

JAMES B. KIRACOFÉ

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Architectural Fusion and Indigenous Ideology in Early Colonial Teposcolula

The Casa de la Cacica: A Building at the Edge of Oblivion

Architectural Fusion in Colonial México: Indigenous Leadership

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE AND standing buildings show that from an early date indigenous leaders in various parts of colonial Mexico were systematically manipulating elements of the incoming European architecture in a deliberate fusion with well known elements of pre-contact form culture, consciously creating new, distinctive, high status building types. In several cases the evidence demonstrates clear ideological and symbolic motives. In these instances, and especially in Teposcolula, the evidence shows that the implementation and integration of the ideological program was not limited in its conception to a single high status building in isolation, but rather was carried out at the level of the initial urban planning of the new colonial towns, and recognized important relationships within the overall sacred landscape. In Teposcolula and elsewhere, then, the evidence shows that the indigenous leadership participated in the process of urban planning, successfully transmitting important elements of their traditional culture into the new era as permanent and highly visible components of their new built environment. This process of fusion of indigenous and Euro-

pean architectural forms and technologies resulting in new building types such the *Casa de la Cacica* in Teposcolula was arrested by the terrible epidemic of 1576. The devastating, demoralizing and destabilizing consequences of the demographic collapse sapped the vitality of this new architecture and rather than flourishing and flowering it died and decayed, leaving us but a few reminders of a hopeful moment in the history of cultural transmission and transformation in early colonial Mexico.

Pre-Colonial Precedents: High Status Architecture in the Codices

Before proceeding to a discussion of early colonial fusion architecture, a brief review of some traditional indigenous building types is in order. Most pre-contact examples of picture writing were destroyed during the early years of the colonial era, however the surviving documents provide numerous examples of buildings depicted in a stylized form. Of various possibilities, selections from three screenfolds from the Mixtec cultural zone—the Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I, the Codex Nuttall, and the Codex Sánchez Solís—sufficiently illustrate typical pre-contact graphic representations of high status buildings.¹

While these and other examples of screenfold illustration have in common a high degree of stylization, the technique is nevertheless capable of distinguishing and differentiating among several types of structures, including steam baths, high status residences and temple platforms. Furthermore, an important distinguishing feature of all buildings is a carefully rendered ornamental frieze. These friezes usually appear along the top of flat roofed resi-

1. Otto Adelhofer, ed., *Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I*, Graz, Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1963. See also Jill Leslie Furst, *Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I. A Commentary*, Albany, Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, 1978 (State University of New York Publication, 4); Zelia Nuttall, ed., *Codex Nuttall: Facsimile of an Ancient Mexican Codex Belonging to Lord Zouche of Harynworth, England*, Cambridge, Peabody Museum, Harvard University, 1902. See also José Luis Melgarejo Vivanco, *Códice Nuttall, tres historias medievales*, Veracruz, Comisión Estatal Conmemorativa del V Centenario del Encuentro de Dos Mundos, 1991; Cottie A. Burland, ed., *Codex Edgerton 2895*, Graz, Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1965 [the Codex Sánchez Solís is also known as Codex Edgerton 2895]. For an excellent general treatment of the topic in English with an extensive bibliography see Mary Elizabeth Smith, *Picture Writing from Ancient Southern Mexico. Mixtec Place Signs and Maps*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1973.

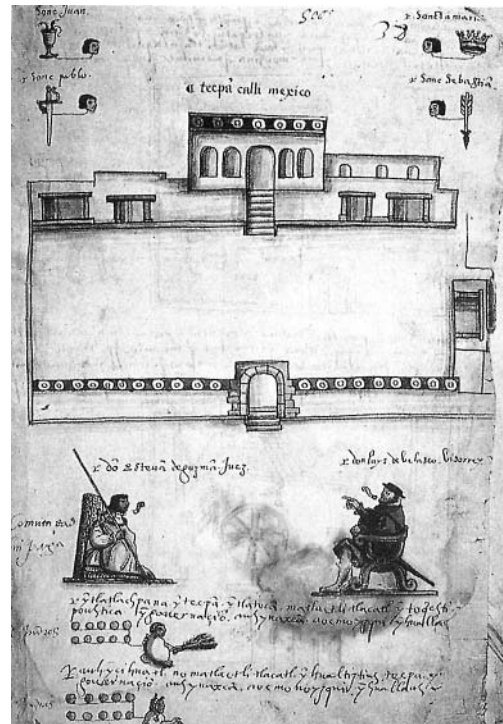


Figure 1.
Codex Osuna.
© James B. Kiracofe.

dential buildings, and sometimes at the crest of steeply pitched thatched roofs. They are also present on temple platforms, both immediately beneath the top surface of the platform and often also appearing on the small buildings on top of the platform. In the case of steam baths these friezes occur as in the case of residential buildings, along the top. No one can say with certainty exactly what these friezes were intended to communicate, however the great care with which they were drawn, the great variety of distinctive patterns employed in diverse combinations with subtle differences in color combinations of repeated forms strongly suggest that they carried specific meanings easily recognized by those initiated into that complex symbolic system. Because, for the most part, these Mixtec screenfolds were concerned with genealogy and the relationship of particular families to particular places at particular times, these friezes may have performed a heraldic function, so that together with specific place glyphs and year glyphs it would be possible to identify the changes of genealogy over time as related to place.

The recording and preservation of this kind of knowledge was, no doubt,



Figure 2. Atotonilco de Tula, Cemetery Chapel. © James B. Kiracofe.



Figure 3. Atotonilco de Tula, Cemetery Chapel, Disk Frieze. © James B. Kiracofe.

quite important to a landowning elite group, entrance to which was restricted to legitimate children of parents of recognized lineages on both sides. These friezes are such prominent features of the architecture as portrayed in the codices that it is natural to assume that the buildings represented actually resembled the graphic depiction and had friezes prominently displaying these same patterns and communicating the same kind of information to those who saw them. It is also possible that the information thus conveyed was understood more precisely by those initiated into what may have been a somewhat esoteric symbolic system, capable of being read at several levels, but denoting at its most basic level of understanding a high status building. It is believed that the Mixtec elite reserved for their private use a spoken language not understood by the common people.²

Early Colonial Fusion: Evidence From the Documentary Record

There are numerous examples of pre-contact building types depicted in documents prepared in the early colonial period, either at the initiative of indigenous leaders presenting cases before the colonial judicial system or at the initiative of colonial officials seeking documentation for administrative or historical purposes. Donald Robertson wrote on the topic of these early manuscripts and presented two documents with special relevance here.³ The Codex Mendoza was painted at the order of the first Viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza, as a background history intended for the King in Spain. A native master painter, Francisco Gualpuygualcal began work on this historical pictorial in 1541. Important here is the retrospective portrayal of Motecuzoma's palace which had been destroyed during the conquest. This document is in itself an example of the artistic fusion between the traditional Aztec painting style and the new European techniques. Folio 69r shows Motecuzoma sitting in his obviously high status pre-contact building.⁴ The tell-tale disk frieze is, again, the most evident ornamental feature.

The architectural transformations resulting from this fusion of two alien

2. Maarten Jansen, "Las lenguas divinas del México precolonial," *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, no. 38, June 1985, pp. 3-14.

3. Donald Robertson, *Mexican Manuscript Painting of the Early Colonial Period*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1959.

4. Ibidem, plate 26; see also his discussion of the Codex Mendoza, pp. 95-107.

traditions may also reflect some modifications in the role of the indigenous leaders in the operation of government in the colonial regime. The Florentine Codex, compiled by Bernardino de Sahagún before 1585, gives specific examples of architectural types in illustrations elaborated by text. In Book 11, Earthly Things, Twelfth Chapter, Ninth Paragraph, “which telleth of the various manners of houses [and] their classifications,” there is a text referring to an illustration numbered 889 describing “Tlatocacalli, House where the lord usually lived. This is the house of the ruler or of him who is esteemed. It means good, fine, cherished, proper house.” The illustration shows a house with a frieze of discs set in a dark field, such as those seen on Motecuzoma’s house and on the Tecpan of Mexico.⁵ Of course, this book was compiled in the 1580’s from accounts of informants who may not have been old enough to recall events and buildings pre-dating the conquest, and who may have been more than a little acculturated after long years of study and work with the Spanish friars. Still, the accounts and illustrations representing an indigenous view on Aztec history and culture before contact are generally accurate. Furthermore, in the specific case of the architectural use of disk frieze ornaments, the evidence presented in the Florentine Codex is corroborated by numerous other early colonial and pre-contact sources as we have seen above. The specific refinement of knowledge offered by this passage in the Florentine Codex is that buildings in which the ruler lived were of a type that had a special name, “Tlatocacalli,” which described this special class or type of building, notable because it was “...a good, fine, cherished, proper house.” And the most notable visual feature of the building in the illustration is the disk frieze. There was clearly an association between the ruler, “or him who is esteemed,” and a particular and appropriate type of special building in the pre-contact world.⁶

In the colonial regime the role of the indigenous “lords” or seigneurs changed from perpetual hereditary dynastic rule to a more democratic system of elected “gobernadores” and “alcaldes” in which the occupants of the local seats of power rotated periodically among members of the traditional

5. Bernardino de Sahagún, comp., Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J.O. Anderson, trans. and eds., *The Florentine Codex: General History of the things of New Spain*, Salt Lake City, The School of American Research and the University of Utah, 1963, Book 11, Earthly Things, pp. 271.

