

SYMBOL OF CONQUEST, ALLIANCE, AND HEGEMONY:  
THE IMAGE OF THE CROSS IN COLONIAL MEXICO

by

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May 1, 2008

DEDICATED TO MY LOVING WIFE AND SONS

Lindsey, Josh, and Jamie

ABSTRACT  
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The universality of the cross image within the transatlantic confrontation meant not only a hegemony of culture, but of symbolism. The symbol of the cross existed in both European and American societies hundreds of years before Columbus. In both cultures, the cross was integral in religious ceremony, priestly decoration, and cosmic maps. As a symbol of life and death, of human and divine suffering, of religious and political acquiescence, no other image in transatlantic history has held such a perennial, powerful message as the cross. For colonial Mexico, which felt the brunt of Spanish initiative, the symbol of the cross penetrated the autochthonous culture out of which the independent nation and indigenous church were born.

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CHAPTER 1  
METHODOLOGY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Conversely that interpretation of the Cross is symbolic which puts it above all imaginable explanations, regarding it as an expression of an unknown and as yet incomprehensible fact of a mystical or transcendent, i.e., psychological, character, which simply finds its most striking and appropriate representation in the Cross.<sup>1</sup>

Carl Gustav Jung

The image of the cross has not only been a significant symbol throughout world history, but also specifically in colonial Mexico where indigenous religions and Spanish Catholicism blended to create uniquely fused traditions. As an important religious and cosmic image among the Spaniards and Native peoples, the cross played an important role as a syncretic device both politically and culturally from the sixteenth century forward. Although there are numerous references to the cross in both secondary and primary sources, its influence has not been studied sufficiently and analyzed in a specific study. A better understanding of the cross as an image ingrained in Mexican history will not only enlighten the historian's understanding of colonial thought and practice, but also the power that the symbol wields even to this day among the peoples of Mexico.

The cross, a simple structure made to hold the human body with arms outstretched, was a Roman form of torture and punishment leading to death, but with the appearance of Christ and the rise of Christianity, the meaning of this image changed to one of Christian salvation. In the early Church, the cross very quickly became an important Christian symbol

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Jung, "Psychological Types", *The Basic Writings of C.G. Jung*, ed. Violet Staub de Laszlo, (New York: The Modern Library, 1959), 275.

and, after Constantine, a symbol of empire. During the medieval crusades to wrest Jerusalem from Muslim control, the cross acted as a religious and political symbol uniting Christians. At home, Europeans used the rhetoric of the cross against Jews who were scattered across Christendom. By the time of Europe's transatlantic colonization, the cross had become heavily embedded in western culture as a religious and political icon.

In medieval Spain the cross represented Christian efforts against the Muslims and Jews, both of whom easily identified this image as a hostile force. However, in coming to the Americas, Spaniards encountered cultures that had already adopted the cross symbol as a powerful image of the universe as well as an icon of the life and death cycle. While the strengthening of Christianity took place in Europe, the Maya were using cross images in religious pictographs at the same time. During the *reconquista* in Spain, the Aztecs developed a cohesive state with religious ceremonies and images that also utilized the cross image. With the collision of western and indigenous cultures in Mexico, the original meaning of the cross was often lost or developed in denotation. What the cross symbolized to Natives and even Spaniards varied from place to place and time to time. The cross could be a sign of cosmic direction, holy conquest, political alliance, religious acquiescence, tyrannical oppression, physical healing, or supernatural miracles.

The range and richness of symbols from the medieval period spilled over into the early modern era, and even today certain images continue to exist and have meaning. The cross undoubtedly is an enduring image in western civilization that inspires hope and reflection as well as fear and outrage. It is a symbol that has been acknowledged by historians of Spain and Mexico to an extent, but only in a limited way has the cultural significance of the cross for the peoples in colonial Mexico been studied.

Historians mention the presence of the cross in various events and use it in general terms as a synonym for Christianity; however, no author has attempted to bring together the accounts found in colonial documents and interpret perceptions of the cross and how they affected Mexican society. Structurally the cross has served as a basic symbol amongst various

peoples of the world, but the transatlantic appropriation of this image in colonial Mexico is unique. The commonality of the cross symbol on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean portended a confrontation not only of culture, but of symbolism. My concern is to bring to light the cultural, religious, and political implications of this image when Spanish colonizers confronted indigenous groups with new meanings for a symbol deeply rooted in their culture.

My approach contends that the symbol of the cross was embedded in Spain and Mexico before their contact. During the blending of these peoples, both Natives and Spaniards manipulated and intensified this image so as to make it inseparable from the culture that resulted in colonial times. Therefore, a better understanding of colonial Mexican society requires an investigation of the practices, meanings, and events involving the cross.

### 1.1 Theories and Methods

This study necessarily dictates not only a historical approach, but also an anthropological one. In order to more fully understand the use and abuse of the cross image in colonial Mexico, the documents relating such events must be interpreted in a general and subjective way because of the nature of symbols. John Van Eenwyk states that “symbols are not so much entities to be interpreted as they are dynamics to be experienced.”<sup>2</sup> However, scholars have argued that certain universal symbols and ritual patterns are traceable to an extent that allows an interpretation of the utilization of specific images in limited regions.

In *Man and His Symbols*, Carl Jung argues that a symbol has no innate power, but that its numinosity exists only in the emotions or unconscious of the individual. The cross image is nothing more than two intersecting bars, but the feelings that were and even are evoked at its sight are generally indefinable. Jung states that, “[t]he symbol is alive only insofar as it is

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<sup>2</sup> John R. Van Eenwyk, “Archetypes & Strange Attractors: The Chaotic World of Symbols”, *Studies in Jungian Psychology By Jungian Analysts*, (Toronto Inner City Books, 1997), 71.

pregnant with meaning.”<sup>3</sup> The cross, as Jung affirms, can be viewed in a semiotic sense, a mere sign of something better explained by what the cross is meant to represent. For example, Christianity is often symbolized with the cross image, which is natural, as the cross is utilized within Christian practice; however, the cross has multiple meanings and the term Christianity more aptly describes what is trying to be expressed rather than the cross.

The Spanish employed this semiotic use of the cross in colonial Mexico, but this image also had the power of being symbolic in a greater, more transcendent sense. For the Natives the cross held precontact meaning which the Spanish challenged and manipulated by clinging to the cross as well as living, fighting, disciplining, and dying in its presence. Natives and Spaniards related many miraculous events to this powerful image making it in their minds something supernatural, an extension or actualization of the divine on earth. As the people of colonial Mexico held diverse and mystical interpretations of the cross it is difficult to ascertain what anyone truly understood. However, what can be said is that those Spaniards that encountered the indigenous people of Mexico did not accept their understanding of an image that for them had one ultimate interpretation, the power of Christendom. Still, surveying the appearance of the cross in the different contexts of the historical record reveals the forms in which the symbol’s meaning morphed according to time and place.

One of the problems with symbology is the modern, Western understanding of the word “symbol”. As early as the Lateran Council of 1059, the Latin Church began to oppose the meaning of the term “symbol” to that of “real”.<sup>4</sup> During this time of scholasticism, Western scholars sought to rationalize every mystery of the Church. The result was that the way the early Church interpreted symbols as a participation in and knowledge of reality dissolved into mere representation in the Roman Catholic Church. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann states that:

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<sup>3</sup> Jung, “Psychological Types”, 275.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 143.

The symbol is means of knowledge of that which cannot be known otherwise, for knowledge depends on participation – the living encounter with and entrance into that ‘epiphany’ of reality which the symbol is...The original sin of [scholastic] theology consists...in the reduction of the concept of knowledge to rational or discursive knowledge or, in other terms, in the separation of knowledge from *mysterion*.<sup>5</sup>

Although Schmemmann’s study concerns sacramental theology in the Eastern and Western Church, his statements are applicable to the division between a religious devotion to the cross as a symbol of divine participation on earth and the rational acceptance of the cross as a representation of the Roman Catholic Church signifying political weight.

The Mexican religious institutions persisted in what Schmemman argues the Latin Church lost during the Medieval period. Like Schmemman, Serge Gruzinski argues that in the Western mind there is the urge to divide and analyze. Therefore, he contends that the idea of a *man-god* in Mexican culture is understood by westerners to mean a man who possesses the force of a deity. However, in Nahua thought, which perceives as a whole the concept of the *man-god*, the man is the very god adored.<sup>6</sup> Because the modern understanding of the word “symbol” in the West has diverged even further from sixteenth-century Europeans, to say nothing of pre-contact Natives, the contemporary use of the term must be considered in its specific cultural context.

Clifford Geertz supports the theory of symbolic anthropology which views culture as a symbolic system that arises primarily from human interpretations of the world. Geertz defines culture as “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”<sup>7</sup> The function of culture is to impose meaning on the world and make it understandable through

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>6</sup> See Serge Gruzinski’s discussion of the intimate belief in the reality of symbols in *Man-Gods in the Mexican Highlands*, chapter 1.

<sup>7</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.

symbols and therefore as culture evolves, so do either the symbols or the interpretation of those symbols.

The conflict comes with the clashing of interpretations that each culture has nurtured in society beginning with childhood. The significance of any symbol is that it simplifies the complex and has layers of meaning so that whether a child or adult, Spanish or Native, the cross had a series of implications that impacted all the peoples residing in colonial Mexico.

Jung states that:

The symbol is not a sign that disguises something generally known. Its meaning resides in the fact that it is an attempt to elucidate, by a more or less apt analogy, something that is still entirely unknown or in the process of formation. If we reduce this by analysis to something that is generally known, we destroy the true value of the symbol; but to attribute hermeneutic significance to it is consistent with its value and meaning.<sup>8</sup>

The elucidation that a symbol like the cross brought in colonial times became so varied that only the “hermeneutic significance” of the broad interpretations may be sketched here. However, at the risk of being reductive, it is important to note that the cross image appears to figure into that category of symbols that is almost universally acknowledged as equated with religious understanding and power.

Joseph Campbell argues that all spirituality is a search for the same primal originating force and that religions are “masks” of this identical pursuit. In the preface to *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell quotes the Rig Vedic manuscripts: “Truth is one, the sages speak of it by many names.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in *Man-Gods in the Mexican Highlands*, Gruzinski states that the origins of the *man-god* were left a mystery, but they were all connected as the power came

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<sup>8</sup> Carl Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, Translated by R. F. C. Hull, (London: Routledge, 1992), 291.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (Princeton: University Press, 1949), 7.

from one source: “for the fire was one and the man-gods were many.”<sup>10</sup> Heavily tied into the myths and metaphors of religion are symbols which, like the cross, appear in numerous cultures worldwide. Correspondingly, Mircea Eliade argued for the universal elements that are common to various religions, which is plainly seen in the cross symbol of the Spanish and the Natives of Mexico. The simplicity of the structure of the cross image may reveal its universality, but the religious connection to the universe made in numerous cultures is harder to explain.

The cross has semiotic and symbolic dimensions peculiar to Mexican culture, which are an outgrowth of its transitional colonial years. The Natives of Mexico underwent a liminal period in which Hispanic influence forced traditional beliefs and practices through a strainer allowing only that, ideally at least, which could be accepted into the new dominant religion to remain. The cross was one of the symbols that not only remained, but was held up as a symbol of ancient Christian influence. Although the cross images that existed in both precontact Iberia and Mexico appeared roughly as the same time, the metonymy of these icons differed.

Eliade argues that hierophanies, manifestations of the sacred, give structure and orientation to a group’s worldview. A hierophany amounts to a “revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse.”<sup>11</sup> It is through these manifestations that the group can establish a sacred order, a set of rites centered around that which has been revealed divinely. In contrast to profane space, the site of a hierophany has a sacredness about it that can be used by the religious to structure their lives around.

Likewise, in *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* Victor Turner puts forward the liminality concept which provides a construct for understanding the formulation of a unique Mexican Christianity that developed throughout the colonial period. Turner states that

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<sup>10</sup> Serge Gruzinski, *Man-god in the Mexican Highlands: Indian Power and Colonial Society: 1550-1800*, (Stanford: University Press, 1989), 24.

<sup>11</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, Translated by Willard R. Trask, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 21.

“Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise.”<sup>12</sup> According to Turner, the liminal period is the second stage of his ritual theories in which, a ritual, especially a rite of passage, involves some change to the participants, especially their social status.<sup>13</sup>

Turner characterizes the liminal state of a group as ambiguous and indeterminate. Whether voluntary or involuntary, the sense of the group’s identity dissolves and there is a period of disorientation. Liminality is a period of transition where normal limits to thought, self-understanding, and behavior are relaxed or forced into a new medium allowing for new perspectives to develop. During the liminal stage, normally accepted differences among the group, specifically social class, are often de-emphasized or disappear. This new social structure, based on equality rather than hierarchy, Turner calls *communitas*.

