that the sinful and mortal human condition prevents us from a full apprehension of Heaven (and Christ's position in it). I think, however, that the image can be read both ways; what was made of it depended on the context, intellectual inclinations and abilities of the reader. Once again, external and expressive modes of religious behavior coexisted with introspective and meditational practices.

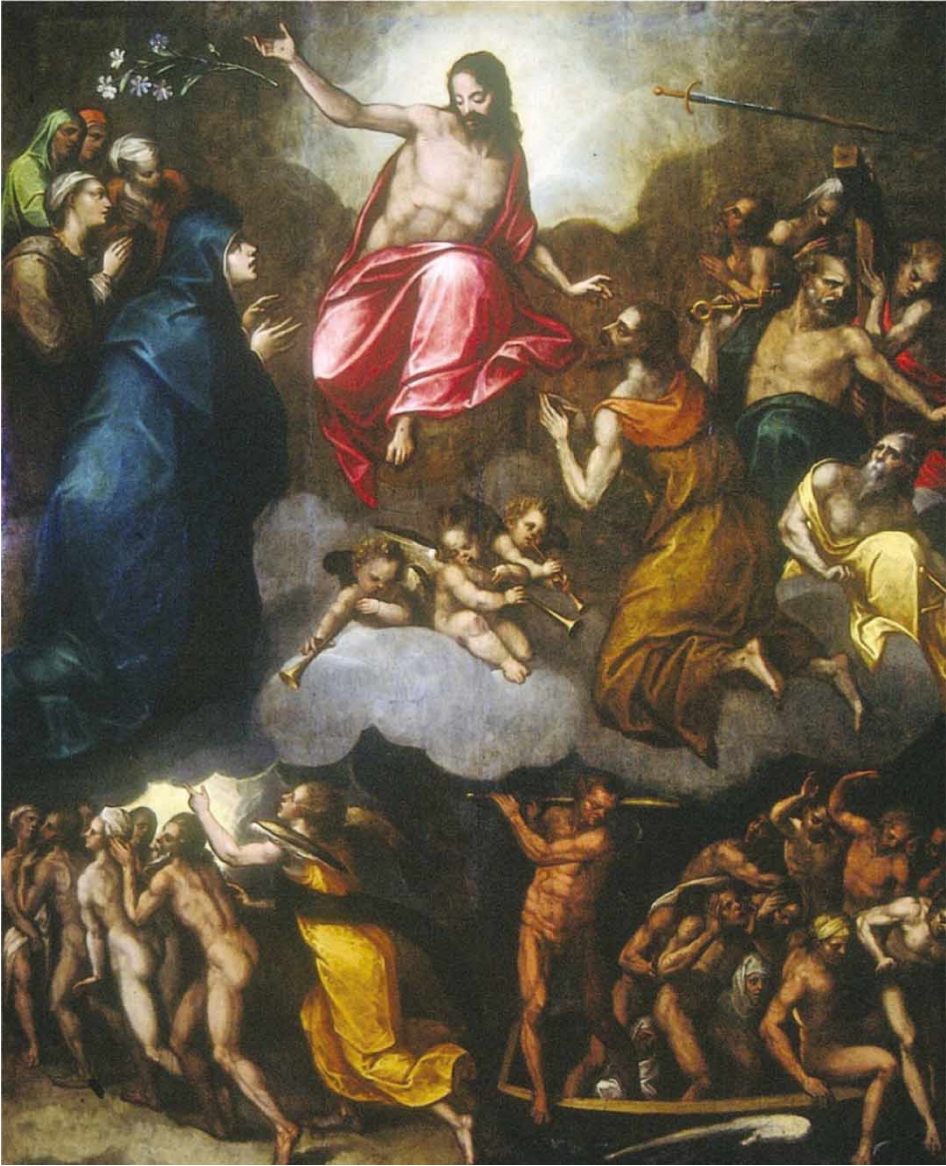
In the painting of the *Last Judgment* (Figure 10), Concha reworked a number of sources into an original composition. While there is an obvious citation of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, evident in the figure of Charon slashing the damned into Hell in the lower right portion, stylistically, the dynamism that characterizes the upper portion of the picture, especially in the wide gestures of Christ and Saint Peter on the right, is reminiscent of Venetian altarpieces of similar subjects, such as Titian's *Glory*, painted between 1552 and 1554 for Charles V's retreat at Yuste, and Tintoretto's *Last Judgment*, painted in 1560 for the church of the Madonna dell'Orto in Venice.<sup>27</sup> Concha's composition is tighter and less flamboyant