6. See also the recent synthesis treating these buildings and their social functions in James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1992, pp. 102-110, and elsewhere as noted in the index.

leadership. While this change took effect gradually during the sixteenth century as access to these elected positions became less restricted, at the outset it was typical for the traditional leaders to be “elected” to the position of *gobernador* or *alcalde*, unless the colonial administration found the traditional hereditary leader to be objectionable for one reason or another.

The mechanism of government changed forever after the conquest, and by the end of the sixteenth century the indigenous leaders were no longer the undisputed possessors of pre-eminent hereditary power, but rather holders of posts with a more diluted, bureaucratized authority institutionalized by the colonial administration. While individuals continued to hold the posts and exercise the power, it was now the exercise of an institutional power in which they participated rather than a personal power exercised on their own authority. This had direct consequences on the architectural expressions of power. In the past the locus of power was the dwelling place of the lord, but under the colonial regime it became the seat of the municipal institutional authority, the *tecpan*, or *cabildo*.

George Kubler states that “The physical remains of early colonial Indian housing are difficult to identify. Their form probably persists in such towns as Mixquic and Milpa Alta. The dwellings of only the Indian nobles and officials approximated European types.”⁷ However, while it is certainly true that the Indian nobles selectively incorporated notable European architectural features in their buildings, even more important was the systematic inclusions of traditional pre-colonial forms and symbolic ornaments. Dr. Kubler adds that “In Texcoco, the Indian nobles preserved their traditional symbols of prestige. No Indian who pretended to social distinction in 1582 could afford not to live upon a terreplein (cf. fig. 81 [which shows the *Tecpan* of Mexico in the Codex Osuna]). Small his house might be, if only enthroned upon an earthen platform.”⁸ Certainly the principal structure in the image Dr. Kubler cites is elevated as he points out. But what he does not mention may be an even more important “traditional symbol of prestige:” the disk frieze as plainly and deliberately evident in the carefully drawn picture as it no doubt was in the real building portrayed.

As Robertson points out, the Codex Osuna was made between January

7. George Kubler, *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1948, p. 202.

8. Ibidem; Kubler cites: “*Relación de Tezcoco*, NCDHM, III, p. 69.”



Figure 4. San Juan Teposcolula, air view, 1955. © James B. Kiracofe.

and August 1565 to present evidence in the 1563-66 *visita* by Valderrama reviewing the government of Viceroy Luis de Velasco. In this document indigenous leaders claimed non-payment of numerous services rendered by their people in building construction and other activities undertaken for the Viceroy. Of special interest is the representation to which Dr. Kubler referred, found in Document VII, folio 500/38r, showing the “*tecpan* or municipal building of Mexico, ‘Tecpa’ calli Mexico’ ”⁹ (figure 1). Here, again, is an explicit documentary depiction of a high status building of early colonial construction (before 1565) shown with the same kind of disk frieze seen on Motecuzoma’s house in the Codex Mendoza as well as on buildings in the pre-contact codices. Other architectural features typical of buildings seen in the pre-contact documents include the rectilinear door openings with the distinctive overhanging lintels. But what is also clearly evident is the use of distinctly European technology and design in the repeated use of compression arches seen in the arcade along the front of the building and especially in the main atrium portal in which the voussoirs are emphatically rendered

9. Robertson, op. cit., plate 33; see also his discussion of the Codex Osuna, pp. 115-122.

with architectural precision. The Codex Osuna is itself a fusion of pre-contact art forms and picture-writing systems with European artistic techniques and alphabetically written language. What is shown in this illustration is an example of a new building type in which traditional pre-contact forms are deliberately fused with unmistakably European forms and technologies.

This building so carefully portrayed in the documentary record is an outstanding example of the design and construction of a new architecture which had never existed before European and Mesoamerican cultures came into contact. It was conceived and built as an architectural statement implementing an indigenous political agenda. The Codex Osuna is a document painstakingly prepared under the direction of the indigenous leadership specifically for use in a judicial process at the highest level of the colonial administration. The building depicted was the seat of indigenous municipal authority, and was constructed to demonstrate and dignify this legitimate indigenous political power within the new colonial regime. Its careful graphic representation in this high level document was intended to convey that demonstration and impart its authority and dignity into the legal process. The Tecpan of Mexico beautifully recorded in the Codex Osuna was a building intended to be a lasting architectural expression of the legitimate power and authority of the indigenous leaders, demonstrating not only their continuing role as transmitters of the traditional culture but also their new role as interpreters and transducers of the new culture. The new architectural forms that emerged under their direction as permanent and highly visible elements of the new built environment demonstrated their ability as cultural and political leaders to successfully perpetuate and integrate their culture into the new world order in early colonial Mexico.

Perhaps the most spectacular example of early colonial Indian civil architecture survives not only in the documentary evidence but also in a standing fragment of an original arcade of the Tecpan of Tlatelolco, begun in 1576. As Kubler said: "It was entirely an Indian enterprise, built to maintain the dignity of Indian town government."¹⁰ It is worth noting Kubler's observation of the perceived need—lavishly expressed by this most unusual building—to maintain the dignity of the town government, as an institution, rather than that of a particular individual. This extraordinarily luxurious complex, over six hundred feet long in all, included a suite of 19 rooms, itself 170 feet long

10. Kubler, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

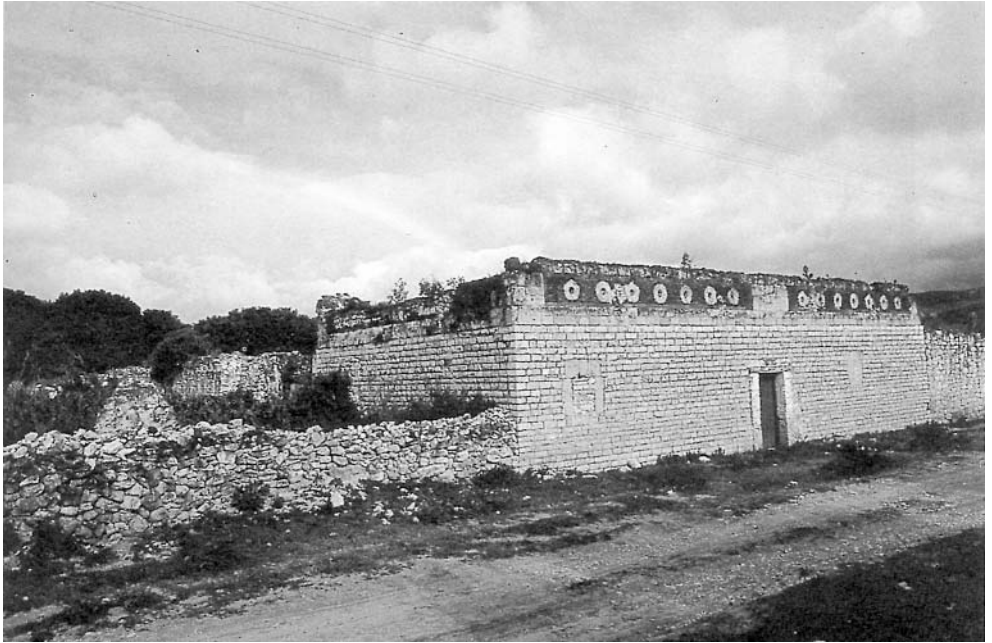


Figure 5. Teposcolula, Casa de la Cacica. © James B. Kiracofe.

and arranged around an elaborate garden, especially dedicated to the entertainment of the Viceroy and other high status visitors. The compound also included special facilities for the various elements of town government, including rooms for scribes, a community room, apartments for less distinguished travelers, a jail (on two floors), a separate latrine, a separate bath-house, all served by a fresh water system. Kubler details the expense of this undertaking which totaled 33,600 pesos, of which 5,600 were paid in cash by the Indian elite, the rest in labor and in kind by the community. He points out that this was on a par with the well known sale price paid in 1562 by the Crown for the *Casas nuevas* originally built by Cortes himself.¹¹

Nor were the Tecpans of Mexico and Tlatelolco isolated instances of high status construction by Indian nobles in the new colonial environment, for, as Dr. Kubler points out, the Indian leaders were busy with their own domestic architecture as well:

11. Ibidem, pp. 213-14

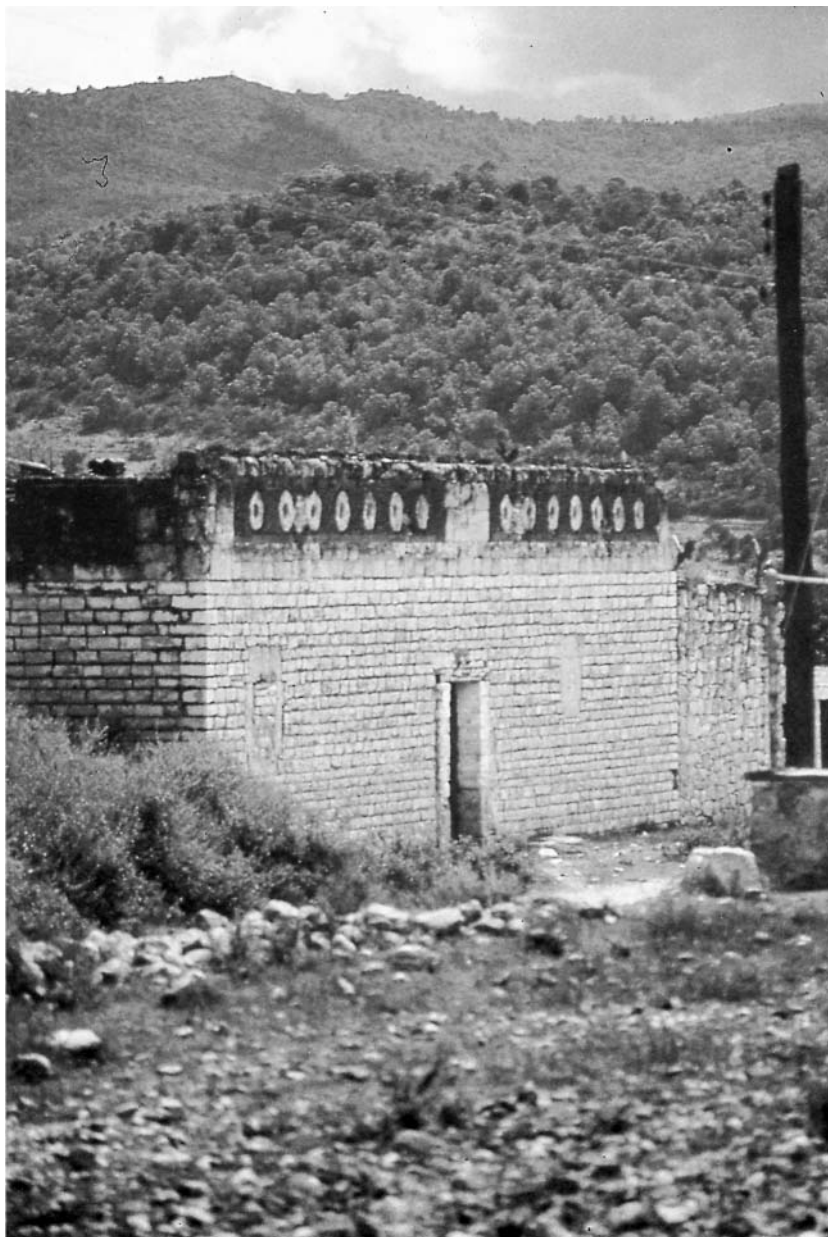


Figure 6. Teposcolula, Casa de la Cacica. © James B. Kiracofe.



Figure 7. Teposcolula, Casa de la Cacica. © James B. Kiracofe.

In 1554, the Indian governor of Tlatelolco lived in handsome houses fronting upon the main plaza. The Indian governor of Coyoacan in 1560 enjoyed the services of ten brick layers and masons, for the building and maintenance of his house, which when built was to face upon the main plaza and market.¹²

Clearly, then, the indigenous leaders were actively engaged in building not only suitable new municipal offices befitting their traditional dignity, but also suitable personal residences for themselves. Both were purposefully integrated into the appropriate locations in the new colonial built environment. This distinction between the residence of the Indian lord and his municipal office may reflect the change in the nature of government: in pre-colonial times the local lord was the hereditary ruler for life, whereas in the colonial regime the office of *gobernador* was—at least officially—an elected position subject to change at the end of the predetermined term at the pleasure of those eligible to vote. What these two types of colonial buildings have in common, however, is that both were locations associated with persons of high status: one for private residential use and one for public, official, and ceremonial use, functions which may have occurred under one roof in pre-colonial times.

Furthermore, the nature of the role of the colonial Indian Governor in public ceremonial life had no doubt also changed considerably, especially as this related to religious ritual performance. In the colonial era public official ceremonial duties might include lavish entertainment of the Viceroy in specially built and luxuriously furnished rooms and gardens, but the era in which these Indian lords or caciques publicly presided over official religious ceremonies had come to an end. In the new regime these sacramental functions were reserved for the archbishops, bishops, priests and friars. Of course, membership in religious confraternities was open to the Indian leaders, an opportunity of which they often took full advantage.¹³ Still, it was not the same pre-eminent relationship to the religious ceremonial life as before. This, no doubt, presented a problem for the native leaders in the public perception of their status in religious affairs. However, as in the case of the residential and municipal buildings already noted, there was an architectural solution to this problem of perception.

12. *Ibidem*, p. 202.

13. Dr. Susan Webster has emphasized in a recent personal communication her belief, based on her own research in the episcopal archive of Puebla, that *cofradías* were actively founded by the mendicant orders much earlier than has been generally assumed.

Early Colonial Fusion: Religious Buildings

A striking example of the Disk Frieze ornament on an early colonial religious building occurs at the Cemetery Chapel in Atotonilco de Tula, Hidalgo, which was probably built in the 1540's but is now in ruinous condition¹⁴ (figures 2-3). In this case the Disk Frieze is used only on the principal façade, and displayed originally five red disks in a field of white mosaic stone surrounded with a matching red border. There is a flower motif carved into the disks in this case, with eight petals with a clearly defined pair of rings, the innermost perhaps again composed of smaller petals. These disks are different from those seen in the Codex Osuna and Codex Mendoza in that they display clearly carved flower petals, perhaps of dahlia, a favorite among noble Indian connoisseurs, including Motecuzoma.¹⁵ There was, in pre-colonial times, an association between the cultivation of flowers for pleasure and high social status.¹⁶ As we have seen in the numerous examples already cited,

14. Kubler, op. cit., pp. 452-3, notes that the Franciscans evangelized this area, perhaps before 1547, when the population was listed, according to *Catálogo... Hidalgo*, at 820 tributaries. Kubler feels that the main church in the town, some miles from this small chapel which he does not mention, was an Augustinian establishment from c. 1560 with links to Acolman and Yecapixtla. The proximity of this community to the large Franciscan center at Tula inclines Kubler to believe that the Franciscan presence in Atotonilco de Tula was dependent on the larger house at Tula. Kubler notes, p. 484, that the Franciscans were active at Tula beginning in 1529, built a primitive church there before 1546, and replaced it with the current edifice after 1550, and the convent from 1553-61. I am inclined to think that the Cemetery Chapel at Atotonilco de Tula may be a survival from the initial Franciscan evangelization, and that it dates from the 1540's. The Augustinian church in the center of the town today may have been built as part of a new town established to congregate the people in an urban environment, not unlike the sequence in Teposcolula.

An old photograph, probably from the 1930's, appeared in Luis MacGregor, *El plateresco en México*, Mexico, Porrúa, 1954, pl. 78. Considerable deterioration has occurred since this photograph was taken, calling attention to the need for an immediate preservation intervention at this important and extremely rare site of transitional architecture.

15. Helen O'Gorman, *Mexican Flowering Trees and Plants*, Mexico, Ammex Asociados, 1961, p. 154, writes that "Very few people outside of Mexico know that the dahlia was originally Mexican, an imperial jewel in the time of Moctezuma, and greatly loved by him and his cousin, the poet-king Netzahualcoyotl."

16. Concerning the importance of flowers, Serge Gruzinski, in *Man-Gods in the Mexican Highlands: Indian Power and Colonial Society, 1520-1800*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1989, pointed out that among the elite the source of "heat" or power was believed to be a divine force infused into the ranks of the *pipiltin* that came from Quetzalcoatl and Xiuhtecu-

there was also in pre-colonial times a clear association of the Disk Frieze on buildings with particular high status individuals. The continuation of these associations between individuals and buildings expressed by the Disk Frieze ornament in early colonial architecture was, no doubt, intended to perpetuate the ideological message, in this case linking a native lord with a new Christian temple. In this way, even if it was no longer possible to publicly preside over the religious ritual performance, still there was a permanently visible stamp of high status association openly and obviously linking the Indian leader with the new temple. The church yard is now surrounded with

tl. On page 20 he elaborates as follows: "This fire lodged in the heart of the nobles was far from being a stable element: the rigors of penance and the discipline of education increased its intensity, as did contact with jewels, floral offerings, the scent of flowers, the consumption of the victims' flesh, and even the cacao." This corresponds with observations recorded by Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl and published in Miguel León-Portilla's *The Broken Spears. The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, Boston, Beacon, 1962, p. 62. From the XIII *relación* of Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, a direct descendant of the last king of Texcoco, there is an account of the meeting of Cortés and Motecuzoma on the causeway. What is particularly interesting is the note about the flowers which were elaborately prepared for the ceremonial event, and its importance has to do with connections with ceremonial flower imagery noted by Gruzinski concerning the building up or intensifying of divine fire by proximity to flowers and their scents:

"The Spaniards arrived in Xoloco, near the entrance to Tenochtitlan. That was the end of the march, for they had reached their goal.

"Motecuhzoma now arrayed himself in his finery, preparing to go out to meet them. The other great princes also adorned their persons, as did the nobles and their chieftains and knights. They all went out to meet the strangers.