Turner’s notion of *communitas* may not be too dissimilar from Nancy Farris’ arguments in *Maya Society under Colonial Rule* in which she argues that the social bond among the colonial Maya was a “collective enterprise of survival”. The Spanish forced those groups of the Americas that fell under their control into a liminal stage desiring to see them converted to Christianity. The whole process of missionary endeavors reflected the means by which the Spanish sought to bring Natives through the liminal stage. However, the transition was one not of change from Mexican pagan to European Christian, but a fusion of the cultures that Spanish Catholics implemented yet worked out among peoples that did not so completely forsake their religious understanding.

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<sup>12</sup> Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, (Cornell: University Press, 1970), 97.

<sup>13</sup> See Turner’s chapter entitled “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage” from *The Forest of Symbols*.



For the Spanish, the liminal process included the destruction of Native images and practices, but most missionaries interpreted the precontact existence of the cross, despite the fact that the Mexicans did not regard it in a European Christian way, beneficial. What Spaniards interpreted as a perversion of the true meaning of the cross, which many believed St. Thomas or some other apostle had preached to Mexicans centuries earlier, could be used during this liminal process as a medium that satisfied both indigenous and European needs and traditions. What Spanish Catholics ultimately sought was the Natives “graduating” in their understanding of and participation in the rites associated with the cross from a pagan into a Christian ritual.

Acknowledgment of the cross as a symbol associated with power and religious belief was a first step, but to participate, and through participation find understanding as the Europeans believed, meant the rejection of a set of rituals and a nurtured worldview that already understood the cross in a certain way. Eliade argues the concept of the “eternal return”, which is the belief that religious behavior is not only an imitation of, but also a participation in, sacred events. Eliade contends that religious thought in general makes a sharp distinction between what is sacred and what is profane. He states that “all the definitions given up until now of the religious phenomenon have one thing in common: each has its own way of showing that the sacred and the religious life are the opposite of the profane and secular life.”<sup>14</sup> The sacred contains all reality, that is everything of value, while profane objects and locations only acquire this reality to the extent that they participate in the sacred.<sup>15</sup>

According to Eliade, traditional society attributes no true value to linear time. Historical events in themselves are generally meaningless unless understood within the religious cycle of time. To give life value, the religious person performs rituals that “reactualize” the accepted

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<sup>14</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, Translated by Willard R. Trask, (Princeton: University Press, 1971), 5.

mythical events.<sup>16</sup> Religious behavior is not only meant to commemorate but also to participate in sacred events. Eliade states that, "In imitating the exemplary acts of a god or of a mythical hero, or simply by recounting their adventures, the man of an archaic society detaches himself from profane time and magically re-enters the Great Time, the sacred time."<sup>17</sup> The reactualization discussed in Eliade can also be seen in Gruzinski's definition of man-gods in colonial Mexico. Similarly, diverse ideas concerning the understanding of the cross led to certain Native groups accepting the cross itself as a deity and not just a symbol or instrument.

Turner also emphasizes the multivocality and bipolarity of symbols, which is true of the cross in colonial Mexico as it held various meanings and represented distinct concepts. Turner introduced the term multivocality to indicate that one image may represent numerous meanings. To understand the multivocality of ritual symbols, he suggested a triarchic approach in which the significance of a symbol must incorporate the exegetical, the operational, and the positional meaning.

In order to identify the exegetical meaning, Turner states that one must question the "indigenous informants about observed ritual behavior."<sup>18</sup> Applying this guideline to the historical record of colonial Mexico is often one sided as most of the primary sources are Spanish, but it is necessary, however inadequate and limited, to construct the pieces left into something identifiable. Although definition of precontact indigenous interpretation of the cross image in Mexico is suspect, records do reveal Spanish precolonial and colonial understandings.

The operational meaning is derived from observing how a society handles a symbol, the composition of the group handling that symbol, and the emotions evoked when the group interprets the symbol. It is here that the historical record does speak as numerous examples

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<sup>16</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 68-69.

<sup>17</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, Translated by Philip Mairet, (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 23.

<sup>18</sup> Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 50.

exist revealing various responses in which groups reacted to the cross during the colonial period. Within this category there are both nurtured and spontaneous responses to the cross image as well as thought-out and manipulative actions.

The final step in Turner's approach is the comparative placement of a symbol in relation to other regarded images. Turner states that "The positional meaning of a symbol derives from its relationship to other symbols in a totality, a Gestalt, whose elements acquire their significance from the system as a whole."<sup>19</sup> Other powerful images during the colonial period are the representations of the Madonna, specifically the Virgin of Guadalupe, which operated in conjunction with the cross image. Similar to the cross, the Virgin image acted as a representative of both precontact Iberian and indigenous religious beliefs.<sup>20</sup> Together the cross and the icons of Mary complemented the missionary effort of replacing and at times syncretizing indigenous beliefs and practices with Christian ones, yet allowed Natives to cling to a newly perceived version of ancient symbols.

The cross acted as a signifier to both Natives and Spaniards alike; however, what it signified was relevant to the viewer. The persistence of the cross symbol in consecrated reenactments allowed all living in colonial Mexico to cling to this image and understand its history in their own way. The cross as a universal symbol with divergent meaning inspired a series of active and passive reactions to its use militarily, politically, and religiously. The rites which developed during the colonial period that continue to be performed in Mexico reflect how both Catholic and indigenous religions utilized the cross as a transcendent image rekindling the sacred past.

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<sup>19</sup> Turner, *A Forest of Symbols*, 51.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531-1813*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

## 1.2 Historiography

Secondary sources focusing exclusively on the effect and impact of the cross in colonial Mexico are rare. Despite the pervasiveness of the cross symbol throughout colonial texts, historians have not synthesized the overall integration of this image. However, authors from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first have utilized the cross in anecdotes and histories to the extent that an amalgamation of this information allows a reconstruction of its use throughout the three hundred years of colonialism in Mexico.

Although the early histories of the conquest provide the Spanish interpretation of the cross image, it is primarily in small doses that authors reflected on the cross. Perhaps Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's 1542 *Relación* comes closest to revealing the integration of the cross between the indigenous and Spanish cultures. Cabeza de Vaca makes the connection that Native observance of Christian use of the cross led them to use the image as an easily made and recognizable symbol of alliance.

Cabeza de Vaca's history resulted from a decade of suffering and subordination amongst the indigenous people, whereas Diego de Landa's appears as one actively struggling against Native religious practice. In his *Relación de Las Cosas de Yucatán* (1566), Landa noted the cross image among the Maya and the ways in which they misused or misunderstood this image. Similar to Landa's account was Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *The Conquest of New Spain*, (1568-ff) in which the cross is praised as an instrument of victory and healing throughout. Although Bernal Díaz' record is from the perspective of the soldier, like Fray Landa he attributes miraculous power to the cross image.

Also similar to Landa's text was Juan de Torquemada's *Monarchia Indiana* (1615) and Bernardo de Lizana's *Historia y Conquista Espiritual de Yucatán* (1633). These texts attempted to interpret indigenous prophecy for the benefit of Spanish conquest. Landa, Torquemada, and Lizana understood the cross image seen in these writings as justification of Spanish rule and believed the references to the symbol in precontact Mexico precluded the idea of indigenous submission.

Seventeenth-century writing becomes more interpretive as authors continue to reference the cross image as a sign of Spanish dominance. Alonso de Benavides's *Memorial* (1630) recounted indigenous amalgamation of the cross with Native symbolism. Likewise, Diego Lopez Cogolludo's *Historia de Yucatán* (1688) states that prophecies led Natives to erect crosses in anticipation of the Spanish. These early histories are tainted with the perspective of conquest, predestination, and colonialism.

Most post-colonial histories, from William H. Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843) to Charles A. Truxillo's *By the Sword and the Cross* (2001), have only given a passing glance at the use and understanding of the cross in colonial Mexico. Macro-historians of this nature force themselves into the broad scheme of politics and economics, and though the history of culture and society exists in these texts, it is the former which are given the weight of developmental importance. For most authors the term cross has been used merely as a synonym for Spanish Catholicism, such as in the title of Truxillo's work.

There have also been macro-histories of the religious side of the Spanish invasion, namely Charles S. Braden's *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico* (1930) and Robert Ricard's *Spiritual Conquest of Mexico* (1966), which took pains to elucidate the introduction of Christianity. However, because the focus of works like these disregarded symbolism and the amalgamation of precontact and colonial images, authors relegated the cross to an object of Christian intrusion, instead of liminal redefinition and syncretism.

Seminal works like Robert Chamberlain's *The Conquest and Colonization of Yucatan* (1948) and Richard E. Greenleaf's *The Mexican Inquisition of the Sixteenth Century* (1969) allow perspective and context for the interpretation of the cross in colonial Mexico, but such books are rightfully conditioned by region or institution. Although the cross symbol does play into the analysis of these works, they see the use of this image as an exception or even an aberration instead of a contiguous role in the development of Mexican history. However, references and insights from works such as these form the basis for more recent scholarship.

One of Nancy Farris' purposes in *Maya Society under Colonial Rule* (1984) is to bridge the chronological gap between ancient and modern Mayan peoples. She argues that the Maya defined survival as a collective enterprise where man, nature, and the gods participated in sacrifice and communion to guarantee universal balance. Although Farris states that the cross among the Maya represented the "First Tree of the World" which linked heaven and earth, she argues that the form of the cross, specifically the nineteenth-century Speaking Cross, was probably Christian rather than pre-conquest Maya.

Despite her many references to the cross image during the colonial period, she says that it did not figure preeminently in Mayan religion. However, the most common depiction of Mayan cosmology was the "World Tree". It was this symbol, which is a cross image, that permeated Mayan thought and religious unity. As Farris contends, the survival of Mayan culture was possible only through creative adaptation, such as the acceptance of transcultural symbols like the cross. The acknowledgment of the multivocality of the cross assisted in their collective approach to survival allowing continued cosmic and social order, but under new guises more acceptable to their colonial masters.

Similarly, Enrique Florescano in *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico* (1987) highlights the versatility of indigenous culture to adapt and assimilate in order to maintain traditional beliefs and practices. He argues that the discourse of the preconquest Nahua continued until the late eighteenth century when the creoles mingled it with Western Enlightenment thought, producing a national history that united and unified all peoples in Mexico. He also argues that religious understanding of time and history which dominated through the colonial period blended with modern secular political thought adopted by creole elites in the late eighteenth century to create a national historical discourse after independence.

As an attempt toward unification, creoles advocated the natural riches of Mexico as a source of economy and beauty, appropriated the indigenous past as a deeply rooted heritage, and embraced the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe as evidence of Mexico's special place in God's sight. Although the cross image does not play a major role in his analysis of Mexican

unity, in his discussion of social solidarity under new forms of identity, he states, “These revitalizations of the ancient culture sought to incorporate the old into the present through the procedure of covering it over with a Christian veneer that permitted it to be accepted in the dominant culture.”<sup>21</sup> As Farris had done, Florescano emphasizes the persistence of indigenous practices and beliefs, without fully crediting the perennial cross image.

In *Ambivalent Conquests* (1987), Inga Clendinnen discusses the implications of European domination and indigenous resistance in Yucatán. Clendinnen argues that the Maya developed a passive resistant syncretism to the spiritual conquest that the Spanish imposed upon them. Native cultures accepted military defeat, but their societies would inevitably revive. In an effort to maintain traditional ritual and thought, Natives paid lip service to Christianity while practicing several ancient traditions. Clendinnen especially notes this theme of the adaptation of the cross when the Maya revolted and crucified Spaniards in the sixteenth-century. Although she does not continue the story of the manipulation of the cross in colonial history, she does argue that the Maya utilized this symbol in their resistance thereby conferring on it a special status that would lead to the nineteenth-century Speaking Cross.

In *Man-Gods in the Mexican Highlands* (1989), Serge Gruzinski discusses the opposition posed against colonial religious authority by four indigenous mystics marginal to their society who claimed Christian spirituality as *man-gods* and who each developed an anti-colonial/anti-clerical cult during the colonial years. These *man-gods* took religious acculturation to the extreme by accepting “Christianity to the point of taking possession of God and his sanctuary.”<sup>22</sup> Gruzinski’s work is influenced by Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud, and Georges Devereux amongst others as he presents not just a historical interpretation, but also an anthropological and psychoanalytical one.

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<sup>21</sup> Enrique Florescano, *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico: From the Aztecs to Independence*, Translated by Albert G. Bork, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 114.