**Figure 9** ‘Ascension of Christ,’ from *Doctrina Cristiana en Lengua Mixteca* (Mexico City, 1567). Cushing Memorial Library and Archives, Texas A&M University. [www.primeroslibros.org](http://www.primeroslibros.org).

than its Venetian counterparts, allowing for a greater and easier readability of the subject. This may be yet another reference to Dürer’s *Small Passion*, which, as noted above, also includes a depiction of the *Last Judgment*. Relying on established late-medieval prototypes, Dürer created a simple composition dominated by the large figures of Christ, Saint John and the Virgin Mary on top and a smaller scene with the partition of the saved and the damned below. The fact that so-called *tequitqui* stone carvings from Central Mexico (see Aguilar in this volume) have also been recognized as having a direct lineage to late-fifteenth-century German woodcuts demonstrates that there is continuity and indeed intentional overlap between native and Spanish artistic productions in the New World (Kubler 1948, 375–76, 392–96; Edgerton 2001, 142). Indigenous patronage and audience, as well as the missionary setting, may be the reasons for the similarity in the iconographic choices.

The cluster of images discussed above—*Pentecost-Ascension-Last Judgment*—all clearly derived from Dürer, is unique at Yanhuitlan. Coupled with the earlier panels depicting the birth and infancy of Jesus, they seem to point to a storytelling that



**Figure 10** Andrés de Concha, *Last Judgment*, church of Santo Domingo, Yanhuitlan. Archivo Fotográfico Manuel Toussaint, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Printed with permission of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

embraced the whole destiny of humanity, from its inception to the last day. In a strikingly similar manner to Dürer's *Small Passion*, such design casts present and past actions onto a cosmological stage, explaining the meaning of human existence as a quest for salvation (Price 2003, 144–45).

The importance of print sources in the artistic development of New Spain often has been stated by art historians, not only in the case of Christian art produced by native artists, who did not have a direct knowledge of Western artistic prototypes and canons, but as part of routine apprenticeship in Europe, including Spanish and Flemish artists. Interpretations, however, have been generally limited to the mere tracing of the original sources (Angulo Íñiguez 1949; Kubler 1948, 372–82; Tovar de Teresa 1992, 191–99), with the inevitable conclusion that lack of originality, misinterpretation, and derivative outcomes are the most common features of New World painting (Manrique 1990; Bargellini 2004, 79–81). This disregards the fact that copying was a wide and generalized practice in Renaissance art and was not due to lack of creativity on the part of the artist. Patrons could require that a certain model be followed, or artists might decide to emulate a famous master. The utilization of printed sources in the arts of colonial Latin America therefore constitutes a means to explore the way in which émigré and native artists and patrons related to and conceived their newly acquired role within the wider Hispanic world (Zalamea 2008). Concha's appropriation of Dürer, far from being a thoughtless process of reproduction or even an intellectual citation, demonstrates a clear and conscious engagement with the doctrinal and theological implications of the original, its structure, and cultural references.

### The Picture of the Rosary and the Art of Memory

The most complex painting in Yanhuitlan's main altar is the panel of the *Virgin of the Rosary* (Figure 11), whose composition is unique in New Spain and rather rare in European Renaissance painting as well.<sup>28</sup> The 'apparition' of the Virgin and baby Jesus is framed by a white rosary. Between each set of five small beads, there is a large one containing scenes of the Mysteries of the Rosary (fifteen in total). The first section is of white flowers, indicating the purity of the infant Christ. The second section, related to the Passion, is a pale red, or pink, in reference to the blood and suffering of Jesus, while the last part is yellow or golden referring to the glory of the Resurrection and related Mysteries. In the lower portion of the painting are members of Spanish colonial society. The church hierarchy is to the left, including the pope, a bishop and a Dominican friar. The Spanish political establishment is to the right, comprising two knights in armor and two women. This picture is highly iconic and emblematic for several reasons. First, it is a diagrammatic display of the Spanish imperial system; second, it does not fit and indeed breaks the narrative flow of the rest of the scenes; and finally, it offers to the viewer alternative levels of reading by incorporating different scenes rotating around a frontal image.<sup>29</sup>

