San Gabriel Cholula: An Indigenous Jerusalem in New Spain[1]

Joaquin Cruz-Lamas
(King's College London)

The Franciscan friars that arrived in Mexico after the fall of Tenochtitlan built several convents in New Spain, one of the most important ones was the one in the community of Cholula (San Gabriel Cholula). By looking into their theological sources and some of the architectural elements of the convent of San Gabriel Cholula, I will show how in the historical context of the Evangelisation of Mexico the eschatological idea of the New Jerusalem shaped the religious identity of the local population and how this was reflected "in stone," i.e. in the architecture of the convent. I will address first the idea of a New Jerusalem and the theological sources that influenced the specific conception that the Franciscan friars had of it. I will then explain how the eschatological ideas of the Franciscans had some similarities with some ideas from the Nahuatl pantheon that were related to the measurement of time (more specifically the Tonalpohualli calendar) and the end of cycles. And I will lastly explain how these ideas shaped the architecture of the convent of San Gabriel Cholula.

New Jerusalem

Most of the convents built in Tequitqui style in what is today Mexico (New Spain during the Spanish occupation) during the sixteenth century have two distinctive architectural elements that have traditionally been associated with castles and fortresses: buttresses and crenelations.[2] Indeed, conventual complexes of the same type as San Gabriel Cholula have been called "conventual fortresses," "mendicant fortresses" or "spiritual fortresses" (Gómez Martínez,16). During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, art historians such as Manuel G. Revilla and Silvestre Baxter used the term "conventual fortress" (*convento fortaleza*) freely to describe these buildings because it was a commonly held belief that the convents served as both religious and defensive buildings.

Art historian George Kubler was one of the first scholars to propose that the real intention of the defensive elements on these sacred buildings was not utilitarian, but rather symbolic (Gutiérrez, Verónica Anne, 125). This becomes evident through careful analysis of these "military elements." In the case of San Gabriel Cholula, as was the case in most convents, the walls of the atrium are not high enough to provide actual defence from an external attack; the crenelations on some of the structures, such as the posa chapels, are not functional and would not provide cover for someone standing behind them; furthermore, the church is relatively easy to access from the front door. Additionally, the military-use theory does not account for the presence of open chapels in the atria of these convents. Against this idea of military defence, I suggest that these convents were instead meant to represent an eschatological idea that arrived in Mexico thanks to the friars and their theological ideas. Building on the arguments of art historian Jaime Lara, I argue that the idea behind the design and construction of these convents was that of a New Jerusalem, a notion which had a fluidity of meaning in this period, but was broadly understood in eschatological terms as a new community of people who lived for God in preparation for the end of time (Lara, 43).

Jerusalem is a city of special relevance and importance to three of the most extended religions in the world, the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The city and its temple (the Temple of Solomon) have therefore long been associated with a multiplicity of meanings that differ according to time and place. In the case of Christianity, Jerusalem can be conceived as the physical city in present-day Palestine, which is the place where many of the events of the Gospels

[1] This paper derives from the author's doctoral thesis. *The Spiritual Counter-Conquest of Mexico: Baroque Architecture and Religious Identity in Puebla*. The thesis is being produced at King's College London.

[2] The Cambridge Dictionary defines buttresses as "a structure made of stone or brick that sticks out from and supports a wall of a building." See: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/buttress accessed on 11/06/23. And crenelations as: "a wall around the top of a castle, with regular spaces in it through which the people inside the castle can shoot." See: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/crenelations accessed on 11/06/23.

occurred. In this sense, Jerusalem can be understood simply as a geographical location, albeit one charged with meaning due to its connection to Biblical events. At the same time, there is a concept of the New Jerusalem, derived from the Book of Revelation, as described by the Apostle John,[3] which has been argued to be not a physical place in the same sense as the geographical Jerusalem, but rather, as described by Lara, a "vision of peace" (Lara, 43). This is the eschatological idea of Jerusalem, i.e. an idea "connected with the branch of theology that is about death and judgement."[4] Lara further explains the multiplicity of meaning by presenting four levels of interpretation which have been associated with Jerusalem and that, in fact, have formed part of Christian biblical exegesis since the Middle Ages:

> Jerusalem was **historically** the city situated in the Holy Land, **allegorically** the Church, especially the Church Militant, **morally** the soul of the believer, and **anagogically** the Heavenly City mentioned in the biblical book of Revelation, also known as the Apocalypse (43).

The idea of a New Jerusalem was developed by the Franciscan friars through a current of thought that has been called millennialism, which "refers to eschatological expectations associated with the turn of a millennium" (Lara, 42). Millennialism consisted in the expectation of the arrival of a new era, a new time of the Church interpreted in many different ways according to different schools of thought and different religious orders. Franciscan millennialism in New Spain (Mexico) had five main sources: The *Book of Revelation* (first century AD), Saint Augustine's *City of God* (426 AD), Prudentius' *Psychomachia* (early fifth century AD), Beatus of Liebana's Commentary to the Book of Revelation (circa 776-786), and the writings of Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202).[5] These texts are critical to an understanding of the idea of New Jerusalem that the friars brought with them from Spain to central Mexico.