<sup>22</sup> Gruzinski, *Man-Gods*, preface.

Gruzinski's analysis is not only useful in revealing examples of syncretism and his theory behind this mixture, but also in the response of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the colonial era. Gruzinski argues that the Baroque church encouraged Natives to accept religious objects, such as the cross, that were considered miraculous and tried to adopt what they could from indigenous culture in order to strengthen their hold on New Spain. However, the authoritarian church of the eighteenth century sought to quell indigenous cults of images even if it separated some indigenous members from the Church.

Samuel Y. Edgerton is one of the only authors who has given more than just a passing glance to the Christian and indigenous cross. In his chapter entitled "Christian Cross as Indigenous 'World Tree' in Sixteenth-Century Mexico" (2005), Edgerton discusses how Native artisans depicted indigenous understandings of the universe within the cross symbols they carved. Although Edgerton's chapter is limited to patio crosses in the *conventos*, he lays the groundwork for further investigation of the religious culture that developed in Mexico pertaining to the syncretized cross image.

In his work *Theaters of Conversion* (2001), Edgerton argues that the religious chose "from the vast store of European artistic motifs and Christian stories just those that would evoke in Indian eyes reassuring resemblances to certain indigenous preconquest concepts."<sup>23</sup> This may be true in general and especially with the "World Tree" cross symbol as Edgerton asserts. However, it is arguable that the cross so prevailed in Spain that it was only natural to carry the image to the Americas and disperse it accordingly. It may only have been happenstance that so many parallels could be made between the Christian cross and the indigenous "World Tree" or it may be the cleverness of the religious; however, no text asserts this conscious overlap of

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<sup>23</sup> Samuel Y. Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion: Religious Architecture and Indian Artisans in Colonial Mexico*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 2.



concepts and therefore much of Edgerton's, as well as my, interpretation depends on uses of images rather than textual explanations.<sup>24</sup>

Spread throughout the pages of conquest and colonial period histories and documents are references and anecdotes pertaining to the cross symbol. The combination and analysis of these sporadic descriptions of the cross reveals a continuity that has failed to attract a sufficient record relevant to the image's importance. It is with this idea that despite its lack of recognition, the cross indeed served an important role in the development of transatlantic history. For the colonial period, the cross became a symbol of alliance, an instrument of revenge, an image of veneration that allowed a uniquely Mexican culture to develop.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 2.

## CHAPTER 2

### SYMBOL OF POLITICAL ALLIANCE AND TYRANNICAL HEGEMONY

On [Good] Friday it was a great consolation to see the still barbarous braves approach meekly and on their knees to adore the holy cross.<sup>25</sup>

Andrés Pérez de Ribas on the first Holy Week celebrations in Atotonilco (1597)

The cross became a symbol of political and/or martial unification between Natives and Spaniards, but opponents considered it an emblem of tyranny to be fought and ousted. From the sixteenth through the eighteenth century, Spaniards erected crosses in indigenous villages as a sign of their political dominance. Some Natives chose to accept this sign and fight for it, like Hernán Cortés' indigenous allies, specifically the Tlaxcala. In areas where the Spanish erected the cross by force, some Natives sought to remove the image through open revolt, such as the Maya Insurrection of 1546-1547 when hostile Natives tried to destroy not only Spaniards, often by crucifixion, but also every vestige of Christianity, particularly the cross.

Turner's liminality concept provides a construct for understanding the formulation of a unique Mexican Christianity related to the cross symbol that developed throughout the colonial period. Turner characterizes the liminal state of a group as ambiguous. This indeterminate stage manifests itself especially in the early years of conquest and colonization where indigenous peoples were challenged not only physically, but spiritually. As the missionary efforts continued to convert newly encountered indigenous groups, the liminal stage began

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<sup>25</sup> Andrés Pérez de Ribas, *Triunfos de Nuestra Santa Fée entre gentes las mas bárbaras y fieras*. 3 vols. (Madrid, 1654: reprinted in Mexico, 1944), 3:155: "El viernes era de grande consuelo ver ya a los bárbaros bravos, llegar mansos y arrodillados a adorar la santa cruz."

anew and therefore the whole of the colonial years may be interpreted as a transition, a time of liminality, in which Natives, and even Spaniards, evaluated their status.

During the transitional colonial years, the Natives of Mexico underwent a liminal period in which Spanish Catholic dominance tried to erase many traditional indigenous beliefs and practices or replace them with a Christian meaning. One of the results was that the signification of the cross image took on symbolic dimensions peculiar to colonial Mexican culture. Despite the fact that crosses existed in both Iberia and precontact Mexico, the metonymic explanation of the image differed.

## 2.1 Political Symbol

Columbus brought the first chronicled Christian cross to the Americas. Before his first voyage west into the Atlantic, Columbus ordered an image of a large, red, Templars' Cross Pattee to be painted on the sails. On October 11, 1492 Columbus recorded that:

At two o'clock in the morning, the land was discovered...which was Friday...The Admiral bore the royal standard, and the two captains each a banner of the Green Cross, which all the ships had carried; this contained the initials of the names of the King and Queen each side of the cross, and a crown over each letter.<sup>26</sup>

Political insignia surrounded the symbol of the cross, reflecting the partnership of church and state and foreshadowing how the cross would be understood in the Americas long after Columbus. Coincidentally, the day on which Columbus claims to have first seen what would become known as the Americas was a Friday, the traditional day of Christ's crucifixion on the cross.

With the exception of the Dutch, the Europeans that colonized in the New World used the physical planting of a cross as a marker of their nations. The French, with supposed Native consent, planted crosses as signs of possession. The Portuguese set up crosses to mark navigational discoveries and the English left crosses as far as they explored. According to

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Christopher Columbus, *Personal Narrative of the First Voyage of Columbus to America*, Translated by Samuel Kettell, (Boston, MA: Thomas B. Wait & Son, 1827), 33.

Patricia Seed in *Ceremonies of Possession*, Spaniards planted crosses “only intermittently.”<sup>27</sup> Seed’s analysis concerns primarily the claiming of territory in the New World; however, she does not account for the abundant uses of the cross by the Spanish in the Americas. Seed contends that the cross was the traditional object planted by Europeans during their explorations in the Americas; however, the actual cultural and political significance varied widely.<sup>28</sup> Seed’s analysis should be taken a step further in asserting the variety of ways in which Europeans used the cross as an instrument of their hegemony in the Americas.

With the language barrier that Amerindians and Europeans experienced, nonverbal communication initially became more important than the spoken word. The cross became the most obvious and disseminated symbol of Spanish influence in the minds of both Spaniards and Natives. Crosses could be seen daily on banners, around necks, in the plazas and, of course, in the chapels.

Spaniards used the cross not only because of its religious connection, but also for an easy, practical application and its historic association with military victory. Practically speaking, the cross symbol is simple and portable and could easily be made and recognized quickly by Spaniards and Natives alike. Cabeza de Vaca recorded that Indians of the villa of San Miguel, a far western settlement in North America, came out to receive the Spanish with crosses in their hands as a sign of obedience and friendship.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, in 1598 when Don Juan de Oñate Salazar first contacted the Manso Indians, forty of them approached the Spanish near modern

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<sup>27</sup> Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 180.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>29</sup> Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *The Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca*, Translated by Rolena Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 168.

El Paso and “made the sign of the cross by raising their thumbs” as a symbol of friendship.<sup>30</sup> This tradition continued into the eighteenth century as Isidro Félix de Espinosa records that certain Texas Indians, who were friendly toward the Spanish, marched out to see them in single file led by a cross-bearer, “bearing a well wrought otate (bamboo) cross.”<sup>31</sup> In all these situations, the Native use of the cross is not religious acquiescence, but rather practical political association of a mutually recognizable symbol.

## 2.2 Setting up the Cross in Native Villages

From first contact, Native Americans noticed Spanish behavior in relation to their cross which provoked questions about Hispanic faith. In an Aztec manuscript dating from the early 1520s, an illustration of Cortés and his company meeting Natives reveals Cortés with a sword pointed toward the ground in his right hand while an uplifted cross rests against his left shoulder. The banner held by the standard bearer also shows the image of the cross.<sup>32</sup> While Cortés discoursed with two ambassadors from Motechuzoma, the camp bell rang signifying that “It was the hour of Ave Maria...we fell on our knees, in front of a cross which we had erected on a sandhill, to say our prayers.” The two men then “asked us why we humbled ourselves before a log cut in that particular fashion.” At this point Cortés had Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo explain the basic tenets of Christian belief, specifically that the Creator of all men died on such a cross, and “begged them to erect in their cities, ...a cross like the one they saw...”<sup>33</sup> Cortés

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<sup>30</sup> Carroll Riley, *The Kachina and the Cross: Indians and Spaniards in the Early Southwest*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), 55.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Arthur R. Gómez, trans. *Documentary Evidence for the Spanish Missions of Texas*, (New York: Garland Pub., 1991), 128.

<sup>32</sup> UT Austin, Benson Latin American Collection, Genaro Garcia, Codices in the Genaro Garcia Collection, 1500-1599, G8 ms., 6-7.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain*, Translated by J.M. Cohen, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 96. Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico:*

established this sixteenth-century precedent, setting up crosses in Native villages, not only to spread Christianity, but also as a symbol of alliance.<sup>34</sup>

Because Spaniards regarded the cross as a special object of worship, they often outlined to Natives the necessity of maintaining the respect due the cross in their homes and villages. As Cortés marched his army across Mexico he set up a wooden cross in each town that willingly received him, both for the sake of the Natives so that they may have a place of true worship and also for the Spanish so that they might identify their allies.<sup>35</sup> In each town, Cortés took time to erect a cross while he explained the meaning of the image and told them "...to treat it with great reverence."<sup>36</sup> In one village, Cortés held Mass in the presence of the various chiefs and Indians assembled and let them see the Spaniards bowing to and kissing the cross. He then gave them an image of the Virgin Mary and a cross "telling them always to keep the place well cleaned and swept and decked with branches, and to worship it if they wanted to enjoy good health and harvests."<sup>37</sup>

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*An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572*, Translated by Lesley B. Simpson, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 17.

<sup>34</sup> Antonio de Espejo visited the province of Cibola in 1583 and found crosses that had been erected near the pueblos and three Mexican Indians that Coronado had left there forty-one years prior (Alonso de Benavides, *The Memorial of Fray Alonso de Benavides, 1630*, Translated by Mrs. Edward E. Ayer, (Albuquerque: Horn and Wallace, Publishers, 1965), 253, notes).

<sup>35</sup> William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 286.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 135.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

The ritual of setting up crosses in Native villages continued into the sixteenth century when Francisco de Ibarra traveled throughout Nueva Vizcaya in 1554. After announcing his peaceful intentions and distributing gifts, Ibarra erected a cross as the first symbol of the Indians' acquiescence to Spain's rule and religion.<sup>38</sup> By the end of the sixteenth century the Spanish, led by Fray Hernando de Santarén and Captain Diego de Avila, began to coax the Indians of Nueva Vizcaya out of their small villages and rural settings into larger, more developed towns. As part of this reorganization, or rather reorientation, at each newly established town the missionary set up a cross and demonstrated how to reverence it by genuflecting.<sup>39</sup>

According to Turner, the liminal period is a rite of passage involving both outward and conceivably inward change, especially with regard to the social status of the group in transition.<sup>40</sup> The sense of the group's identity dissolves and there is a period of disorientation in which the group strives for or is forced into a new structure. Although the Spanish recognized and placated the rulers among indigenous peoples, they had all been reduced to the same level of paganism in the eyes of Spaniards. In order to regain social standing under Spanish control, the Native leaders established a pattern of leading their peoples through the transition period to an acceptable form of Christianity. The outward reconstruction of a group's identity and even the cityscape of the village usually involved the cross image.

In the Nueva Vizcayan village of Atotonilco, Fray Gerónimo Ramírez celebrated the first Holy Week services in 1597. In attendance was a fellow missionary and historian, Andrés

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<sup>38</sup> Charlotte M. Gradie, *The Tepehuan Revolt of 1616: Militarism, Evangelism, and Colonialism in Seventeenth Century Nueva Vizcaya*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000), 97.

<sup>39</sup> Gradie, *The Tepehuan Revolt of 1616*, 121.

<sup>40</sup> Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage", in *The Forest of Symbols*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).