The prototype of this picture is the late-fifteenth-century *Rosenkranzbild*, which developed in Germany across different types of print media. Single-leaf woodcuts representing the Virgin enthroned, surrounded by large medallions with vignettes of the Passion, were accompanied by texts explaining the indulgences conceded to those devoted to the Rosary (Panofsky 1955, 111). In New Spain, this image seems to have



**Figure 11** Andrés de Concha, *Virgin of the Rosary*, church of Santo Domingo Yanhuitlan. Archivo Fotográfico Manuel Toussaint, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Printed with permission of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.



**Figure 12** ‘Virgin of the Rosary,’ from *Arte en Lengua Zapoteca* (Mexico City, 1578). The John Carter Brown Library. [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).

circulated mainly in prints, such as the one in Figure 12 taken from a page of the *Arte en Lengua Zapoteca* (a grammar of the Zapotec language), written by the Dominican friar Juan de Córdoba and published in 1578.<sup>30</sup> In the Iberian Peninsula, the cult of the Virgin of the Rosary was especially popular in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, from which the closest antecedent to Concha’s depiction originates. It is an engraving by the Catalan artist Francisco Doménech dated 1488 (Figure 13), possibly part of the first publication containing the recitation of the Fifteen Mysteries of the Rosaries, but known today only as a loose print (Bauman 1989, 138). The *retablo*-like page is divided into two sections. On top are the fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary, arranged in a grid. The *Ascension* shows the same disappearing Christ seen at Yanhuitlan, followed by the *Pentecost* and the *Assumption* and *Coronation of the Virgin*. At the bottom, the Virgin and Child, framed by a large Rosary, are surrounded by kneeling clergymen on the left, and a knight on the right (Bauman 1989, 140–42).<sup>31</sup> This print, its sources, and its iconographic and formal execution are close to Dürer’s *Small Passion*, pointing again to a clear decision on the part of Concha and his patrons to assimilate and reproduce specific European models.

The Virgin of the Rosary is a cult particularly dear to the Dominicans. It is therefore no surprise that a book titled *Institución, modo de rezar y milagros e*

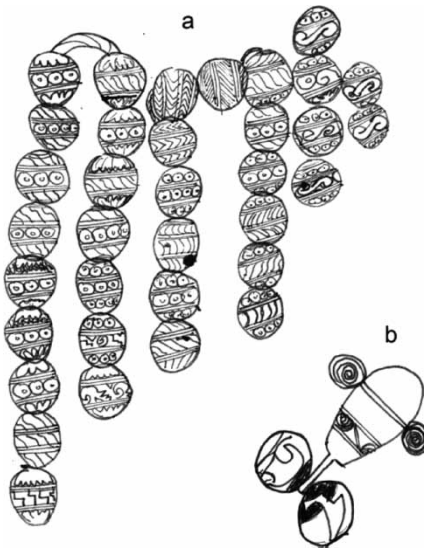


**Figure 13** Francisco Doménech, *Fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary*, 1488. Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels.

*indulgencias del Rosario de la Virgen María* circulated in Oaxaca in the latter part of the sixteenth century.<sup>32</sup> It was translated into Mixtec sometime in 1584 with the title *Rosario Dzequeyy[a dzehe Sancta Ma.]* ('Rosary, jewel of the Virgin Mary'), but we do not know if it was ever published. The manuscript is kept today in the Library of the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística in Mexico City (Jansen 1998).