Book of Revelation

In the Book of Revelation, also known as The Apocalypse, the apostle John describes a New Jerusalem with the following words:

> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. (Revelation 21:2-3)

According to biblical studies specialist Oliver Larry Yarbrough, it is significant that the apostle John does not speak of a "Heavenly Jerusalem," but rather of a "New Jerusalem." The sense of newness seems to be of importance in Yarbrough's reading, as it conveys hope in a better future. He quotes one of the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor as the first source of the idea of a New Jerusalem, and proposes that the intention of the letter is to "exhort readers to patient endurance, faithfulness, and steadfastness in the face of persecution" (Yarbrough, 285). This better future is promised in the form of a city as, by speaking of a New Jerusalem descending from heaven, the

[3] According to tradition, it was the apostle John who wrote the Book of Revelation after receiving a series of visions in the island of Patmos. The historical authorship of the book, however, has been debated. For the purposes of this work, I will be referring to the author of the Book of Revelation as the apostle John. See Collins.

[4] This is how the Oxford English Dictionary defines the adjective "eschatological." See: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/eschatological accessed on 17/06/23.

[5] According to Lara we can see the influence of these sources in the eschatological thought of medieval Franciscan theorists such Peter Olivi, Ubertino Casale and Angelo Clareno. See Lara, 58. The influence of Joachim of Fiore became perhaps specially significant in some of the sixteenth century chroniclers of Mexico, such as Gerónimo de Mendieta and Bernardino de Sahagún. See also Pereyra.

apostle John seems to imply that at the end of times there will be a new era that will originate a ***new political power***.

Saint Augustine

In his book *De Civitate Dei* (The City of God) (426 AD), Saint Augustine speaks of two cities and compares them in light of the eschatological idea of salvation at the end of time. There is, on one hand, the city that lives for itself and, on the other, the city that lives for God. The former is represented by Babylon and the later by Jerusalem (Meyer, 62). According to scholar of medieval literature Ann R. Meyer, the conception of the two cities that Augustine presents was influenced by the philosophy of the late Hellenistic Platonist philosopher Plotinus (circa 204-270 AD), who speaks, in his work *The Enneads* (circa 253-270 AD), of the human soul as being in a constant process of improvement and perfection as it becomes closer to the One, the source of all good.[6] This is relevant to Augustine's eschatology and conception of an idealised Jerusalem insofar as it shaped his idea of the Church. Jerusalem here, as in the allegorical level of meaning, is an image of the Church, and in this sense represents a community of people.

Prudentius

Prudentius (348-413 A.D.) was a Roman Christian poet born in Tarraconensis (now Northern Spain) whose works were "quoted in mendicant literature and art in [sixteenth-century] Mexico." In one of his poems, Psychomachia, he speaks of a "Temple of Wisdom," which has been traditionally associated with the Temple of Solomon and the city of Jerusalem. According to scholar of medieval art, Bianca Kühnel, the purpose of Prudentius's allegory is to establish a connection with Judaism and the Old Testament. Prudentius seems to speak of the Temple as if it were the city (of Jerusalem), and, at the same time, when speaking about the city, he seems to describe it as the Temple, making them in a certain way interchangeable (Lara, 48).

Beatus of Liebana: Politics and Visual Reference

Beatus lived during the Muslim occupation of the Spanish peninsula and had to escape the south of Spain to the region of Cantabria due to persecution against Christians (Lara, 49). He took refuge there, became a monk and lived in the monastery of San Martín de Turieno (now Santo Toribio de Liebana). During the Muslim occupation of the Spanish peninsula, more specifically during the Umayyad Emirate of Córdoba (756-929 AD), the Christian communities of the north of Spain began to see the book of Revelation as "the book of the resistance, a source of courage and faith, of hope and revenge" (Kühnel, 122). This produced the perfect conditions for Beatus to write his *Commentary on the book of Revelation*. In it, he presents an image of both Babylon and a New Jerusalem. The contrast between the cities is similar to that presented by Saint Augustine in his De Civitate Dei: Babylon represents the earthly kingdoms and the city that lives for itself, while the New Jerusalem is the city that lives for God. Most copies of Beatus 'Commentary include illuminations of both cities. Of these, the **Facundus Codex** (1047) is perhaps one of the best preserved. In it, the city of **Babylon** is depicted as deserted and engulfed in flames, while an angel hovers over it with the following legend next to him: *ubi babilon id est iste mundus ardet* (where Babylon, that is this world, burns) **(Figure 1)**. The illumination representing the **New Jerusalem** presents it as quadrangular city, surrounded by turrets and crenelated walls. The Lamb of God is in the centre accompanied by an angel and the Apostle John. **(Figure 2)** This represents the vision of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven that John describes in the book of Revelation.

[6] The One in Plotinus is the ultimate source of all good and life. It is described in the Enneads as a source of constant light that "sets in motion the spiritual dynamism of the cosmos." See Meyer, 50 and Gerson.

Joachim of Fiore

Joachim of Fiore (Gioacchino da Fiore in Italian, Joaquín del Fiore in Spanish) (circa 1135-1202), was an Italian Cistercian monk and theologian whose apocalyptic ideas gained popularity during the Middle Ages. He commented on the Book of Revelation and, using it as inspiration, proposed that the history of humanity could be understood in a trinitarian order in which there would be three ages (or eras): an age of the Father, an age of the Son and an age of the Holy Spirit (or just age of the Spirit). These theological ideas were collected soon after his death in 1202 in a manuscript called the *Liber Figurarum* (book of figures), which includes an illumination of the three ages **(Figure 3)**.