Pérez de Ribas, who commented that, "On [Good] Friday it was a great consolation to see the still barbarous braves approach meekly and on their knees to adore the holy cross."<sup>41</sup> The pacification that, at least in the eyes of Pérez de Ribas, was represented in Native reverence for the cross is paralleled by a display of Spanish might that was occurring simultaneously. Pérez de Ribas states that Spanish soldiers and allied Indian warriors escorted the celebrants during the processions and activities of Holy Week. Because Nueva Vizcaya was "still a frontier territory," this display of arms accompanying the religious rites must have reinforced Spanish dominance and the need for Indian acquiescence.<sup>42</sup>

In 1630, Fr. Alonso de Benavides recorded that in New Mexico, "I set up in it [a *rancheria* in the Mansa nation] a Cross, of the height of a lance, and told them, among other things, that that was the token of God, that all we Christians kept it with us and kept it in the pueblos and houses in which we lived."<sup>43</sup> Fr. Benavides continued to expound on how the Indians venerated the cross and looked to it for healing which Spaniards interpreted as Indian acceptance of the Spanish and their God. For the Natives to accept the cross, at least outwardly, indicated an acceptance of the Catholic faith and Spanish rule.

The tradition of erecting crosses as Spanish political symbols continued into the eighteenth century. In an effort to conciliate the Natives in New Mexico and Texas, Spanish officials instructed the Marquis de San Miguel de Aguayo to placate the Apaches he came across during his *entrada* into Texas during the early 1720s. Juan Antonio de la Peña, a missionary accompanying Aguayo, recorded that the Spanish erected crosses at every campsite from San Antonio to East Texas, which he said was a sign to the Apache of their

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<sup>41</sup> Pérez de Ribas, *Triunfos de Nuestra Santa Fée entre gentes las mas bárbaras y fieras*, 3:155: "El viernes era de grande consuelo ver ya a los bárbaros bravos, llegar mansos y arrodillados a adorar la santa cruz."

<sup>42</sup> Gradie, *The Tepehuan Revolt of 1616*, 133.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Benavides, *Memorial*, 15.



Spanish allies.<sup>44</sup> Over a century later, Manuel de Mier y Terán noted the continual use of the cross in the villages in Texas. On June 23, 1828 Terán claimed that, "Among these ranchos along the route there are so many crosses that it could be called 'Via Crucis' [Way of the Cross]."<sup>45</sup>

The Spanish willingly disbursed crosses to Natives who were eager to accept them. However, in certain villages where indigenous conversion seemed too euphoric, Cortés curbed his enthusiasm for setting up crosses. After landing at Vera Cruz, Cortés' company quickly established relations with the peoples of Ulúa, Cempolala, Jallapa, and Socochima, all of whom did not pay tribute to Motechuzoma, and set up crosses amongst them. However, as the company moved further west across the mountains they came upon a town called Xocotlan, which was subject to the Aztec Empire.

Although Cortés preached a similar message to the inhabitants of Xocotlan and was eager to erect a cross, Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo reportedly told Cortés that "In my opinion, sir, it is too early to leave a cross in these people's possession. They have neither shame nor fear and, being vassals of Montezuma, may either burn it or damage it in some other way."<sup>46</sup> This statement not only presents a religious concern, but also a political reasoning that pitted Cortés against Olmedo and left the indigenous of Xocotlan without the allied symbol of the cross. Against the wishes of Fray Olmedo, Cortés erected crosses at Cholula and Tlaxcala from which he would draw powerful allies during his march on Tenochtitlan.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Juan Antonio de la Peña, *Derrotero de la Expedicion en la Provincia de los Texas*, Translated by Richard G. Santos, (Austin: Jenkins Pub. Co., 1981), 58.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Manuel de Mier y Terán, *Texas by Terán: The Diary kept by General Manuel de Mier y Terán on his 1828 Inspection of Texas*, Translated by John Wheat, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 171.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 137.

<sup>47</sup> Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest*, 18.

In addition to Fray Olmedo's complaints about the quick initiation of Natives into the Catholic faith and practice are those of the Dominican missionary Fray Bartolomé de las Casas. Las Casas argued that the indoctrination of the Christian faith would take time and that the setting up of crosses and brief teachings would not suffice to overturn the years of indigenous tradition ingrained in Indians since childhood. Las Casas states:

They have made the Indians erect crosses, which they induced them to reverence. Well and good if there were time for it...it seems a superfluous and useless thing; because the Indians may think they are given an idol of that figure, which Christians have as God, so they will worship that stick as God, and be idolaters.<sup>48</sup>

Las Casas describes the premature setting up of crosses in indigenous villages as one of the "errors and blunders" of Spanish religious efforts in Mesoamerica.

### 2.3 Forcing the Christian Cross

Native acceptance of the Christian cross did not hinge solely on force or even political advantage. Certain Indians and tribes appear, according to Spanish accounts, to have accepted Christianity primarily because of missionary conversion efforts. One such example is Sanaba, the head captain of the Apache of Xila in the early seventeenth century, who was converted by the preaching of Fr. Benavides. Sanaba presented Fr. Benavides with a tanned deer skin and on the white background there was painted a green sun with a cross on top and below it a gray moon with a cross on top of it as well. Sanaba explained the significance of the drawing to Fr. Benavides:

Padre, until now we had not recognized any other benefactor so great as the sun and the moon; for the sun warms us and gives light by day and nourishes the plants for us; and the moon gives us light by night. And so we used to adore these two, as them that did us so much good, and we knew not that there was any other thing better; but now that thou hast taught us that God is the Lord, and Creator of the sun and of the moon and of all things, and that the Cross is a token of God, I ordered [them] to paint the Cross over the sun and over the moon, that thou shouldest understand that we do that which thou teachest us; and not forget that above everything we adore God and his holy Cross.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Todd Downing, *The Mexican Earth*, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 70.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Benavides, *Memorial*, 43.

Apache conversion required diligence on the part of cross-bearing missionaries. Fr. Benavidas recorded that the first time he planted crosses among the Apache in the early seventeenth century they ran away from the catechizing priest, which he stated was typical at the beginning of conversions.<sup>50</sup> This explains all the more why Fr. Benavidas praised God for so great and thorough a conversion, which is not only represented in Sanaba's words, but also delineated in a Native pictograph utilizing the indigenous worldview and the image of the cross.<sup>51</sup>

Native refusal to accept the Christian cross and reject former ways of worship sometimes led Spaniards to act rashly. According to Bernal Díaz, when Cortés encountered the Natives on Cozumel, he ascertained that they worshiped and sacrificed to false gods. Cortés assembled the chiefs and explained to them that they should receive and venerate an image of the Virgin Mary and a cross and that sacrifices to idols should cease. Cortés related to them that what they practiced currently would lead to eternal damnation, but reverence for the Virgin Mary and the cross would prove a blessing both in this life and the next. When they refused to tear down their idols, Cortés had the images destroyed and put Christian objects in their place.<sup>52</sup>

The Spaniards also used force to erect the first cross on the Mexican mainland. As Cortés' ships drew near the Mexican mainland, the local Indians along the Tabasco River let them know that they were not welcome. After Cortés entreated for peace, he landed his men

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>51</sup> Another example of Amerindians embracing Christianity, specifically the symbol of the cross, was in a Cholulan city where a stone crucifix of gigantic proportions stood high above the buildings. This cross represented the people's reliance on the Christian God for protection instead of the traditional hope for the return of Quetzalcoatl (William Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 372).

<sup>52</sup> Charles S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1930), 81. The cross was an object of worship in Cozumel before Spaniards arrived.

and forced the Natives into submission. He then ordered them back to their homes and spoke to the chiefs about Christianity and the need for them to cease idol worship. According to Bernal Díaz, the Natives willingly agreed to do away with their idols and to stop human sacrifices. Cortés presented them with an image of the Virgin Mary and had his men build an altar topped by a very high cross.<sup>53</sup>

In certain areas of Spanish-controlled America, specifically in the northern reaches of New Spain, the Spaniards made it imperative that Natives use the cross religiously and politically or else face slavery and death in this life and the next. When Melchior Díaz's company found Cabeza de Vaca wandering through the northern regions of Mexico, Melchior had an interpreter explain to the Indians of Culiacán, which is on the Pacific coast across from the tip of Baja California, that God had sent Cabeza de Vaca to preach the news of the one true Deity. In essence Melchior Díaz summed up the *Requerimiento* of 1526 stating that those who believed and obeyed the one true God of the Christians would be saved and that the Spanish would call those Indians brothers; however, those who did not would be condemned to hell and be enslaved by the Spanish.

After realizing the truth of this threat, in that Spanish slave traders were already moving in and out of the region, the Indians agreed to become Christians, to come out of the sierras, and build houses for themselves and one for God with a cross on it.<sup>54</sup> Although Melchior Díaz and Cabeza de Vaca did not have to resort to physical force among the New Mexican Indians, the willingness of the Indians to submit to the Spanish was overshadowed by the great threat of Spanish violence. Cabeza de Vaca promised peace if the Indians welcomed Christians with a cross in the hand and not a bow, otherwise they would feel the hand of wrathful Spaniards.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Braden, *Religious Aspects*, 84-85. In Tabasco the cross symbolized the god of rain.

<sup>54</sup> Vaca, *Narrative*, 166.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

The Aztecs had felt this wrath during the invasion of Tenochtitlan when the Spaniards discovered that the Aztecs had removed the crosses that had been set up when Cortés and Motechuzoma were on friendly terms. It seems natural that the Aztecs would remove the religious objects of their enemy from their temples, but this only motivated the Spanish to destroy many of those that fought against the cross.<sup>56</sup> For years to come, Spanish outrage at Natives for not fully embracing the cross of Christ and laying aside their religion would lead to conflict.

#### 2.4 Anti-Christian Rebels versus Christian Allies

Anti-Christian movements occurred sporadically throughout the colonial period, one of the most notable being the Mixtón Insurrection of 1541-1542. Natives in Nueva Galicia, ready for revenge after harsh treatment under the *encomienda* system and inspired by a new religious movement coming from the north in which medicine men promised victory over the Spanish, attacked Christians and their symbols. The insurgents of the Mixtón insurrection understood that the power and image of Spain was intimately linked to Christianity and therefore when they entered the villages of Tlaltenango and Cuzpatlán they made it a point to burn or defile not only the monasteries and churches, but also all the crosses that had been set up in the towns.<sup>57</sup> The first Viceroy of New Spain, Antonio de Mendoza, reported that in Juchipila the rebelling Indians, “made many insults against the cross.”<sup>58</sup> It was only with the aid of thousands of Christianized Native allies that the Spanish were able to quell this rebellion.

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<sup>56</sup> Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 569 & 749.

<sup>57</sup> Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest*, 265.

<sup>58</sup> Descargos del Virrey D. Antonio de Mendoza, números 35 al 42 inclusives, del interrogatorio de la Visita del Licenciado Tello de Sandoval. Found in C. Pérez Bustamente, *Don Antonio de Mendoza, primer virrey de la Nueva España*, (Santiago de Compostela, 1928), 157: “con la cruz hizieron muchos vituperios en ella.”

Similar to the Mixtón medicine men, Native priests in other northern provinces of New Spain called on their followers to kill the Spanish and forsake their religion in favor of traditional beliefs. After decades of coexisting with Spaniards, Natives of Nueva Vizcaya had begun to adopt some of the rhetoric and symbols of Christianity. Prior to the Tepehuan Revolt of 1616, the shaman called Quautlatas began preaching to Tepehuanes, Acaxees, and Xiximes around Durango. He called himself a bishop and carried a broken cross resembling a primitive crucifix which he said represented the “son of the sun god”.<sup>59</sup> Quautlatas stated that this icon was “god on earth” and when the Spanish heard of it they referred to it as a “demon idol”.<sup>60</sup> Quautlatas stated that the cross idol promised victory and the resurrection of those that the Spanish killed in battle. Quautlatas’ cross represented not Christianity in general, but a particular source of power that could be borrowed without acceptance of the Christian God or His rites. Beyond the image itself, self-proclaimed bishop Quautlatas also borrowed the Christian cross rhetoric that through death life can be gained.

Governor Gaspar de Alvear had Quautlatas and his followers publicly whipped, but an anti-Spanish stirring had already aroused the Tepehuanes, who rose up in the latter part of 1616.<sup>61</sup> The Tepehuane victory on November 16 led to the mockery of religious rites including the parading of crosses through streets, the breaking of church crosses into pieces, and the use of crucifixes for target practice.<sup>62</sup> Besides Quautlatas’ manipulation of the cross as a source of power, the Tepehuane generally considered the cross as the symbol of the oppressor.

Another famous revolt involving the manipulation of the cross image occurred in New Mexico. Prior to the Pueblo Revolt in 1680, the friars in New Mexico sought to quell the Indians’

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<sup>59</sup> Gradie, *The Tepehuan Revolt of 1616*, 149.

