

SACRED BOOKS AND SACRED SONGS FROM FORMER DAYS:  
SOURCING THE MURAL PAINTINGS AT SAN MIGUEL  
ARCÁNGEL IXMIQUILPAN<sup>1</sup>

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One of the most extraordinary and enigmatic programmes of sixteenth-century native mural painting in Mexico covers the nave walls at the Augustinian mission church of San Miguel Arcángel in the Hidalgo town of Ixmiquilpan. Extraordinary, because of its unique iconographic content which crosses the boundaries of what the church found acceptable during that first troubled century of the Catholic imposition.<sup>2</sup> Enigmatic, because in spite of the efforts of scholars to identify a precise source for the murals' iconography, or offer interpretations on the projections of its imagery, we are still far from finding a definitive answer to the many questions which the murals pose. This paper explores the possibility that the source of the imagery in the Ixmiquilpan programme was a traditional Nahuatl warrior song such as those found in the *Cantares Mexicanos* collection - that the programme is, in fact, a pictographic rendering of that song. However, the murals do not represent a subversive attempt to superimpose pagan beliefs over Christian teachings, but comprise a unique visual example of the varied treatment — the mixing of pre-Hispanic and Christian ideas and concepts— which many of the song-poems and the new doctrinal texts underwent in the sixteenth century as a result of the Nahuatl “desire for accommodation between the old myths and the new...” (Burkhart 1996: 95).

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<sup>2</sup> As early as 1555, the Mexican Church Council was already expressing grave concerns over the type of imagery appearing on church walls and ordered, “...que ningun Español, ni Indio pinte Imagenes...fin *[sic]* que primero el tal Pintor sea examinado...y mandamos a los nuestros Visitadores, vean, y examinen bien las Historias, é Imagenes, que estan pintados hasta aqui...” (1<sup>o</sup> Concilio Provincial (1555), in Lorenzana 1796: 91-2).

*The mural programme and problems of interpretation*

Dated possibly between 1569 and 1572 (Estrada de Gerlero 1976), and with some breaks due to the construction of neo-classical altars at points along the nave and in the apse, the murals consist of an extended polychrome frieze of native warriors and mythological beasts entwined in a vast turquoise grotesque of classical urns, acanthus vines and blossom (Figs. 1-3). Starting at the west end of the south wall, a solitary figure, unique to the mural programme (Figs. 1/2*a*) faces east towards the first major panel which depicts sparsely dressed, native combatants confronted by a fair-haired warrior clad almost entirely in turquoise (Figs. 1/2*b*). Continuing up the nave and divided by the classical urns, the frieze then presents sequences of *cactli*-shod centaurs and 'dragon'-horses backing jaguar warriors who wield traditional obsidian-edged *macanas* and hold aloft the bloody trophy heads of their victims. The defeated lie dead or dying at their feet (Figs. 1/2*c-g*). The north wall appears to be dominated by jaguar and coyote warriors, but Albornoz (1994:72) notes one figure in a feathery costume, which almost certainly represents a member of the Eagle-warrior group. Some leap forth from fruit- and foliage-decked buds which sprout from the acanthus vine, while others are paired with semi-naked captives (Figs. 1/3*h-n*). Dragged by the hair, the latter succumb to their captors' fury. Here the sequences are separated by European medallions, or roundelles, within which further bloody reenactments take place (Figs. 1/3*h*). Similarly structured friezes also appear on the west wall of the church on their respective sides: the leaping jaguar warriors to the north (Fig. 1*p*) and the fair-haired warrior to the south (Fig. 1*q*). Although prepared from at least two identifiable stencils (Fig.4), each sequence is different in that costumes, faces, and action change, while other background details are added or rearranged.

In the lunettes at either side of the narthex, eagles and jaguars proper take pride of place. To the south side (Figs. 1/2*x*), a great raptor, its wings arched as if in ascent or descent, is flanked by two jaguars perched on rocks. Between the eagle and the jaguar to its right, there is a traditional *altepetl*, or 'water-mountain', glyph for a town or geographical location, qualified by a diagonal strip containing footprints, the symbol for a road or journey. The imagery on the north wall lunette (Figs. 1/3*y*) is badly damaged but the eagle, this time with wings outstretched, has survived. It also stands on an *altepetl* glyph, a shell-tipped fragment of the water element being all that remains. To the eagle's right, the rump of one jaguar can be seen, while to the left a

plumed headdress and the remains of yellow-spotted markings indicate the presence of another. In both lunettes, the fearsome protagonists are surrounded by the candelabra cacti so typical of the arid, hilly landscapes of the region north of Pachuca where Ixmiquilpan lies.

The immediate overall impression is that the nave programme consists of a narrative sequencing of a pre-Hispanic battle, taking place at a geographical location in or near Ixmiquilpan.

Despite the unorthodoxy of these images in Christian terms, influence from European art forms and techniques is evident. Animals and humans are portrayed in a naturalistic manner (albeit with a certain lack of expertise), and perspective is achieved through provision of a baseline and the positioning of figures and foliage. However, manipulation of European forms also occurs. The elements of the classical grotesque, which commonly included centaurs and other mythical beasts, were undoubtedly copied from woodcuts or engravings in bibles and prayerbooks brought over from Europe, appearing over and over in Indian decorative art of the period.<sup>3</sup> The difference at Ixmiquilpan, however, is that the use of these elements is far from the non-thematic ornamentation which characterises the grotesque in its purest form. Together with the figures of the warriors, they clearly play an active role in the narrative which unfolds across the nave walls.

Further manipulation can be seen in the lunette on the south side of the narthex (Fig. 2*x*) where the *altepetl* glyph is framed within a European scrolled emblazon used to display heraldic arms (indeed, the flanking jaguars are also in rampant pose). Viewed by the colonial ecclesiastical authorities as containing little which would threaten their purpose, native place name glyphs were retained after the Conquest. Surviving examples of glyphs incorporated into European-style emblazons can be found, for example, on the village fountain at Tochmilco (Puebla), and on the facade of the monastery church at Acolman (Mexico). In the latter case, the crest carries the toponym of pre-Hispanic Acolma. However, the footprinted road on the Ixmiquilpan glyph does not appear to offer a reading of the town's name.<sup>4</sup> As listed pictographically in the tribute roll on f. 27 of the *Codex Mendoza* (Fig. 5), the toponym derives from *itzmiquilitl*, the edible herb purslane or *Portulaca rubra* (*Florentine Codex*, Bk. 11, Ch. 7; Anderson & Dibble (1963) XII: 134, fn. 3). *Ix-* and *Yz-* are colonial corruptions.

<sup>3</sup> See Estrada de Gerlero (1976) for suggestions on more precise European sources for the grotesque's mythical beasts.

<sup>4</sup> Estrada de Gerlero (1976) believes it to be the toponym of nearby Cerro de la Nariz, today Cerro Juárez which lies to the north-west of Ixmiquilpan.

While the resident friars at Ixmiquilpan must have seen—and approved—the extraordinary iconography which runs through the nave, it is in the context of the town's toponym that one of the most unusual aspects of the Ixmiquilpan decorative programme occurs. Clearly not intended for the eyes of the friars, or the uninitiated, the Ixmiquilpan artists added a final touch. High above the nave, and camouflaged within the predominantly turquoise and white floral panels of the transept arch vaulting, stands another magnificent eagle dressed in full battle regalia. From its beak issues a series of complex speech scrolls together with an arrow, while a circular breastplate with a hole in its centre hangs from its neck (Figs. 1z, 6). It perches on a third painted *altepeltl* glyph, this time qualified with a nopal cactus and, beneath, other vegetation which is clearly the *itzmiquilitl*, or purslane plant, from which the town takes its name. There are two immediate problems here. Why include the town's toponym in an image which cannot be seen unless one knows it is there? And, how do we understand the presence of the nopal cactus on the toponym? Should we read the glyph not as Ixmiquilpan, but as Tenochtitlan-Ixmiquilpan?

A further set of painted images which, to date, appear not to have been included in any interpretative study of the site's mural programme can be found in the upper cloister walkway. Their importance within the overall argument presented in this paper will become clearer later, but a brief description of their iconography is appropriate here. Across the tops of the walls at the point where the ceiling vaulting rises, a series of black and white half-flowers encased in semicircles and sprouting 'rays' emerge, giving them the appearance of rising or setting suns (Fig. 7). Some are linked by a single ray to one of eight star-like patterns painted on the vaulting itself (Fig. 8). While these latter configurations evidently find their origins in the European, ribbed Gothic star or crystal design usually worked in stone, the Mexican ribs are tipped with delicately executed flower heads (Fig. 9), the overall effect being that of a cascade, or shower, of blossoms onto the viewer below. A similar painted design may be found throughout the monastery buildings at nearby Actopan, although the rays link a repeated image of a skull and crossbones rather than the diverse array of half-flowers found, possibly uniquely, at Ixmiquilpan.