According to Joachim, **the age of the Spirit** would also be the age in which the events described by John in the book of Revelation would take place. More specifically, Joachim had in mind the emergence of a New Jerusalem, a community that would fit the description provided by Saint Augustine in De Civitate Dei, i.e. a city that would live for God, and that could also be interpreted as the Jerusalem descending from heaven described by the apostle John. By the end of the age of the Spirit, history itself would come to an end. This last age, Joachim believed, would have certain characteristics: First, during its peak, groups of twelve people would go around the world preaching the Gospel and converting Jews and gentiles. The number twelve is significant here, on the one hand, because in Biblical exegesis the number twelve has traditionally been associated with the ideas of completion and fulfilment (Mishory, Chapter 10). And on the other, because it recalls the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles (Lara, 54). Secondly, it would be characterised by a monastic lifestyle adopted by "every Christian man, woman, and child: married, cleric, or vowed" (Lara, 56). And thirdly:

> During the imminent crisis of history, two new religious orders of spiritual men would arise to confront Antichrist and his forces: an order of preachers in the spirit of Elijah (symbolised by the colour white), and an order of hermits in the spirit of Moses (symbolised by the colour black) (Lara, 54).[7]

Having these three characteristics of the Spiritual age in mind, we can trace the impact of Joachim of Fiore on the thought of Spanish Renaissance Franciscan friars. Firstly, the two orders described by Joachim resemble (if only generally) the Dominicans (preachers), founded by St Dominic in the year 1216, and the Franciscans (hermits), founded by St Francis of Assisi in 1209. According to Lara, most of the Franciscan and Dominican friars who arrived in Mexico during the first half of the sixteenth century believed that Joachim had anticipated the founding of the Dominican and Franciscan orders (Lara, 54). This is probably due to the fact that thirteenth-century Franciscan theologians, such as Peter Olivi, Ubertino de Casale and Angelo Clareno, saw Saint Francis as the founder of the order predicted by Joachim of Fiore and spread this view among the members of the order (Lara, 58).[8] Additionally, the first cohort of Franciscan friars who arrived in Mexico after the three forerunners (Pedro de Gante, Juan de Tecto and Juan de Ahora) did so in a group of twelve, which is hardly a coincidence, given that Joachim described the evangelisation of the age of the Spirit as being carried out by groups of twelve people (Lara, 58). We can see a representation of these twelve missionaries in Diego de Valadés' engraving of the ideal atrium **(Figure 4)**.

Nahuatl Tonalpohualli

According to historian of religion Francisco Morales, Aztec religious belief was "based on a strong relationship of humanity to the universe of the gods" (Morales, 140). This relationship extended to the measuring of time, making of it a religious process in itself. The Aztecs had three

[7] See also Grundman.

[8] Lara here argues that the texts written by Olivi, Casale and Clareno were being read by the Franciscan friars of the Observant Reform (the branch of the order of St Francis that evangelised Mexico) and even by Christopher Columbus, who was himself a Third Order Franciscan lay brother.

calendars, each of them with a different use but nonetheless intimately connected between them. The first of them was known as Xihuitl, and it was used to measure natural years, almost in the same way as Europeans used the Julian calendar before 1582.[9] The second one was known as Tonalpohualli, and it was the calendar used to measure liturgical cycles (Lara, 64).[10] The third calendar was the result of combining the first two and it was known as Xiuhmolpilli. This last calendar made the profane and liturgical calendars coincide at the beginning of time, and became a way to give religious meaning to secular time.

The Xiuhmolpilli divided time into cycles of 52 years, at the end of each of these there would be a liturgical feast in which, according to Aztec religion, creation needed to be reinvigorated through the performance of sacrifices in a ceremony of New Fire in the city of Teotihuacán, a sacred city not far away from Tenochtitlán (Mexico City).[11] According to Lara, the Aztec religion was similar to Christianity in its measuring of liturgical time in cycles. Indeed, in Christianity the liturgical year runs parallel to the Gregorian calendar, and works in a cyclical manner (Lara, 64).

The Aztec religion, with its Xiuhmolpilli calendar, resembled Joachim of Fiore's conception of time in its cyclicality and its sensitivity to events that can be called apocalyptic. Both conceptions saw the end of an era approaching and predicted eschatological events. Joachim's conception of time had three eras, which are, as has been mentioned before, the age of the Father, the age of the Son and the age of the Spirit. The Aztec Xiuhmolpilli divided time into five eras or suns, which is why the Aztecs called themselves "people of the sun."[12] The fifth sun was believed to have been initiated by two deities of the Aztec pantheon: Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl. Tezcatlipoca was believed to be the creator of heaven and earth,[13] and Quetzalcoatl was a man-god, "the Feathered Serpent god, symbol of divine wisdom, [who] bled his body to give life to human beings" (Morales, 140). The Aztecs of the early sixteenth century believed they were living at the end of this fifth sun, and that its closing would bring upon the world an event similar to a fire apocalypse.[14] In this sense of eschatological progression of time, the Aztec conception resembled that of Joachim of Fiore, who believed that the climax of the age of the Spirit was approaching, and that the end of said era would mark the end of time. In both systems we can find the anticipation of the end of an era. This similarity between indigenous time measuring and Joachim's eschatological ideas was picked up by the Franciscan friars, who incorporated it into their aspiration of founding a New Jerusalem in the New World at a time that they believed would mark the climax of the era of the Spirit.[15]