"They brought trays heaped with the finest flowers—the flower that resembles a shield; the flower shaped like a heart; in the center, the flower with the sweetest aroma; and the fragrant yellow flower, the most precious of all. They brought garlands of flowers, and ornaments for the breast, and necklaces of gold, necklaces hung with rich stones, necklaces fashioned in the petatillo style.

"Thus Motecuhzoma went out to meet them, there in Huitsillan. He presented many gifts to the Captain and his commanders, those who had come to make war. He showered gifts upon them and hung flowers around their necks; he gave them necklaces of flowers and bands of flowers to adorn their breasts; he set garlands of flowers upon their heads. Then he hung the gold necklaces around their necks and gave them presents of every sort as gifts of welcome."

Alva Ixtlilxóchitl's account here has the air of an informed observer, he may be recording a living memory of the event. Certainly the particular distinctions of the types of flowers and the lavish use of flowers is most interesting, and relevant to this discussion of the deliberate use of flower imagery on early colonial buildings.



Figure 8. Teposcolula,
Casa de la Cacica.
© James B. Kiracofe.

a high wall, and is so filled with graves that in some cases they seem to be piled one on top of another, since it is evidently still a prestigious, and preferred place for burial.

The chapel of Atotonilco de Tula is but one example of this kind of use of the pre-colonial Disk Frieze on early colonial Christian churches. Among the standing examples are San Juan Nepopualco, Morelos, in which a frieze of large double concentric ring disks, like those on Motecuzoma's house are still clearly visible, painted on the original, but now crumbling stucco. Nearby, two other examples of the double concentric ring disks show up on early Christian buildings: virtually identical painted disks in the cloister at Yecapixtla and in sculptural form on the tower at Totolapan. Another example closer to Atotonilco in the northern Valley of Mexico may be seen at Tequixquiac, Mexico, on the bell tower, here set in a mosaic field with a border as at Atotonilco de Tula.¹⁷ There are also examples of the use of the Disk

17. Constantino Reyes Valerio, *Arte indocristiano*, Mexico, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1978, see photo 241. Tequixquiac lies north of Mexico City on route 167, below Atotonilco de Tula.

Frieze ornament on churches and chapels in the documentary record, see for example the place sign of Amusgos on the *Lienzo de Zacatepec*.¹⁸

Early Colonial Fusion: The municipio of Tlayacapan

Another, slightly less obvious, use of the Disk Frieze survives in fragmentary form at the Municipal Palace located on the Plaza of Tlayacapan, Morelos, where an incomplete row of disks appears along the top of the building, alternating between an eight petalled flower and a disk composed of two concentric rings. The disks emerge from the white-washed wall which becomes thicker just below the frieze, suggesting a build up of layers of replastering. This later resurfacing may also be covering the mosaic field characteristic of Atotonilco de Tula and Tequixquiac. While the frieze is incomplete, there is a double concentric ring below on the wall near one of the windows.

According to the President of the Municipality, this building was built before the well known Augustinian convent next door and was used as a temporary residence for the friars who moved to the convent when it was completed. Then the building was used as the *cabildo* for the local government, according to the President. Of course, the local government, or *cabildo*, would have been composed of the *cacique* and the *principales* of the area. The convent dates from 1555, and Kubler says that the Augustinians took up residence in Tlayacapan in 1554. Certainly the surviving frescoes in the vaulted arcade support the claim that the building dates from the mid-sixteenth century.¹⁹

Early Colonial Fusion: Yanhuitlan and Father Cobo's Visit

In Yanhuitlan, situated in the largest valley of the Mixteca Alta of Oaxaca, there were certainly buildings associated with high status individuals at the time of initial contact with the Spanish and these buildings evidently survived on into the early colonial era and were vividly portrayed, clearly show-

¹⁸ Smith, op. cit., fig. 114, p. 293.

¹⁹ Personal interview with the President of the Municipality, August 1992, and Kubler, op. cit., p. 520.

ing their Disk Frieze ornaments, as, for example, in the case of the Cacique Nine House seen sitting in front of a large group of his people in the mid-sixteenth century Codex Yanhuitlan.²⁰ An eyewitness description by the Peruvian Jesuit Bernabé Cobo, who passed through Yanhuitlan in January 1629, shows that unmistakable European architectural techniques and luxury features were incorporated into a building he refers to as the *casa del cacique*.

En este mismo pueblo de Yanguitlan vi la casa del cacique que es de la misma obra de la iglesia, toda de silleria con grande patio cuadrado a la entrada que se corren en el toros, y dentro tiene otros dos claustros menores de columnas de piedra, y las salas de boveda con sus chimeneas en ellas a lo de corte, casa por cierto capaz de aposentarse en ella la persona real. Detuveme en aquel pueblo 3 dias en casa de un pariente del Pe. Ror. recibiendo todo regalo posible: vi en los terminos deste pueblo arboles de madroños y la plaza del tiene una alameda de alamos blancos.²¹

The reference to bulls indicates that bullfights were staged in this enclosure, a recreational activity enjoyed by high status individuals in Spain as well as the New World, and its mention here was intended to convey how large the enclosure was. Dr. Kubler referred to this building as “the Tecpan” and noted that it was built “during the third quarter of the century, at about the same time the church was in construction.”²² Undoubtedly masons who worked on the still spectacular church and monastery also worked on the Tecpan, or *casa del cacique*, and were able to include the same kinds of distinctly European luxury features in the now lost building described by Cobo.²³

20. Wigberto Jiménez Moreno and Salvador Mateos Higuera, eds., *Códice de Yanhuitlán*, Mexico, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1940, lám. II.

21. C.A. Romero, “Dos cartas inéditas del P. Bernabé Cobo,” *Revista Histórica*, Lima, 1925, vol. VIII, no. I-III, p. 35.

22. Kubler, op. cit., p. 214.

23. There is an oral tradition in Yanhuitlan related to me by the brothers David and Norberto Jiménez, one of whom was the sacristan, that a large set of standing walls built of mud and rubble south of the convent complex was once the Casa del Cacique of Yanhuitlan. This was confirmed by Dr. Ronald Spores in conversation, February 1993. The brothers also related that these walls once had been clad in fine cut stone, but that the cacique had given [sold?] this fine stone for work on the Dominican church. Certainly the current façade of the church is a later baroque addition, applied directly over the original, probably more plain, façade. This is apparent when standing in the doorway and looking straight up. The original

That this building featured the Disk Frieze ornament may reasonably be assumed on the basis of the clear record of the Disk Frieze ornament associated with Nine House as seen in the Codex Yanhuitlan, a document roughly contemporary with Cobo's building, and from a surviving example of the use of the Disk Frieze ornament on what appears to be an early colonial building on the plaza in Yanhuitlan. Except for the disks themselves, this building is of adobe, and was neglected, roofless, and near collapse in August 1993, but its location on the plaza in approximate alignment with the Municipal Palace indicates its original high status, reinforced and stated publicly by the Disk Frieze. In this case the disks are not of the standard double concentric ring variety or of the flower variety, but rather closely resemble a symbol seen in Lamina VI of the Codex Yanhuitlan, which may have been a place glyph, suggesting that this may have been a residence of a high status individual, if not the cacique then perhaps a *principal* of the *barrio* indicated by this sign.²⁴

San Juan Teposcolula: A Possible Model

Following his pleasant sojourn in Yanhuitlan, Father Cobo continued north, passing through San Juan Teposcolula, which he noted was 2 leagues away. Dominating a commanding site with a sweeping view down the valley (figure 4), the church of San Juan Teposcolula is an early colonial structure, unusual for its three aisled basilica plan. Of special interest here, however, is

door had pyramidal ornament such as is found at Tlaxiaco and Tejupan, and in several places within the convent at Teposcolula. The stone of the new façade certainly matches the rest of the building, and if it is true that the stone cladding of the Casa del Cacique of Yanhuitlan was removed after Cobo saw it in 1630 for work on the church, then Cobo would have been correct in his observation that the work on the Casa was of the same kind of stone as the church. The façade certainly has a mid-seventeenth century look. Thus, the oral tradition of the Jiménez brothers may well originate in fact. Stratigraphic excavation within the high walled compound would reveal much about the early history of colonial Yanhuitlan, but until now this has not been possible.

24. It is possible that these ornaments were originally part of the Casa del Cacique of Yanhuitlan, and that when that building was stripped of its stone cladding in the middle of the seventeenth century, the disks were saved and re-used on an adobe building built in an impoverished period after the great prosperity of the sixteenth century. Cobo notes that already by his time the population of Yanhuitlan had fallen from over 10,000 to about 400.

the residential building immediately south of the church. San Juan was a *visita* of San Pedro y San Pablo Teposcolula, and while it was not a recognized convent, the building next to the church is clearly intended as a residential facility, perhaps for friars visiting in the course of their regular liturgical duties in the town. But as Cobo's letter shows, travelers from Oaxaca passed this way en route to Mexico on what was then, as now, the direct route. San Pedro y San Pablo may have been a larger population center with a larger church and "accepted" priory, but it was also a long way from the direct north-south road, and notably absent from Cobo's list of points along his route, which did include, however, Tejupan, Tamazulapan, Huajuapán among other towns that anyone making the same journey would pass today. Perhaps, then, the building at San Juan was a stopping point in the Dominican chain from Mexico to Guatemala, perhaps this building functioned as a hospitality house for travelers along the chain as well as a residence for friars from the *cabecera* at Teposcolula visiting for missionary and liturgical duties.

