

CONTRIBUTIONS
IN NEW WORLD ARCHAEOLOGY
Volume 14

CONTRIBUTIONS

IN NEW WORLD ARCHAEOLOGY



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**CONTRIBUTIONS
IN NEW WORLD ARCHAEOLOGY**

Volume 14

*Proceedings of the 24th European Maya Conference
Cracow, November 11-16, 2019
Part 2*

Edited by
Christophe Helmke, Harri Kettunen and Jarosław Żrałka

Kraków 2020

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Details of the murals from the chapel of Santa María Xoxoteco, Mexico.
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FROM THE EDITORS

This issue of the *Contributions in New World Archaeology* journal contains the second set of papers presented at the 24th European Maya Conference (EMC) that took place in Kraków between the 11th and 16th of November, 2019. The title of the 24th EMC was *Contact and Conquest in the Maya World and Beyond*, and it concentrated on the events 500 years ago, since the start of the conquest of Mexico, as well as the colonization and collision of cultures from the early sixteenth century onwards, the changes it brought about, and the dawn of globalization. The conference also addressed the subject of conquests and contacts between different Mesoamerican societies and cultures before the European arrival.

During the conference, more than twenty papers were presented. The first part of contributions has been published in volume 13 of CNWA. The present volume contains another set of six papers that are mostly concentrated on the subject of Spanish conquest and changes it brought to Mesoamerica as seen in the art, ceramic production, languages, and religion, and how the Columbian exchange influenced not only the New World but also the Old.

The volume begins with an article by Dora Maritza García Patzán titled *Vasijas no conquistadas: Patrones de continuidad de la cerámica maya*. The author describes changes brought by conquest and colonization in the process of ceramic production in Guatemala and Mexico. The author also shows that despite the introduction of new European ceramic modes, many production techniques and decorations of pre-Columbian origin were maintained in the manufacture of ceramics not only during the colonial period but even up until today.

The following article, *Didactics and cosmos: heaven and hell in the early colonial murals of Santa María Xoxoteco, Hidalgo, Mexico* by Mikkel Bøg Clemmensen, reports on the fascinating colonial period murals that were used in the process of evangelization and conversion of indigenous people of central Mexico. Clemmensen concentrates on presenting many iconographic elements of pre-Columbian origin that were used by friars and local artists to describe the most important concepts and elements of the Christian religion.

The next paper in the volume is by Bruce Love and is titled *Chilam Balam 'prophecies' and the Spanish invasion and occupation of Yucatan*. The author discusses the famous passages from the Books of Chilam Balam, attributed to five *ah kin*, the ritual specialists and diviners who interpreted the words of the gods in sixteenth-century Yucatan. The study reveals that the *ah kin* were contemporary cohorts from neighboring polities in the western and northern peninsula and that they urged their old enemy, the Itza Maya, to accept the new religion and people from the east. The paper re-examines the Spanish invasion and occupation of Yucatan and finds that in the years prior to the inquisition trials by Diego de Landa there was incentive for the Maya to collaborate with the Spaniards and the Franciscan missionaries.

Igor Vinogradov's paper *Linguistic archaeology in the Poqomchi'-speaking area: tracing language contacts before and after the conquest* focuses on language contacts in the Maya area by analyzing early colonial manuscripts written in Poqomchi'. These written documents can be used in reconstructing the social context of the speakers. For example, similarities in the grammatical development during the colonial period can be observed between Poqomchi' and Q'eqchi'. Interestingly, however, Poqomchi' maintains the tendency to borrow linguistic structures rather than individual lexemes, which may be due to the deliberate efforts of the speakers to preserve their linguistic identity.

In the next paper, *New World words and things in the Old World: How the Americas conquered the world*, Harri Kettunen examines the linguistic and biological effects of the *Columbian exchange* by analyzing the history of lexical borrowings from Indigenous languages of the Americas around the world, as well as the history of New World items in the Old World. Whereas the Columbian exchange brought numerous plants and animals, as well as technology and diseases, to the New World, the flow of New World items to the rest of the world was much more restricted, involving primarily cultivated plants. However, the author points out that if we consider the Columbian exchange to be an *ongoing* process, there are numerous species of flora and fauna that are continually spreading to new areas, mainly with the intentional or unintentional help of humans. Furthermore, Kettunen points out that understanding the origins of the species and cultigens, the history of their global dispersal, and the Indigenous methods that foster diversity, provides us with better tools to understand the interconnectedness of culture and biodiversity. In addition, unlike the 'items' themselves, the cultural knowledge and diversity of New World plants and foodstuffs did not always travel along with the products, leading, at times, to unwanted consequences, as in the case of malnutrition or famines caused by maize in Africa and potatoes in Ireland. Besides these, the study discusses loanwords that originate in Indigenous American languages and reveals interesting generational patterns in their usage outside the area of the origin of the terms: some terms that were common a few decades ago have all but disappeared today, while others have started a new life in popular culture.

The volume closes with an article by Lorraine A. Williams-Beck titled *The peninsular Maya's unfinished spiritual conquest*. The author continues with the topic of indigenous responses to the ideological and religious changes brought to the Yucatan Peninsula by the conquest. Williams-Beck concentrates on the subject of religious fusion and syncretism as well as the continuity of pre-Columbian elements in colonial art, architecture, and beliefs in the Yucatan Peninsula, focusing on the municipal seat church and convent complex in one autonomous political jurisdiction near the Spanish viceregal administrative seat in Mérida, and other indigenous community churches under this and Tizimin's Missions ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the northeastern peninsular Maya hinterlands. The study suggests a more autonomously derived divine substrate to characterize Maya religious practice – rather than a Roman Catholic and Maya syncretism or Catholic synthesis of autonomous philosophy – and point to an unfinished religious conquest in the area.

DIDACTICS AND COSMOS: HEAVEN AND HELL IN THE EARLY COLONIAL MURALS OF SANTA MARÍA XOXOTECO, HIDALGO, MEXICO

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Abstract

The 16th-century murals in the chapel of Santa María Xoxoteco, Hidalgo, are didactic artworks, painted within the first decades after the conquest with the purpose of converting the indigenous population to Christianity. In this article, I analyse the representations of heaven and hell in the murals, and I demonstrate how the artists chose motifs with meaning both in Christian and Mesoamerican cosmology. I discuss how the murals reflect a widespread method among the friars and the indigenous authors and artists of using Mesoamerican concepts and motifs to convey Christianity and facilitate the transition to the new religion. Firstly, I provide a description of the murals, and a review of their didactic function from the perspective of the Augustinian mission. I then turn to some of the lesser-studied parts of the murals: the paradise-representations in the vault – the flora, the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic creatures and the Solar-Christ – the mouth of hells on the sidewalls and the adjacent representations of Satan mixed with the characteristics of the *tzitzimime*, an Aztec class of deities branded by the early missionaries as devils.

Keywords: Indo-Christian art, Colonial art, cosmology, Colonial Mexico, Mictlan, wall paintings, Solar-Christ, tzitzimime

Resumen

Los murales del siglo XVI en la capilla de Santa María Xoxoteco, Hidalgo, son obras de arte didácticas. Fueron pintados durante las primeras décadas después de la conquista con el propósito de cristianizar la población indígena. En este artículo analizo las presentaciones del cielo y del infierno y pongo en evidencia cómo los artistas eligieron temas que representaron un significado tanto en la cosmología cristiana como mesoamericana. Examinó cómo los murales reflejan un método extendido entre los frailes y los creadores y artistas indígenas de usar conceptos y temas mesoamericanos para transmitir la cristianidad y facilitar la transmisión a la religión nueva. Primero proporciono una descripción de los murales y una reseña de su función didáctica desde la perspectiva de la misión agustina. Luego enfoco mi investigación en las partes de los murales poco estudiadas, es decir, las presentaciones del paraíso en la bóveda – la flora, las criaturas zoomorfas y antropomórficas y el Cristo Solar – las bocas del infierno en las paredes laterales y las representaciones adyacentes de Satán mezcladas con las características de *tzitzimime*, una categoría de dioses aztecas marcados como diablos por los primeros misionarios.