Another connection used by the friars to elide the two religions was the resemblance between the Aztec glyph known as the quincunx and the Christian cross of St Andrew. The quincunx was the symbol used to represent the concept *Ollin*, which was the name assigned to the fifth sun **(Figure 5)**. The glyph, in its most simple version, consists of four dots in each corner of a quadrangle united by intersecting lines which form a fifth dot in the centre where they meet. It resembles a cross in X, or cross of St Andrew, with a circle or dot in the centre.[16] This symbol would continue to be used in visual art in central Mexico during the sixteenth century (Elzey, 315-334). It became architecturally important for two reasons: Firstly, because it was sculpted into the decoration of sixteenth-century convents in the form of flowers or decorative elements which retained the characteristic X shape. Secondly, because the quincunx shows how the Tonalpohualli calendar made time visible spatially. The four corners of the quincunx coincide with the four corners of the universe, which, according to historian Wayne Elzey were associated in the Aztec religion with certain periods of time measured

[9] See Brundage.
[10] See also Colston and Brundage.
[11] See Brundage.
[12] According to Barajau, each era is 2028 years long.
[13] See Heyden.
[14] See Barajau and Annals of Cuauhtitlán in *Códice Chimalpopoca: Anales de Cuauhtitlán y Leyenda de los Soles.* www.historicas.unam.mx/publicaciones/publicadigital/libros/000/codice_chimalpopoca.html (accessed: 11/05/23).
[15] See Morales.
[16] Lara also describes it as resembling a butterfly. (Lara, 64).

in the Tonalpohualli calendar (Elzey, 315).[17] In essence, the Aztecs represented "periods of time according to areas of space, and vice versa" (Elzey, 315). The quincunx could be said to be simultaneously a map of the four corners of the universe and a symbol of the time associated with those corners.

This layout would be incorporated into the atria of the convents. In this sense, it can be argued that the quadrangular shape of the quincunx facilitated its association with the idea of a New Jerusalem. Indeed, given the quadrangular shape of the atria, which was a reference to the New Jerusalem, and the reference to the four corners of the universe in the posa chapels, we can observe that both ideas coincide in this architectural layout. This will become more clear as I analyse the architectural elements of the convent.

San Gabriel Cholula Architecture

Atrium

The most prominent architectural element of the convent of San Gabriel is the wide atrium **(Figure 6)**. On the east side it has the Royal Chapel (or Chapel of the Natives), in the centre it has the atrial cross in Tequitqui style and in three of its corners it has posa chapels. It is surrounded by a low wall with crenelations, which were commonly used in conventual architecture in sixteenth century Mexico. The inclusion of crenelations, as I have mentioned above, has led to some confusion among scholars who believed that the convents had both a military and a religious function. However, historian Antonio Rubial García, has argued instead that they "symbolised the earthly Jerusalem in constant fight against Satan; they were not, as it has been frequently suggested, instruments used in the defence against indigenous groups, who were very unlikely to attack once they had converted to Christianity" (Rubial García, 49).[18] Indeed, the resemblance between the pictorial representation of the divine Jerusalem in the 1562 fresco of the ceiling of the retrochoir at the convent of Tecamachalco **(Figure 7)** by Juan Gerson, a tlacuilo working in the area of Puebla, and the above-mentioned print engraving of the ideal atrium in *Rhetorica Christiana* **(Figure 4)**, show that the proper function of the atrium was not military, but that it was intended to represent the New Jerusalem.

Prehispanic civilisations, including the Cholultecas, built wide quadrangular plazas in which religious ceremonies took place. The quadrangular shape was of special relevance, since it was a direct allusion to the cardinal points and represented the encounter between the earthly and divine worlds, an idea that was present as well in the shape of the Quincunx glyph used to represent the *Ollin* (Landa Abrego, 1-21). This conception was adopted into the design of the atrium at San Gabriel (Espinosa Pineda, 21). The configuration of the atrium, along with the posa chapels and chapel of the natives, was a local Mexican invention (González Galván,73), not present in European architecture, that "synthesised locally from older models in order to satisfy new demands" (McAndrew, 202). In the case of Cholula, as in other convents of the time, the atrium was built on the site of an important pre-existing ceremonial religious centre: a temple to the god Quetzalcoátl, the patron god of the Aztec priesthood associated with wind, Venus and the Sun as well as with arts, crafts, knowledge and learning.[19] The Aztec temple, like most prehispanic temples, had a plaza in which the people would gather for religious ceremonies. The friars incorporated these already extant wide-open spaces, transforming them into atria. In addition, the friars aligned the atrium with the cardinal directions. This facilitated two things, the celebration of the mass "*ad orientem*" (facing east), and provided continuity with indigenous prehispanic religions in which the four cardinal directions represented the corners of the universe (Aguilar-Moreno, 46). It can be argued that this is why the royal chapel is located on the eastern side of the atrium, so that the mass could be celebrated on its altar facing east while most of the congregation would stand in the atrium.

[17] See León-Portilla.
[18] McAndrew also argues against them having a properly military use.
[19] He was represented as a feathered snake and was one of the most important deities in the prehispanic pantheon of several indigenous peoples, including the Cholultecas. See Carrasco.

The liturgical use of the atrium and its relationship to the idea of the Temple of Jerusalem was another point of contact between the old indigenous religions and Christianity. The semantic relationship between the ideas of the New Jerusalem and the Temple has been fluid, allowing a freedom of representation in which the New Jerusalem has been evoked by using the image of the Temple. Anthropologist Gabriel Espinosa Pineda compares the use of prehispanic plazas in the time before the conquest to the use of the atrium in the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem described in the book of Kings. He finds that both spaces were places of sacrifice, in which worshipers would bring their offerings in the form of animals. He argues that this is one of the motifs behind the building of the atrium: as an evocation of the temple of Jerusalem (Espinosa Pineda, 25). According to his interpretation, the atrium in the convent of Cholula, even if not used in the same sacrificial way as in the prehispanic religion, would still inform the liturgical ceremonies that took place in it.