The residential building at San Juan was quite well built, with standing walls made completely of stone. There is no evidence in what survives of stone vaulted rooms, perhaps because this building was not built for a rich local cacique, as was the building Cobo described, but rather for occasional use by friars from the convent at Teposcolula and for mostly mendicant and other travelers on the *camino real*. Nevertheless there is a fireplace set neatly into the wall, as in fashionable buildings back in Spain. The windows are all marked by carefully cut jambs and the doors all have compression arches carved out of large stone voussoirs with elaborate mouldings. This is not a rude hut, but an elegant building suitable for dignified, high status, if not rich, individuals. It has much in common with another elegant building, this one in San Pedro y San Pablo Teposcolula, built not for the comfort of Spanish travelers but as the residence of a Mixtec Queen.

San Pedro y San Pablo Teposcolula: Casa de la Cacica

At San Juan Teposcolula a road branches southwest toward Tlaxiaco and the coast from the path followed by Father Cobo. About twelve kilometers from San Juan along this road is the early colonial town of San Pedro y San Pablo Teposcolula, justly famous for its spectacular open chapel. But a lesser known yet equally important building stands on a rise overlooking this great

open chapel and in a direct axial alignment with its altar.²⁵ It is known locally as the *Casa de la Cacica* and it has much in common with the building described by Cobo and with the Tecpan of Mexico seen in the Codex Osuna.²⁶

The *Casa de la Cacica* of Teposcolula is actually a compound including a principal structure still bearing the distinctive Disk Frieze ornament characteristic of a royal residence, as well as several smaller buildings arranged around a large walled enclosure (figures 5-11). Today in this enclosure are kept a small herd of sheep, several cows, a pair of donkeys, some dogs, and occasionally a pig or two. If cleared of the debris of some collapsed rooms, a large manure pile, and various agricultural implements, the enclosure might still comfortably host a bull fight. The vestiges of a fountain show that fresh water was run to the compound and suggest that this enclosure was once landscaped in a luxurious fashion. Another important similarity with the building illustrated in the Codex Osuna is the continuation of the Disk Frieze on the upper portion of the enclosing wall. While this detail survives only in a fragment at the junction of the outer wall with the north east corner of the principal structure (figure 12), it is enough to demonstrate the remarkably close similarity, if not indeed identical conception, of this com-

25. An important aspect of the alignment was pointed out to me by Dr. Annegrete Vogrin after she saw the presentation of this paper at the 48th International Congress of Americanists in Stockholm, July 5, 1994. In the presentation I showed a slide prepared for me by Patrick J. Hannigan using a digitalized 1955 airview photograph in a computer aided design system. I asked Mr. Hannigan to outline the open chapel in blue and the Casa de la Cacica compound in green and to project a red line from the location of the altar of the open chapel perpendicular to the western façade of the chapel and see where the line went. I had supposed that it would bisect the Casa de la Cacica residence. The projected line approximately bisects the enclosed area behind the Casa residence, but I was disappointed that it did not bisect the actual Casa residence. Rather it appeared to align with the plane of the south wall of the Casa residence. In spite of my disappointment, I nevertheless used this slide for the presentation, and it was precisely this alignment along the south wall, making the Casa tangent to the axial line, which attracted Dr. Vogrin's attention. She has for some years been re-surveying Maya sites, correcting older site surveys, and her work has repeatedly revealed precisely this same kind of tangential alignment. What had been a disappointment for me was convincing evidence of a premeditated systematic arrangement of monumental architecture consistent with the well established pre-Columbian practice seen in her work. She referred me to her work *Die Architektur von Copan (Honduras)*, Graz, Akademische Druck-und Verlagsanstalt, 1982.

26. Local informants agree that this building has been known as the Casa de la Cacica throughout living memory.



Figure 9. Teposcolula, Casa de la Cacica, interior. © James B. Kiracofe.

plex and the Tecpan of Mexico. While the exterior walls of the principal structure at the Casa de la Cacica survive more or less intact, the perimeter wall of the enclosure and the rooms joining it have been badly damaged, by neglect if by nothing else. The masonry at the juncture of the perimeter wall with the northeast corner of the main building strongly suggests that the main building and the perimeter wall were not built simultaneously, but that the perimeter wall came after the main building. Although the surviving fragment of the Disk Frieze on the perimeter wall is constructed in precisely the same way as that on the main building, it appears to have been damaged and then repaired or added on to in a more clumsy execution. A possible explanation for the absence of the Disk Frieze elsewhere on the perimeter wall might be that the work was never finished during the original campaign, perhaps another casualty of the epidemic of 1576-78. But there is clear, unmistakable evidence of the beginning of a frieze on the north wall of the enclosure which, if the rest had been completed or had survived, would present today a building compound virtually identical to that seen in the Codex Osuna. And, like the building in the codex, the Casa de la Cacica makes emphatic use of European technology and taste in the elaborate compression arches, richly ornamented with carved moldings. Yet another similarity is that there are out buildings erected against the perimeter wall and that there was once a principal opening in the perimeter wall aligned with the principal door of the main building. Finally, it is worth noting that on the east and west façades, that is the long façades, of the Casa de la Cacica the disks appear in two groups of seven, and in the codex the Tecpan clearly shows the disks in a single group of seven, two groups of seven being perhaps too difficult to render in the reduced scale of the drawing.

Based upon a close examination and comparison of the masonry techniques employed at the Dominican complex and at the Casa de la Cacica, it appears that these projects were built more or less concurrently and by the same crews. The initial program of construction at the Dominican project was terminated before completion in 1579, probably as a result of the epidemic of 1576-78.²⁷ The crews were assigned to work on another private project,

27. Kubler, *op. cit.*, p. 63, gives a general range of 1540-50 for the first campaign of building; in his appendix he notes, pp. 532-533, that building was still in progress in 1579, but he states: "The Dominicans, after conflict with the encomendero at Yanhuitlan in 1541, withdrew to Teposcolula, which before that time had been a secular curacy. When the Dominicans returned to Yanhuitlan ca. 1548-49, the vicarate of Teposcolula continued under Fray

perhaps at the Casa de la Cacica.²⁸ Concurrent construction of these two projects would parallel the pattern at Yanhuítlan, where, as Cobo noted, the house and the church were “of the same work.” So it would appear that the Casa de la Cacica was under construction and nearly completed late in the third quarter of the sixteenth century, paralleling again the case of Yanhuítlan.

Dr. Kubler refers to the pre-1565 Tecpan of Mexico as a residence and

Juan Cabrera. A stylized representation of the church that served the community ca. 1550 occurs in the *Códice de Yanhuítlan*. This Church is mentioned by Viceroy Mendoza in 1550. After complaining that the Dominicans were undertaking many new buildings without proper architectural supervision, he cites Teposcolula, where the friars had built an inadequate structure (“de muy ruin mezcla”) in the hope of attracting the Indians to settle near the site. This first campaign of building has nothing to do with the present edifices at Teposcolula, for the unhealthy and humid site described by the Viceroy does not fit the present location upon the well-drained slopes of a hill rising to the east of the settlement.” It seems likely that the decision noted in the Acts of the January 1540 provincial meeting to congregate dispersed indigenous populations may have marked the beginning of a program to relocate the people of Teposcolula, a process well under way by 1540.

John McAndrew, *Open-Air Churches of Sixteenth Century Mexico*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1965, p. 554, speaking of the construction of the open chapel, states: “Since the work is unfinished, after someone was discouraged with the work itself, or perhaps discouraged by the plague of ’76, or possibly discouraged when workmen who were to do the final finishings were diverted to private undertakings in ’79.” His endnote 30 on that page refers to Silvio Zavala and María de Castelo, eds., *Fuentes para la historia del trabajo en Nueva España*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1939, vol. II, p. 195. Kubler also cites this source when he notes that the workers came from surrounding villages.