<sup>60</sup> Pérez de Ribas, *Triunfos*, 3:162.

<sup>61</sup> Gradie, *The Tepehuan Revolt of 1616*, 150.

<sup>62</sup> Susan Deeds, *Defiance and Deference in Mexico’s Colonial North: Indians under Spanish Rule in Nueva Vizcaya*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 30-31.

revival of Native religious practices, specifically ritual dances. Fray Benito de la Navidad recorded that one such missionary was Fray Salvador de Guerra who "...not being able to restrain them...went through the pueblo with a cross upon his shoulders, a crown of thorns, and a rope about his neck, beating his naked body, in order that they might stop the dance."<sup>63</sup> No Spanish attempts to stop the rejuvenation of these practices worked and on August 13, 1680 a Spanish-speaking Indian leader parlayed with Governor Antonio de Otermin in Santa Fe demanding him either to withdraw his men or be killed. The Pueblo Indian reportedly said:

There was now no hope for it...the Indians who were coming with him and those whom they were awaiting were coming to destroy the villa. They were bringing two crosses, one red and the other white, so that his lordship might choose. The red signified war and the white that the Spaniards would abandon the kingdom.<sup>64</sup>

Before the Spaniards withdrew from their New Mexico settlements to El Paso, the Pueblo and their allies killed 380 of them. Of those Spaniards killed in the Pueblo Revolt, twenty-one were cross-bearing priests.<sup>65</sup>

A decade later the Spanish returned to Santa Fe and the cross played a crucial role in the unfolding events. Diego de Vargas describes in his journal the return of the Spanish into Santa Fe on December 16, 1693 as the Indians feigned obedience to the Spaniards. The Indians in the walled city, primarily Tanos and Tewas, welcomed the Spanish in and as the friars escorted by soldiers entered the city, all the inhabitants fell on their knees before a cross they had erected in the plaza. Vargas promised to Christianize them and ally with them against their Apache enemies. However, the Indian contingent was only biding its time until a battle erupted a few days later. What is interesting is Native use of the cross as bait to lull the

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<sup>63</sup> Quoted in A.L. Knaut, *The Pueblo Revolt of 1680: Conquest and Resistance in Seventeenth-century New Mexico*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 115.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth A. H. John, *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds: The Confrontation of Indians, Spanish, and French in the Southwest, 1540-1795*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 100-102.

Spaniards into their confidence. The Indians used their understanding of Spanish religious attachment to the cross as a weapon. The cross placed at the center of Santa Fe and revered by prostrations reflects the power of this Christian symbol religiously and politically as indeed the church and state relationship was not to be divided in the minds of Spaniards or Native Americans.<sup>66</sup>

In the Great Maya Revolt of 1546-47, the Maya of the Yucatán peninsula were divided among those allied with the Spanish and those trying to oust them. Both groups of Maya encountered the Christian cross and adapted it to their own understanding of history and prophecy. According to the famous prophecies of Chilam Balam discussed in the next section, foreigners would arrive bearing a symbol of power. Those Maya who received this prophecy embraced the Spanish and their cross while those rejecting them used the cross in ritualistic defiance. Doubt has been cast on the authenticity of the prophecy as too over-laden with obvious Christian interpretation, but a deeper analysis of Mayan culture and the reaction of certain Mayan groups to the cross suggest that the cross symbol may very well have been prophesied before the arrival of the Spanish.

Unlike the relatively quick conquests of the Aztec and Incan empires, the conquest of the Maya in the Yucatán, specifically in the east, never became fully accomplished during the colonial period. Although Francisco Hernández de Córdoba landed in the Yucatán peninsula in 1517, the initial conquest of the Maya did not occur until 1527.<sup>67</sup> There were three phases of conquest beginning in the late 1520s, resumed in the early 1530s, and completed in the early to mid 1540s when the Spanish obtained a limited, peripheral control of the peninsula. A major factor contributing to the Spanish difficulty in conquering the Maya was the indigenous political

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<sup>66</sup> David H. Snow, ed., *The Native American and Spanish Colonial Experience in the Greater Southwest. Spanish Borderlands Sourcebooks*, vols. 9-10. (New York: Garland Pub., 1992), 394-395.

<sup>67</sup> Matthew Restall, *Maya Conquistador*, (Beacon Press, 1998), 6-8.



fragmentation in the Yucatán. Although this factionalization allowed the Spanish to exploit intertribal rivalries, the decentralization of the Maya peoples created a problem in unifying the area under Spanish rule.<sup>68</sup> The central and eastern provinces of Cupul, Cochua, Sotuta, and Chetumal retained varying degrees of independence, and continued to harass the Spaniards.

## 2.5 Mayan Prophecy

During the last decades of the fifteenth century and perhaps into the sixteenth century, the Mayan priest Chilam Balam lived and prophesied.<sup>69</sup> One of his most famous prophecies concerned the arrival of white foreigners bearing what Spaniards interpreted as the cross symbol. Religious fervor often led to misleading Spanish translations of Indian prophecy and tradition. The Spanish, eager to justify their actions as divinely inspired, embraced the prophecy of Chilam Balam. Fray Bernardo de Lizana, writing in the early seventeenth century, recorded the prophecy in this way:

The sign of God will appear in the heights, and the Cross, with which the globe was enlightened, will be manifested to the world. There will be a division among the wills [of men] when this sign be brought forth in the future...you will see the Cross that will appear to you and will wake you up from Pole to Pole, the worship of false gods will cease, receive the barbarians of the East who come to bring the sign of God, it is the God that comes to us with gentleness and power, already the new (sign) of our life comes that you should not have fear of the world, you are the only God that created us, you are a friendly and merciful God, we praise your sign on high, we praise it to worship it and to see it, we worship the Cross in opposition to the lie which appears, against the first tree of the world...<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Anthony P. Andrews, "The Political Geography of the Sixteenth Century Yucatan Maya: Comments and Revisions" *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 40 (Winter, 1984), 589.

<sup>69</sup> *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, translated by Ralph L. Roys, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 3.

<sup>70</sup> Bernardo de Lizana, *Historia y Conquista Espiritual de Yucatán*, (Mexico, 1892), 38-39: "Vendra la señal de Dios que está en las alturas, y la Cruz se manifestará ya al mundo con la qual el orbe fue alumbrado. Avrá division entre las voluntades quando esta señal sea trayda en tiempo venidero...vereis la Cruz que se os aparecerá y os amanecerá de Polo a Polo, cessará luego el culto de vanos dioses ya vuestro guespedes, guespedes barbados del Oriente

This interpretation of the Mayan prophesy is couched in very specific European terms that are only generally represented in the books of the Chilam Balam. What can be said with certainty is that the Spaniards wanted to place the cross as the emblem of the one true God in the minds of both Native Americans and Europeans. This translation of the indigenous prophecy was not for the Maya, but for contemporary Spaniards and for all of posterity to know that God had prepared the indigenous peoples to receive the cross-bearing Europeans as divine messengers, affirming existing Spanish religious and political intentions.<sup>71</sup>

Many towns in northern Yucatán possessed books of the Chilam Balam and seem to have embraced his teachings as sagacious and prophetic. It is difficult to say exactly when the prophecy concerning the cross first appeared in the books of Chilam Balam, as Mayan prophecy often followed the “foretold” event as a way of forcing history into fatalism. Gruzinski asserts that “...the introduction of omens by the indigenous chroniclers appears to have had the effect of effacing the unforeseen from history and of the returning to what it had always been, the ineluctable fulfillment of fates.”<sup>72</sup> Most extant copies of the books of Chilam Balam date from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but earlier records show that these copies are consistent in their linguistic reproduction.<sup>73</sup> As an expert on the Chilam Balam prophecies, Ralph L. Roys argues that “To anyone who knew them only through their Spanish translations,

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que vienen a traer al señal de Dios, Dios es que nos viene manso y poderoso, ya viene la nueva de nuestra vida no teneis que temer del mundo tu eres Dios unico que nos criaste, eres Dios amigable y piadoso, ea ensalcemos su señal en alto ensalcemosla para adorarla y verla, la Cruz emos de ensalcar en oposicion de la mentira se aparece oy en contra del arbol primero del mundo,”

<sup>71</sup> Lewis Spence, *Mexico and Peru: Myths and Legends*, (London: Senate, 1994), 8.

<sup>72</sup> Gruzinski, *Man-gods in the Mexican Highlands*, 27.

<sup>73</sup> *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, translated by Ralph L. Roys, 5-6.

they would appear to be inspired by missionary propaganda; but an examination of the Maya texts leads to a conviction of their genuine character.”<sup>74</sup>

Despite “their genuine character” the question remains whether the prophesy pertaining to the cross was in the original writings of Chilam Balam or collected later as a way of justifying the Spanish arrival. Perhaps it seems farfetched that Mayan prophesy could contain a reference to the cross as a symbol of the god of foreigners, but certain facts coming from the study of Mayan culture and Spanish accounts may help explain the authenticity of this image in these writings. There are at least three arguments for this possibility. The first is linguistic as the Maya word in the prophesy is “tree” or “wood”, hearkening to the symbolic Mayan “World Tree” which is represented by what Spaniards would perceive as the cross. The second argument is the existence of pre-Hispanic crosses, both in painted and relief form, some of which may have been based on the prophesy. The last argument pertains to the alliances established between Spaniards and those Maya who received the prophesy and quickly embraced the cross.

In his 1566 *Relación*, Diego de Landa stated that one of the revered Mayan Chilams of Maní, “announced to them publicly that they would soon be subjected by a foreign race, and that they would preach to them one God and the power of a tree, which in their language is called ‘uahom che,’ which means ‘a tree erected with great virtue against the evil spirit.’”<sup>75</sup> Landa, unlike other Spanish authors, translates the powerful symbol of the prophesy as a tree. Although most Spanish interpretations of the prophesy refer to the Christian cross instead of “the power of a tree”, when the Maya text uses such terminology as “tree” or “wood” it may be referring to the cosmological symbol of the cross image.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 185-186.

<sup>75</sup> Diego de Landa, *Relación de Las Cosas de Yucatan*, Edited by Alfred M. Tozzer, (New York: Kraus Reprint, 1966), 42-43.

The Maya believed that the universe was divided into three layers - heaven, earth, and the underworld, also called Xibalba - all of which were interrelated. The universe was depicted as a "World Tree" whose center axis, called *Wacah Chan*, coexisted in all three vertical domains. A horizontal cross-bar represented the earth which divided heaven from the underworld. The Maya believed that the center axis was materialized in the king himself whose outstretched hands formed a cross figure.<sup>76</sup> The king wore ceremonial dress that figured him as the "World Tree", as he was the vertical axis made flesh that penetrated all three layers of the universe.<sup>77</sup>

On the sarcophagus lid of Pacal, a Mayan ruler of Palenque in the seventh century AD, a relief depicts Pacal being drawn into the underworld and a cross-shaped tree growing out of his body (fig. 1).<sup>78</sup> On this ritual coffin, the Maya portrayed the "World Tree" as intersecting wooden beams which constitute what westerners consider the cross. The Mayan king depicted plays a crucial role in this cosmic relief as life springs up out of his death. In the image, Pacal is accompanied on his decent by a half-skeletal monster head carrying a bowl of sacrifice marked with the carved symbolic figure of the sun. This solar glyph is meant to emphasize the belief that, like the sun, Pacal would rise again in the east after his sojourn through Xibalba, cheating death of full victory.<sup>79</sup> It is easy to see how Spanish missionaries, eager to elucidate Christianity, could use this indigenous image of the power associated with the cross symbol to

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<sup>76</sup> David Friedel and Linda Schele, *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya*, (New York: Quill/W. Morrow, 1992), 66-67.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>78</sup> J.B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., *The History of Cartography*. Vols. I-II, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987-1992), vol. II, book 3, 237.

<sup>79</sup> Friedel and Schele, *A Forest of Kings*, 225-226.



Figure 1. Pacal's sarcophagus lid, 6x10 ft., (Temple of Inscriptions, Palenque, Mexico, seventh century AD)

explain Christ's decent into hell, the underworld, and his resurrection, the new life that grows out of his body and blood.<sup>80</sup>

Other translations of the prophecy do not use the word "tree", but some wooden form that also ties into the concept of the "World Tree". The Tizimin book of Chilam Balam recorded that white people with red beards "manifested the white God standing on the tall pole."<sup>81</sup> Another interpretation refers to the symbol of power as "the white wooden standard that shall descend from heaven."<sup>82</sup> According to the Maya understanding of creation, four trees upheld the world. One of these trees, noted as a "pillar of the sky" was "the white tree of abundance in the north" which, like the other trees, was "a sign of the destruction of the world."<sup>83</sup>

Because the image of the "World Tree", in essence the cross symbol, was already ingrained in Mayan religious thought, there is no reason to doubt that this image could be the one referred to in Chilam Balam's prophecy. This symbol held a connection to the east because both the king who traveled the cross-like "World Tree" was to be resurrected, and the prophesy's bearded foreigners were to appear in the direction of the rising sun. Because the Maya most commonly portrayed the "World Tree" as an intersection of two lines forming 90 degree angles, when their prophesy speaks of a powerful tree symbol, the best assumption is that the Maya envisioned a cross-like image.