The evident skill of the Ixmiquilpan artists also comes to the fore in the impact of noise and movement which their work still manages to convey. None of the images included in the murals corresponds to the static, silent forms of the contemporary European models on which most were based. Nearly all the protagonists—animal and human—are communicating with each other and, it seems, their audience. In the traditional mode of volutes qualified by glyphs, the jaguars on the south wall lunette roar directives over the head of the eagle (Fig. 2x). Opposite, on the north wall, it is the magnificent raptor which calls, while at the same time 'speaking' arrows, as if proclaiming battle (Fig. 3y). Beneath, the jaguar replies, and the cry is echoed back across the nave from

the beak of their companion in the transept vaulting. Ferocious expressions on the faces of the jaguar warriors, centaurs and dragon-horses suggest extremes of tension and strain as the battle rages. Some are shrieking wild 'curls' into the fray (Fig. 2*d*); others are seen to be singing 'blossoms, or the flowery mode of sacred song: *in xochitl in cuicatl* (Fig. 2*d*). Around them, lesser warriors and the monstrous heads which materialise from within the fronds of the acanthus vine join in the general cacophony (Fig. 2*g*).

Through all this, the turquoise grotesque snakes rhythmically down the south wall to eventually disappear behind what is now the high altar. When it re-emerges on the north wall, its rhythm has changed. Now it swirls over and around the warriors and their victims, lifting the great circular medallions to reveal the arrowed limbs of the fallen (Fig. 3*h*), or yet another warrior in pursuit of his enemy (Fig. 3*h*). The painted rhythm is very similar to that which occurs on the *tequitqui*-carved facades of many sixteenth-century religious buildings, where the repetitive and occasionally spasmodic forms of this colonial native style, enhanced by patterns of light and shade, are reminiscent of a "staccato tom-tom beat" rather than the flowing, "melodic" sequences of European linear ornament (McAndrew, 1965: 198-200). Abrupt changes in rhythm frequently occur as forms move from one architectural element to another; from arch to jamb to *alfiz*, for example.

The Ixmiquilpan murals were not intended to be gazed at in awed silence. They were meant to be watched and listened to. As Reyes Valerio (1978: 237) has observed, the frieze's elongated form and iconographic content give it the appearance of a gigantic screenfold of the pre-Hispanic era. In this sense, the grotesque itself can also be understood to serve the same function as the boustrophedon reading streams of old as it guides the reader through the painted 'text'. However, with its flowery scrolls and rhythmic patterns, this 'text' was more evidently destined to be sung. What possible Christian theme could a song which glorifies the strife of pre-Hispanic battle be entoning?

Current interpretation is somewhat divided. An early paper saw references in the iconography to *Tonatiuhinchan*, the pre-Hispanic House of the Sun, where warriors who died in battle and women who succumbed to childbirth found their honoured destiny as guides to the heavenly body in its daily path across the sky (Nye, 1968). A similar argument is offered by Albornoz (1994), although her overall thesis attempts to show that despite the choice of the patronage of St. Michael, biblical extirpator of demons from the Kingdom of Heaven, the site remained dedicated to the worship of pre-Hispanic gods, most specifically Tezcatlipoca. While it is true that the overwhelmingly pre-Hispanic thrust of the murals might beg a pagan interpretation, neither of these papers addresses the obvious problem of why such imagery was

permitted by the resident friars. They, at very least, must have been convinced that an appropriate theme lay within the murals' strange and unorthodox representations.

On the other side of the fence, Carrillo y Gariel (1961) pointed to the eternal struggle of Good over Evil, where the eagle and jaguar warriors represent Good, and the monsters and fallen Indians, Evil and Sin. Here, a possible textual or graphic source for the warrior-victim pairings on the north wall might be a medieval rendering of the Virtues against Vices theme, based on the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, as already suggested by Estrada de Gerlero (1976). Written in the early fifth century, the work was soon illustrated although by the 1300s had started to include such non-Prudentian features as the Vices being seized by the hair (Calkins, 1979; Katzenellenbogen, 1964). In this context, further research has shown that the inspiration for the murals may also lie in the series of Chichimec attacks on Augustinian missions and Spanish mining towns in the Hidalgo area between 1548 and 1595 (Estrada de Gerlero, 1976; Pierce, 1981). Through analysis of weaponry and costume, Pierce claims to identify the warriors in the battle scenes as christianised Otomis defending their community from the, as yet unconverted, Chichimec marauders (Pierce, 1981: 7). These are, of course, cogent arguments based on strong documentary evidence. However, there is still the difficulty in explaining the inclusion of so many pre-Hispanic glyphic concepts which seem irrelevant to the overall Christian message and in many ways actually enhance a pre-Hispanic, or pagan, reading. Only recently has an explanation been offered which tentatively supports both sides of the argument. Through analysis of two battle scenes executed by sixteenth-century native artists (the Santiago relief at Franciscan Tlatelolco and the Ixmiquilpan nave programme), Abel-Turby (1996) identifies the philosophical divergences which existed between the Franciscan and Augustinian Orders in respect of military action during the colonisation process. The Franciscans, she argues, actively participated in Spanish military policy and this is reflected in the unambiguous detail of the Santiago relief with its slain Mexican natives. In the case of Ixmiquilpan, the 'support only' stance of the Augustinians required a more allegorical work in which Otomi participation in the Chichimec Wars which affected the Augustinian mission area was not explicit. However, in permitting such literal pagan imagery—a ritualised battle of the 'flower wars' with an honoured outcome for both victims and victors—the Augustinians were at once accommodating the visual understanding of the Otomi converts and effecting "a transference of identification between the pre-Hispanic rite and the Augustine struggle of the soul." (Abel Turby, 1996: 17).

There are two main drawbacks to the more recent interpretations summarised above: none offers an explanation for the imagery in the narthex lunettes or on the transept vaulting, and all tend to focus almost exclusively on Otomi peoples, as if Nahuas had no role or presence at the sixteenth-century mission. The *Codex Mendoza* records that pre-Hispanic Ixmiquilpan was a tributary of the Triple Alliance, although there is no record of when it was subjected to the system. In 1482, the newly elected *tlahtoani* of Tenochtitlan, Tizoc, used Otomi warriors from Actopan, Atotonilco, and Ixmiquilpan to mount a campaign against the nearby, independent city-state of Meztitlan, the object being to obtain sacrificial victims for his investiture (Cantú Treviño, 1953; Byam Davies, 1968). Thus, although not necessarily subjects, or allies, of the Triple Alliance, the people of Ixmiquilpan were participating in Aztec forays of a ritual nature. Other sources note that the town's name was changed in the pre-Hispanic era from the Otomi Zecteccani, or 'Place of the Plantain', to the Nahuatl Itzmiquilpa (Carrillo y Gariel, 1961: 7; Nye, 1968: 25; Albornoz, 1996: 14, 19). While this might only suggest a Nahua presence at the time of the Conquest, the text of a *Memoria* signed by Fray Andrés de la Mata in 1571 (quoted by Carrillo y Gariel, 1961: 8) makes it clear that at least three of the four then resident friars were confessing the native population in and around Ixmiquilpan in both Nahuatl and Otomi, although the Otomi population was by far the larger. If, again, this does not confirm the physical presence of Nahuas, it certainly points to a strong linguistic influence with all the cultural implications which such an imposition must imply. The murals themselves also indicate an active Nahua role in the formal decoration of the sixteenth-century monastery complex. The iconography is, admittedly, ambiguous in places, as Pierce's (1981) analysis of weaponry and costume has suggested. Equally, the serpent-like, turquoise *grotesque* with its wild-haired, screaming heads may be a reference to the old Xaltoca-Otomi deity Acpaxapo, "una gran culebra; su rostro, de mujer; y su cabello enteramente igual al de las mujeres...", which —appropriately here— appeared to the Otomi in battle to forewarn warriors of their fate (*Anales de Cuauhtitlan* [1945] 1992: 25). However, the murals' iconic references in the form of glyphs which can be traced directly to Nahua sources, together with an all too evident emphasis on the dynastic history and religious expression of the Mexica capital itself point to an important participation of Nahua artists.

### *Visual precedents*

As documented by Reyes-Valerio (1978: 217-290), the presence of pre-Hispanic glyphs in colonial artwork is not restricted to purely traditional representation. And, at Ixmiquilpan, the manipulation of European graphic forms to portray such traditional glyphic readings as *altepetl* and *in xochitl in cuicatl* must suggest that others are also present. This is indeed the case and both phonetic and conceptual examples can be paralleled with Aztec sculpture and painting, and ethnographic material gleaned from Nahua sources after the Conquest. More significantly, the contexts in which these precedents are found all relate to the subject of Aztec warfare: its patron deities, its ritualisation, its symbolic underpinnings, and the sacred roles and destinies of its warrior men and women. That is, the narrative does not present a political history, but rather a ritual momentum much like that contained in the *teoamoxtli*, or sacred books of former days.