Originally written in Catalan by the Dominican friar Jerónimo (Geroni) Taix in 1556, with the title of *Llibre des miracles del roser*, only one Spanish version exists today and it is found in the Biblioteca Burgoa in Oaxaca, part of the old Dominican library in the city convent, but it is not known if this text circulated in the Mixteca during the most important decades of evangelization. Nevertheless, the so-called *Codex Yanhuitlan*, f. 8r–v (Figure 14a), which details in a pictorial manner the early years of the evangelization in the village, clearly shows the importance given to the object itself and its cult. In the beads, sacredness is expressed with pre-Hispanic symbols, such as those found in the jewels of Monte Alban’s Mixtec tombs (Figure 14b). Similarly to the objects described in the possession of don Gabriel de Guzmán, these ancient symbols were reutilized and incorporated into a Catholic object (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2009, 285–343; Jiménez Moreno and Mateos Higuera 1940, 63–64).

The *Libro del Rosario* is divided into four sections (*libros*), dealing with different aspects of the Virgin of the Rosary cult, such as its institutionalization through the foundation of a confraternity devoted to it, the indulgences granted by the Church to the members of the Confraternity, and various miracles attributed to the Virgin of the Rosary. Book Two specifically explains different ways in which one can pray the Rosary, beginning with the examples of notable men and women.<sup>33</sup> A devout Spanish lady by the name of María, for example, used different images to recite the Rosary. First, she would put before her eyes an image of the Virgin and begin to go through the first five Joyful Mysteries by contemplating the heart, eyes, ears and lips of Mary (Taix does not mention the fifth body part, perhaps implying that different ones could be chosen according to one’s preference). The Sorrowful Mysteries pertaining



**Figure 14** Rosary in *Codex Yanhuitlan*, f. 8v, and bell pendant from Tomb 7, Monte Alban. Drawing by Jaime Andrés Martínez Ramírez.



to the Passion of Christ were similarly recited by concentrating on Jesus's body parts. Finally, the Glorious Mysteries were prayed in front of different images in the church altars, favoring those for which the woman had the greatest devotion. Another lady called Catalina la Bella (Catherine the Beautiful) prayed the Joyful Mysteries by contemplating an image of the Child Jesus. Taix explains that although the image would depict a baby, Catalina had in her mind the image of the crucified Christ. The contrast between the tenderness of the actual image and the cruelty of the mental one was meant to intensify the emotional involvement during prayer. Catalina chanted the second and third *quinquagesimas* (rounds of fifteen prayers to the Mysteries) while contemplating images from the Passion, first concentrating on the human suffering of Christ and then on the divine significance that derived from it, that is, salvation. As the 'linear' recitation of the Ave Maria and Paternoster progressed, the devotee was asked to concentrate on different pictures and their details. What sounded externally like a mere repetition corresponded internally to a visionary figural composition (Winston-Allen 1997, 53–54).

In the 1576 edition of Taix' Rosary in the Biblioteca Burgoa, the exact pages illustrating the use of images for praying are missing.<sup>34</sup> However, illustrations found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century versions of the same book published in Catalonia suggest a similar reading that combines meditation, prompted by an image and short text, with oral recitation.<sup>35</sup> In all editions, each mystery is illustrated by a vignette and a short rhymed text meant to elicit a personal connection with the episode explained. In these texts the reader addresses the Virgin directly, often manifesting sympathetic emotions of joy and sorrow. The illustrations are in some cases round, rather than squared, a reference to the rosary beads the reader would have in their hands. At the end of the texts, it is stated how many Ave Marias and Pater Nosters have to be prayed. At the beginning of the section and separating the three blocks of mysteries is a full page with different representations of the Virgin in the upper part and a short lyrical text below followed by an indication of the prayers to be recited. Looking at the vignettes sequentially, it can be seen that they run parallel to the meditational text and create a linear representation of the rosary images, in which there is a large bead/image for every five smaller ones. This is the case of the Yanhuitlan painting (Figure 11), where the five-mysteries' blocks are interspersed with roses, for example, and of the illustration from the Zapotec dictionary (Figure 12), where a larger rose is placed every ten beads. In each case, there is an explicit allusion to the manner of alternating the recitation of the Ave Maria and Pater Noster.