Palabras clave: Arte indocristiano, arte colonial, cosmología, Mexico colonial, Mictlan, pintura mural, Cristo-Sol, tzitzimime

INTRODUCTION

This article revisits the murals of the 16th century Augustinian chapel of Santa María Xoxoteco, a small village northeast of Mexico City in the mountains of the state of Hidalgo. The murals are famous for their elaborate illustrations of indigenous people tempted by devils to drink pulque, of a Spanish *encomendero* wielding a flagellum, of a convert turning his back on his old religion rendered as a codex-style temple pyramid, and of the elaborate torture of both indigenous and European sinners in hell. In a unique and direct fashion, they attest to the complex interplay of religion, social life and politics in the early colonial period. The murals also illustrate the paradoxical nature of colonial art as they address the violence and suppression of the era, while also bearing witness to the religious and artistic creativity that resulted from the early contact between the Christian and the Mesoamerican cultures.

Since the local inhabitants of Santa María Xoxoteco discovered the murals under layers of whitewash during restoration in the 1970s, the chapel has attracted scholarly attention. Shortly after the discovery, the architect Juan Artigas became involved in the restoration of the murals, and he published a monograph with descriptions and drawings of the chapel and murals (Artigas 1979, 2009). The year before, the art historian Elena Estrada de Gerlero had published an article comparing the murals to those of the open chapel of nearby Actopan (Estrada de Gerlero 1978). In her article, she discusses the emphatic focus of the two chapels on the torments in hell and the Last Judgement. She proposes that the Augustinians' choice of imagery was governed by an eschatological frame of mind, characteristic of the 16th century when devastating smallpox and *cocoliztli* epidemics raged. More recent publications by the historians Arturo Hernández and Robert Jackson provide in-depth analyses of the socio-cultural context of the Augustinian mission in the area north of Mexico City – Tenochtitlan (Hernández 2008; Jackson 2013). In short, both authors concluded that the murals' eschatological focus reflected the Augustinians' resort to a more heavy-handed indoctrination approach, due to the severe challenges they met being few in numbers and missionising on the fringe of Mesoamerica in challenging geographical surroundings. Hernández and Jackson also both argued that the war with the semi-nomadic Chichimecs would have created a need for explicit imagery that could have forced or threatened the Otomí population of the region into alliances with the Spaniards (Hernández 2008: 7-9, Jackson 2013: 85ff). Apart from these works on Xoxoteco, the murals have been mentioned in discussions on varying aspects of the evangelisation (e.g. Clemmensen 2018; Klein 1990; Lara 2004: 71-77; López Austin 2019; Macuil Martínez 2017: 65-67; Peterson 1993: 169; 1995).

In previous publications, the overarching focus has been on the parts of the murals that concern sinful behaviour and eternal suffering in hell (e.g. Estrada de Gerlero 1978; Hernández 2008; Jackson 2013). In this article, I will widen the focus to include the paradisiacal theme of the vault, which has received almost no attention in the literature. Furthermore, I examine motifs within the sidewalls' depictions of hell that likewise have received little attention in previous works. I demonstrate how the artists portrayed both heaven and hell using the spatial potential of the chapel, and how they chose motifs for these realms that held a meaning not only within Christian iconography but also within the Mesoamerican religion. In doing this, they adhered to the colonial norms of including indigenous elements in the presentation of Christianity.

The argument in this article is based on the theoretical premise that colonial art reflects an intertwining of indigenous religion and Christianity that took place in the decades following the conquest. This premise is supported by recent comparative works such as those of art historians Samuel Y. Edgerton (2001), Jaime Lara (2004, 2008) and Eleanor Wake (2010), who

have been able to demonstrate recurring themes, styles and motifs in the architecture, murals and sculptural art of a large number of colonial churches. Although they sometimes disagree with regard to the exact interpretation, they uphold the common hypothesis that these artworks systematically reflect a mixture of indigenous and Christian religion. Such a hypothesis contrasts to earlier views on both colonial art and the conquest itself. Writing in the 1960s, art historian George Kubler claimed that the pre-Columbian art motifs created within the colonial society were ‘fragments’ and ‘survivals’ deprived of meaning, rather than evidence of a continuity of indigenous culture (Kubler 1961). Like several of his contemporaries, Kubler doubted that indigenous religion had made it through the trauma of the conquest. Since then, however, a steadily growing body of translations of texts from indigenous languages and many important scholarly publications have caused a change in attitude towards the conquest (e.g. Lockhart 1992; Matthew and Oudijk 2007; Restall 2003; Restall *et al.* 2005). Importantly, scholars have demonstrated the active participation of indigenous intellectuals in the development of the material used in the indoctrination process (e.g. Burkhart 1989, 1991, 1992; Christensen 2013; Farriss 2018: 141-166; Leeming 2017). Sermons, religious plays and other doctrinal texts were authored by these individuals and bear a distinct indigenous mark revealing many interpretations of Christianity, some of them perhaps less Christian and more indigenous than the friars would have hoped for. Furthermore, the discovery and restoration of important mural programs from the 16th century, together with works that have systematically registered indigenous elements in the art and architecture of the early colonial period, have made the visual arts accessible as sources of colonial religion (e.g. Reyes-Valerio 2000). Part of this process is the realisation that indigenous artists were responsible for almost all the murals painted in the early colonial period, and that there was a high degree of collaboration between the friars and the artists, and sometimes even an indigenous autonomy in the choice of motifs (Peterson 1993: 43-52; Reyes-Valerio 2000: 385-405). Building on this insight, the works such as those of Edgerton, Lara and Wake mentioned before, contribute to a more coherent understanding of colonial art and its place within the larger narrative of the religious development during the 16th century. These authors thoroughly oppose the earlier idea of ‘fragments’ or ‘survivals’ by focusing on the broader tendencies within the many colonial artworks. In this article, I apply a similar approach as I seek to gain a better understanding of the Xoxoteco murals through a comparison with other contemporary sources, both written as well as visual. Comparing the murals with other doctrinal material of the time is necessary in establishing how they relate to the evangelisation of the 16th century. Of particular relevance are sources related to the Aztecs, as the murals of Xoxoteco contain several Aztec elements, indicating that the artists were Aztecs, had Aztec affiliations or that they worked within Aztec areas.

Before examining the representations of heaven and hell in the vault and on the sidewalls, in the following I provide a description of the different parts of the murals.

THE CHAPEL AND THE MURALS

In pre-Columbian times, Xoxoteco was part of Metztitlan, an independent *altepetl* with a primarily Otomí-speaking population¹. Shortly after the conquest, Metztitlan was subjugated by the Spaniards, and Hernán Cortés turned the region into an *encomienda* (Gerhard 1993:

¹ See Hernández (2008) for a deeper historical review of the area before and after the conquest.

184-186). The Augustinians were the first to attempt a systematic indoctrination of the people of Metztitlan, and from 1536 and in the following decades, they established a series of mission stations in the rugged and mountainous areas of Hidalgo (Rubial Garcia 1989: 109ff). They were few in numbers, and in Metztitlan a mere 4-5 resident missionaries faced the challenge of converting a population of some 20,000 individuals spread over many small villages throughout the region (Jackson 2013: 24, 43). In 1550, the indigenous workers managed to finish an impressive church, Los Santos Reyes, with a breath-taking view on top of a hill in the town of Metztitlan. However, throughout the region, the Augustinians established mostly small *visita* chapels without resident friars, among these the chapel of Xoxoteco. The chapel of Xoxoteco, originally a ‘open chapel’ with an open facade, consists of a single nave that measures 12 meters in length and 7 meters in width, and a small adjoining building (Hernández 2008: 215). The murals, which are all located in the nave, can be divided into three categories: Biblical scenes, hell and temptation, and a paradisiacal theme (Figure 1, 2)². These themes are typical for the late medieval period, and the murals are in many ways very similar to the iconography found in contemporary churches throughout Europe.