Atrial Cross

At the centre of the atrium at Cholula we find the atrial cross in Tequitqui style **(Figure 8)**. These crosses, found in most convents from the time, became an architectural feature in colonial Mexico that persisted during the Baroque in religious architecture. The crosses are a variation of the Spanish *humilladeros*, usually placed on roads outside pilgrimage towns that served as place markers.[20] In central Mexico, however, the crosses acquired another association with the *Xócotl*, a tall wooden post placed in the centre of plazas during important religious ceremonies in prehispanic indigenous religions. According to Espinosa Pineda, this was one of the most significant points of contact between Christianity and the old indigenous religions. By virtue of this association, the crosses in the atriums came to symbolise "the centre of the universe" and "a place of communication between the earthly and divine dimensions" (Espinosa Pineda, 26-27).

Portiuncula Door

On the southern side of the atrium we fin the portiuncula door in Cholula **(Figure 9)**, which, by virtue of its passional iconography, would have been a representation of the Jerusalem described by Augustine as an allegory of the Church: the gate to salvation and new life. This presence of passional iconography supports the theory of Espinosa Pineda according to which the atria were seen as places of sacrifice. By displaying passional iconography, the portiuncula door would symbolise that the sacrifice of Christ was the ultimate sacrifice.[21] It becomes of special importance, then, that the atrium of the convent was associated with the old plaza where sacrifices took place in the old indigenous religions.

Posa Chapels

On the corners of the atrium we find the Posa chapels, **(Figure 10)**, which are found in most sixteenth-century convents in Mexico (McAndrew, 281, 333).[22] According to archaeologist Gabriel Espinosa Pineda, they hold a connection to the Aztec religion as the number four was significant for two reasons: they refer to the four corners of the earth, which can be seen in the quincunx glyph representing the *Ollin*, and to an indigenous custom of repeating any important ritual four times (Espinosa Pineda, 21). Espinosa Pineda further explains that in prehispanic indigenous cities of central Mexico, four geographical points would be used as references that symbolised the four corners of the world. These would commonly be mountains, but could be other geographical points of reference. Once they had been identified, it was customary to build small temples in the periphery of the cities that would represent these places, and to celebrate processions to them in special feasts.[23]

[20] See O'Banion.
[21] See John 2:19. "Tear down this temple, and I'll rebuild it in three days."
[22] See also Ricard, 221-22.
[23] To this date, in some places of Mexico processions to sacred sites outside cities still take place. An example of this can be found in the processions that the *tiemperos* (or *temperos*) organise to a place near the crater of the volcano Popocatepetl.

In this way, the atria came to represent a miniature version of the city, and the posa chapels would be the representation of the four corners of the universe that a city would normally have. According to Rubial García and Ledesma Gómez, the city represented in this layout would be Jerusalem. This can be demonstrated by observing the similarities between the quadrangular shape of the atrium, with the posa chapels in its corners, and the visual representations of the New Jerusalem in the illuminated copies of Beatus' *Commentary*.

Royal Chapel

Finally, on the eastern side of the atrium is the Royal Chapel, also known as Chapel of the Natives (Capilla de los Naturales) **(Figure)** (Piña Dreinhofer, 81-96). This peculiar building has nine naves that go from North to South, seven aisles going from East to West, an altar in the middle nave, and 49 domes covering the intersections of the naves and aisles, except for the nave adjacent to the north wall and the nave adjacent to the south wall. In many ways, the interior closely resembles that of a mosque such as the former mosque of Córdoba (784 AD) in Spain, which was converted into a cathedral in 1236. However, it has been argued that the inspiration for the Royal Chapel didn't come from the old mosques in Spain, but rather, from indigenous religious cosmology.[24]

Architect and restorer Moisés Morales Arizmendi has argued that there can be an indigenous reading of the layout of the chapel in Cholula:

> The nine naves from north to south represent the nine levels from Earth to heaven (Mictlan) [and] the seven naves from east to west represent the Chimecóatl (Seven Snakes), Mother Earth, whose feast is still celebrated in the Royal Chapel under the name of Altepetlylhuitl or Feast of the Town (the Sunday before Pentecost). (Morales Arizmendi, 105)[25]

This reading of the Chapel complements the theory according to which the atrial cross, with its evocation of the *Xócotl*, represents not only the centre of the universe but also "a place of communication between the earthly and divine dimensions" (Espinosa Pineda, 26-27). This can be observed in the way in which the nine naves going from north to south represent the nine levels that go from earth to heaven (or Mictlan) in Aztec eschatology.[26] They both symbolise the same movement from the earthly to the heavenly realms. As we can see, both the atrial cross and the royal chapel use pre-columbian symbology to transmit Christian ideas to the indigenous population. The references to the encounter between the earthly sphere and the celestial sphere are not accidental, since they would have served to transmit through architecture the idea that the convent was as a place of encounter with the sacred. Indeed, this message would have been especially relevant in the royal chapel, since the sacrament of the Eucharist is celebrated on its altar. Through this sacrament, according to Catholic theology, God makes himself materially present through bread and wine (Toner, 217-231). Furthermore, since the atrium and the portiuncula door evoked the idea of sacrifice, the reference to Christ's death on the cross became even clearer. In this sense, the architectural elements of the convent functioned as a whole oriented towards the presence of Christ, as the lamb of God, in the world. At the same time, as I have shown, this message was marked by the idea of establishing a New Jerusalem in New Spain. The convent served as an architectural representation of this idea.