It is clear from the examples presented so far that representations of the Virgin of the Rosary typically adopt either a linear (Figure 13) or a circular representation (Figure 11), which reflects the dual nature of the reader's interaction with the image. The viewer/picture relationship functioned within two 'polar opposites': oral recitation, carried out aloud and characterized by long repetitions, and an internal meditation on the picture. Techniques of mental praying owe much to the medieval 'art of memory' (Yates 1966, 50–104). Based on the canons of Classical rhetoric, mnemotechnics allowed for the memorization of massive quantities of information

that had to be mentally organized according to a well-known image. A more complex mental picture enabled the memorization of more articulate contents, which were stored along a visually structured outline and could be recited in an ordered fashion. In the case of the rosary picture, the text to be recited is in itself rather simple; what is complex are the doctrinal, dogmatic and even theological implications of the mysteries of the life of Christ.

Not only the overall structure, but also each picture carried an intrinsic cosmological or affective knowledge that is tied to the recited text, even though not explicitly mentioned (Parshall 1999, 456–72). This feature is evident in the composition of the images of the rosary, where each single vignette captures a deeply meaningful and symbolic event in the life of Jesus. The correspondence between words, images and overall composition multiplied the ways in which analogies between different realms (textual, visual and oral) could be imagined and interpreted. As an example, the rose depicting the mystery of the Ascension in the *Virgin of the Rosary* displays the same iconography of the disappearing Christ of the main panel. This self-referentiality points to the ways of reading the *retablo*'s pictures on the part of the audience, who could easily refer to the recitation of the rosary while staring at the larger picture and vice versa.

Looking back at the overall program of Yanhuitlan's altar, we can now better understand why, while the lower panels that relate to the infancy and earthly episodes of the life of Jesus follow a clear chronological order, the upper part, where the godly nature of Jesus is revealed, move away from a linear (human) comprehension towards a visionary one (see also Winston-Allen 1997, 54). The picture/text relationship can be characterized by a series of oppositions, which frame the dialog between the natural, human world of the believer and the supernatural and divine realm of God. Pictures play a fundamental role, as they help move from a superficial and sensorial apprehension to a deeper intellectual grasp of the divine. There is a constant tension between two poles (outward/inward; picture/text; sensory/intellectual), based on the ontological dualism between body and soul. One cannot exist without the other and faith itself becomes the constant struggle to reach across the gap that separates the human condition from God. The high placement of the panel of the *Virgin of the Rosary*, which makes it almost impossible to discern the episodes depicted in the small rosettes, also points to a progressive movement toward a more ascetic and difficult penetration of the mysteries of faith.

### Final Remarks

In this essay, I have argued for a complex interaction of people and ideas that went into the production and execution of a similarly complex object: the main altar at Yanhuitlan. If documentary evidence is strong for such a relationship of interdependence between patrons and their artists, the interpretations that are given of the artistic legacy of sixteenth-century *retablos* do not accurately account for the situation. Christian iconography and Spanish artistic forms are considered a testament to the successful imposition of Spanish culture and religion on the

conquered American territory and its people. This type of cultural analysis does not take into account that indigenous caciques appear in the documents as individuals fully capable of participating in Hispanic society, economically and culturally. The Mixtec text presented here, the *Rosario Dzequeyy[a dzehe Sancta Ma.]* ('Rosary, jewel of the Virgin Mary'), together with the *Doctrina en lengua mixteca*, and possibly others that have not come down to us, contain extremely elaborate and complex doctrinal, moral and theological explanations that imply equally knowledgeable Mixtec authors, regardless of the fact that they still remain anonymous.<sup>36</sup> It becomes obvious, then, that Mixtecs were fully able to participate in elaborate Catholic practices and as such had a say in the iconography of the *retablo* just discussed. The fact that no discernible indigenous elements seem to surface in these paintings has more to do with our modern ways of seeing and recognizing indigenous presence than with the colonial situation (Dean and Leibsohn 2003).