The biblical scenes are located on the wall behind the altar with depictions from Genesis, and a Last Judgement-motif based on the book of Revelations (Figure 2a-c). The scenes from Genesis include God’s creation of Eve from the rib of Adam, and, on the other side of the altar, the

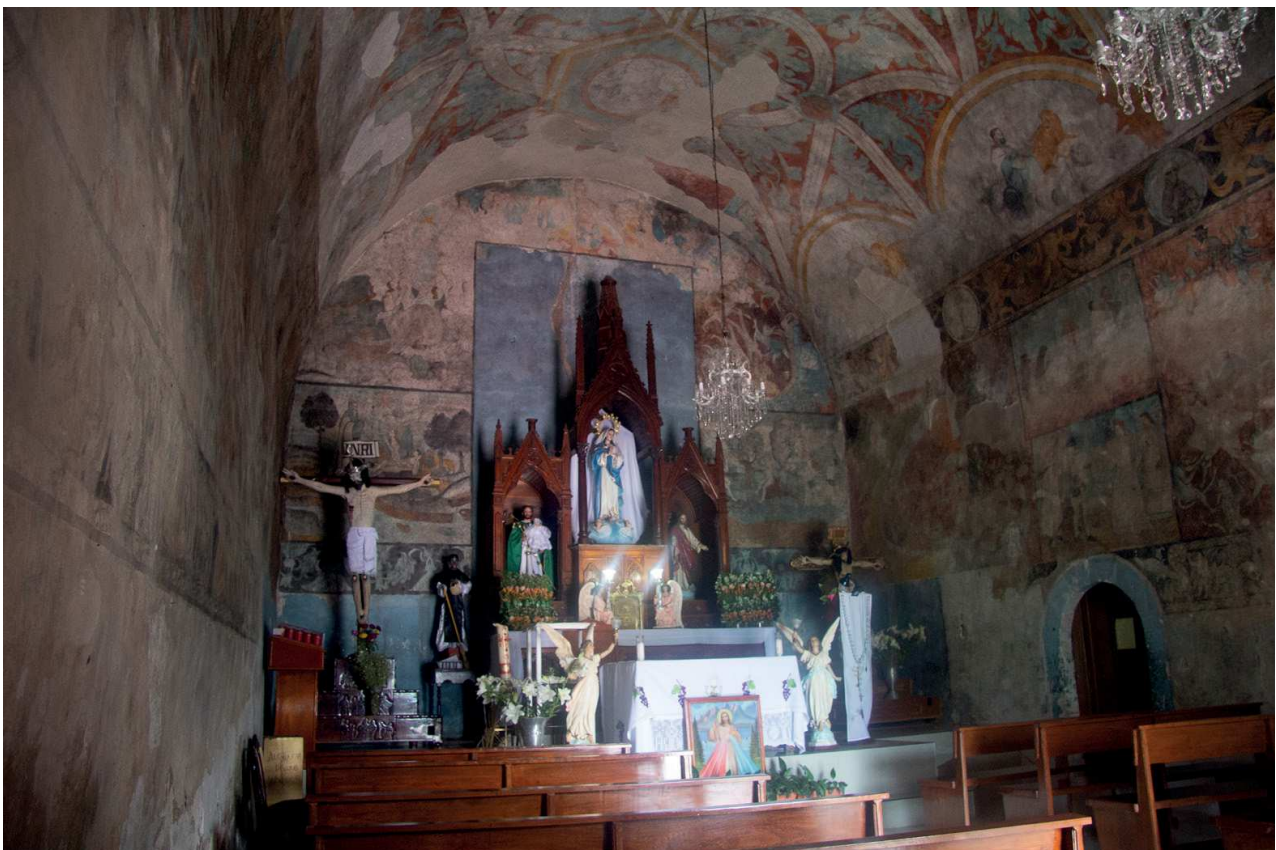


Figure 1. The chapel of Xoxoteco. Photo by the author.

² See Hernández (2008: 216-245) for a walk-through of all the scenes.

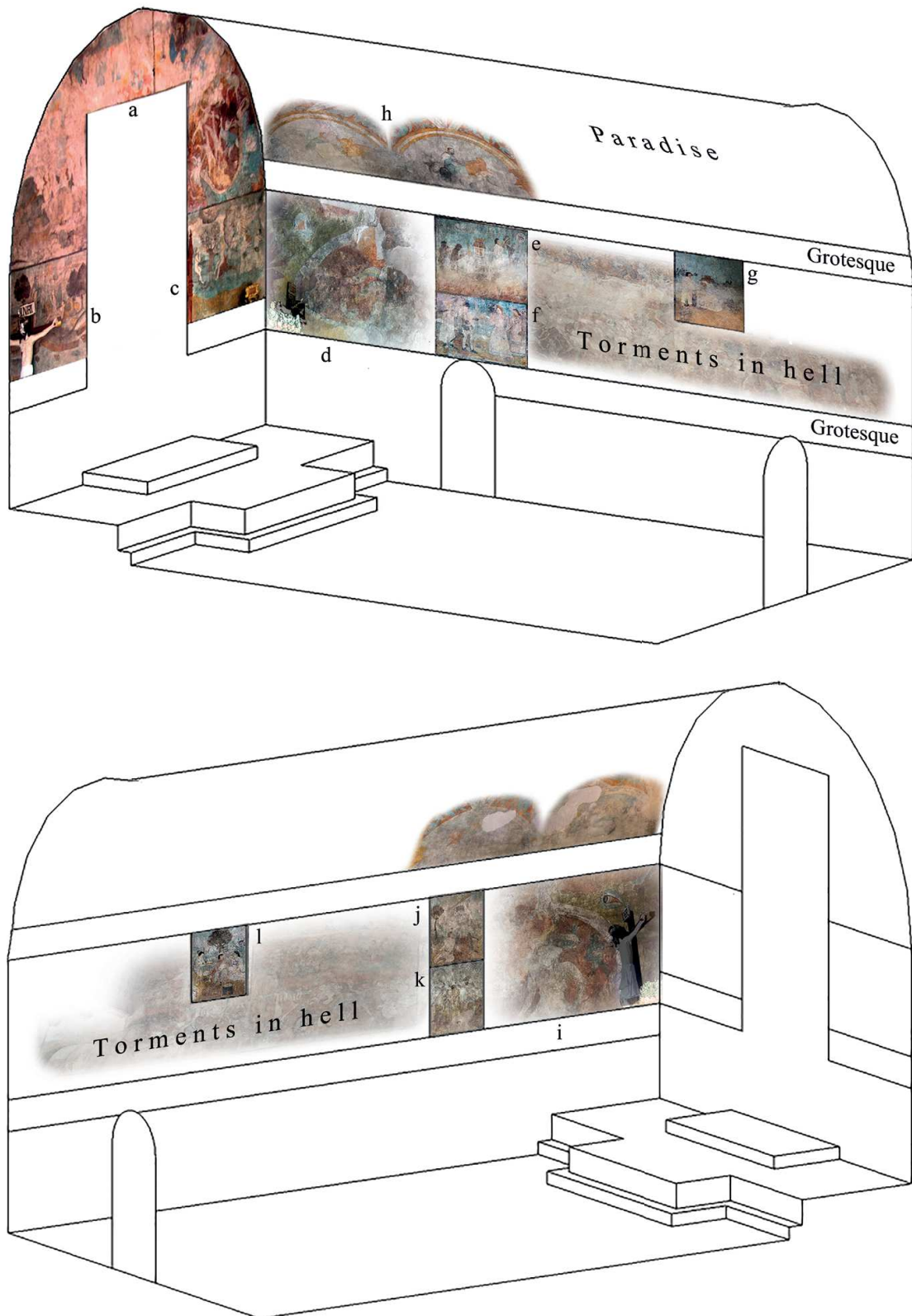


Figure 2. Sketch of chapel and placement of murals, with the right wall on top and left wall below. a) Last Judgement, b) creation of Eve, c) the original sin and expulsion from paradise, d) mouth of hell and representation of Satan, e) idolatry vs Christianity, f) temptation of adultery (?), g) temptation of stealing (?), h) the evangelists, i) mouth of hell and representation of Satan, j, k) flagellation/punishment, l) temptation of imbibement. Graphics and photos by the author.