There is no question that variations of the cross symbol existed among the Maya before the Spanish arrival. The Spanish did not expect to find the cross symbol among those

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<sup>80</sup> Although Pacal's tomb was not discovered by westerners until the twentieth century it represents a general understanding in Mayan culture on which the Spaniards could have based explanations.

<sup>81</sup> *The Ancient Future of the Itza: The Book of Chilam Balam of Tizimin*, Translated by Munro S. Edmonson, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 55.

<sup>82</sup> *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, translated by Ralph L. Roys, 148-149.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

whom they considered pagans. During the 1518 Grijalva expedition in Cozumel, the Spanish found “in the Midst of it [the temple courtyard] a Cross of white Lime three Yards high, which they held to be the God of Rain...Crosses after the same manner, and painted, were found in other Parts of the Island, and many in Yucatan.”<sup>84</sup> In preparation for Cortés’ venture to the mainland, Diego Velázquez, governor of Cuba, instructed him that “It has been said that crosses have been found in that country. Their significance must be ascertained. The religion of the natives, if they have one, must again be studied and a detailed account of it made.”<sup>85</sup> Later that year in Campeche, Bernal Díaz stated, “There were many painted idols and bas-reliefs of serpents on the walls...and we saw there a kind of cross, painted on the Indian statues.”<sup>86</sup> The Spanish continued to find symbols resembling the cross amongst the Maya, specifically in relief form, which predated not only the Spanish, but also the Chilam Balam prophecies.

Diego López de Cogolludo, a late seventeenth-century Spanish author, states that in the Chilam Balam prophecy, the sign of the cross is delineated and that this prophecy encouraged the placing of stone crosses in the temple patios. Cogolludo also states that many people came to see and venerate these stone crosses, which meant that the cross image was fresh in their minds prior to the Spanish arrival.<sup>87</sup> Cogolludo’s writing, nearly two hundred years removed from the events he described, is based on Spanish interpretations. It is hard to discern whether or not the Maya built crosses in direct relation to the prophecy, but it is a fact

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<sup>84</sup> Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, *The general history of the vast continent and islands of America, commonly call'd, the West-Indies, from the first discovery thereof: ...* (London, 1725-26), II: 121.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest*, 16.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe*, 153.

<sup>87</sup> Diego Lopez Cogolludo, *Historia de Yucatán*, (Campeche: Comision de Historia, 1954), I: 355.

that crosses existed prior to the Spanish arrival and they were integrated into the religious fabric of society. Because the “World Tree” image was so pervasive among the Maya it is not unlikely that certain cross carvings and paintings were a recent response to the prophecy when the Spanish arrived to see the Maya reverencing them.

Upon adelantado Francisco de Montejo’s first encounter into the Yucatán, specifically in Maní province, the Spaniards saw the Natives reverencing the cross.<sup>88</sup> Spanish accounts state that the Maní never waged war against the Spaniards. It was among the Maní that Chilam Balam who “they considered a great prophet and soothsayer” lived prior to the arrival of the Spanish. Reportedly he told them that “within a short time a white and bearded race would come from where the sun rises and that they would bear on high a sign that looks like this + which their gods could not approach and before which they would flee.” The lord of the Maní, Mochan Xiu, had the sign of the cross fashioned out of stone and placed in the courtyards of the temples. He said that it was “the green tree of the world” and many people worshiped this symbol.<sup>89</sup>

In 1541 Montejo officially received fealty from the Maní and, although it was January, he celebrated the news with the Good Friday ceremony of the Adoration of the Cross. This sheds light on how crucial the cross symbol was in securing the Maní as allies. The Spanish could easily have celebrated the traditional liturgy for that January day, but instead they chose to celebrate one of the most powerful services in the Christian calendar months in advance of its traditional date. As the title of the church service suggests, the entire liturgy focused both in word and image on that symbol prophesied to the Maní decades before.

In this ceremony the priest held up a crucifix in one hand and a piece of the true cross in the other and chanted, with great majesty, in Latin: “Behold the wood of the Cross!” and then in Spanish: “I have here the holy wood of the Cross!” At this the soldiers knelt together and

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., I: 356.

<sup>89</sup> Landa, *Relación*, 42.



chanted in unison: “On that does the salvation of the world depend. Come let us adore.”<sup>90</sup> They performed this ritual three times. Towards the end of the service all the Spanish, led by Montejo, approached the priest, prostrated themselves three times, and kissed the cross. Accordingly, the lord of the Maní, Tutul Xiu, knelt before the cross and kissed it in imitation of the Spanish.<sup>91</sup>

From the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries the league of the Mayapán, including the Maní, united the northern and western provinces of the peninsula. The eastern and southern provinces ruled themselves in separate polities, specifically the Sotuta and the Cupul whose animosity developed against the neighboring Maní.<sup>92</sup> There existed an “ancient hatred” of the Cocoms of Sotuta against the Maní, which helps explain the rejection of their prophet Chilam Balam.<sup>93</sup> This enmity deepened in the 1530s when the Cocoms, upset with the peaceful acceptance of the Spanish by the Maní, slaughtered more than forty Maní nobles, including their lord.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Crescencio Carrillo y Ancona, *El Obispado de Yucatan: Historia de su Fundacion y de sus Obispos desde el Siglo XVI hasta el XIX, Seguida de las Constituciones Sinodales de la Diócesis y Otros Documentos Relativos*, (Fondo Editorial de Yucatán, 1979-1981), I: 88-89 – “!Ecce Lignum Crucis! !He aquí el santo leno de la Cruz!...In quo salus mundi pependi: Del cual pende la salud del mundo. Venite adoremus.”

<sup>91</sup> Carrillo y Ancona, *El Obispado de Yucatan*, I: 90.

<sup>92</sup> Andrews, “The Political Geography of the Sixteenth Century Yucatan Maya”, 589.

<sup>93</sup> Landa, *Relación*, 56. In the *Relación of Teav* (Teabo) “the said province of Mani was always at war with that of Cotuta with a lord of the ancient people of this land called Na Chi Cocom on account of the longstanding enmity which the said Cocoms had against the Tutul Xius saying that he Cocoms were ‘natural lords’ and the Tutul Xius, foreigners.” (*Relaciones de Yucatán*, I: 288-9)

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

In allying with the Spanish, the Maní may simply have been accepting their fate or possibly enjoying revenge on their old rivals. However, there does seem to be an affirmation of the prophecy's authenticity as those provinces that received the words of Chilam Balam also embraced the Spaniards and their cross as a symbol of political and religious alliance. It is debatable that the Maní, along with other Mayans, allied themselves against a common enemy, the Sotuta and Cupul, and the prophecy was written as an affirmation of their allegiance with the Spanish. However, it is also possible that it was because of the important role that prophecy played in Mayan culture that the apparent Spanish fulfillment of the prophecy as bearers of the cross-symbol led to an alliance.

## 2.6 Great Maya Revolt of 1546-47

Although the Spanish officially controlled the Yucatán by 1546, various Maya nations united in the idea that they could oust the Spanish from the peninsula. There was no gold to draw the Spanish to the Yucatán, so those who settled the area contented themselves with slowly developing agriculture and trading raw materials like salt, honey, cacao, cloth, and wax. The *encomienda* system empowered the Spanish to exploit Native labor and, even with the passage of the New Laws of the Indies in 1542 which were meant to protect Natives from abuses, the independent-minded Maya had no stomach for this kind of submission. The belief that the Maya could be victorious was encouraged by the fact that Mayan warriors had driven the Spanish out of Ciudad Real de Chichén Itzá in the province of Cupul in the 1530s.

Religion is key to understanding the Great Maya Revolt of 1546-47. When the Franciscans began evangelizing the Yucatán in 1535, the Maya saw the progress of the order as a threat to their traditional belief system. The Yucatán peninsula was on the periphery of Spanish control affording the Maya a longer span of independence and struggle. The political intrusion of the Spanish did not disrupt Mayan society to the extent that the missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church threatened to do. The Spanish administration allowed the Maya elites the opportunity to remain in a position of authority and adhere to a syncretic religion which on the surface was Christian, but covertly maintained Mayan tradition. The Maya were willing and

expecting to accept the God of the Christians as they were powerful and so must their God be, but to ask them to get rid of their pantheon of gods and religious rites was paramount to suicide. Mayan belief taught that there was a delicate balance in the universe, a sacred umbilical cord connecting mankind with the gods. The Christianity forced on the Maya posed a great danger to their culture, yet on some levels the two religions seemed compatible.

When Maya decided that a certain group within reach of their community, whether Maya or foreign, had overstepped its bounds, the usual response was a war of eradication which included the sacking of cities and the ritual killing of captives.<sup>95</sup> The Spaniards had been pushed from the eastern Yucatán twice before and had failed to get the message that they were unwelcome. The third and hopefully final response against them had to be one of eradication because of their great atrocities. The Maya who led this insurrection assumed that Spanish influence had to be obliterated at its very roots, which included the rites and symbols of Christianity.

The heart of the resistance movement was in the province of Cupul, but neighboring Maya provinces, including the Chakan, Cocom of Sotuta, Cochua, and Chetumal, willingly banded together against Spanish domination.<sup>96</sup> Similar to the religious movement amongst the Mixtón five years earlier, the Cupul priests held themselves to be divine and preached a holy war. Montejo wrote “[the Indians rose] because of some Chilams, whom they call gods among

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<sup>95</sup> The cities of Chichen Itza and Mayapan participated in and themselves were sacked and their captives ritually killed. The concept of sacking and ritual killing extended beyond the Maya world to other parts of Mesoamerica. For evidence of ritual killing in the archaeological record see Jonathon B. Pagliaro, James F. Garber, and Travis W. Stanton, “Evaluating the Archaeological Signatures of Maya Ritual and Conflict,” in *Ancient Mesoamerican Warfare*, (Roman Altamira, 2003), 75-89.

<sup>96</sup> Landa, *Relación*, 256.

themselves...[These] Chilams told the people that they should let the Spaniards go to the pueblos of their *encomiendas*, and that they should [then] kill all of them.”<sup>97</sup>

While the Maya conspired to oust the Spanish, they feigned submission and obedience. On the night of November 8-9, 1546, the Maya of Cupul moved in on various *encomenderos* and their families in the district of Valladolid, killing or capturing men, women, and children. The captives suffered various forms of torture leading to death. The killing also extended to those Maya who willingly served the Spanish or had accepted Christianity.<sup>98</sup> At least 600 Maya were killed and sacrificed because they had been serving the Spaniards as laborers or had collaborated with them.<sup>99</sup>

On that night of November 8-9, 1546 two young brothers, Juan and Diego Cansino, were the first Spaniards to feel the wrath of the Maya during this uprising. They lived in Chemax, a pueblo east of Valladolid in Cupul province.<sup>100</sup> The Maya easily captured them as the Spaniards there were unaware of the impending insurrection. The Maya could have quickly killed the two boys, but they opted to use them as an example. They were the sons of a conquistador, Diego Cansino, who had participated in the subjugation of the Maya. The Cupul's hatred of the Spanish and their ways became apparent in the form of execution. They suspended the brothers on two crosses that had been prepared and then shot them with arrows so as not to kill them too rapidly. After the boys' slow death, the Maya cut them down,

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Robert Chamberlain, *The Conquest and Colonization of Yucatan, 1517-1550*, (New York, Octagon Books, 1966), 239. Also Matthew Restall, *Maya Conquistador*, 14.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>99</sup> Peter Gerhard, *The Southeast Frontier of New Spain*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 136.