Two examples of fifteenth-century Aztec sculpture, known as the Stones of Tizoc and Moctezuma, are generally believed to commemorate these rulers' respective military victories together with conquests made by their predecessors (*cf.* Alcina Franch *et al.*, 1992: 200; Solís, 1992: 225-232). Both examples are carved on their upper surfaces with a great solar disc not dissimilar to that on the Sun Stone itself, while around their vertical planes a series of warrior-captors taking a prisoner by the hair is depicted. Each pair is accompanied by a glyphic toponym of the conquered locality. The warrior-captors on both are almost identical in that, each with a smoking stump in place of one foot, they represent—or make symbolic reference to—the god Tezcatlipoca. Early colonial sources record that the monuments were ordered by their respective namesakes as altars on which to sacrifice prisoners of war (*idem*). Thus the representation of Tezcatlipoca and the sacrificial function of the stones more closely relates the imagery to the ritual aspects of war. As exemplified in the first part of the *Codex Mendoza*, Nahua representations of political conquest were generally conventionalised in the form of a burning temple; actual captive-taking (more often than not, for the purposes of ritual sacrifice) was symbolised by captor-prisoner pairs as can be seen on the title page of the same manuscript, and again on f.66. (Albornoz, 1994: 65) also gives an example from the *Codex Huamantla*.) The importance of Tezcatlipoca in the Aztec pantheon is well documented but in affairs of ritual warfare, specifically the Flower Wars in which the prime objective was to secure victims for sacrifice, priests would accompany the warring parties carrying an image of the god in his manifestation as Yaotl, the enemy, or ultimate arbiter of the battlefield (Brundage, 1979: 206; Carrasco, 1991: 42). The parallels in imagery which occur on the north wall of the nave at

Ixmiquilpan, suggest that this section of the mural programme was, regardless of any contemporary European sources, distinctly native in concept: the semi-naked prisoners are grasped by the hair by jaguar and coyote warriors who, in turn, always appear with one foot hidden in foliage. Here, the presence of the warrior-eagle in the transept vaulting is also explained. Identified by both Guerrero y Guerrero (1973) and Albornoz (1994) as an image of Tezcatlipoca, it bears a strong resemblance to a representation of this god which appears on page 13 of the *Codex Borbonicus* (Fig. 10). The circular breastplate is the *anahuatl*, a round, perforated plate or ring which appears frequently on images of Tezcatlipoca, but also Huitzilopochtli (M. León-Portilla - personal communication). The whole nave at Ixmiquilpan thus appears to evoke a ritual battle, presided over by Tezcatlipoca-Yaotl who, unseen in his camouflaged setting high up in the church roof, is further identified in pre-Hispanic conceptual terminology as the god who was "invisible e impalpable" (Sahagún [1570-1580] 1981, II: 62). The north wall of the nave (Fig. 3i-d) can almost be viewed as a rolled-out, painted version of the sculpted stones.

One striking element of the costumes of the warriors on the south wall, and its west wall companion, is the characteristic turquoise *copilli* mitre of the rulers of Tenochtitlan. These warriors are, then, not only Mexica, but Mexica rulers. Closer examination of the murals' iconography shows that the glyphic names of at least some of these rulers can still be read. Acamapichtli, the second *tlahtoani*, whose name means 'handful of reeds', is glyphed in the *Codex Mendoza* by a hand grasping three arrows, where reeds and arrows are synonymous in Mesoamerican conceptual expression. On the south wall of the nave, the centaurs are also seen grasping three arrows (Fig. 2c, f).<sup>5</sup> These are splayed, but the feather-tufted shield with three arrows which makes up the power-glyph of Tenochtitlan presents a similar configuration in the *Mendoza* entries for Chimalpopoca and Itzcoatl, and are believed to represent rebellion (Ross, 1984: 22). This image must have been particularly pleasing to the friars for it corresponds to the Augustinian insigne of three arrows piercing a bleeding heart. However, it is perhaps well to remember that the same arrow-heart configuration makes up the sculpted plaques excavated at pre-Hispanic Tula, now housed in the Museo Nacional de Antropología. The relative proximity of Tula to Ixmiquilpan is perhaps significant,<sup>6</sup> while the Mexica interest in the site and the Toltec cultural legacy is well understood. Tizoc, or Tezotzicatzin, is glyphed in the *Mendoza* as a leg pricked with spikes. On the north wall of the nave, and its west wall companion, small arrow-

<sup>5</sup> Nye (1968: 29) has also commented on this association of imagery.

pierced legs protrude from beneath the painted roundelles (Fig. 3*a*). Finally, the whole battle frieze in the nave is framed above and below by a band of three horizontal stripes in the colour configuration blue-red-blue. It is identical to the pierced skyband in the *Mendoza* which gives the name of [Moctezuma] Ilhuicamina, 'he-who-shoots-arrows-into-the-sky'. The Ixmiquilpan skyband in the upper frame of the west wall and south narthex panels is also pierced, this time with the military paraphernalia carried by two of the non-Mexica warrior figures (Fig. 2*b*). This last glyphic reading is of additional importance for it tells us that the battle which rages on the walls of the nave is represented in a celestial setting. That the name glyphs are not attached to specific figures is perhaps explained, then, by the fact that it is the presence of the spirits of these rulers that we are actually viewing - those "valientes y famosos hombres que han muerto en las guerras...los cuales están haciendo regocijo y aplauso a nuestro señor el sol..." invoked in one of the prayers to Tezcatlipoca-Yaotl in Book 6 of Sahagún's *Historia General* (Sahagún [1570-1580] 1981, II: 62-65).

Further reference to Mexico-Tenochtitlan's glorious past comes in the two stone-carved emblems on the upper tier of the church facade. Both echo the imagery in the narthex lunettes (Fig. 11) and, as with the painted *altepetl* glyph on the south side, the influence of the European tradition is evidenced in the heraldic shields in which the images are encased. These are, then, intended to be coats of arms. The sculpted crest on the north side includes an eagle in battle regalia flanked by two spotted creatures which might resemble jaguars if it were not for their hooked beaks and head tufts. They are clearly hybrids and, based on observations recorded by the chronicler, Cervantes de Salazar, may well represent the cross between an eagle and a big cat carried on the banners of Aztec rulers:

El escudo de armas que estaba a la puerta de palacio y que traían las banderas de Motezuma y de sus antepasados, era un águila abatida a un tigre, las manos y uñas puestas como para hacer presa. Algunos dicen que es grifo y no águila, afirmando que en las sierras de Teguacán hay grifos... En confirmación desto dicen que aquellas sierras se llaman Cuitlachtepetl, de cuitlachtli que es grifo como león ...tiran mucho a león y parecen águila; pintábanlos con cuatro pies, con dientes y con vello, que más aina es lana que pluma, con pico, con uñas y alas con que vuela. (Cervantes de Salazar [c.1566] 1985: 295).

While we might forgive Cervantes de Salazar's obvious difficulties in

<sup>6</sup> According to the 1978 Official Guide to Actopan, Ixmiquilpan was conquered by Toltec peoples in AD674 (INAH, 1978, source not cited).

identifying the strange *cuītlachtli*<sup>7</sup> and eventually plumping for the mythical European griffin, there is little doubt that the eagle and the jaguar were powerful Aztec symbols of rulership in general. The historian Ixtlilxóchitl recorded that in a gallery of carved royal insignia at Tetzcotzingo, a portrait-head of Nezahualcoyotl of Texcoco was depicted emerging from the mouth of a similar hybrid, “un león de más de dos brazas de largo *con sus alas y plumas*” (Ixtlilxóchitl [c. 1630] 1985: 115; my emphasis). The symbolism of this creature becomes clearer in the same author’s account of Tezozomoc’s dream in which Nezahualcoyotl, transformed at once into an eagle and a “tigre”, consumed his heart and tore his feet to pieces. The ravages of the eagle —according to the Tepanec ruler’s soothsayers— foretold the end of his royal house and lineage; those of the “tigre”, the city of Azcapotzalco (*idem*: 54).