The *tiemperos* are people who, according to an indigenous belief, have been chosen by the spirit of the volcano (Gregorio Chino Popocatpetl is believed to be the name of the spirit of the Popocattpetl) to communicate directly with him. The spirit would give them information in advance regarding natural phenomena such as volcanic eruptions, rain, hail and drought, and would even grant them the power to call for rain if needed. The processions to the volcano seek to propitiate good weather for the crops. See Glockner. These same kind of processions would have happened before the arrival of the Spanish in Mexico and the indigenous populations saw a similarity between them and the processions that took place inside the atria using the posa chapels as points of reference.

[24] See Morales Arizmendi.

[25] The translation is mine.

[26] See Milbrath, Aboytes, and Espinoza Pineda, 26-27.

Final Considerations

Through an analysis of the tequitqui architecture of the convent of San Gabriel Cholula, as well as the Christian and Aztec eschatological ideas that influenced its construction, I have shown in this paper that the convent reflects a conception of the New Jerusalem which was formed in Mexico in the sixteenth century. This conception was shaped, firstly, by the theological and philosophical ideas that the Franciscan friars imported from Spain, and secondly, by the influence of certain elements of the indigenous religious worldview regarding the measurement of time.

The idea of the New Jerusalem that we can see reflected in the convent of San Gabriel Cholula has an allegorical and anagogical meaning. It is allegorical due to the Augustinian influence on the idea of the New Jerusalem, where the Church is conceived as the city of Jerusalem. In this sense, the New Jerusalem represents the community of people who seek sanctification. As has been demonstrated in this chapter, the Franciscan friars sought to establish a community of this nature in New Spain. In this sense, such community is understood as part of the universal Church, and therefore as belonging to the Jerusalem described by Saint Augustine in *The City of God*. In an anagogical sense, the friars wanted this community to reflect the one described by Joachim of Fiore in the age of the Spirit, which would be founded during the third era of history by groups of twelve evangelists and would adopt a monastic way of life. The indigenous ideas that influenced the construction of the convent, such as the references to the *Xiuhmolpilli* and *Tonalpohualli* calendars, as well as to the four corners of the universe represented in the quincunx glyph, also contributed to the anagogical meaning attributed to the idea of the New Jerusalem. This is because these ideas refer to the end of a cosmic cycle in an event of an apocalyptic nature. In this way, the architecture of the convent reflects the fact that the friars and the indigenous people who collaborated in its construction sought to reflect an idea of the New Jerusalem which was responsive to the sources mentioned in this paper.