Figure 3. Scenes from the side walls: a) flaying (right wall), b) dismemberment (left wall), c) disembowelment and cannibalism (left wall). Graphics by the author.

temptation in the Garden of Eden and the subsequent expulsion. The Last Judgement-motif follows a standard composition with Jesus sitting on an orb parting the righteous from the damned and sending the latter flying into an open mouth of hell to his left. On the opposite wall, above the entrance to the chapel, the artists painted a black and white Golgotha-scene relating the story of the resurrection of Christ. The scenes of temptation and torments in hell together with two enormous mouths of hell take up the murals on both sidewalls (Figure 2). Most of the space is dedicated to sinners who undergo torments of various kinds including dismemberment, disembowelment, burning, ingestion of boiling water, flaying, impalement and more (Figure 3). With torture victims of both European and indigenous ethnicity, these scenes constitute a fascinating New World-version of the medieval genre dubbed ‘moralities’ by

the archaeologist Clive Rouse. Rouse describes the genre as ‘moral and didactic or allegorical themes usually containing warnings against particular sins or modes of life’ (Rouse 1991: 35). Following the conventions of this genre, the artists in Xoxoteco also included six vignettes depicting specific temptations that could lead to sin. In the Old World, this visual format would have served to remind people of what they already knew: that they would go to hell if they sinned. To the convert in the New World, however, this logic was not necessarily so obvious. In Mesoamerica, it was not your deeds in life that decided your fate in the afterlife, but the type of death you suffered. Dying in battle would send you to one place, drowning would land you in another place, and so on. Most people – all those who died an undramatic death – went to the underworld, to the place the Aztecs called *Mictlan* (Sahagún 1950-1982: III: 41-51). The ‘moralities’-format, as it is painted in Xoxoteco, must have been a useful tool for the friars in the New World when instructing the indigenous converts in the relationship between one’s comportment in life and the afterlife.

One of the more illustrative of the six vignette-scenes shows two indigenous people being served pulque by a servant, while demons lurk behind them, symbolising temptation (for a closer study of this motif, see Peterson 1995: 21-24). The friars saw pulque-drinking as a serious problem, not least because they experienced a clear connection between intoxication and idolatry (Nielsen and Hansen 2015; see also Córdova 2015). The vignette opposite the pulque drinkers probably depicts a person being tempted by demons to steal from a chest, but the painting has badly deteriorated. Another vignette depicts two men and two women with demons sitting on their shoulders, likely indicating the temptation of adultery. In the vignette above, a cogent and instructive scene shows a baptised indigenous man turning away from his old religion represented by a pre-Columbian temple pyramid and two indigenous priests with long black hair, incense burners, and tobacco containers (Figure 4). With his back to his old religion, this individual follows the example of a European-looking person and prays towards a small emblem with the initials IHS, the monogram of Christ.

The last two vignettes seem to have a more acute and political dimension, as they both show a Spaniard wielding a weapon on an indigenous man. In one image, the latter is well dressed, and it seems that he is accepting his punishment, while in the other, he is fleeing accompanied by a devil. The message is most likely that one should accept one’s punishment. As Artigas (1979: 57-60) noted, this would be logical considering the friars’ obsession with flagellation and masochistic punishment, and moreover, corporal punishment of this kind was a standard measure taken towards people for not attending church and other offences (for another interpretation see Hernández 2008: 188-189, 225).

As mentioned, previous interpretations of the murals (Estrada de Gerlero 1978; Hernández 2008; Jackson 2013) have viewed the temptation and torture scenes as an especially harsh way of getting people to comply with the friars’ directions, reflecting the Augustinians resort to more desperate measures in the region of Metztitlan. However, devils and hellish torture were standard components in medieval art and not that surprising in the murals of Xoxoteco, especially considering the pronounced eschatological beliefs of the New World-friars and their concern with the presence and power of Satan (see Cervantes 1994; Edgerton 2001: 13-34; Lara 2004: 44-91; Peterson 1993: 169). Phelan (1970) identified full-blown millennialism in the writings of several high-standing Franciscans, and although this theological extreme may have been less prevalent among the Augustinians, the latter did see themselves in a wider cosmological-historical perspective, where the fight with the Devil was the turning point (Rubial Garcia 2008; Jackson 2013: 51-61). The friars experienced this fight as very real, including in Metztitlan, as is



Figure 4. Vignette from side wall showing an indigenous person turning his back to his old religion. Photo by the author.

evident from a telling anecdote recorded by the Augustinian chronicler Juan de Grijalva writing in the 17th century. According to Grijalva, one of the first friars to enter Metztitlan in the 1530s, Antonio de Roa, had the doubtful pleasure of talking to the Devil himself in the guise of a stone sculpture of the deity *Mola* worshipped by the population of Metztitlan. When interrogated by Roa, *Mola* admitted who he really was – a fallen angel – and that all those whom he had tricked into venerating him for generations were now burning in hell (Grijalva 1985: 90). The devil was literally considered to be waiting outside the church walls, which makes the murals less abstract and more realistic than a modern viewer might imagine.

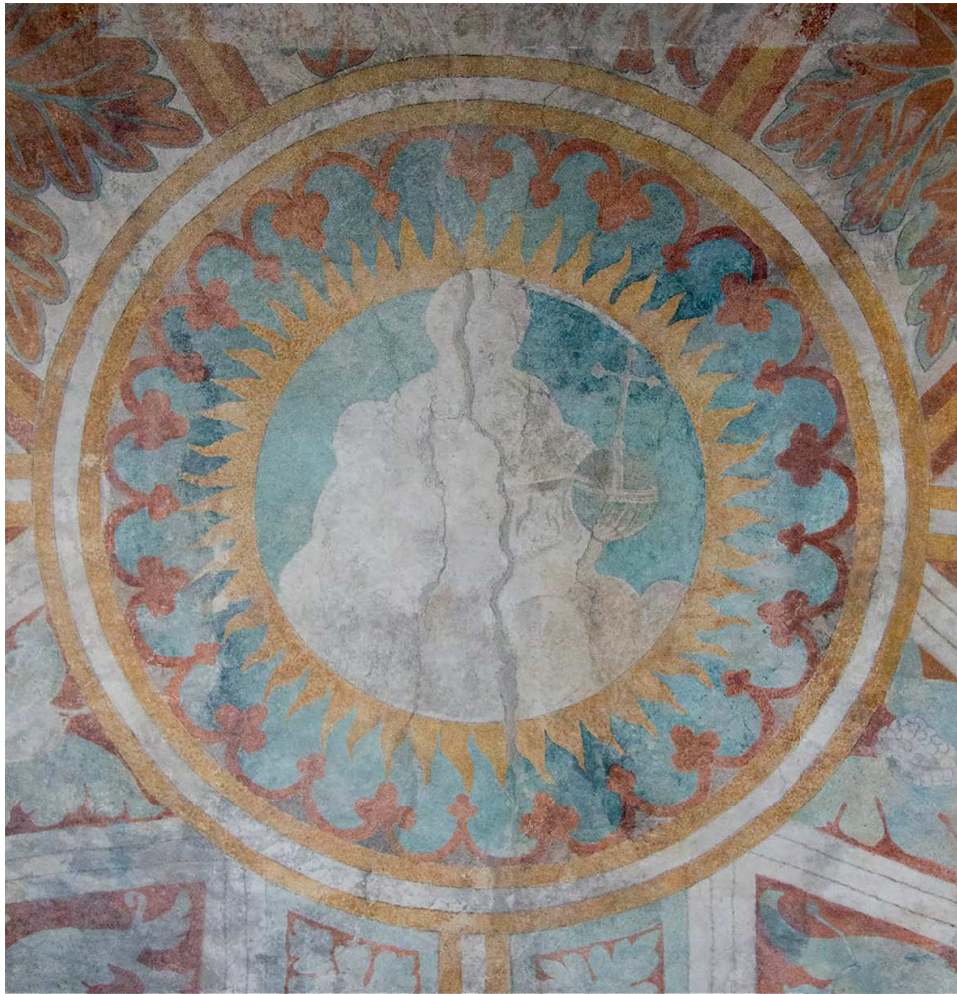
In contrast to the sidewalls' scenes of torture and suffering, the murals in the vault instil a calm, pleasant and dreamy feeling in the beholder (Figure 5). Large blue, red and golden acanthus and grape vines dominate and fill the voids in the ribbed vault. Well hidden within the vegetal imagery, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic beings with flowers emanating from the mouth surprise the eye (Figure 6a, b). Round the lower edges of the vault, the four evangelists sit calmly in white clouds that form a protecting layer against the torture scenes below (Figure 2h). In the middle of the vault, a large round motif encircled by yellow sun rays and an outer circle with a red fleur-de-lis pattern frame a large persona of whom only the silhouette is visible due to deterioration (Figure 7a). However, the outline of the silhouette reveals a hand holding a *globus cruciger* – an orb with a cross – as well as a halo around the head. The silhouette appears to portray Christ as *salvator mundi* framed as the sun. The artists also painted another circular