Nonetheless, all the performative and oral clues found in the iconography of the main altar of Yanhuitlan and related texts point also to the common ground that Spanish and Amerindian shared in the sixteenth century. In indigenous America, non-literate cultures have developed sophisticated devices for the durable representation of their philosophy and history (Severi 2010). Similar to the case presented here, in Native American pictography, the oral and the written, the recited and the permanent, live in a constant interchange of meaning, within a variety of contexts and uses. Ancient Mesoamerican civilizations, and the Mixtecs in particular, developed a long picture-writing tradition, which continued well into the colonial period, as numerous pictographic and documentary sources attest (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2007). Despite the fact that the different manners of readings such texts have not been the focus of much investigation, it is perfectly plausible that an ancient 'Amerindian art of memory' may have imbued Spanish artistic practice in sixteenth-century Mixteca, beyond what can be currently recognized.<sup>37</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a general discussion of the economic situation in the Mixteca Alta in the sixteenth century, see Romero Frizzi 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Gonzalo de las Casas, *encomendero* of Yanhuitlan, claimed that his mother introduced the industry in the Mixteca Alta (Casas 1996). See also the so-called *Codex Sierra*, from the Mixtec-Chocho town of Tejupan, for a detailed account of silk revenues and church-related expenses (León 1933).

<sup>3</sup> When the Dominican friars first settled in Yanhuitlan in 1527, they built a church on the same site (a pre-Hispanic platform) where the current church is found. However, they were forced to leave the town a few years later and by the mid-1540s, the structure was in ruins (Jiménez Moreno and Mateos Higuera 1940, 30).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Mullen 1975.

<sup>5</sup> Mullen primarily relied on the *Actas* (accounts of the Dominican chapter meetings) to assign a preeminent role to Fray Francisco Marín, as an architect, and to the friars Antonio de Serna, Juan Cabrera and Domingo de Aguiñaga for the logistical planning of the construction at these sites. It should be mentioned, however, that these friars led an almost frantic, peripatetic life,

which makes it unlikely that they would have any long-standing involvement in any of these regional projects, which spanned over two generations. For a recent hypothetical reconstruction of the construction phases at Yanhuitlan, see González Leyva et al. 2009.

- <sup>6</sup> The most important document in this respect is AGI, Escribanía da Cámara 162C (Hermann 2008).
- <sup>7</sup> For references on contemporary assessments of Andrés de Concha, see Tovar de Teresa 1979, 129.
- <sup>8</sup> The text in Spanish reads: 'Juan mulato, dorador, esclavo de Andrés de Concha.'
- <sup>9</sup> To his oeuvre should be added the paintings once attributed to the 'Maestro de Santa Cecilia' (Tovar de Teresa 1992, 134). They include *Santa Cecilia*, *La Sagrada Familia con San Juan niño*, *El martirio de San Lorenzo*, and *Los Cinco Señores*, all in the Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City. Interestingly, none of them is a *retablo* (the result of teamwork as in the Mixteca and later in Mexico City), but instead rather large single-canvas paintings (so-called 'unified altarpiece' derived from Italian Renaissance models).
- <sup>10</sup> For a review of the relationship between Concha and his patrons, see Sotos Serrano 2007–2008.
- <sup>11</sup> 'un sagrario [...] de la misma orden manera y traza [...] de aquel que está y yo hize para el monasterio de Yanguitlan.'
- <sup>12</sup> 'Un hombre pintor por oficio y muy aventajado que aunque no sabe cosa alguna de cantería, ha hecho obra de escultura de buen crédito y se tiene por más inteligente como arquitecto que los demás.'
- <sup>13</sup> The boy appearing on Codex Yanhuitlan, f. 8v, counting the rosary with the help of a lay Spaniard is likely don Gabriel. He is identified with his Mixtec calendrical name '7 Monkey' and personal name 'Jaguar con Antorcha' (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2009, 322).
- <sup>14</sup> A transcription of the testament in Spanish is found in Paillés H. (1993, 37–42). An English translation is in Restall, Sousa, and Terraciano 2005, 106–13.
- <sup>15</sup> 'vna joya de oro grande que tiene doce cascabeles con figura de águila. otra joya que tiene pintado un Santiago con seis caxcabeles; otra joya con las armas rreales y siete caxcabeles [...] vn caiman con diez caxcabeles de oro y vnos chalchihuites ...' (AGN, Tierras 400, f. 10v) See also Paillés H. 1993, 38–39. Similar depictions are found in the Cuicatec *Códice de Tepeucila* (Herrera Meza and Ruiz Medrano 1997).
- <sup>16</sup> 'Yten tengo por mis bienes un Flor sanctorum y otro librillo chico llamado Contentus Mundi' (AGN, Tierras 400, f. 11v). These books were also best sellers in Spain and exported in large numbers to the New World. See Leonard 1949.
- <sup>17</sup> 'yten aclaro q. estan en mi poder dos joyas q. son dos caxcabeles de oro para bailar de la comunidad de achiutla ...' (AGN, Tierras 400, f. 11v). Transcription in Paillés H. 1993, 39.
- <sup>18</sup> Francisco de Burgoa (1934, 287) relates that in the 1670s, during religious celebrations in Yanhuitlan, dances were so grand that rows of dancers stretched through the whole nave of the church. So extravagant were they in the use of their green feathers that some people had up to fifty of them hanging from their heads down to their feet.
- <sup>19</sup> See also the insightful essay by Dean and Leibsohn 2003.
- <sup>20</sup> This execution seems to be peculiar to New Spain, since Peninsular *retablos* in the late sixteenth century favor a fully sculptural composition, which occurred only later in New Spain. See, for example, Palomero Páramo 1987–1989.
- <sup>21</sup> This painting enjoyed continuing popularity in the city, as mentioned by the seventeenth-century painter and theoretician Francisco Pacheco and the eighteenth-century writer and collector Ceán Bermúdez. Cited in Angulo Íñiguez 1951, 244–45.
- <sup>22</sup> For studies on these murals, see Estrada de Gerlero 1983 and Webster 1997.
- <sup>23</sup> In New Spain, this paraliturgical tradition was already established by 1582 (Dávila Padilla 1955, 565–66).
- <sup>24</sup> A few sources report on the use of portable cloths (*lienzos*) to instruct native people in the Mixteca; they were used as prompts for sermons and public preaching (Burgoa 1934, 287; Jansen 1998).