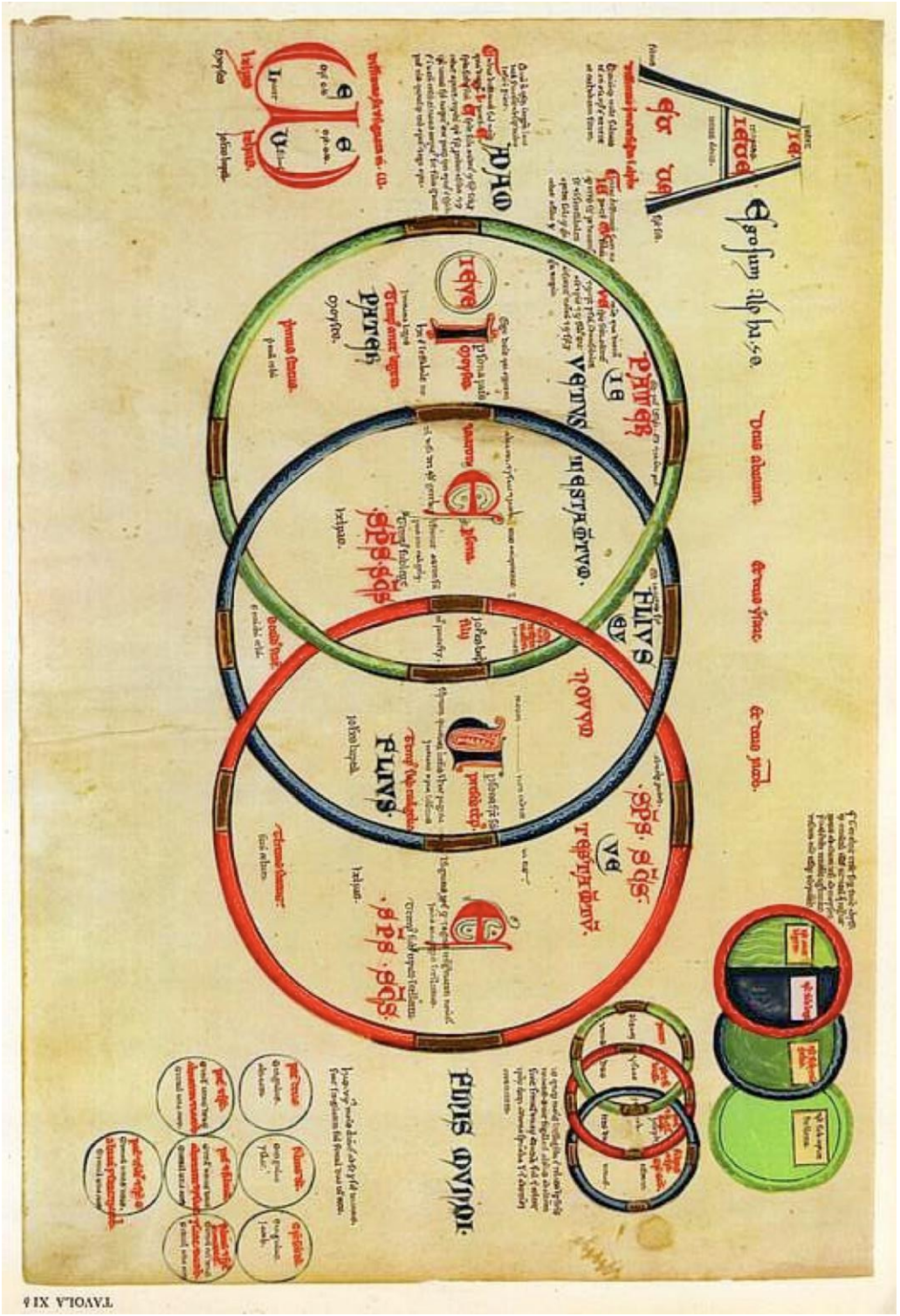
FIGURE 1

1. Beato de Facundus, f°233v *Judgement of Babylon reduced to flames*. Retrieved from: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beato_de_Li%C3%A9bana#/media/Archivo:B_Facundus_233vd%C3%A9t.jpg on 20/06/23

FIGURE 2

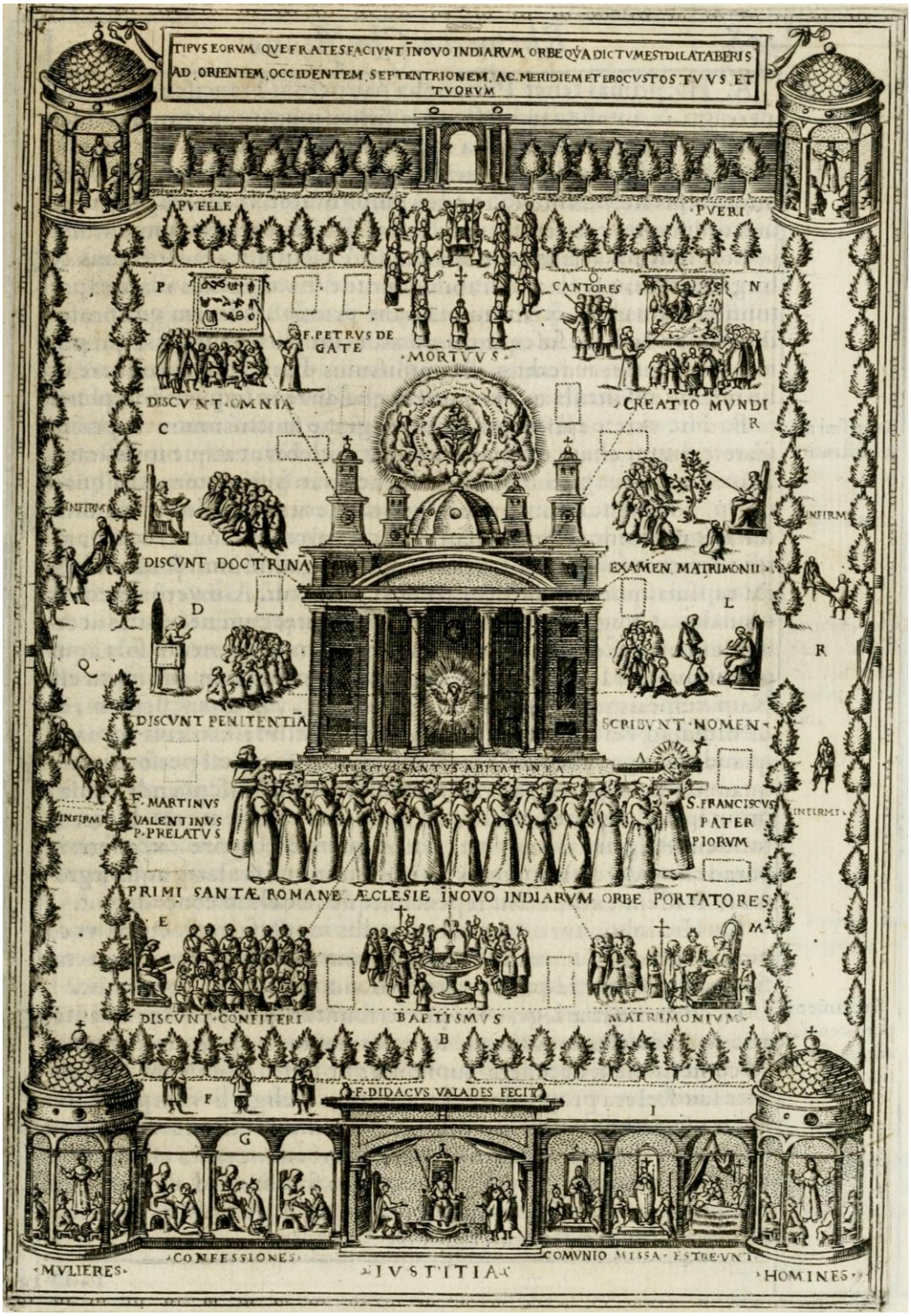
2. Facundus Beatus, f°253v *The new Jerusalem*. Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commentary_on_the_Apocalypse#/media/File:B_Facundus_253v.jpg on 20/06/23