<sup>100</sup> Andrews, “The Political Geography of the Sixteenth Century Yucatan Maya”, 593.

dismembered them, and sent the parts of their bodies to various places as a sign of their vengeance and to inspire more executions.<sup>101</sup>

Over the next few decades, official documents often repeated the story of these two boys who came to represent Spanish suffering at the hands of pagan Natives. By the time the Franciscan chronicler Diego López Cogolludo described the incident in his seventeenth-century history, the boys' story had become hagiography. Cogolludo stressed Mayan hatred for the Spaniards as evidenced by the protracted deaths of the youths, who the insurgents placed on two crosses and shot them with arrows "little by little." Cogolludo wrote that the boys "preached to them from the crosses, that they should remain in the obedience that they had given to the king and promised to have to the church. The result they received was to hear blasphemies."<sup>102</sup>

Prolonged death and torture typified captive sacrifice, as these methods produced more blood, which was the more important gift to the gods than the actual life of the victim. Although the Spanish stressed the animosity of the Mayas in the sacrifice of the Cansino boys, the Maya would have viewed their sacrifice as particularly pleasing to their gods. The methods employed in the sacrifice of the Cansino boys, including arrow sacrifice and dismemberment, were typical, but the use of the cross became a new feature.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Diego López Cogolludo, "Rebelión de los indígenas del oriente de la provincia de Merida de Yucatán, 1546" *Rebeliones indígenas de la época colonial*, edited by Ma. Teresa Huerta and Patricia Palacios, (Mexico D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1976), 56-57.

<sup>102</sup> Diego Lopez Cogolludo, *Historia de Yucatán*, 3 vols, (Campeche: Comision de Historia, 1955), II: 19; "les predicaban desde las cruces, permaneciesen en la obediencia que habían dado el rey, y prometido tener a la iglesia. El fruto que cogian, era oír blasfemias."

<sup>103</sup> Robert Sharer, *The Ancient Maya*, 6th Edition (Stanford University Press, 2005), 543-46.

The rebelling Maya specifically chose to crucify Juan and Diego Cansino rather than use other more traditional forms of execution, such as stretching them upon a stone and removing their hearts with an obsidian knife. The Maya, resentful for the destruction of their idols and the submission forced on them by the Spanish, used the symbol of the cross as an image of their resistance. The eastern Maya appropriated this powerful religious icon and through these crucifixions demonstrated their animosity toward Christianity.

By March 1547 the Spanish and their Mayan allies, specifically the Maní, had subdued the revolt in the major insurgent provinces.<sup>104</sup> The Spanish-Maní alliance assisted greatly in the conquest of the insurgents. Once they suppressed the rebellion, the Spanish tried most of the prominent leaders of the revolt and executed them.<sup>105</sup>

## 2.7 Consequences of the Great Maya Revolt

After the revolt was crushed, the Franciscans were able to systematically attempt the conversion of the Maya through the establishment of *conventos* and schools. Reportedly 28,000 Maya were baptized in the gulf coast provinces, which had allied with the Spanish during the revolt. In these schools for the sons of Mayan lords, Franciscans inundated the pupils with Christian teaching through texts and catechisms.<sup>106</sup> In his description of these schools, the nineteenth-century author Juan Francisco Molina Solís states that “Every day after sunrise the older persons left the church carrying in their hands a small cross, raised like a standard, and went to their respective districts. Passing from house to house, they called the

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<sup>104</sup> Landa, *Relación*, 256.

<sup>105</sup> It is of interest to note that the Spanish did not use crucifixion as a means of execution. Since Constantine I in the fourth century, the Spanish had not executed criminals on a cross because it was a religious symbol representing Christian martyrdom and not appropriate for the execution of heathen.

<sup>106</sup> Chamberlain, *The Conquest and Colonization of Yucatan*, 314.

children...forming them into a procession."<sup>107</sup> In this way Mayan youth had to accept the cross symbol as an image of Spanish religious and political authority, but it is possible that this tension was not as great for those who had accepted the prophecy of cross-bearing foreigners.

However, among the Maya of the eastern provinces, the missionaries did not reap similar results. Although there would not be a major uprising among these Maya for several generations, their will to resist continued after 1547. The resistance that did persist among the eastern Maya took the form of ritual crucifixion. Typical human sacrificial techniques among the Maya often included the removal of the victim's heart while stretched upon a stone, arrow sacrifice, or flaying the victim. Seeing the Spaniard's emphasis on the cross symbol, eastern Mayan groups adapted crucifixion as another means of sacrifice. Often the victim was tied or nailed to a wooden cross, their heart removed, and the victim along with the cross weighted with stones and hurled into a revered pit of water called a cenote.<sup>108</sup>

In 1562 investigations conducted in the Yucatán under the supervision of Fray Diego de Landa, discovered that Natives were performing gruesome practices commingling Christian and Mayan beliefs.<sup>109</sup> Landa recorded a statement involving the sacrifice of two girls on crosses because they claimed Christ as Lord. Reportedly the Maya executioners, who were Juan and Lorenzo Cocom of Sotuta, traditional enemies of the Maní, stated that "These girls die on the cross just as Jesus Christ died, of whom they say he was Our Lord, but we do not know if he was."<sup>110</sup> After the crucifixion they cut the girls down, cut out their hearts offering them to the gods, and threw the bodies into a cenote.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>108</sup> Landa, *Relación*, 115.

<sup>109</sup> Nancy Farris, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival*, (Princeton, N.J.: University Press, 1984), 291.

<sup>110</sup> *Don Diego Quijada Alcade Mayor de Yucatan, 1561-1565*, Edited by France V. Scholes and Eleanor B. Adams, (México, Antigua librería Robredo, de J. Porrúa e hijos, 1938),

These specific crosses were adopted as ritual instruments of the Mayan ancient tradition against Christians. The executioners guarded the two crosses and not long after used them again in the sacrifices of two other girls. According to the schoolboy informant, Antonio Pech, the crosses continued to be used to sacrifice pairs of girls at least two more times.<sup>111</sup> Another schoolboy, Francisco Canche, confirms Pech's story saying that while the girls were on the cross, Juan Cime said "See here the figure of Jesus Christ."<sup>112</sup> Canche also states that the crosses were kept in the house of Lorenzo Cocom to be used later.<sup>113</sup>

Also in 1562, Pedro Huhul of Kanchunup confessed that he witnessed the crucifixion of two boys. They took these boys one at a time to nail their hands and tie their feet to a large cross made for the purpose. After removing their hearts while still on the cross "the *al-kines* gave a sermon telling them that it (the crucifixion) was good and what they must do, and that through adoring those gods they would be saved, and that they should not believe what the friars were saying to them."<sup>114</sup>

These confessions were taken during an inquisition campaign in the Yucatán when Landa was trying to flush out all idolatry. Many of these confessions may have been forced, throwing doubt on their authenticity. However, so many accounts described crucifixion and the methods in which they were carried out resembled too closely the traditional Mayan sacrifices. Therefore, the essence of these confessions should be believed. That certain Maya groups, specifically the Cupul and Sotuta, were practicing ritualized crucifixions as early as the 1550s is

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I: 78; "Mueran estas muchachas puestas en la cruz como murió Jesucristo, el cual dicen que era Nuestro Señor, mas no sabemos nosotros si lo era."

<sup>111</sup> *Don Diego Quijada Alcade Mayor de Yucatan*, I: 78-79.

<sup>112</sup> Inga Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 206.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.



documented in the confessions of 1562. Perhaps they had been performing such rites since the first two Spaniards were crucified in 1546.

Other records earlier than 1562 indicate that other Natives performed similar abuses of the Christian cross. On September 3, 1553, Fray Tomás de Casillas described the hostilities of the Lacandones and their allies against Christianity in the province of Chiapas: “They killed and they captured many people, and the children they sacrificed on the altars, and they removed the hearts and with the blood they greased the images that were in the church, and that at the foot of the Cross they sacrificed others.”<sup>115</sup>

Although there is no evidence that the Maya practiced crucifixion as a form of sacrifice before the arrival of the Spanish, the Dresden Codex does portray the “World Tree” cross in association with ritual killing. In a scene from this codex, a naked man is depicted, mouth agape and bound hand and foot. He is laid out on his back as the cross-like image of renewal emerges from his body.<sup>116</sup> The Dresden Codex is believed to have been written as early as the thirteenth century and associated with the Maya in Chichén Itzá, the very region that rebelled and practiced ritualized crucifixions during and after the Great Maya Revolt.

Although the Maya did not always use the Christian cross as directed by the Spanish, it is significant that they embraced it. There had been a spiritual exchange, or rather integration,

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<sup>115</sup> Miguel Othón de Mendizábal. “Rebelión de los lacandones, 1553-1556” *Rebeliones indígenas de la época colonial*, edited by Ma. Teresa Huerta and Patricia Palacios. (Mexico D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1976), 83: “mataron y cautivaron mucha gente, y que de los niños sacrificaron sobre los altars, y les sacaron los corazones y con la sangre untaron las imágenes que estaban en la iglesia, y que al pie de la Cruz sacrificaron otros: y que hecho esto a voz alta comenzaron a decir y pregonar. Cristianos decid a vuestro Dios que os defienda. Y quemaron la iglesia.” (see also Remesal, 595-596).

<sup>116</sup> *The Dresden Codex*, Reproduced by William Gates, (Baltimore: The Maya Society at the Johns Hopkins University, 1932), 3.

as Mayan prophecy collided with Christian evangelization and conquest. The durability of Mayan culture was possible only through creative adaptation in which their collective approach to survival continued to sustain their cosmic and social order, but under new guises more acceptable to their colonial masters.<sup>117</sup> Inga Clendinnen states that “the ‘crucifixion’ stories too are in a sense a compliment, if a perverse one, to the friars’ teachings, implying as they do that the symbol of the Cross had bitten deep into the Maya imagination.”<sup>118</sup>

Interaction with the Spanish redefined the meaning of the cross symbol. Prior to the Spanish arrival, the cross had been a symbol associated with the god of rain, the “World Tree”, and the cosmic directions of the universe. For the Maní it became a fulfillment of prophecy, a symbol of alliance with the powerful white foreigners prophesied by Chilam Balam. For the Cupul and Sotuta, it became a symbol of repression that could be manipulated in defiance of foreign invaders.

In 1562, the first resident bishop of Yucatán, Francisco Toral, ordered wooden crosses erected in all the pueblos and major points along the roads. The Natives were required to prostrate themselves before these crosses each time they passed one in order to teach them reverence.<sup>119</sup> It can be assumed that for some of the Maya these crosses were images of repression, but for others the fulfillment of prophecy.

## 2.8 Conclusion

The symbol of the cross acted as a point of departure for the first encounters between Native and Spaniard. The Spanish confronted each indigenous group they met with the cross, forcing them into a decision of acceptance or rejection. Those Natives that came under

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<sup>117</sup> See Nancy Farris’ arguments in *Maya Society under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival*, (Princeton, N.J.: University Press, 1984).

<sup>118</sup> Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, 122.

<sup>119</sup> Don E. Dumond, *The Machete and the Cross: Campesino Rebellion in Yucatan*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 18.

Spanish control, whether willingly or unwillingly, proceeded through a liminal process which included, among other things, the destruction of their images and challenges to their belief systems. The results of this intrusion became diverse as the struggle against different religious structures left the people in a state of uncertainty. Despite the religious significance of the cross symbol for Spaniards and even Natives prior to contact, this image figured intimately in the political alliances that were made by the leaders of the *entradas* into the American mainland as well as the major indigenous rebellions that occurred during the colonial period.

The liminality of the colonial period produced a new people, a fusion of Spaniard and Native, which later found its new expression in throwing off the status of colony for that of nation. Their collective experience, specifically in relation to the cross, aided in the unification of different peoples making this novel enterprise possible. What effectively happened in the colonial period was a transitioning of multiple indigenous people-groups with foreign influence from a divergent nonentity into a more politically, linguistically, and, what is more important for this study, religiously unified body. That is not to say that variances of colloquial language and culture did not exist nor that post-colonial times were any less climactic or transitional: but that the resulting people of Mexico in the early nineteenth century was neither fully Spanish nor indigenous but somewhere in between and that this in part relates to the cross image as a powerful symbol of political alliance and Hispanic hegemony.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE CROSS AT WAR

Catholics who have girded themselves with the cross for the extermination of the heretics, shall enjoy the indulgences and privileges granted to those who go in defense of the Holy Land.<sup>120</sup>

Fourth Lateran Council (1215)

The cross was used in a variety of ways throughout the history of Christian Europe and its incursions into other parts of the world. However, the traditions pertaining to the cross that developed during the crusades of the eleventh-thirteenth centuries carried on throughout the *reconquista* in Iberia. The crusading mentality, tied so closely to the image of the cross, guided the systems and customs of Spanish conquest in Mexico. This precedent in medieval European warfare not only revealed itself in open combat against the heathen, whether Muslim or Aztec, but also against those, like the Jews or Maya, who tried to live a Christian life on the surface, but inwardly held to traditional beliefs. The image of the cross was tied to the Inquisition not only in its use in ceremonies, but also in its files of accusations. Disrespecting, striking, or ridiculing the cross brought on the wrath of inquisitors who sought to cleanse the daily practices of all within their reach.