- <sup>25</sup> Thematic and analogical pairings, rather than chronological sequencing, are quite common in Christian iconography since the Early Christianity.
- <sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the different doctrinal books that circulated in the Mixteca in the sixteenth century, see Doesburg and Swanton 2008.
- <sup>27</sup> Venetian painting was especially popular in the Iberian Peninsula due to the personal taste and patronage of Charles V and Philip II.
- <sup>28</sup> Concha painted another almost identical version in the Dominican church in Tlahuac in the Federal District (Victoria 1986).
- <sup>29</sup> The characters depicted on the right were identified as the Spanish monarchs (Charles V and Philip II with their wives) by José Guadalupe Victoria (1986, 34–35). The fact that characters with basically identical features appear in the copy of the same painting in Tlahuac seems to exclude that they may be the Spanish donors of the painting (such as, for example, the *encomenderos*).
- <sup>30</sup> For more references, see O’Gorman 1939a.
- <sup>31</sup> The knight refers to the Legend of the Knight of Cologne, who was miraculously saved by the Virgin of the Rosary when he was about to be killed by his opponents.
- <sup>32</sup> It was published in Mexico City by Pedro Balli in 1576. See García Icazbalceta 1954, 278–79; León 1891, 76–84.
- <sup>33</sup> Each Mystery requires the recitation of specific numbers of Pater Noster and Ave Maria prayers, usually either five or ten, leading to a total that could be up to 150 prayers.
- <sup>34</sup> The pages were cut out very carefully. Nicolás León (1902) said he found them inside the binding of a copy of Maturino Gilberti’s *Diálogo de Doctrina Cristiana en lengua de Michoacán* (1559), but never published them.
- <sup>35</sup> I was able to examine these books, held in the Biblioteca de Catalunya, through [www.books.google.com](http://www.books.google.com).
- <sup>36</sup> In all these texts, the only identified authors are the Dominican friars, although it is impossible that a non-native speaker could have been able to write such texts without the fundamental collaboration of a Mixtec intellectual.
- <sup>37</sup> See, for example, Frassani 2005.

## Archives Consulted

- AGI: Archivo General de Indias, Seville  
 AGN: Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City  
 AHJT: Archivo Histórico del Juzgado de Teposcolula, Oaxaca  
 AHPSE: Archivo Histórico Provincial, Seville  
 Ayer: Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago

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