28. Manuel Toussaint, *Paseos coloniales*, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1939, pp. 26-27, and *Colonial Art in Mexico*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1967, p. 61, felt that the existing church was built later than the open air chapel which he thought was built between 1550 and 1575, while suggesting that some of the existing sculptural elements of the church façade may have come from an earlier building. McAndrew, op. cit., p. 544, points out that “a monastery and a church must have been acceptable enough to the Provincial Chapter by 1561, since that year they chose to meet there.” He states his assumption that the open chapel was probably built between 1561 and the plague year of 1576. On p. 547 he adds: “No more skillful vault had been built in the Americas... It was perhaps the finest example in the New World of Medieval craftsmanship on a grand scale which has survived to our time.” McAndrew points out similarities of the work with illustrations of various editions of Vitruvius, Serlio and Diego de Sagredo. Robert Mullen, *Dominican Architecture in Oaxaca*, Phoenix, Center for Latin American Studies, 1975, pp. 128-138, describes events surrounding its construction, and suggests that an “old” chapel, “there had to be one,” was demolished and the “new” open air chapel must have begun after Fray Martín returned to Teposcolula in 1548. He identifies Fray Martín as its architect and notes that it was his masterpiece.

describes the 1576 Tecpan of Tlatelolco as a richly appointed municipal building. While both would have been used by high status indigenous leaders, there is a difference between a municipal building and a residence, and it may well be that this difference had to do with chronology. The building pictured in the Codex Osuna is clearly identified in a written text immediately above the building as “‘Tecpa’ calli mexico” or *tecpan* house of Mexico. The building Cobo described has much in common with the one pictured in the Codex Osuna, and with the description in the “Códice... Tlatelolco” Dr. Kubler draws on and the surviving fragment of the arcade.²⁹ Yet in the case of Yanhuitlan Father Cobo specifically refers to this as the *Casa del Cacique*, which is the same usage as in the case of Teposcolula except that in Teposcolula it is cast in the feminine: Casa de la *Cacica*. A possible explanation for this may be found in a document dated 1563 from Viceroy Luis de Velasco in which he officially declared and recognized the legitimate claim to the *cacicazgo* of Teposcolula by Felipe de Austria, who was cacique of Teozacualco but who had married the natural cacica of Teposcolula and was living there. Evidently she had been ruler in her own right prior to the marriage, and this may have been built as her house, hence Casa de la Cacica.³⁰

If indeed this is the case, then the residential portion of the complex may have already been in existence by 1563, and it would be associated with this natural *cacica*. If the work on the Dominican complex came to an abrupt end in 1579 and the workers were assigned to another private project, it may have been an addition to the Casa de la Cacica, and this may help explain the obvious discontinuous joint at the northeast corner of the original build-

29. Kubler, op. cit., p. 185, see note 232. He cites: “‘Códice... Tlatelolco,’ Investigaciones históricas, 1, no. 3 (1939).”

30. Ronald Spores, *Colección de documentos del Archivo General de la Nación para la etnohistoria de la Mixteca de Oaxaca en el siglo XVI*, Nashville, Vanderbilt University Publications in Anthropology, 1992, p. 31, document 61, “Mandamiento de amparo a don Felipe de Castilla de Teozacualco en el cargo sin que se haga novedad a la relación de Alonso Canseco.” Dr. Spores’ typescript transcription of the relevant passage follows: “Por cuanto don Felipe de Austria cacique del pueblo de Teozacualco está por mí declarado por cacique y gobernador de la provincia de Tepozcolula porque se casó legítimamente con cacica natural y a causa de tener su vivienda en la dicha provincia de Tepozcolula con su mujer se teme que los del dicho pueblo de Teozoacualco [sic] era novedad a no admitirle por tal su cacique y gobernador natural y me pidió le mandese dar mi mandamiento de amparo para que fuese tenido y obedecido por tal su cacique y gobernado del dicho pueblo de Teozacualco como lo era de Tepozcolula.”

ing noted above. The 1563 date suggested by this document is reinforced by the certainty of the 1565 date of the illustration in the Codex Osuna, which pictures a building of precisely the same type. Furthermore, in 1560 Viceroy Luis de Velasco issued a *merced*, or grant, authorizing Teposcolula, among other towns in the Mixteca, to furnish workers, “algunos macehuales,” every week specifically for personal service to the *principales*, to work on their lands and houses.³¹ So the *repartimiento* of labor was officially in place for the construction of a house for the cacica, and work of a very similar kind had already been going on at the Dominican convent down the hill at least since 1550. Clearly, then, by 1550 there were skilled masons at work in Teposcolula in sufficient numbers to build by 1563 a structure such as the main building at the Casa de la Cacica, even working in small teams on a rotational basis.

By 1575 Felipe de Austria was no longer cacique of Teposcolula, as shown in a document from that year.³² It appears that Diego de Mendoza, legitimate son of Diego de Orozco and María Zárate, caciques of Zoyaltepeque, was himself cacique of Teposcolula and Tamazulapan, in which towns he lived, and not wishing to live in or be cacique of Zoyaltepeque, he gave the cacicazgo to his brother, Bartolomé. This suggests that Diego came into possession of Teposcolula by marriage, as had Felipe de Austria before him. Furthermore, by December 1580 another dynastic change had occurred in

31. Ibidem, p. 22, document 45, “Sobre que en cada pueblo de la Misteca se repartan cada semana algunos Indios para beneficiar las tierras parajes y reparar sus casas, pagandoles su trabajo.” Although the document is damaged and incomplete, it specifies that the workers shall be paid, but is less clear on how many workers are to be provided.

32. Ibidem, p. 52, document 107, “Diego de Mendoza y Diego de Orozco sobre el cacicazgo de Zoyaltepec.” Dr. Spores’ typescript transcription of the relevant passage follows: “E por ende, por virtud de la dicha licencia al dicho don Diego de Mendoza, dada e concedida, dijo que de su grado y buena voluntad sin premia ni fuerza que le sea hecho en pública ni en secreta. E que por cuanto él es hijo legítimo de don Diego de Orozco, e de doña Maria Zárate su legítima mujer a quien podría suceder el cacicazgo e señorío del pueblo de Zoyaltepeque como hijo mayor del dicho don Diego, su padre. E porque él tiene el cacicazgo e señorío del pueblo de Tamazulapa, a de Teposcolula y vive y reside en los dichos pueblos, en los cuales goza de los dichos cacicazgos, e no puede asistir en el dicho pueblo de Zoyaltepeque a gozar del dicho cacicazgo, e conforme a la dicha su costumbre e faltando el hijo mayor, yéndose a casar y vivir en otro pueblo e cacicazgo, sucede en él, segundo hijo, que por aquella vía e forma que de derecho mejor lugar haya él cedía y traspasaba y renunciaba e renunció el aución que a él tiene y le pertenece y puede pertenecer en qualquier manera a don Bartolomé de Orozco.”

Teposcolula, a Domingo de Zúñiga had become “cacique y gobernador,” and he had asked Viceroy Lorenzo Suárez de Mendoza for permission to ride in a saddle with a bridle on a jennet, or small Spanish horse. The Viceroy granted his request.³³

If there was, about 1579, an addition or modification to the Casa de la Cacica, it may have reflected a transition in the use of the building from a private residence of the hereditary ruler, or “cacica natural,” to a municipal building. Certainly it appears that Teposcolula had passed by marriage out of the local ruling family responsible for the construction of the original main building within the Casa de la Cacica compound, and, after the catastrophic changes brought by the plague of 1576-78, the building may have ceased to be a residence. There is documentary evidence suggesting that this may indeed have been the case, and offering a possible explanation for an interruption in the work on the Disk Frieze on the enclosure wall.

On December 15, 1580 Viceroy Lorenzo Suárez de Mendoza, Conde de Coruña, wrote that he had been informed by “algunos naturales” of Teposcolula that for many days a Spaniard, one Miguel Sánchez, had been occupying “las casas de la comunidad” where the Indians had been having their “cabildos y ayuntamientos” and had been storing their goods and tributes for His Majesty. The Viceroy ordered the Spaniard to vacate the buildings immediately and without delay, without continuing to occupy any part thereof.³⁴ This incident suggests that there was some kind of trouble in the “casas de la comunidad” at about the time that Domingo de Zúñiga, perhaps newly possessed of the cacicazgo, was applying for his permit to ride a horse. There may have been serious disruptions in dynastic continuity re-

33. Ibidem, p. 68, document 146, “Domingo de Zúñiga, Cacique de Teposcolula.”

34. Ibidem, p. 69, document 148, “Los Naturales de Teposcolula.” Dr. Spores’ typescript transcription of the document follows: “Don Lorenzo Suárez de Mendoza, etc. Hago Saber a vos el alcalde mayor de la provincia de Teposcolula que algunos naturales de ella me ha sido hecha relación, que un Miguel Sánchez español, so color de ser suegro del escribano propietario de la dicha provincia y pueblo de Teposcolula, tiene ocupadas muchos días las casas de la comunidad de él, donde los dichos naturales han de haber sus cabildos y ayuntamientos y recoger sus bienes y tributos de Su Magestad, pidiendo se la mandase desocupar. Y por mí visto, por la presente os mando que luego que os sea mostrado compeláis al dicho Miguel Sánchez deje a los naturales del dicho pueblo de Teposcolula libres y desembarazadas las casas de su comunidad, no dejando ocupada en ellas parte alguna. Lo cual haced y cumplid sin dilación ni remisión. Hecho en México a 15 días del mes de diciembre de 1580 años. El Conde de Coruña. Por mandato de Su Exceccencia, Martín López de Gaona.”



Figure 10. Teposcolula, Casa de la Cacica, enclosure. © James B. Kiracofe.

sulting from the epidemic which gave an opening to the opportunistic Spaniard. These disruptions may have interrupted construction before the building program in progress was fully implemented.