The crest on the south side of the facade reproduces the *altepetl* qualifier of footprints, this time on a tall, slightly curved rock. This may represent the very prominent crag rising from a range of hills lying to the north-east of Ixmiquilpan (that is, east of Cerro Juárez). At the foot of that range lies the village of Santa Ana El Mandhó, Otomi for ‘long stone’. The crag is not visible from the village but local inhabitants also refer to a long green stone (jade, or possibly green obsidian?) which gave the village its name (personal communication). In itself, such a find must have been highly significant: its unusual colour (often associated with water/fertility) possibly denoted the presence of a residing sacred force, or was seen as a sign from a tribal god to settle the area. It is therefore feasible to argue that in some way the sixteenth-century town of Ixmiquilpan identified itself toponymically with the early settlement at Mandhó. In this context, the graphic and conceptual parallels between the footprinted stone on the church facade, the footprinted *altepetl* qualifier in the narthex lunette, and the illustration of the founding of Tenochtitlan on f. 91 of the *Codex Tovar* are clear. The eagles and jaguars (symbols of lineage and rulership) in the lunette are seen to be protecting the footprinted *altepetl* in the traditional metaphorical usage reported by Sahagún:

‘Estrado de tigre, estrado de águila’. Quiere decir, allí viven los fuertes, los robustos, nadie puede vencerlos. Por esto se dice: Allí está tendida la estera del Águila, la estera del Tigre. Y se dice: Allí está en pie la muralla del Tigre, la muralla del Águila, con que es resguardada la ciudad, es decir, el agua, el cerro. (Sahagún [1570-80] 1981, II: 244)

If the stone crests are intended to be toponymic and refer respectively to Tenochtitlan and Ixmiquilpan-Mandhó, then the vegetal

<sup>7</sup> The exact nature of this animal is still the subject of some disagreement, not least because in Book 11 of the *Florentine Codex* it is described as having bear-like features, while the accompanying illustration is more representative of a wolf.

qualifiers on the third *altepetl* glyph on the transept arch —the nopal and the purslane— possibly form a dual toponym symbolising the ritual union of Ixmiquilpan and Tenochtitlan in matters of warfare. Here, a correlation between the footprinted long stone and the accepted toponym of Ixmiquilpan as it appears in the tribute lists of the *Codex Mendoza* (Fig. 5) can also be argued. Composed of a sprig of *itzmiquilitl* with one leaf in the form of an *iztli* flint-knife, it appears to be configured in the position of a human body prepared for sacrifice. The ‘trunk’, or stem of the plant, complete with leafy ‘head’ and ‘limbs’, is bent over on its ‘back’ with the sacrificial ‘flint’ leaf occupying a place between the two ‘arms’ —the chest of the human victim. As one warrior song in the *Cantares Mexicanos* tells us, the term *itzimiquiliztli* literally ‘death-by-the-knife’, was deemed to be the desired end of the perfect warrior as he contemplated death on the battlefield (*Cantares Mexicanos* f. 9r; in Bierhorst, 1985a: 160; Brundage, 1979: 202). *Itzimiquiliztli* was also the destiny of those captured in battle. Here, then, the long and arduous path to glory through battle and sacrificial death also appears to be echoed in the footprinted flint at a place called Itzmiquilpa. In this sense, we can perhaps also understand the eagle and jaguars which flank the footprinted path as warrior-guardians of the celestial *altepetl*.

The destiny of these warriors was the House of the Sun - the sky, where “*haciendo estruendo y dando voces...iban delante dél [the sun] peleando...*” (Sahagún [1570-1580] 1981, II: 180), as they guided the celestial body on its daily journey. But women who died in childbirth were also honoured as sacrificed warriors, taking up the solar guardianship at its zenith (*idem*: 181). As Nye (1968: 31) pointed out in her early paper,<sup>8</sup> the semi-naked captives on the north wall are women, and obviously pregnant. Sahagún ([1570-1580] 1981, II: 180) further recorded that live warriors went to great lengths to obtain the hair of these dead women, believing that it gave them strength in battle, a pursuit which is again depicted in the captive-taking sequences. In this reading, then, the murals narrate how, at Itzmiquilpa, homonymic ‘place-of-death-by-the-knife’, the great Nahua rulers of the past, together with their valient captains, their adversaries, and their warrior-kinwomen, continue to act out their sacred roles in the House of the Sun - now, to all intents and purposes, the House of the Christian God. This final and somewhat prickly observation will be taken up later. First I will close the discussion here by proffering a brief explanation as to why this imagery pertains (as far as is known) only to Ixmiquilpan. It was Peñafiel (cited by Macazaga Ordoño, 1979: 82) who first proposed that the town’s glyphic toponym was an example of advanced syllabic writing, expressing both ideographic and figurative concepts not immediately apparent

<sup>8</sup> Nye credits Jorge Olvera of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia with this observation.

in its accepted phonetic reading. I have argued above that the glyphic *itzmiquilitl* represents a human at sacrifice, and that the Nahuatl word for 'death-by-the-knife' can be employed as a homonym for Itzmiquilpa. On the basis of this, I would also suggest that the imagery contained in the battle frieze can be seen to include the hidden elements inferred in the town's glyph: that is, the murals in the nave at Ixmiquilpan can also be read as a toponym - one that describes fully the historical, social, and religious underpinnings of the town's identity.

While, at a graphic level, the Ixmiquilpan artists drew from both European forms and traditional native conventions to build up their giant codex, still other factors point to the balance being tipped to the Indian camp. The murals clearly offer the possibility of multiple readings of a cosmic and historical nature, a technique readily identifiable in traditional pictographic texts (*cf.* Brotherston, 1995: 147-153). I have also suggested that the narrative running around the nave begins with the solitary figure at the corner of the south and west walls, who faces east announcing, as it were, the action as it unfolds. Thus, in native mode, a right-to-left reading is indicated, the first imagery set being protagonised by the fair-haired figure,<sup>9</sup> followed by the series of jaguar-clad warriors with their centaur and dragon-horse companions. On reaching the apse, the format changes, as we follow the actions of the jaguar, eagle, and coyote warriors with their female captives. At the west door of the church, a further change occurs with the panel to its south now depicting the second, fair-haired combatant, although in different dress and setting to the first. The 'narrator' is wedged between the two, thus creating an illusion of continuity rather than denoting an abrupt end to the story. This circular reading principle effectively follows a west-east-west route around the nave itself, a more than appropriate artistic strategy to represent both the daily path of the sun and its sequential relay of warrior-guardians. At the same time, the variations in format across the murals are seen to be closely aligned to the reading principles characteristic of the *teoamoxtli* (the 'divine' or 'cosmic' genre of pre-Hispanic 'book'), where clear divisions between 'chapters' are made through just such changes (Brotherston, 1995, Ch. 7). The 'landscaped' lunette scenes, for example, appear to set both the cosmic and historical stage, emulating the maps which often open and/or close the *teoamoxtli* (the *Laud*, *Féjérvári*, and *Porfirio Díaz*, for example).

Although produced in the style of the *teoamoxtli* (a fact, incidentally, which more than confirms native authorship), the significant intrusion

<sup>9</sup> There are two examples of this figure in the nave murals. While they might be seen to represent a biblical referent —that is, non-native— figures wearing blonde wigs are also found in abundance in, for example, the Borgia ritual screenfold, particularly among the series of patron deities of the *tonalpohualli* (70-61), the four world directions (53-49), and the twenty day signs (13-9). (I am grateful to Gordon Brotherston for pointing out the existence of this visual precedent.)

of European forms must also tell us that the murals were not copied from a native pictographic source. Indisputably, one or more European pictorial sources were at hand or had been used to train the artist ultimately responsible for the murals' design (see fn. 2), but thematically and contextually they had undergone a profound change in order to represent, or accommodate, the images—and the concepts—which were obviously running through his mind at the time.

### *Verbal corollaries*

As observed earlier, the textual qualities of the Ixmiquilpan murals are greatly enhanced by references to song, particularly the presence of flower-tipped volutes which represent sacred words: *in xochitl in cuicatl*. A number of songs belonging to the pre-Hispanic era has been preserved in collections such as that of the *Cantares Mexicanos* manuscript. Written down after the Conquest in alphabeticised Nahuatl and —occasionally— re-edited to replace, for example, the names of pagan deities with Christian referents (Garibay [1953-1954] 1971, 1:159-161; Bierhorst, 1985a: 108-109; Lockhart, 1992: 398; Burkhart, 1996: 95), their immediate source appears to have been oral transmission (Burkhart, 1996: 95).<sup>10</sup> These literary treasures include several types of ancient poetic modes, most notably here the *xochicuicatl*, or flowery songs, and the *yaocuicatl*, or songs of war. The *yaocuicatl* contain a vocabulary much enriched by experience of battle while at the same time are characterised by the use of a series of repeated sets of metaphoric imagery: the 'flood and the blaze' (war); 'shield-fame' (glory); and the flower, "that multiple concept, referred [in the *yaocuicatl*] to lordliness." (Brotherston, 1979: 276). Literary analysis of these song-poems presents numerous difficulties given the deployment of many other as yet undeciphered metaphors, together with the bewildering actions and movements of human, animal, and floral protagonists. However, bizarre flowery worlds were an inherently Indian notion of the sacred and, thus, their activation in the song-poems also served as both textual and conceptual frameworks within which sacred words and deeds could be appropriately placed and expressed (Wake, 1995). At the same time, obscurity of meaning does not deter the reader familiar with the structures of pre-Hispanic iconography from drawing out recognisable imagery, and it is here that the songs do offer strong internal references to visual sources. There are frequent examples of known glyphic metaphors such as the *altepetl*, or 'water-mountain', mentioned earlier. Similarly, the term [*chalchitutzilacatl*] *zilicatoc a yxochicampana*, '[jade-gong] pealing of church-bell flowers' (*Cantares Mexicanos*,

f. 45v; trans. Bierhorst, 1985a: 285) can clearly be represented glyphically as church bells 'speaking' flowers, or sacred song/music expressed through the flowery speech volute (Wake [1996]). Use of colour in the songs is, of course, another important element which can be drawn from -or transferred to- a pictorial rendering of the texts.