Figure 5. The vault. Photo by the author.



Figure 6. Details of the vault: a) zoomorphic being singing flowers, b) bird-man singing flowers, c) plant leaves. Photos by the author.



a



b

Figure 7. a) Solar-Christ in the ‘zenith’ of the vault. Photo by the author, b) Aztec solar disc, after Peñafiel 1890: III: 306.



Figure 8. Detail from the grotesque. Photo by the author.

motif in the vault between the Christ-motif and the wall behind the altar, but the central image in this circular form, if there ever was one, is gone today.

One last motif deserves mention. Well hidden within the repetitious motifs of the grotesques, the head of a small reptilian, reminiscent of the mouth of hell just below it, bites the arm of an angel (Figure 8). Here, the artists possibly gave their own interpretation of the battle between good and evil, as a humorous comment on the overall theme of the murals.

Previous dating of the murals has placed them within a time span from 1540 to 1585. These dates are based on circumstantial evidence, as there is no inauguration plate or any other kind of inscribed or written year. Artigas proposed that the paintings were made between 1540 and 1556, primarily based on the type of clothing worn by the individuals in the paintings (Artigas 1979: 82). Estrada de Gerlero compared the style of the paintings to contemporary codices, but she also argued that eschatological motifs like those of Xoxoteco were most popular during large-scale social crisis, such as epidemics. In light of this, she deemed it most likely that the murals were painted in the wake of the devastating *cocoliztli* epidemic of 1576, but probably before 1585 where most murals were whitewashed on the order of the Third Mexican Council (Estrada de Gerlero 1978: 86-87). More in line with Artigas, Hernández argued that the murals were painted in the mid-16th century. However, he based his argument on an analysis of the socio-religious situation of the area (Hernández 2008: 257). Jackson agreed with Hernández, focusing especially on the murals as the reaction of the Augustinians to conflicts with the Chichimecs, coupled with the friars' realisation that the conversion was too superficial among the Otomí. According to Jackson (2013: 85), this would indicate a date somewhere in the 1550s.

A unique circumstance regarding the murals of Xoxoteco is that almost the exact same composition and motifs exist in another chapel from the same period, in the town of Actopan some 40 kilometres to the west of Xoxoteco. The murals in Actopan were discovered in the late 1970s, a few years after those of Xoxoteco, and they turned out to be almost identical (Ballesteros 1999: 37; Estrada de Gerlero 1978). The chapel in Actopan is larger, and the artists had room to paint a few more scenes from the Bible, but it remains obvious that the murals in the two chapels must have been painted either from the same template or by copying the other. Apart from the extra additional scenes, only a few details in the composition and some minor changes to the motifs set the two mural programs apart. The artists who painted Xoxoteco, however, were not the same as those who painted Actopan, which is clear from the different styles. The artists of Xoxoteco are unknown, but in the murals of Actopan, a signature reading 'JO GER' could point to the indigenous artist Juan Gerson, who also painted the murals of Tecamachalco (Ballesteros 1999: 72).

Having reviewed the different parts of the murals with a brief discussion on their role within the Augustinian mission, I now return to the representations of paradise in the vault and the underworld on the sidewalls.

CONVERGING COSMOLOGIES: THE COLONIAL INTERPRETATIONS OF HEAVEN AND HELL IN XOXOTECO

A severe challenge for the friars consisted in conveying the Christian concepts of heaven and hell to the indigenous population³. To implement the Christian cosmos, the friars and their indigenous assistants chose to model it upon indigenous cosmological realms, and they typically kept the indigenous words for these realms instead of ‘paradise’ and ‘hell’ (Burkhart 1989: 47ff; Farriss 2018: 228-234). In Aztec cosmology, the afterworld called *Mictlan*, ‘among the dead’ (Burkhart 1989: 51), became more or less synonymous with hell after the conquest. According to the sources, it was an unpleasant place, but not a place of torture and fire like the Christian hell. Rather it was a cold, dark place, lying somewhere within the earth, and ruled by the death deity *Mictlanteuctli* and his consort *Mictlancihuatl* (Burkhart 1989: 51; see also Mikulska 2015). Some friars were aware of the caveats of drawing a parallel between hell and *Mictlan*, one problem being that most people already expected to go there, scarcely making it effective as a threat to follow Christian moral standards (Burkhart 1989: 51-52). Nevertheless, it became the commonly used model for hell, although some further explanation was needed to illustrate the ‘real’ nature of this place. The friars described, demonstrated and depicted hell with vivid imagery in order to impose a Christian conception of the underworld (Leeming n.d.). This not only took place in sermons, but also in religious theatre where hell was recreated with actors playing the role of demons and sinners (Schuessler 2013: 128-175). Some friars also held local demonstrations of the torments in hell by burning live animals or pouring hot water over themselves (Burkhart 1989: 53-54).

In the same way as the friars reused the concept of *Mictlan*, they exploited various indigenous afterworlds to impose the concept of paradise (Burkhart 1989: 49). Misunderstandings also arose here, as these afterworlds had different functions from the Christian paradise, just as *Mictlan* was very different from hell. Typically, as models for the Christian paradise, the missionaries chose those of the indigenous afterworlds that were lush gardens and characterised by a wealth of precious flora, fauna, and stones with positive, religious connotations for the indigenous people (Burkhart 1992: 89; Lara 2004: 78-79; Peterson 1993: 125-137). Sahagún’s book of hymns in Nahuatl is an illustrative example, where heaven – as well as Bethlehem and other holy locations – is consequently attributed with ‘sweet-smelling flowers’, ‘golden flowers with petals raining down’, ‘flowers shining like golden dew’ etc. (Sahagún 1993: 374, 157, see also Burkhart 1992). Holy figures such as Jesus, Mary and the saints are also referred to and surrounded by

³ Among the Otomí of the Sierra Madre, not far from Xoxoteco, French ethnographer Jacques Galinier has demonstrated that the concepts of heaven and hell never took hold in the way intended by the friars (Galinier 2004: 22). Neither did the concepts of virtue and sin, and today – just as in the 16th century – ‘the final home of the dead is determined by the cause of their death (sickness, drowning, murder, etc.), and not their behaviour among humans’ (Galinier 2004: 22). Also of interest here is the strictly dualistic cosmology observed by the Otomí, with a vertical division permeating the conception of the cosmos and of the human body. Galinier argues that this dualism has pre-Columbian roots and that it is not a result of Christian influence (Galinier 2004: 221-222).