The Casa de la Cacica as Part of a Planned Urban Context

The Casa de la Cacica was not an isolated, stand alone architectural expression of an indigenous ideological agenda. Rather it was part of an integrated program of urban design openly and obviously intended to demonstrate and celebrate the continuing prestige of the “cacica natural” of Teposcolula in the new colonial regime. The relationship between the principal elements of the built environment in early colonial Teposcolula was not accidental, but the result of careful planning from the beginning of the urbanization. The people of San Pedro y San Pablo Teposcolula were persuaded by the

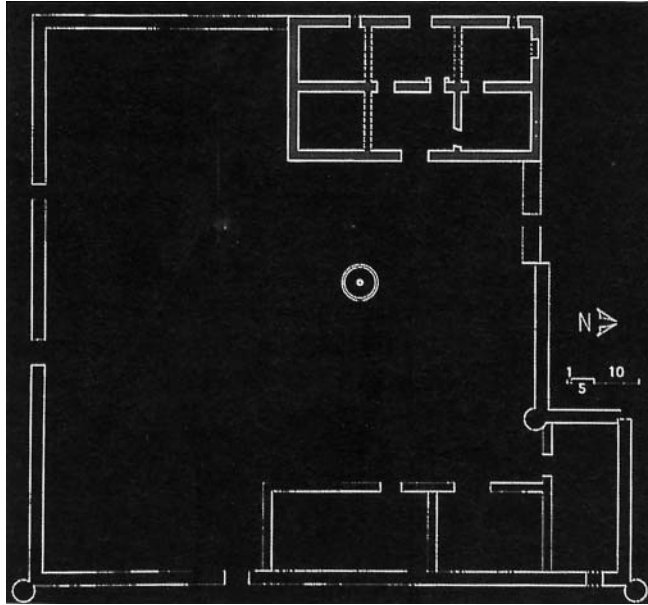


Figure 11. Teposcolula, Casa de la Cacica and enclosure. © James B. Kiracofé.

Dominican friars to move from their mountain top redoubt to the floor of the valley sometime after 1535.³⁵ Indeed, the place name of the community center was known to the Mixtecs before contact as “Yucu Ndaa,” meaning “on the flat top of the mountain,”³⁶ which is a good description of the site now known as the “pueblo viejo.”

Of course the Dominicans were interested in the construction of a suitable religious center as the focal point for the new Christian life of the community. This required a new urban form. Furthermore, the people of Teposcolula no longer required the protection offered by hill-top locations for their settlements because the long period of armed struggle against the imperial ambitions of the brutal Aztec regime had been ended by the Spanish-led popular revolution. The construction of colonial San Pedro y San Pablo

35. The exact date of the first Dominican arrival in Teposcolula remains uncertain. Mullen, *op. cit.*, p. 31, demonstrates that a Dominican house, founded after 1535 by Fray Betanzos, was “accepted” or recognized by the 1538 Provincial chapter meeting of the order.

36. Raúl Álvarez, *Toponimia mixteca*, Mexico, Ediciones de la Casa Chata, 1988, p. 92.

Teposcolula was in progress by 1540, and well under way by 1550 when the buildings of the present Dominican convent and open chapel were certainly under construction, partially replacing some of the primitive structures of the initial campaign. By 1550, then, the layout and arrangement of the Dominican complex had been finalized, and with it the layout and arrangement of the *traza*, or grid of the street plan. Along with the establishment of the *traza* went the distribution of building lots. Certainly it is no accident that the most prestigious parcel of urban real estate was reserved for the ruler, with its prominent location overlooking the spectacular open chapel and precisely situated in direct axial alignment with its altar (figure 13). Nor would this open and obvious relationship have been lost on the villagers, or pilgrims from other communities, standing in the atrium between the perfectly aligned open chapel and the cacica's house on the hill with its clearly visible Disk Frieze, the royal insignia.

These two structures were the two most prestigious, most distinctive architectural statements in the new town. One was the new ceremonial center for Christian ritual performance, the other the residence of the hereditary ruler of the community. The relationship between the buildings suggests a relationship between their functions. The open chapel is the most spectacular stage for the enactment of the sacred drama of the mass ever erected in the New World. It is completely without European precedent. In its marvelous synthesis of Gothic and Renaissance forms and techniques it exceeds in its complexity, elegance and stupendous scale all other open chapels. It was a fabulous architectural concentration of wealth, the wealth which the Mixtecs of Teposcolula kept for themselves, to be permanently, conspicuously displayed and enjoyed by them, as well as any others who might come to see their treasure. Such an undertaking required careful planning and decision making for so vast an allocation of resources. Naturally, the Dominican friars encouraged such lavish undertakings of religious devotion, but without the approval and support of the indigenous leadership, no such building would have been built. Under compulsion perhaps some other building might have been forced out of them, but not this one. Not one, but many complex decisions were made along the way to realizing so unique and so prestigious a temple. And these were decisions made by the Mixtec leaders. The friars provided design and technical support and plenty of enthusiastic encouragement, but the Mixtecs provided the resources. It is not known if any of the Mixtec leaders of Teposcolula actually labored on the project

themselves, though this seems unlikely. The decisions they made to build this building were carried out by the general population, on whose backs the countless blocks of stone were transported. But temple building has never been easy, neither in pre-colonial times nor since. At least in the case of colonial Teposcolula the project was located on the floor of the valley, and not on a mountain top.

The new open chapel served not only as a locus for the celebration of the mass, it also served for the enactment of other, less liturgical, more pedagogical religious dramas during the holiday festival cycles. The Casa with its easily recognizable Disk Frieze, basking in the reflected glory and sharing the prestige of the community's great architectural achievement, is perfectly located for viewing all the ritual activities performed in the chapel. Indeed, the relationship of the Casa to the chapel makes complete a special sacred landscape, giving architectural expression to the ceremonial hierarchy of community life in this new urban environment, vividly reinforced by the iconographic statement made by the Disk Frieze. These disks, apparently also depicting distinctly petalled flowers sacramentally utilized in pre-colonial times, alternate between round and multilobular outline, with a deep central cavity in both cases.³⁷

37. My ongoing research aims at positively identifying flowers corresponding to the explicit forms depicted in the disks, and at identifying patterns in the iconographic-ideological use of the Disk Frieze throughout post-conquest Mexico. However, on November 5, 1994 I showed Dr. Leslie Garay slides of the disks on the Casa de la Cacica, the church at Yolomecatl, a town between Teposcolula and Tlaxiaco, and on the chapel at Atotonilco de Tula, and also slides of the disks found on the tower of the church at Tlalmanalco and on the arm of the statue of the Flower Prince, Xochipilli, discovered in Tlalmanalco in 1885. Dr. Garay, a botanist long familiar with tropical plants and recently retired from the Botanical Museum of Harvard University, was a longtime colleague and research associate of Richard Schulte who published frequently on the topic of psychotropic and narcotic plants used in aboriginal American religious ritual. Dr. Garay was also a close friend and colleague of Gordon Wasson, well known for his work about hallucinogenic mushrooms in Native American cults. Drs. Garay and Schulte often traveled and worked together in the field in many areas of Latin America including Mexico. Looking at the alternating disks on the Casa de la Cacica he confirmed my suspicions when he said without hesitation that the one with spikes is *datura* and the other is morning glory, both much used in ritual intoxication in pre-conquest Mexico. He said both were abundantly present in the flora of Oaxaca during the period of contact. He pointed to the many examples in Emily Walcott Emmart, ed., *Badianus Manuscript (Codex Barberini, Latin 241). An Aztec Herbal of 1552*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1940. We discussed the curling c shape seen on the Teposcolula, Yolomecatl, and Tlalmanal-

The cacica might no longer preside over sacramental ritual performances in the new Christian town, but it was clear from the spacial relationship between these two buildings and the iconographic statement made by the Disk Frieze that, from her commanding residence overlooking the chapel, the “cacica natural” maintained an important ceremonial role in the life of her people gathered in the atrium below, at the foot of the great chapel. It is as though the chapel was built as a backdrop for public religious celebration performed to be seen by the cacica from her special royal viewing station. The architecture made this a visible, physical reality, inescapably obvious to anyone with eyes. The creation of a built environment in which these relationships were so clearly stated architecturally did not happen by accident, it was planned this way from the beginning by the indigenous leaders as a permanent demonstration of their continuing prestige and high status, even in the colonial regime. They achieved this by deliberately manipulating a new architecture and urban form, successfully integrating and celebrating symbolic systems well known from the pre-colonial world. In this way they perpetuated their own cultural heritage by integrating it into the new architecture, and they did this to advance their own ideological agenda. Nor was Teposcolula the only place in which this architectural manipulation of public ceremonial space occurred in sixteenth-century Mexico.

Other Disk Frieze Buildings in Early Colonial Urban Contexts

In 1581, the government of Nochixtlan, a town in the Mixteca not far from Yanhuitlan, prepared a response to a questionnaire circulated by the Crown.

co disks and he said his first impression was that this could have been an artistic or stylized way of indicating the petals having a curled shape which unfolds as they bloom. He further pointed out, drawing on his many years of experience interpreting historic documents and renderings of plants, that this would have been a botanically accurate depiction of these flowers. He agreed without hesitation that the flower on the chapel at Atotonilco could be a dahlia, but his first impression was a sun-flower. Clearly this is a composite flower, rather than one with 5 or 6 petals. He pointed out that the middle disk on Tlalmanalco had five c shaped lines with curling ends, and that the flower on Xochipilli's knee and forearm had only three of these shapes, so that the while these two representations were not identical, they had formal similarities. He later said that in the Xochipilli examples this could be a form of visual short-hand, something he had often encountered in looking at old codices, where often the images conveyed the first impression rather than a precise rendering of reality.