Many verses in the *yaocuicatl* of the *Cantares Mexicanos* collection recall the imagery of the painted battle at San Miguel Ixmiquilpan:

Let there be a mutual embracing of eagles, of jaguars, O princes. Shields, companions, are shrilling. Let them stand upon this flood. They're scattering down on us, sprinkling down on us: they're combat flowers... (*Cantares Mexicanos*, f. 18r, trans. Bierhorst, 1985a: 189)

I seem to crave the knife death, there! in battle. Out hearts want war death... There! a jaguar, an eagle sprouts. There! lords are blossoming: they're rising in the blaze. (*idem*, f. 9r, trans. Bierhorst, 1985a: 161)

Jaguars and eagles abound in these songs, as do floral settings. One also finds references to captors and captives (ff. 36v-37r; 55v-56r), Mexica rulers (ff. 7v; 8r; 16r; 19v-20v; *ad passim*), and to Tenochtitlan and the Mexica nation (ff. 6v-7r; 19b-20v; *ad passim*). That is, the inspiration for the murals' imagery—regardless of European iconographic intrusions—seems to have been drawn directly from the regularly employed, metaphoric language which formed the basis of the pre-Hispanic *yaocuicatl*.

On folios 6r-6v of the *Cantares* we find an even closer textual reading. The 'Song of Green Places' (reproduced here in Bierhorst's (1985a: 148-151) translation with my highlighting)<sup>11</sup> was, according to its sixteenth-century glossator, a Nahuatl translation of an old Otomi composition sung at feasts and marriages. Bierhorst refutes this provenance, noting that one of the most common epithets for a Mexica warrior was *otomitl* which conveys the notion of proverbially savage; the song, an *otoncuicatl*, defines at a metaphoric level the Mexicas' ferocity in battle (*idem*: 29, 94). Whatever the case (the inclusion of Otomi warriors from Ixmiquilpan in Mexica ritual warfare is perhaps coincidental) the composition echoes the iconographic detail of the sections of the murals covering the south wall, the lunettes, the transept vaulting, and the cloister to such a degree that it is difficult not to pinpoint an ancient *yaocuicatl* as both the literary and conceptual source for part, or all, of the Ixmiquilpan programme.

*Clever with song, I beat my drum to wake our friends, rousing them to arrow deeds, whose never dawning hearts know nothing, whose hearts lie dead*

<sup>10</sup> Although Sahagún recorded that the songs of old were written down (*Florentine Codex*, Bk. 3, Ch. 8; Anderson & Dibble (1973) IV: 65), these must have consisted of ideographic and phonetic glyphic inventories, committed to memory for oral recital in the *calpullis* and schools (León-Portilla, 1986a:125; Lockhart, 1992: 393).

asleep in war, who praise themselves in shadows, in darkness. Not in vain do I say, 'They are poor.' *Let them come and hear the flower dawn songs drizzling down incessantly beside the drum.*

*Sacred flowers of the dawn are blooming in the rainy place of flowers that belongs to him the Ever Present, the Ever Near.* The heart pleasers are laden with sunstruck dew. Come and see them: *they blossom* uselessly, for those who are disdainful. Doesn't anybody crave them? O friends, not useless flowers are the life-colored honey flowers.

They that intoxicate one's soul with life lie only there, *they blossom* only there, within *the city of the eagles, inside the circle*, in the middle of the field, where *flood and blaze are spreading*, where *the spirit eagle shines, the jaguar growls*, and all the precious bracelet stones are scattered, all the precious *noble lords dismembered, where the princes lie broken, lie shattered.*

These princes are the ones who greatly crave *the dawn flowers*. So that all will enter in, he causes them to be desirous, *he who lies within the sky, he, Ce Olintzin*, ah! the noble one, who makes them drizzle down, giving a gift of flower brilliance to the *eagle-jaguar princes*, making them drunk with the flower dew of life.

If, my friend, you think the flowers are useless that you crave here on earth, how will you acquire them, how will you create them, you that are poor, you that gaze on *the princes at their flowers, at their songs?* Come look: do they rouse themselves to *arrow deeds* for nothing? There beyond, the princes, all of them, are troupials, spirit swans, trogons, rose-ate swans: they live in beauty, they that know the middle of the field.

With shield flowers, with eagle-trophy flowers, the princes are rejoicing in their bravery, adorned with necklaces of pine flowers. *Songs of beauty, flowers of beauty, glorify their blood-and-shoulder toil.* They who have accepted *flood and blaze* become our Black Mountain friends, with whom we *rise warlike on the great road. Offer your shield, stand up, you eagle jaguar!*

The song conjures up the presence of those who lie dead, asleep in war, the bird princes who live in the beautiful beyond, the great warrior ancestors who have died in battle or sacrifice and passed on, as exotic birds, to the Flowery Realm of the Sun. As flowers themselves (in this sense, sacred entities), and with their flowery songs, they are asked to arise with the dawn to pursue their arrow deeds: to escort the Sun

<sup>11</sup> I am aware of Dr. León-Portilla's (1986a) objections to this translation and interpretation of the *Cantares* collection. For non-Nahuatl speakers, however, it still offers a wealth of pre-Hispanic detail as yet not available elsewhere in complete form. My purpose in this paper is to comment on the imagery which these song-poems project, rather than their intrinsic meaning. In this context, comparisons with earlier translations into Spanish of some of the songs (Garibay [1953-4] 1971; 1964-8) reveal sufficiently consistent parallels to warrant use of the English translation here.

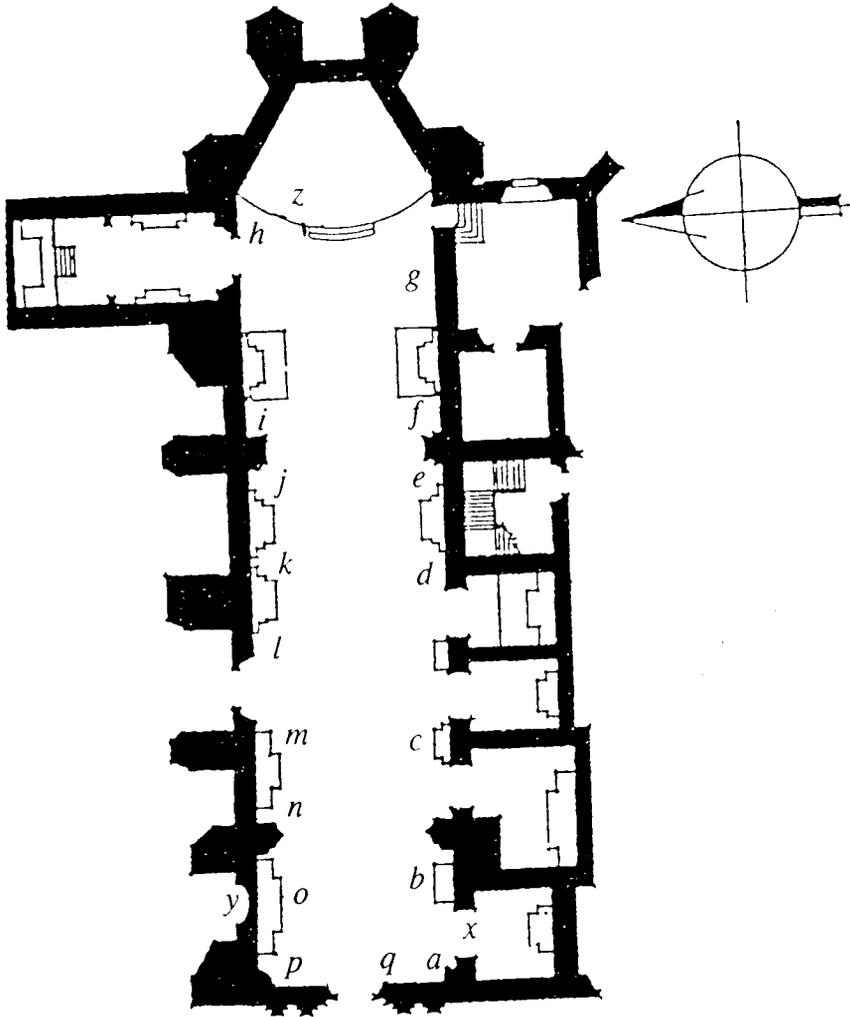


Fig. 1. Plan of the nave of the Augustinian foundation at San Miguel Arcángel, Ixmiquilpan, showing locations of existing murals (adapted from Kubler, 1948)