precious flowers. As Anderson (1993: xxvi-xxxi) pointed out, the flowery metaphors used in these psalms were derived from pre-Columbian Nahuatl poetry and now served a Christian purpose. The indigenous ‘sacred garden’ and the Christian paradise were superficially alike but there were fundamental differences between them. As Burkhart explains, the indigenous garden was ‘not a place of reward for the righteous, existing on some transcendent plane of reality separate from the material world’, but rather ‘a sacred aspect of reality that one called into being by manipulating this garden imagery in ritual contexts, particularly through song’ (Burkhart 1992: 89). In other words, the garden imagery, which included flowers and plants, shimmering gems, precious stones, birds and butterflies, was not a symbol of a paradisiacal realm, as in the Christian conception, but something else, or more, that could be called upon during ritual. Several friars recorded how the indigenous population filled the churches with flowers (Zaragoza n.d.), which indicate what Burkhart (1992: 90) has called ‘the traditional practice of enflowering sacred space’ and possibly a conception of the churches as functionally identical to pre-Columbian ritual locations such as temples or caves. Furthermore, among the many plants and flowers depicted throughout the murals and sculpture of the religious architecture of the 16th century, several were native to the New World and had a specific use within indigenous religion, probably giving rise to a double understanding of the vegetal imagery (Peterson 1993: 83-123; Wake 2010: 224-249).

Both cosmological realms were obvious candidates for mural painting with the purpose of visually underlining what hell and heaven really looked like. The murals of Xoxoteco and Actopan are some of the most illustrative depictions of hell in the context of colonial mural painting (see Jackson 2013: 102-133 for a few more). The Augustinian *ex-convento* of Malinalco has the most famous colonial depiction of paradise in the form of an ambitious mural cycle, with the inclusion of many plants and animals native to the New World (see Peterson 1993). Apart from Malinalco, many churches and convents have beautifully painted vaults that surely depict paradise with flowers and angels, one magnificent example being the church of Los Santos Reyes of Metztitlan. The Xoxoteco-murals contain both a depiction of paradise and a depiction of hell, and I treat these in the following sections.

Flowers, Butterflies, and Sun Deities: The Paradisiacal Vault

In the churches of medieval Europe, paradise was typically depicted in the vault, due to the association of this realm with the above and the celestial abode (Davidson 1994a: 4-7). The traits most often used to depict paradise were clouds, saints, angels and flowers, and during ceremonies and liturgical dramas, music, incense, and real flowers also filled the churches to invoke a paradisiacal ambiance (Davidson 1994a, 1994b; Meyvaert 1986: 50-53; Rastall 1994; Rhodes and Davidson 1994). The motifs that I discuss from the vault of Xoxoteco are the vegetal motifs, the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic creatures, and the large sun-disc surrounding a Christ-motif. Together with the other elements in the vault, they denote paradise from a Christian viewpoint, but, as I aim to show, the artists in Xoxoteco selected motifs from the Christian tradition that aligned the Christian paradise with indigenous afterworlds.

Flora and Fauna

Large leaves and plants are the dominant motifs of the vault, and the artists depicted them in warm colours with a high degree of detail and variation. This imagery would no doubt have

been meaningful as a ritually important element from both the friars' and indigenous beholders' perspectives. The leaves are elaborately detailed with many different and unique shapes, and some of them bear a striking resemblance to butterflies and birds (Figure 6c). As mentioned, indigenous authors and artists appropriated butterflies and birds – part of the indigenous 'sacred garden' – to serve a Christian purpose. Precious birds are found in Sahagún's hymnbook, where they denote, among other things, the realm of heaven (Sahagún 1993: 121). This has a relation to Aztec mythology, where the heavenly realm of the Sun was filled with birds and butterflies who were the transformed souls of dead warriors and of women who died during labour (see Berlo 1983; Sahagún 1950-1982: III: 49; Taube 2000). In other vaults within the Augustinian mission zone, angels were sometimes depicted resembling butterflies in the vaults (Wake 2010: 30, 246), and in the church of Ixmiquilpan, elegant little birds and butterflies are hidden within the floral milieu of the vault (Duverger 2002: 200-201; Vivar-Cravioto 2012: 104). Moreover, in the vault of Xoxoteco, two zoomorphic beings and a small bird-man peek out among the leaves (Figure 6a,b). Both have flowers protruding from their mouths. This attribute is not uncommon in the European grotesque-genre, but in Mesoamerica, singing flowers was a metaphor for poetic song and structurally connected to the religious dimension (Hill 1992: 123ff). The artists would have recognised this metaphor in their recycling of a European grotesque motif in the present context.

Christ as a Solar Deity

Placed in the 'zenith' of the vault of Xoxoteco and surrounded by the leaves and plants, the Solar-Christ (Figure 7a) is yet another example of a Christian element that resonated with indigenous religion. In the Old World, the association of Jesus with the sun was commonplace and with roots in the Jewish and Christian adoptions of solar cults from the Near Eastern, Egyptian, Babylonian and Greco-Roman religions (Lara 1998: 261-265). The friars brought the concept of the Solar-Christ with them to the New World, where they promoted the parallel between the sun and Jesus by integrating a range of solar metaphors in their sermons (Burkhart 1988; see Lara 2004: 174-175). In Mesoamerica, however, the sun played an important role in myth and ritual, filling these metaphors with a potentially unintended meaning (Miller and Taube 2015: 158). In the Aztec religion, *Tonatiuh* – the personified sun – was a 'symbol of godhead *par excellence* and the theoretical recipient of all blood sacrifice' (Nicholson 1971: 424). As Burkhart has pointed out, misunderstandings could easily arise if the converts understood the sun not as an analogy for Christ – as the friars intended – but as identical with Christ himself in the same way that *Tonatiuh* is the sun itself (Burkhart 1988: 240). Moreover, although light had positive moral connotations for the Aztecs, the sun itself did not bear this meaning. Rather, the sun 'had crucial roles in the creation and maintenance of earthly life, the ordering of time and space, and as the lord of a celestial realm', roles that had 'no sense of "salvation" or spiritual "enlightenment"' (Burkhart 1988: 238). The sun-representation in Xoxoteco is part of this parallel drawn during the evangelisation process.

Apart from the conceptual overlap of the two notions of the sun, there was also an overlap in the visual representation of the sun in the Mesoamerican and Christian traditions. On pre-Columbian monuments, objects, and codices, the Mesoamerican sun deity was depicted within a sun disc (Figure 7b; Matos and Solís 2004: 89-103). Encircling the deity, yellow and red sun rays alternated with other symbols in varying ways. The visual tradition of depicting a deity within a sun disc also existed in the Old World, where Jesus, Mary or the saints, or their

monograms, could appear within a circle or ellipse of sun rays (Lara 1998: 265; 2008: 194-199; Schiller 1971: II:109). In Xoxoteco, the sun disc with its yellow sun rays and red *fleur-de-lis* symbols encircling Christ elegantly accommodates the sun-deity motif of two visual traditions.

It ought to be mentioned that the Solar-Christ in the vault of Xoxoteco was one of several, perhaps many, depictions of Christ within a sun disc in the vaults of the Augustinian mission zone. In spite of the relatively few preserved murals, similar Solar-Christ figures can be found in other chapels in the vicinity, such as that of Iztacoyotla, where a baby Jesus-motif encircled by sun rays takes the central place in the vault, in a way that is very similar to those in Xoxoteco (see Perusquía and Beltrán 2016: 113). Hernández also notes that local informants remembered a large sun motif in the top of the vault of the old church in Ocuilcalco, now in ruins (Hernández 2008: 245). Further, sun discs decorate the vaults in the chapels of Tepatetipa, Tlatemalco, and Tlaxco, and although these are of a later date, they could very well be restorations of the original motif (Gallegos 2006: fig. 110, 148, 154-159, 175-176).