FIGURE 3



3. Table XIb of the manuscript "Liber Figurarum", “Book of Figures" by the Abbot Joaquín de Fiore(1135-1202) symbolising in three circles the “Holy Trinity”. Retrieved from: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joaqu%C3%ADn_de_Fiore#/media/Archivo:Liber_Figurarum_Libro_de_las_Figuras_Tabla_XIb_C%C3%B3dice_Reggiano(s.XIII)_Joaquin_de_Fiore(1135-1202).jpg on 20/06/23

FIGURE 4



4. Diego Valadés, "The Ideal Atrium," 1579, copperplate engraving, within *Rhetorica Christiana ad concionandi et orandi usum accommodate […] ex Indorum maximè deprompta sunt historiis*. Perugia: Petrus Jacobus Petrutius, 1579 (Getty Research Institute). Retrieved from https://smarthistory.org/engravings-in-diego-de-valadess-rhetorica-christiana/ 03/05/23

FIGURE 5

5. Two representations of the Quincunx glyph of the Ollin in bronze. Retrieved from: https://masdemx.com/2017/03/quincunce-simbolo-culturas-mesomericanas-prehispanicas-nahui-ollin/ on 20/06/23

FIGURE 6

6. View of the atrium. Author's photo

FIGURE 7

7. Juan Gerson, *La ciudad de Dios*. 1562. https://jstor.org/stable/community.10601681.

FIGURE 8

8. Atrial cross of Cholula. Author's photo.

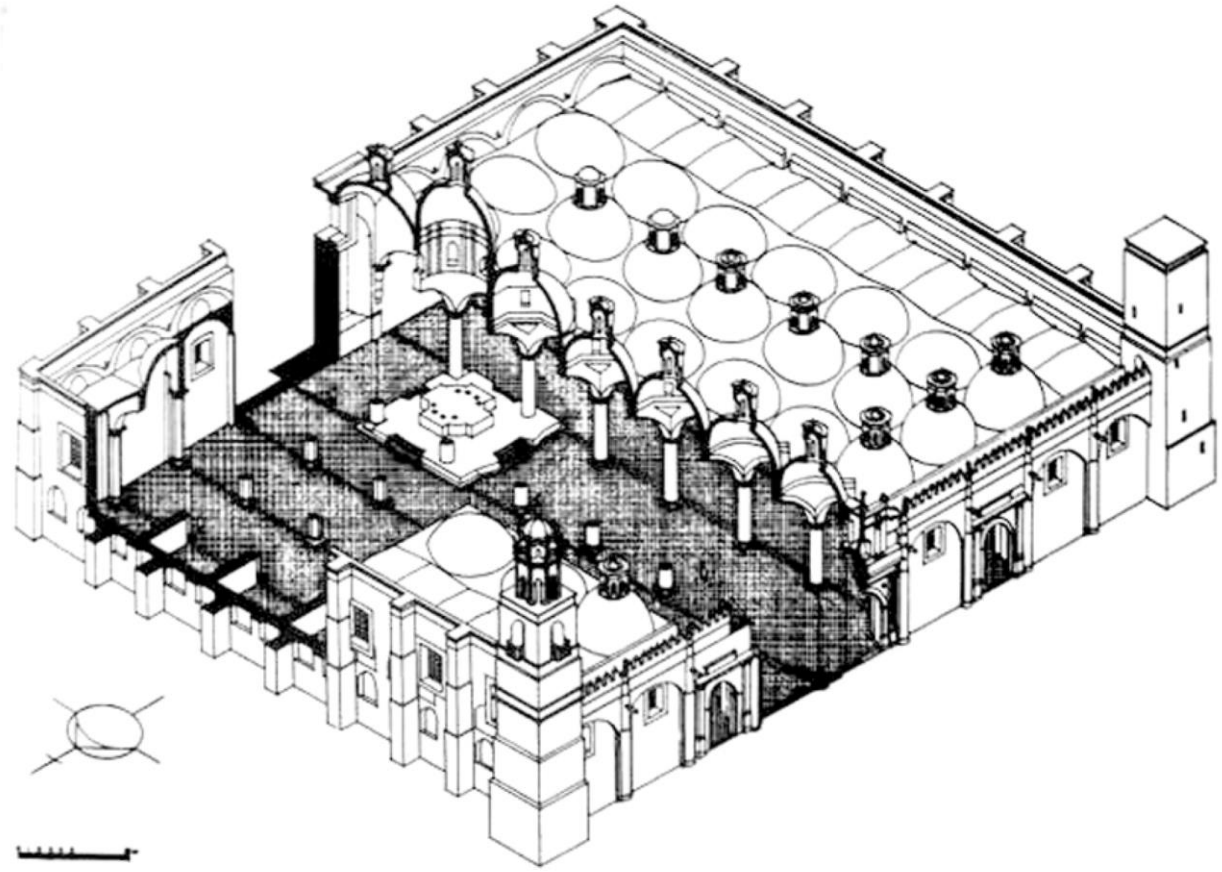
FIGURE 9

9. Portiuncula Door of San Gabriel Cholula. Author's photo

FIGURE 10

10. Posa chapel of San Gabriel, Cholula. Author's photo.

FIGURE 11



11. Royal Chapel of Cholula. Piña Dreinhofer, Agustín. “Convento de San Gabriel Cholula.” Artes de México, 1971, No. 140, Cholula Ciudad Sagrada (1971), pp. 81-96. p.84.

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