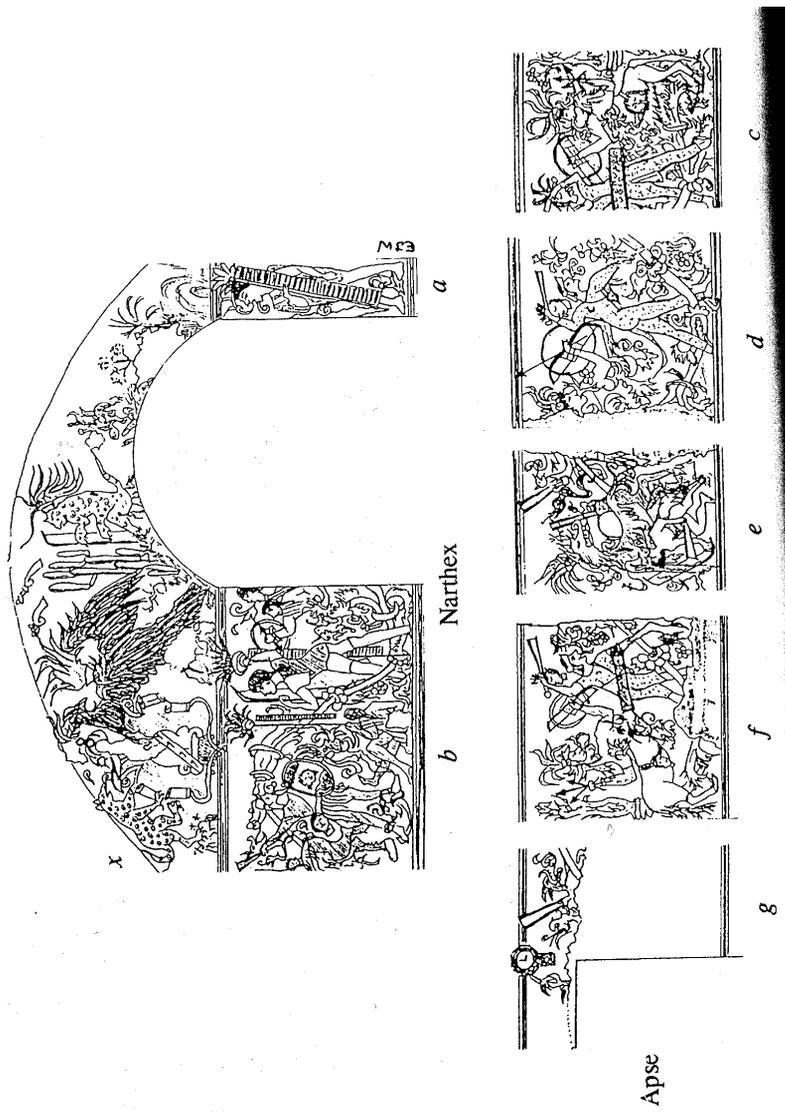


Fig. 2. Nave 8 (south wall)

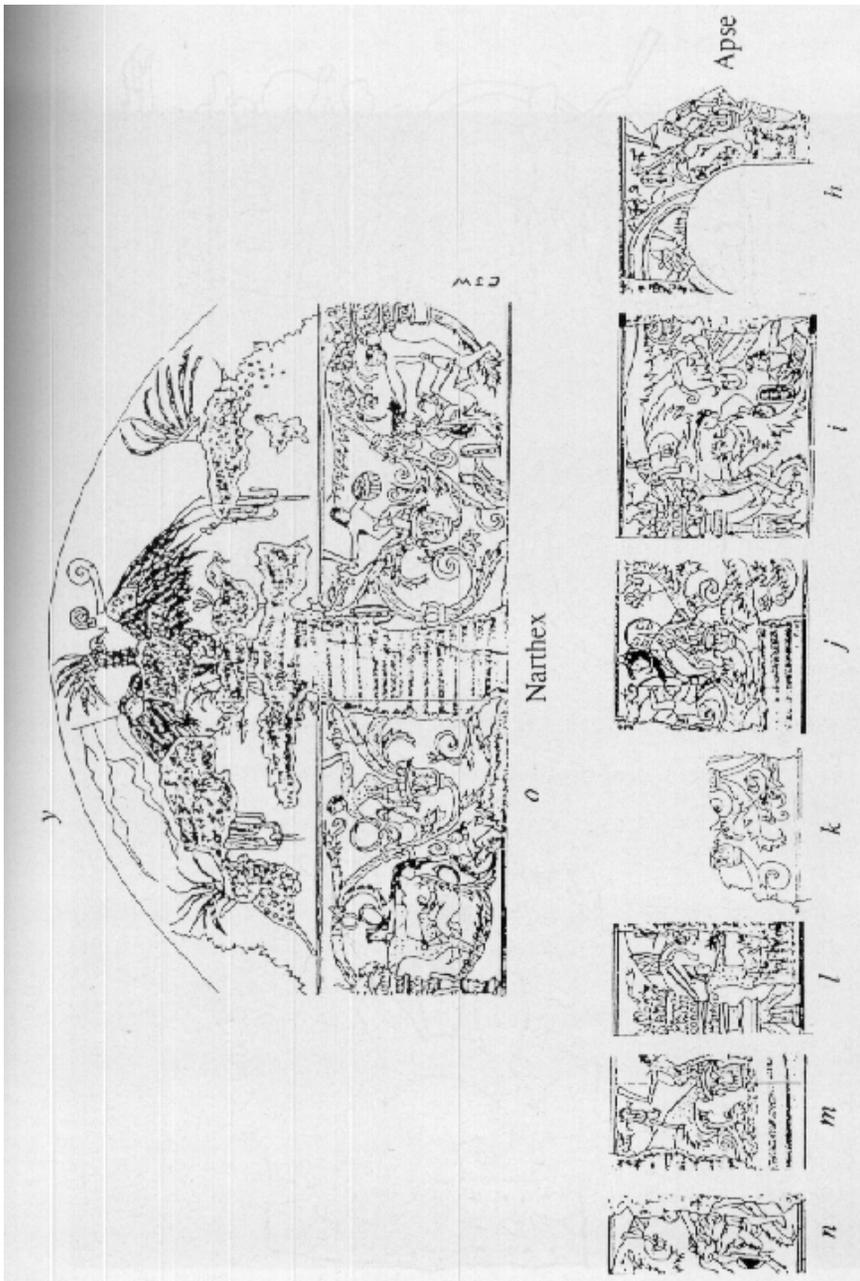


Fig 3. Nave (north wall)