An Indigenous-Christian Paradise

Basically, the vault of Xoxoteco depicts a paradise with a medieval Christian iconography that has been selected and adapted to fit the specific New World-context. The elaborate use of vegetal symbolism in other colonial descriptions and depictions of paradise is repeated in the vault of Xoxoteco, reflecting a pan-colonial way of presenting paradise. The modifications of the form of the leaves to resemble butterflies, and the inclusion of flower-singing zoomorphic and anthropomorphic entities would also have pitched well with contemporary representations in the doctrinal material. The Solar-Christ was an important hybrid symbol in colonial religion, and the representation in Xoxoteco thus taps into the wider colonial religious process of making Christ a meaningful figure for the indigenous converts.

Devils and Caves: The Colonial Underworld

The theme of hell that fills the sidewalls was also adapted by the artists in several ways. The inclusion of both European and indigenous sinners as torture victims of Satan's evil helpers is one example of this. Furthermore, it is remarkable that although all the types of torture on the sidewalls are known from contemporary European mural programs, the artists seem to have chosen those that had a direct parallel with indigenous ritual sacrifices, as has also been previously pointed out (Estrada de Gerlero 1978: 81, Hernández 2008: 189-190; Klein 1990: 90). The flaying scene can be associated with the ritual practice of flaying that was an integrated part of pre-Columbian rituals, such as the Aztec *tlacaxipehualiztli* and *ochpaniztli* (Sahagún 1950-1982: II: 13, 19). Dismemberment, cannibalism and decapitation were likewise practiced systematically before the conquest, and the placement of two heads on the top beam of a wooden stand give associations to the *tzompantli*, the skull rack, on which heads of war prisoners were exhibited. Scaffolding and burning, also among the Xoxotecan torture methods, were likewise known from the Aztec world (Aguilar-Moreno 2006: 154-155). Finally, one of the devils blows a conch shell-trumpet (Artigas 1979: 91-92), an instrument used by priests at the high points of rituals. By choosing these torture methods and placing them on the central parts of the side walls, the artists adapted the conventional mural-genre of 'moralities' and gave hell a new face, one that fitted the New World. This also included the adaptations made to Satan himself, as described in the following.



a



b



c

Figure 9. a) Hell mouth with representation of Satan on right wall, b) mouth of hell with representation of Satan on left wall. Graphics by the author, c) Codex Tudela fol. 46.

The Satan-tzitzimime Hybrids

One of the first things to notice in the murals is the mouth of hell-motif painted on both sidewalls flanking the altar. In front of each mouth of hell the artists painted a figure of prominent size, surely representing Satan or Antichrist (Lara 2004: 74) (Figure 9a, b). This composition with a mouth of hell and a Satan-representation in front of it has clear models in medieval iconography: the mouth of hell was a medieval symbol of hell invented in the 10th century, signifying the entrance to the Christian underworld (Sheingorn 1992: 1-6; Schmidt 1995), and



a



b

Figure 10. Other representations of the mouth of hell: a) Detail from the vault of Højby Kirke, Denmark, late 14th century. Photo by the author. b) Chicomoztoc in Codex Durán (1581).

sometimes this motif included a depiction of Satan in the mouth opening (see Figure 10a). The artists in Xoxoteco clearly deemed the mouth of hell to be an important part of the murals, portraying them twice (perhaps reflecting a Mesoamerican preference for symmetry [Jesper Nielsen, personal communication 2020, see also Boone 2007: 66]) and painting them to fill the entire height of the sidewall friezes. Their prominent place within the murals may not only be due to their efficiency in scaring the converts to follow Christian moral standards, but may also stem from the meaning of the symbol of the animal mouth in pre-Columbian iconography. In Mesoamerica, animal jaws symbolised cave entrances, which were places of ritual potency and conceived of as portals to the underworld (Brady and Prufer 2005; Heyden 1975; Taube 1986). Some missionaries exploited this coincidence, describing the Christian underworld as a cave in sermons and other writings (Burkhart 1989: 56; Sahagún 1950-1982: XI: 277). Colonial artists also made use of the visual overlap between the two traditions. In the Codex Durán (1581), the mythological origin cave of the Aztecs, *Chicomoztoc* – in pre-Columbian contexts depicted as a stylised animal mouth – is reproduced as a full European-style mouth of hell (Figure 10b). In this remarkable illustration, the life-giving aspects of the cave and the underworld as a place of

origin in Mesoamerican thought is portrayed through a Christian symbol signalling the entrance to a place of eternal suffering. The fundamental differences between the two cultures' conception of the underworld are thus clearly exposed (Nielsen 2020: 245). In composing the murals of Xoxoteco, the artists likely wanted to harness the bi-cultural meaning of the animal mouth-symbol to consolidate the theme of the underworld. The placement of a deity – Satan mixed with traits from the *tzitzimime*, as explained below – in front of the mouths of hell furthermore accords with the Mesoamerican concept of caves as places of residence for fertility deities (see also Sotelo 2005: 220; Osorio and Santoyo 2016: 460-461). Thus, the whole composition with the mouth of hell and Satan could be seen as meaningful within two cultural traditions.

The two figures representing Satan are both badly deteriorated, and the facial and bodily features are hard to distinguish. The figure on the right wall (from the perspective of the beholder looking towards the altar, Figure 9a) is headless, and four fire-belching serpents rise from the neck opening. Only the outline of the upper body is visible, and apart from the large claws with long nails, time has unfortunately erased any detail. The figure on the left wall (Figure 9b) is similar in size and pose, but it has a head and wears a crown from which three smaller serpents rise. While the facial characteristics have mostly vanished, a few details on the torso can still be identified. The ribs are visible, revealing skeletal features, and from the arms dangle what appear to be pieces of skin. Around the neck, the figure bears an elaborately painted necklace with human hands and hearts. This figure also has large claws, and one of the elbows features what seems to be an outgrowth of some sort, perhaps once depicting a devilish face. The figure on the left wall has been discussed briefly by several commentators (Clemmensen 2018; Hernández 2008: 222; Lara 2006: 74; López Austin 2019; Macuil Martínez 2017: 66), whereas the being on the opposite, right wall has received little or no scholarly attention (apart from Clemmensen 2018).

Descriptions and depictions of Satan have been inspired by various local deities throughout the history of Christianity, not least during the New World-mission (Báez-Jorge 2003: 271-312; Russell 1977: 215-220, 245-246; 1981: 190-191; 1984: 62-91). A likely source of inspiration for the two Satan-figures in Xoxoteco are the *tzitzimime*, a complex group of supernatural beings branded as devils in the colonial era. Klein (2000) identified the diagnostic features of the *tzitzimime*. The hands and hearts, worn in the form of pendants on a necklace by the figure on the left wall (Figure 9b), and the skeletal features visible on the torso of the same figure, are indications of affiliations with the *tzitzimime*⁴. These two traits are also reminiscent of the illustrations of a *tzitzimitl* in Codex Magliabechiano (fol. 76r) and Codex Tudela (fol. 46) (Figure 9c). The connection to the *tzitzimime* for the figure on the right wall is less obvious, but the silhouette of the torso and the claws on this figure are similar to the other one. Decapitated, and with serpents rising from the neck opening, this figure bears a likeness to the great *Coatlicue* statue exhibited in the Museo Nacional de Antropología, that also has serpent heads rising from the torso instead of a human head (Boone 1999). This statue further bears a necklace of hands and hearts, and Boone has convincingly argued that

⁴ This has also been pointed out by Clemmensen (2018: 105-107), López Austin (2019), and Macuil Martínez (2017: 66-67). López Austin, however, identifies the figure as *Tlaloc* based on similarities with a *Tlaloc*-depiction in Sahagún's *Primeros Memoriales*. Macuil Martínez states that the Mesoamerican population would have seen the figure as a representation of the Lady of the Earth, which does not necessarily conflict with the interpretation given here, following Klein's (2000) conclusion that other earth- and fertility deities had *tzitzimime* aspects.

it is in fact a *tzitzimitl*, together with other female deities associated with fertility such the *cihuapipiltin*, who also wore this necklace (Boone 1999; Klein 2000: 27-29).