Figure 12. Teposcolula, Casa de la Cacica, Disk Frieze ornament. © James B. Kiracofe.



Figure 13. Teposcolula, Alignment of the Casa de la Cacica with the open chapel. © James B. Kiracofe.

This was the *Relación de Nochixtlán*, and included a map showing the grid pattern *traza* with the church on a plaza in the center.³⁸ Nearby three other buildings are shown occupying different blocks near the center of the town. One of the three buildings is clearly portrayed with a Disk Frieze. From the map there is no clear association, either by alignment or by architectural elements, between the building with the Disk Frieze and the church, except that both are near the center of town and both have friezes, though in the case of the church the frieze is not a Disk Frieze but a stepped geometric pattern. The Disk Frieze building is located northwest of the church. It is not yet known if this building survives in any fragmentary form, but given the steep site of the church and the possibly pre-colonial embankment on which it is built, it may be that geography prohibited a convenient ceremonial relationship between these buildings other than proximity. Nevertheless, the distinctive Disk Frieze sets the building apart from all the others as plainly on the map as it no doubt did on the ground. Further research will investigate possible alignments with significant topographical elements in this case.

In Mexico City, there was another case of the juxtaposition of a well known and unusual round chapel and a Disk Frieze building recorded in an early pictographic document. In a map of Mexico City attributed to Alonso de Santa Cruz, the Chapel of San Miguel, built between 1556 and 1558, on Chapultepec Hill is shown on the hill top, but at the bottom of the hill it shows another building with a Disk Frieze and a row of arches just as is seen in the Codex Osuna and at Tlayacapan.³⁹ Unlike in Teposcolula, the chapel is in a higher position, but nevertheless associated with it, at the bottom of a monumental staircase leading to it, is a building combining European arches with a traditional pre-colonial Disk Frieze ornament, denoting high status. The buildings are linked by a staircase along which one can well imagine ceremonial processions. The unmistakable fact is that the buildings are linked

38. René Acuña, ed., *Relaciones geográficas del siglo XVI: Antequera*, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, 1984 (*Relaciones geográficas de Mesoamérica*, 2), pp. 361-372, and map.

39. Kubler, op. cit., p. 249, see figure 132. His footnote no. 42, p. 249, contains the following information: "The dates are given in the *Anales mexicanos*, no. 1, as copied and translated by Chimalpopoca in the *Anales Ramírez*, ms, fol. 437: 1556, 'Comenzó la iglesia de S. Miguel,' 1558, 'se lebanto S. Miguel.' See Cervantes de Salazar, *Crónica de la Nueva España*, p. 321. Allusion to it is made in the narrative of Ponce's travels. Ca. 1585, it was ministered by the Franciscans. *Relación... Ponce*, 1, 57-8, Pl. 86."

by means of carefully designed architectural elements and highly visible spatial relationships, in another example of the manipulation of the ceremonial landscape to advance an indigenous ideological agenda.

The map provided with the 1580 *Relación de Zempoala*, a colonial site in what is today the state of Hidalgo, is a fine example of the early colonial fusion of picture writing and map making. The scale and geographic accuracy of the map are somewhat vague and difficult to interpret. But that several distinct building types are depicted is abundantly clear, including the large church of Zempoala, numerous smaller chapels, perhaps of the single cell variety common in Hidalgo.⁴⁰ There is also an example of a Disk Frieze building facing the large church of Zempoala. The actual spatial relationship between these two buildings cannot be conclusively confirmed on the basis of this document alone, due to its abstract and schematic nature. However, further field research may identify the location of the Disk Frieze building pictured. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that the artist responsible for this map clearly sought to carefully portray the large church and the disk frieze buildings as exceptional cases, given the high level of uniformity with which all the other buildings are depicted. Furthermore, these two buildings are the only ones, out of the thirty odd buildings shown, which clearly face each other or have anything other than a purely random relationship. Whatever the reality of their physical relationship may have been, then, the artist in this case clearly sought to portray them as though they were in a spacial relationship for the purpose of the *Relación*.

Conclusion

The evidence presented here shows that the indigenous leaders in Teposcolula and other early colonial towns in Mexico deliberately created a new built environment which emphasized their own continuing prestige by integrating highly significant symbolic systems from their traditional cultural heritage into a new architectural fusion of Mesoamerican and European forms and techniques, such as is seen in the Casa de la Cacica of Teposcolula and the Tecpan in the Codex Osuna. The residential building at San Juan Teposcolula shows that the Mixtec artisans were quite capable of building in a purely

40. Kubler, op. cit., pp. 487-88. The building was begun in 1570.

European style when appropriate, and yet they could apply these same skills to other buildings which, through a careful and deliberate fusion of traditional Mixtec form and ornament, gave an altogether different appearance. Thus in the new built environment there existed side by side buildings fulfilling European needs and other buildings in a new architectural style advancing an indigenous cultural agenda. The relationships between the buildings we have examined were not accidental, but the results of a complex process of decision making and urban planning. On the basis of standing buildings and documentary evidence we can safely conclude that in Teposcolula the indigenous leaders were in control of this process. The artistic creativity of the indigenous people of Teposcolula and other towns and cities of sixteenth-century Mexico produced a beautiful new architecture, an architecture which had never existed before their contact with Europeans. The evidence shows too, however, that the terrible epidemic of 1576-78 terminated the development and diffusion of this new architecture before it had fully matured. Fortunately, the masons at Teposcolula were building for the ages, and enough has survived to transmit across time the physical evidence of a deliberate process of cultural survival through integration in the early colonial world.✿

Bibliography

- Acuña, René, ed., *Relaciones geográficas del siglo XVI: Antequera*. Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México-Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, 1984, 2 vols. (Relaciones geográficas de Mesoamérica, 2).
- Adelhofer, Otto, ed., *Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I*. Graz, Akademische Druk-und-Verlagsanstalt, 1963.
- Álvarez, Raúl, *Toponimia mixteca*. Mexico, Ediciones de la Casa Chata, 1988.
- Burland, Cottie A., ed., *Codex Edgerton 2895*. Graz, Akademische Druk-und-Verlagsanstalt, 1965.
- Emmart, Emily Walcott, ed., *Badianus Manuscript (Codex Barberini, Latin 241). An Aztec Herbal of 1552*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1940.
- Furst, Jill Leslie, *Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I. A Commentary*. Albany, Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, 1978 (State University of New York Publications, 4).
- Gruzinski, Serge, *Man-Gods in the Mexican Highlands: Indian Power and Colonial Society, 1520-1800*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1989.
- Jansen, Maarten, "Las lenguas divinas del México precolonial," *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, June 1985, no. 38, pp. 3-14.
- Jiménez Moreno, Wigberto, and Salvador Mateos Higuera, eds., *Códice de Yanhuítlán*. Mexico, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1940.
- Kubler, George, *Mexican Architecture of the Sixteenth Century*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1948, 2 vols.
- León-Portilla, Miguel, *The Broken Spears. The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*. Boston, Beacon, 1962.
- Lockhart, James, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1992.
- MacGregor, Luis, *El plateresco en México*. Mexico, Porrúa, 1954.
- McAndrew, John, *Open-Air Churches of Sixteenth Century Mexico*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1965.
- Melgarejo Vivanco, José Luis, *Códice Nuttall, tres historias medievales*. Veracruz, Comisión Estatal Conmemorativa del V Centenario del Encuentro de Dos Mundos, 1991.
- Mullen, Robert, *Dominican Architecture in Oaxaca*. Phoenix, Center for Latin American Studies, 1975.
- Nuttall, Zelia, ed., *Codex Nuttall: Facsimile of an Ancient Mexican Codex Belonging to Lord Zouche of Harynworth, England*. Cambridge, Harvard University-Peabody Museum, 1902.
- O'Gorman, Helen, *Mexican Flowering Trees and Plants*. Mexico, Ammex Asociados, 1961.
- Reyes Valerio, Constantino, *Arte indocristiano*. Mexico, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1978.
- Robertson, Donald, *Mexican Manuscript Painting of the Early Colonial Period*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1959.
- Romero, C.A., "Dos cartas inéditas del P. Bernabé Cobo," *Revista Histórica*, Lima, 1925, vol. VIII, no. I-III, pp. 26-50.
- Sahagún, Bernardino de, Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J.O. Anderson, trans. and eds., *The*

- Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*. Salt Lake City, The School of American Research and the University of Utah, 1963.
- Smith, Mary Elizabeth, *Picture Writing from Ancient Southern Mexico. Mixtec Place Signs and Maps*. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1973.
- Spores, Ronald, *Colección de documentos del Archivo General de la Nación para la etnohistoria de la Mixteca de Oaxaca en el siglo XVI*. Nashville, Vanderbilt University Publications in Anthropology, 1992.
- Toussaint, Manuel, *Paseos coloniales*. Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1939.
- , *Colonial Art in Mexico*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1967.
- Zavala, Silvio, and María de Castelo, eds., *Fuentes para la historia del trabajo en Nueva España*. Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1939, 7 vols.