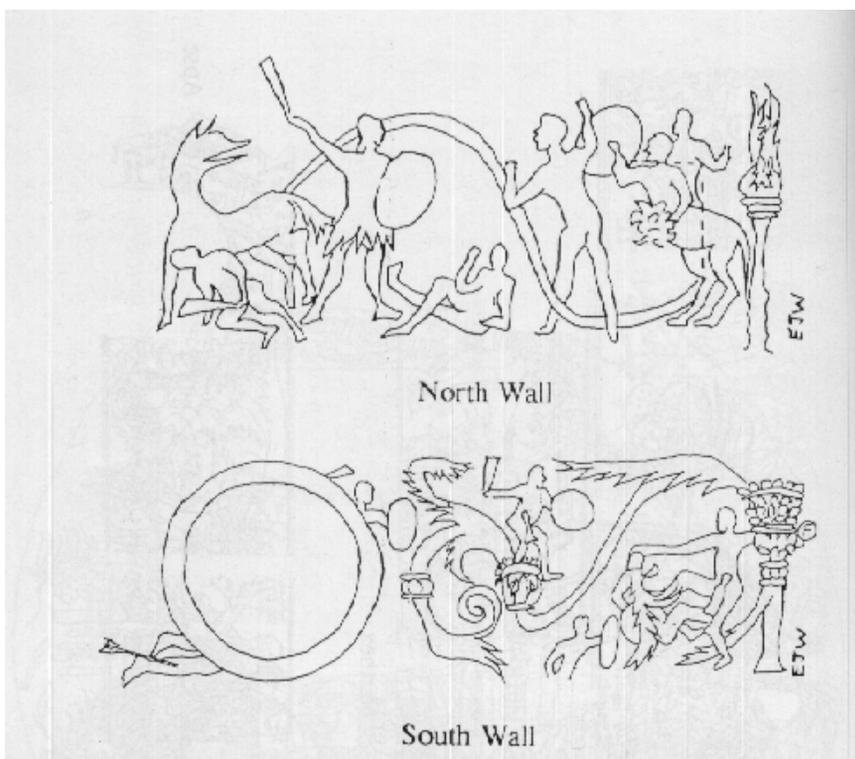


Fig. 4. Basic stencils employed in the mural programme

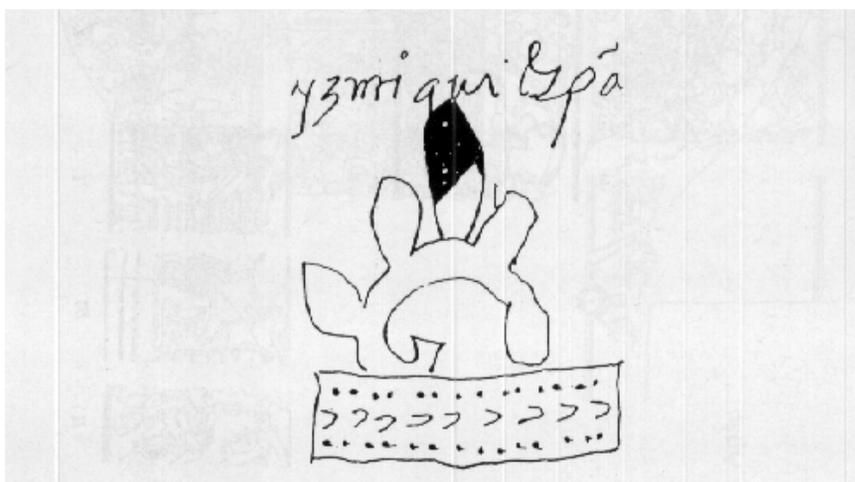


Fig. 5. The toponym of *Yzmiquilpa*, after *Codex Mendoza* f. 27



Fig. 6. *Tezcatlipoca-Yaotl*, transept vaulting (photo: E. Wake/INAH-CNCA-MEX.)



fig. 7. Floral 'sunrise', cloister vaulting (photo: E. Wake/INAH-CNCA-MEX.)



Fig. 8. Floral 'sunrise', cloister vaulting (photo: E. Wake/INAH-CNCA-MEX.)



Figura 9. Flower-tip of a cascading Gothic star, cloister vaulting  
(photo: E. Wake/INAH-CNCA-MEX.)



Fig. 10. *Tezcatlipoca*, after *Codex Borbonicus*, p. 13

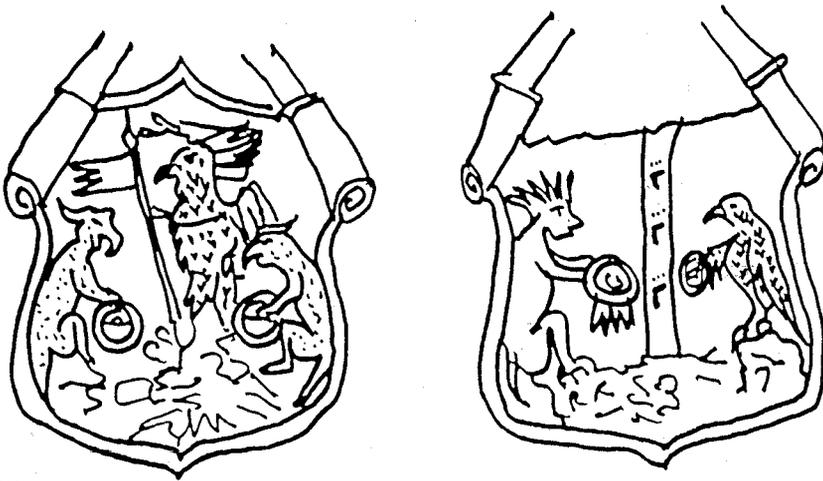


Fig. 11. Stone emblems, church facade (after Reyes-Valerio, 1978)

safely across the battlefield of the sky. Here, two thematic correspondences with the Ixmiquilpan programme are immediately identifiable. The battle takes place in the sky (between the blue-red-blue skyband which frames the nave frieze). It is also fought against an extravagant floral and vegetal background which defines the abode of the sacred - at Ixmiquilpan, the hallowed interior of the church.

Highlighted detail in the text argues more strongly for a correspondence of sources. *Clever with song, I beat my drum...*: the unique figure depicted at the west end of the nave carries an elongated object representing the vertical *huehuetl* drum. With a florid speech glyph, he faces east, rousing the *dawning hearts* to their *arrow deeds*, written glyphically in the arrowed exhortations of the eagle in the north wall lunette and its partner on the transept vaulting. This introductory mode occurs with frequency across the *Cantares* collection, especially in the *yaocuicatl* and the *xochicuicatl* (ff. 9v; 28v; 30v; 31v; *ad passim*). In the last sentence of the first stanza, a clear correspondence exists in the dawning flower-suns and flowery cascades on ceiling of the upper cloister. Here, the *drum* is possibly a metaphor for the church building (Bierhorst, 1985a: 33), not a difficult association given the dark, vaulted interiors of sixteenth-century churches around which the sacred songs echoed.

The *Ever Present, the Ever Near (tloque nahuaque)* is one of the names of Tezcatlipoca (Bierhorst, 1985b: 358; Carrasco, 1991: 41; Albornoz, 1994: 89; *ad passim*). *Rainy place of flowers* is read in the turquoise blue (water), floral designs which surround the Tezcatlipoca on the transept vaulting. The eagle, jaguar, and coyote warriors, the 'flowers' who leap from the buds of the acanthus vine, most evidently *blossom* into life.

The *city of the eagles (quauhtepetitlan)* is a phonetic reading of the three *altepetl* glyphs on which stand painted eagles. Given the pre-Hispanic associations of the eagle and the sun, the city of the eagles may, in itself, also refer to *Tonatiuhinchan*. The original Nahuatl morpheme *yahualih-* is employed for *circle*, that is, the battlefield, but also echoes in *yahualaloa*, to become coiled like a snake (Bierhorst 1985b: 403). This metaphor is portrayed most adequately in the movement of the grotesque across both the north and south walls. Again, the turquoise grotesque with its flame-like fronds provides a good pictographic representation of the *teoatl tlachinollia*, the *flood and the blaze*, which spreads through the battlefield, a place also described metaphorically as 'where spreads out the passionate divine liquid' (Brundage, 1979:199).

*Ce Olintzin* (One Movement), *he who lies within the sky*, is a calendrical epithet for Tezcatlipoca (Bierhorst, 1985b: 71). The positioning of the Ixmiquilpan Tezcatlipoca in the transept vaulting, looking down on the battle below, is appropriate.

In the final two stanzas the descriptions of *the princes at their flowers, at their songs; their songs of beauty, flowers of beauty* [which] *glorify their blood-and-shoulder toil* provide an excellent reading of the murals' overall iconographic theme. The princes do indeed *rise warlike on the great road*, in the *Cantares* war songs perhaps also the Sun's path across the sky (Bierhorst, 1985a: 433).

Large as the *Cantares* collection is, it cannot be exhaustive in terms of the great and varied tradition of song-poems which were memorised and, with later adaptations and modifications, passed down across generations. That the compositions survived the Conquest and were still being sung is evidenced not only in Sahagún's efforts to replace them with Christian equivalents, "...they have been given canticles about God and His saints, so that they may abandon the other old canticles...But in other places—in most places—they persist in going back to singing their old canticles..." (Sahagún [1583] 1993: 7; also cited in Spanish by Anderson, 1990: 18), but also in León-Portilla's studies of the recently documented *Yancuic Tlahtolli* verses. Despite the disappearance of written Nahuatl from the eighteenth century onwards (1986b: 126), these particular song-poems often display renewed expressions of the ancient 'divine words' (*idem*: 134), are "portadoras de antiguas creencias" (1989: 384), or have in themselves been preserved from ancient times (1986b: 126). As such, they testify to "una nunca interrumpida continuidad en la expresión literaria en náhuatl." (1989: 382).