The crown of serpents worn by the left figure is not characteristic of the *tzitzimime*, nor is it a typical Aztec headdress. However, as Macuil Martínez (2017: 66-67) has noted, it has models in other non-Aztec sources, for example the Codex Vindobonensis where certain persons bear a crown with intertwined serpents, but the connection is unclear. In contrast, the serpent skirt was one of the characteristic traits of the *tzitzimime* (Klein 2000: 41-45), but in Xoxoteco this trait is absent. So, the figures in Xoxoteco do not appear to be exact one-to-one illustrations of the *tzitzimime* or other deities, but rather hybrids combining many of the traits from the *tzitzimime*, or certain related fertility deities, and those of Satan. The serpent crown was, for example, most likely a creative interpretation by the artist playing with the serpent as a symbol characteristic of these indigenous deities and the devil alike. The crown also recalls the serpent mane of the Greek mythological being Medusa, who, during the Middle Ages, represented sexuality, sin, and the lethal temptation of women (Leeming 2013: 23-34) – all themes that the missionaries would have wanted to infuse in this portrait.

The iconographic indications pointing to the *tzitzimime* as a source of inspiration for the motifs in Xoxoteco are supported by the fact that these deities were favourite objects for the missionaries' demonisation of indigenous deities (Alcántara Rojas 2013: 114-116; Boone 1999: 198-200; Burkhart 1989: 42, 55; Klein 2000: 21ff). Interestingly, before the conquest, the *tzitzimime* appeared to have had several benevolent aspects. They were, for example, called upon by midwives, as Sahagún (1950-1982: VI: 164-165) relates, and from an iconographical perspective, their skeletal characteristics associate them with fertility (see Furst 1982; Nielsen 2019: 246-247), as does the symbol of hands and hearts (Klein 2000: 45). Nevertheless, according to the written sources, their reputation appears to have accentuated their frightening appearance and lethal behaviour, which to the missionaries would have made them readily identifiable as devils. Reviewing the sources describing and depicting the possible pre-Columbian conceptions of the *tzitzimime*, Boone (1999: 198) characterises them as 'celestial monsters'. They resided in heaven, sometimes in the form of stars, from where they had the ability to descend to earth to eat men (see also Mikulska 2015: 117-118). This could have taken place during the New Fire-ritual, if the priest had not succeeded in drilling a fire in the chest cavity of the victim and thus bring light back to the world. It could also be in the form of the deified women, the *cihuapipiltin*, who died during labour and went to the realm of the sun but descended to earth looking for their husbands, or trying to afflict children with certain deceases at night (Boone 1999: 199; Sahagún 1950-1982: VI: 163). Here, the missionaries saw a parallel between the descent of the *tzitzimime* and the fallen angels (Boone 1999: 198), and with a general fear of the *tzitzimime* among the population, they were a good match for the demons of hell. The eschatological aspects of these beings – evident in their association with the New Fire-ritual and the end of the 52-year cycle (Miller and Taube 2015: 176) – would also have accorded well with the friars' apocalyptic beliefs.

Some of the more vivid descriptions of the *tzitzimime* as demons come from the hands of indigenous authors. In a passage of one of Sahagún's sermons, authored by his Nahuatl assistants, the residents of *Mictlan* are described with a range of indigenous characteristics:

'Indeed, they are Tzitzimime, they have mouths like Tzitzimime, they have mouths like huts, they have gaping mouths. They have metal bars for teeth, they have curved teeth, they have tongues of flame, their eyes are big burning

embers. They have faces on both sides. Their molars are sacrificial stones. Everywhere they eat people, everywhere they bite people, everywhere they gulp people down. They have mouths on all their joints like monsters with which they chew. And they have big long nails.'

(Quoted from Burkhart 1989: 55)

Some of the traits, such as the long nails, are present in the depictions in Xoxoteco, while some are absent and others impossible to see due to deterioration. Like Sahagún's assistants, the artists in Xoxoteco seem to have chosen certain traits – although not necessarily the same – from the *tzitzimime* hoping to make Satan intelligible to an indigenous audience. As such, the murals can be seen as a visual pendant to this passage from Sahagún's sermon.

The artists may also have intended a connection between the Satan-*tzitzimime* figures and the Solar-Christ painted in the vault. In Aztec mythology, the *tzitzimime* participated in a cosmic battle with the sun, not only during the New Fire-ritual, as mentioned above, but also during eclipses where the *tzitzimime* were perceived as stars that became visible next to the eclipsed sun and threatened to overwhelm it (Boone 1999: 199). Furthermore, adopting what appears to be a benevolent role, the *tzitzimime*, in their form as the souls of women who died in childbirth, each day donned war regalia and fought for the sun's path across the sky, aided by the souls of men who had died on the battlefield (Sahagún 1950-1982: VI: 161-163). The men accompanied the sun until its zenith, passing on the responsibility to the women who led the sun the rest of the way until it set. Here they delivered it into the hands of the inhabitants of *Mictlan*. These close associations between the *tzitzimime* and the sun and the celestial realm add another dimension to the murals of Xoxoteco: The cosmic battle, or relationship, between the *tzitzimime* and the sun in Aztec mythology becomes the Christian cosmic battle between Satan and Jesus.

It must be mentioned that apart from the *tzitzimime*, the artists may have fused another indigenous class of supernatural entities into the depiction of Satan on the right sidewall (Figure 9a). The serpents radiating from the neck opening have fearful serpent heads belching balls of fire, and these heads have large horns. In Christian iconography, the many-headed dragon representing Satan sometimes has serpent heads with horns (Hall 2008: 25; O'Hear and O'Hear 2015: 140-148). However, in the Aztec religion, the deer-serpent, *mazacoatl*, also has these characteristics. *Mazacoatl* is included in the illustrations pertaining to Sahagún's catalogue of serpents in the Florentine Codex, and it is also represented in the colonial murals of the Franciscan convent of Atlihuetzia (Tlaxcala). This latter depiction was apparently inspired by Fray Ioan Baptista and his colourful descriptions of the *mazacoatl* in sermons and plays (Alcántara Rojas 2013: 117-118). As with the *tzitzimime*, *mazacoatl* had both curing abilities and dangerous aspects, and during the colonial era, it was branded as a devilish creature by the friars (Nielsen 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

Colonial artworks of the 16th century are characterised by a presence of both Christian and Mesoamerican iconography and concepts, one of the reasons being that friars and indigenous artists modelled Christianity upon elements from indigenous religion (Edgerton 2001: 2). In this article, I have sought to demonstrate how the murals in the chapel of Xoxoteco reflect this colonial mixture of traditions. Even though the murals formally remain within the boundaries

of Christian iconography, they accommodate graphic and conceptual changes to the Christian cosmos. These changes comprise a certain way of presenting paradise through an adapted vegetal symbolism with meaning within both cultures, the employment of the Solar-Christ compatible with both Mesoamerican and Christian beliefs, the choice of certain torture methods that are reminiscent of indigenous ritual, the emphasis on the mouth of hell signalling an entrance to the underworld in both traditions, and finally the attribution of *tzitzimime* traits to Satan that draw a parallel between these beings of the night and the evil god of the Christian cosmos.

Whereas the murals were painted in accordance with the Augustinian friars' intention of conveying the concept of sin and the connection between the deeds in life and the fate in the afterlife (Estrada de Gerlero 1978; Hernández 2008; Jackson 2013), this article has described another layer of didactics in the form of a well-planned and thoroughly colonial presentation of the cosmos. In choosing this specific composition and these specific motifs for their portrayal of heaven and hell, the artists likely followed the standards of the day, as most of their choices were reflected in other contemporary doctrinal material. However, certain choices – such as the visual juxtaposition of heaven and hell with the Solar-Christ and the *tzitzimime* as 'representatives' of these realms – are unique within the corpus of preserved visual sources from the 16th century.

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