#### *Accommodating the old and the new*

The above interpretation and tentative sourcing of the iconography at San Miguel Ixmiquilpan would seem far removed from the Christian message which this paper also sets out to explore. Yet the execution of such an extensive and visible programme, at a religious house in which there were always several friars in permanent residence, only speaks of approval and (albeit with a generous dash of compromise) even encouragement. Or perhaps, as Fraser (1991: 15) has suggested, the friars saw the murals first and foremost as yet another example of the ubiquitous grotesque and, as such, purely decorative and devoid of meaning. However, and given the dedication of the monastery church at Ixmiquilpan together with the reference to a battle in heaven, an obvious theme must be that shared by almost all interpretations made to date: St. Michael Archangel's routing from heaven of the fallen angels, or, in doctrinal terms, the struggle of Good over Evil. Drawn from the Book of Revelation, the story and its message were certainly used widely for the conversion programme, as is evidenced in surviving copies of the printed *Doctrinas* written especially for the New World mis-

sion. The theme, as León-Portilla (1986c: 169, fn. 1) has pointed out, must have been of great importance to the evangelising body: from the confrontation between good and bad angels, they were able to explain to their Indian congregations exactly what their gods were and where they came from. Pursuing this line of argument even further, such explanations would also leave no doubt as to where the followers of these diabolic entities had gone, specifically, “*todos los que han muerto de vosotros y...todos vuestros ante-pasados.*” (Córdoba [1545] 1945: 66). Evidently copied from European sources and, therefore, familiar to native artists, images of the armour-clad warrior-saint adorn the walls of a number of contemporary religious buildings in Mexico. What, then, prompted the artists at Ixmiquilpan to portray the protectors of the Kingdom of Heaven as the pagan followers of the Sun; to illustrate a first-century Christian text which encapsulates the principles of God’s government of the world with imagery drawn directly from a native warrior song eulogising the role of their (now, eternally damned) ancestor-rulers? Indeed, how did this Christian text come to be transformed into the format of a *teoamoxtili*? In their minds parallels clearly existed between the two great events and their respective sacred texts, and available evidence points to this having resulted from the attempts on both sides - the evangelisers and their proselytes - to facilitate the message of Christianity and to accommodate the differences which arose between them during the first decades of the colonial presence.

The use of a warrior song to illustrate the theme of the murals was not an open act of defiance. Despite Sahagún’s railings on the subject of the old “canticles”, these particular compositions were evidently not on the official list of literary prohibitions. The *otoncuicatl* reproduced above, together with other examples in the same collection, was preserved, as far as we can tell, in an un-edited form, while a 1566 diary entry of Fray Juan Bautista records that one such song was included in a religious festival at Tepeyacac in September of that year, receiving full ecclesiastical approval (Anderson, 1990: 27; 1993: xxiv). War dances, performed in full battle regalia and probably accompanied with appropriate chants, were also acceptable in the Christian context as evidenced in the *Codex Tlatelolco*’s pictographic account of the 1562 founding ceremony of the cathedral in Mexico City. The flowery mode was likewise preserved, being employed extensively in the *Cantares* to celebrate the Christian presence (see for example the 1553 ‘jewel song’ dedicated to the nativity on folios 37v-38v) and, more importantly, imitated by Sahagún ([1583] 1993) in his replacement collection.<sup>12</sup>

Use of native concepts and imagery by the friars themselves to get across the Christian message (a strategy which created considerable misunderstandings)<sup>13</sup> is perhaps also partly responsible for the Ixmiquilpan artists’ interpretation. It is not difficult to see how the prac-

tice of encouraging Indian artists to copy scaled-up illustrations from bibles and prayerbooks onto the walls of their new churches could lead to the understanding that those structures were akin to books. If, in the absence of illustrations, the artists at Ixmiquilpan were attempting to reproduce the *text* of the Book of Revelation, then to give it the format of the *teoamoxtli* was perhaps an instinctive approach. However, the association of ideas may again have been nurtured by the friars: in the Nahuatl version of Sahagún's 1564 *Coloquios* (a written record of the 1524 dialogues between the priests and nobility of Tenochtitlan and the first Franciscan mission) the word of God contained in the Holy Scriptures is continually referred to as the *teutlahtolli* contained in the *teoamoxtli* (Sahagún [1564] 1986: 106, 111, *ad passim*; León-Portilla, 1986c: 25).

The Old World symbolism of the sun as a metaphor for Christ as the 'Light of the World' was also incorporated into doctrinal texts for use in the conversion programme and again, as Burkhart (1988: 235) has argued, it was but the logician response of the native worldview to come to identify Him with this all-important celestial body. The references included in Sahagún's own *Psalmodia*, already partly distributed among the Indians in manuscript form in 1564 (Anderson 1990:17; 1993: x), are exemplary. In the psalm written for the Feast of Saint Thomas Apostle, the reference is to "*in totecuio Iesu christo, in toteutonatiuh*" (Jesus Christ, the holy sun), while for the Nativity, "*In iquac oualmoma tonatiuh in Iesus*" (when the Sun, Jesus, came forth) was included (Sahagún [1583] 1993: 358-359; 368-369; Burkhart, 1988: 247; Anderson, 1993: xxix). In the song for Easter, uniquely titled *Suchicuicatl* and based on the Revelation of St. John (Sahagún [1583] 1993: 128-139), the city of God, the shining shimmering "*ialtepetzi*", is replete with good angels, and there is constant singing. There is also no sun for Jesus Christ has become its light.

Closer still to the theme of St. Michael, Sahagún's *Coloquios* describe the fallen angels as having been "encarcelados en la región del ayre tenebroso, fueron hechos diablos horribles y espantables. Estos son los que llamáis *tzitzizime, culetetí, tzuntemoc, piyoche, tzumpachpul*", (Sahagún [1564] 1986: 92). According to Sahagún ([1570-1580] 1981, II: 83, 271), the *tzitzimime* would appear at the end of the world age, destroying the earth and plunging it into eternal darkness: "y que aquella noche y aquellas tinieblas serian perpetuas, y que el sol no tornará a nacer o salir" (Sahagún [1570-1580] 1981, II: 83, 271). That is, they were the monstrous daytime stars of the solar eclipse, whose knives would

<sup>12</sup> See also Burkhart, 1992; 1996: 225.

<sup>13</sup> See Burkhart, 1989.

gouge and tear at the celestial body which had sustained the Fifth World Age (Brotherston, 1992: 92, 94, 222, 244). They were, in effect, the final transformation of the brave warrior women who for four years after their own, similar, death had pursued a role of solar guardianship in the western sky (Clendinnen, 1991: 179). As defined in the *Coloquios* (and the *Doctrina* contained in the same manuscript), the *tzitzimime* bear more than a passing resemblance to the wild floating heads which materialise from the acanthus vine at Ixmiquilpan (Fig. 2g). They also appear to be glyphically named. Albornoz (1994: 102) points to the white centaurs and golden dragon-horses as representing respectively “*iztactzitzimil*” and “*coztzitzimil*”. A head with tangled yellow hair appearing in the church’s Sacristy corresponds well to the *tzumpachpul*, “el de los pelos colgantes a modo de heno” (Sahagún [1564] 1986: 173), while many of the lesser warriors who are wounded or decapitated by the jaguar warriors and their fair-haired companions wear their hair tied in a tail at the back of the neck: the *piyoche* or “el que tiene cabellos en el cogote” (trans. León-Portilla, 1986c: 173, fn. 8).

It seems, then, that it was through the evangelisers’ rather inappropriate search for linguistic parallels, together with their ignorance of the ritual and cosmic aspects of native warfare, that the story of St. Michael’s triumph over Evil, of his protection of the city of the Sun-Christ, came to be represented at Ixmiquilpan as the daily battle of the warrior-guardians of the Sun against the native forces of darkness. It is quite feasible that doctrinal material like that referred to above reached the Augustinian mission where it was used in sermons, or that the Nahua artists employed at the mission were familiar with it from their visits to other centres. And, as my interpretation of the pre-Hispanic concepts expressed in the murals argues, the homonymic ‘place-of-death-by-the-knife’ provided those artists with a significant conceptual basis on which to develop their work.

But it was not just the conceptual flaws inherent in these Christian texts which were reproduced pictographically at Ixmiquilpan. Re-editing of the *Cantares* song-poems frequently resulted in the protagonists of the original songs, the warrior-ancestors sentenced to eternal damnation, continuing to act out their ritual battles this time in the setting of the Christian heaven. There, where “the blaze is seething”, the ‘eagle and jaguar princes’ combat flowers now give pleasure to “the Only Spirit, God the father”. (*Cantares Mexicanos*, f. 18v, trans. Bierhorst, 1985a: 189). In compositions belonging to the post-Conquest era, princes and captains continue to “blossom” and “rejoice” in God’s home (*idem*, f. 60r, trans. Bierhorst, 1985a: 341). Burkhart (1996: 206) has also noted how, in many other songs from this collection, associations between tropical birds and angels are often strong enough to suggest that for

their Nahuatl composers, the latter in turn came to represent the heroic dead who lived out eternity as beautiful birds in the Realm of the Sun.

Despite the fate pronounced on the ancestors by the friars, this evident determination to incorporate them into the new Christian order does not entirely suggest a subversion of Christian teachings or even a resigned acceptance of the new religion albeit on the Indians' own distorted terms. Rather as Burkhart (1996: 96-97) proposes in her analysis of an end-of-century Nahuatl version of a Spanish play prepared for Holy Wednesday—in which native ancestors are also liberated from the underworld—this on-going process of redemption “symbolically incorporates the ancestral age into the colonial and Christian order while casting the coming of Christ as an event that not only was prophesied in ancient times but recapitulates ancestral patterns of penance and world renewal”. At Ixmiquilpan we have a pictographic representation of just such a cosmic renewal.

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