#### 3.1 Crusading Mentality

Crucial to the crusading mentality was the belief in the imminent return of Christ. Medieval mystics fully embraced the book of the Apocalypse which outlined the end of the world and the beginning of a millennial kingdom. However, for the apocalyptic presages to be made manifest, Scripture, according to medieval interpretation, would have to be fulfilled. This

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<sup>120</sup> Fourth Lateran Council (1215), Canon 3: Translation from H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*, (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937), 236-296.

interpretation led to the belief in two major goals to satisfy the gospel and the medieval mind. The words of Christ to “make disciples of all the nations,” and the delivery of Jerusalem from the unbelievers must be accomplished before Christ returned.<sup>121</sup>

For Spaniards the cross encompassed both religious and political symbolism as it held its place in the churches and on the battlefields. The cross was a symbol of God accompanying Christians into battle when that war was deemed just and holy by the Church. Pope Urban II’s 1095 speech at Clermont reveals that the crusader’s vow should be shown visibly as a cross sewed onto the crusader’s clothing. By the mid-twelfth century “taking the cross” became a liturgical rite. Initially there was little distinction between the vows of a pilgrim and that of a crusader as the rite of taking the cross developed out of the ceremony of the blessing of purse

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<sup>121</sup> Florescoano, *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico*, 82; John Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*, (University of California Press, 1970), 21; *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 28:19.

and staff, the symbols of pilgrimage.<sup>122</sup> Upon taking his crusading vows, the crusader would proclaim: *Cruciatum sum cum signo crucis* (I have been crucified with the sign of the cross).<sup>123</sup>

Urban II embedded the phrase “to take the cross” in his speech as he quoted the words of Christ that, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”<sup>124</sup> After the Third Crusade (1189-1192), a Christian warrior bent on reclaiming land presently controlled by Muslims officially began to be referred to as *cruce signati*, that is to say

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<sup>122</sup> James A. Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 118-120. Brundage describes the earliest extent rites for taking the cross, the ceremony included a blessing upon the crusader’s *crucis signum*. The cross was given to the crusader with the words *Suscipe...crucis insignante* (Brundage, “A Note on Attestation of Crusaders’ Vows” *Catholic Historical Review*, 61 (1966): 305). Pilgrims and crusaders who wore the cross in medieval Europe were entitled to certain legal rights and privileges that con artists used to their advantage wandering through villages, wearing the cross, and begging alms for the supposed trip to the Holy Land (Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law*, 121).

<sup>123</sup> Joseph F. O’Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 87. Baptism is the traditional symbol of a Christian’s death and resurrection with Christ. St. Paul, *Letter to the Romans*, 6: 3-9.

<sup>124</sup> Edward Peters, ed., *The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 26. This dictum of Christ is recorded in three of the four gospels: Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, and Luke 9:23.

“the one signed with the cross”.<sup>125</sup> At the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, Pope Innocent III summoned a crusade and used the term *crucesignatus* frequently.<sup>126</sup>

To take the cross implied that that Christian ought to willingly imitate Christ in the form of utter devotion and sacrifice. St. Paul argued that as a Christian he could boast “in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” because it was the symbol of both life and death. Just as on the cross Christ’s death brought life to the world, a Christian’s taking up the cross symbolized a break with the sinful world and his new life in Christ.<sup>127</sup> Pope Urban II sought to empower his listeners with the confidence that “to bear the cross after Him”, that is to find life in Christ, meant, “to take up the way to the Holy Sepulcher”, that is to put to death Muslims.<sup>128</sup>

The jump from Christ to Urban II is a thousand years of Church history which includes the realization of Islam as a growing religious and political force from the early seventh century. A crucial factor in understanding the crusading mentality is the development of the just war theory first accredited to Augustine of Hippo and continually developed by theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, throughout the medieval period.<sup>129</sup> The argument that in a Christian world there would be no war and that any shedding of blood should produce tears and not shouts of joy resounds in Augustine and Aquinas. Augustine theorized that war was acceptable only under certain conditions. He argued that war must occur for a good and just purpose rather than for self-gain or as an exercise of power, that just war must be waged by a properly instituted authority, such as the state, and lastly that love must be a central motive even in the midst of violence.

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<sup>125</sup> O’Callaghan, *Reconquest*, 180.

<sup>126</sup> Michael Markowski, “Crucesignatus: Its Origins and Early Usage,” *Journal of Medieval History* 10 (1984), 158.

<sup>127</sup> St. Paul, *Letter to the Galatians*, 6:14.

<sup>128</sup> Peters, *The First Crusade*, 26.

<sup>129</sup> See St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIX and St. Thomas Aquinas, “On War”.

Over time, the cross evolved from a strictly religious symbol of “the power of God” for salvation to a political image of the power of a united European Christendom for the slaughter of nonbelievers.<sup>130</sup> The Emperor Constantine was the first to politicize the image of the cross. His victory at the battle of Milvian Bridge in 312 AD was the first recorded use of the cross in battle for political gain. Constantine’s *Edict of Milan* (313) allowed Christianity to openly grow throughout the Roman Empire. A century later, the empire stood on the brink of collapse as Augustine penned *The City of God* in which he developed the just war theory. Six centuries later the Latin Church, bent on the political goal of reuniting Constantine’s empire, reinterpreted Augustine’s text to justify the Crusades. Constantine’s victory and Augustine’s justifications initiated the rationalization not only of Christian warfare, but the use of the cross as a symbol in war.

Crusading sermons were common in medieval Europe and the religious community created model homilies centered on the cross that could be used and molded by the preacher in a specific locale. What the cross could symbolize to the Christian warrior is exemplified in Humbert of Romans’ thirteenth-century paradigm. Humbert argues that three aspects of the cross should both motivate and encourage Christians against their Muslim foes. Humbert contends that the symbol of the cross is a sign “...that they take up this war for the faith of the Crucified...that they are soldiers of the Crucified carrying his sign, and...that the large indulgence which is granted them is taken entirely from the treasure of Christ’s passion, which was fulfilled upon the cross.”<sup>131</sup> With this understanding, the Christian soldier marched into battle under the sign of the cross not merely as a contemporary symbol of Christendom, but as a confirmation of Christ’s past victory and the Christian’s future reward.

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<sup>130</sup> St. Paul, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 1:18.

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Christoph T. Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology: Model Sermons for the Preaching of the Cross*, (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), 217.



The blending of martial and religious feelings infiltrated European culture to the extent that prayers developed using the symbolism of the cross to invoke both courage and outrage against pagan foes. Christians often referred to Muslims as *inimici cruces Christi* (enemies of the cross of Christ) emphasizing Muslim antagonism not only against Christians, but against their salvific image.<sup>132</sup> In the thirteenth-century *Ceremonial of Cardena*, prayers are contained that are to be read during military campaigns against the Muslims. One of the final appeals reads “Grant that, by the power of your name and the most victorious Cross, the people of the Moors, who everywhere always humiliate it, may powerfully be conquered.”<sup>133</sup> This is in stark contrast to Augustine’s fifth century writing: “For even when we wage a just war, our adversaries must be sinning; and every victory, even though gained by wicked men, is a result of the first judgment of God, who humbles the vanquished either for the sake of removing or of punishing their sins.”<sup>134</sup> Whereas Augustine sought a war that would punish sins and produce salvation, the medieval crusading mentality exacted only the understanding that those that are not Christian are to be subdued or annihilated.

### 3.2 *Reconquista* as Crusade

Crusaders of the Middle Ages not only headed east towards Jerusalem, but south toward Córdoba where Muslims controlled the southern part of the Iberian peninsula. Muslim invaders from North Africa had routed King Rodrigo, “last of the Goths” in 711 securing most of the Iberian peninsula under Muslim control. Spanish Christians eventually united behind king Pelayo (719-737) who defeated the Muslims at Covadonga securing the Christian kingdom of Asturias and inspiring hope for those looking for the *salus Spanie*.

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<sup>132</sup> St. Paul used this phrase in his *Letter to the Philippians*: Philippians 3:18.

<sup>133</sup> Quoted in O’Callaghan, *Reconquest*, 186.

<sup>134</sup> Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 694. This quote comes from Book XIX, Chapter 15.

The *reconquista* was an ongoing process over several centuries with the ultimate goal of Christian rule in the Iberian peninsula. However, not every campaign of the *reconquista* was a crusade. The *reconquista* evolved from a religious/political war in Iberia, in which Christians and Muslims fought over who would rule the peninsula, to a crusade with papal commission, specifically from Alexander II (1062-1073) and Gregory VII (1073-1085), and crusading alliances with other Christian kingdoms, specifically France. Although Pope Alexander II proclaimed an indulgence to Iberian Christians who fought against Muslims in Spain in 1063, the *reconquista* was not officially considered part of the crusading movement until after the First Lateran Council in 1123.<sup>135</sup>

The First Lateran Council of 1123 stated that those who had placed the cross on their clothing should keep their vows in either the Holy Land or Spain.<sup>136</sup> In “Crucesignatus: Its Origins and Early Usage” Michael Markowski argues that initially the warriors who fought against the Muslims in Spain were not designated *crucesignatus* (those signed with the cross. i.e. crusaders), but later popes did extend this name to *reconquista* soldiers. Although some popes, like Innocent III (c.1161-1216), supported the *reconquista* they avoided crusading terminology (*cruce* and *signari*) and instead used the phrase *Saracenorum Guerra*. However, earlier popes, such as Calixtus II and Innocent II, established precedents which offered the option of the Holy Land or Spain as locations to fulfill crusading vows. Thus the term *crucesignati* and the cross image itself became important to *reconquista* soldiers.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Markowski, “Crucesignatus”, 162; Hubert Jedin, *Consiliorum oecumenicorum Decreta*, (New York: Herder, 1973), 192 – “pro Hierosolymitano vel pro Hispanico itinere cruces...”.

<sup>136</sup> O’Callaghan, *Reconquest*, 33. See Canon 13 of the First Lateran Council.

<sup>137</sup> Lucien Auvray, *Les Registres de Gregoire IX*, 4 vol. (Paris, 1896-1955), 1: 338-40.

Pope Gregory IX (c.1143-1241) used the term *crucesignatus* concerning the *reconquista*.

Pedro I of Aragon took up the cross in 1100 and is considered the first Spanish crusader. He appeared before Zaragoza in 1101 “with the banner of Christ” which is the first cross emblem referenced in the crusades.<sup>138</sup> Various other Spanish kings took up the policy of driving the Muslims out of Iberia perhaps more for political strength, but it was with religious rhetoric tied closely to the cross image with which they sought to inspire a Christian army. In 1225 Jaime I of Aragon stated that to fight the *reconquista* was to “promote the affair of the cross.”<sup>139</sup> Other Spanish leaders also referred to the endeavor as the “business of the cross.”<sup>140</sup> In *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain*, Joseph O’Callaghan states that an official crusade had to have papal sanction through the promise of indulgence and international unity against Christian enemies. In fulfilling the standards of what a crusade was, Archbishop Rodrigo of Toledo (1209-1247) preached the Spanish crusade in France saying that they should: “fortify themselves with the sign of the cross.”<sup>141</sup>

The first groups to depart for Iberia on the Second Crusade were Anglo-Norman and Flemish crusaders whose goal was to conquer a number of positions on the west coast of Iberia, among them the city of Lisbon. Afonso I of Portugal was already in the field when the Anglo-Norman troops landed on the Lusitanian beaches in June 1147. According to the account written by Ricardus Osbernus, the Muslim defenders taunted the crusaders by defiling a cross: “They showed to us, moreover, with much derision the symbol of the cross. They spat upon it and wiped the feces from their posteriors with it. At last they urinated on it, as on some despicable thing, and threw our cross at us....”<sup>142</sup> Whether these accusations were true or not,

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<sup>138</sup> O’Callaghan, *Reconquest*, 33.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>142</sup> Ricardus Osbernus, *De expugnatione Lyxbonensi*, ed. William Stubbs, *Chronicles and Memorials of the Reign of Richard*, Rolls series (London: Longmans, 1864), I: 20-23;

they were enough to arouse the Christian crusaders to avenge this believed desecration. They would march into battle to destroy the infidel, having been blessed with the sign of the cross.

The cross developed into a sign of political dominance within the conquered cities of the Muslims. Upon the Moorish surrender of Lisbon to the Christian crusaders in 1147, Osbornus recorded that “[t]he Archbishop and the other bishops went in front of us with the Lord’s cross...the saving cross was placed atop the highest tower to be seen by all as a symbol of the city’s subjection.”<sup>143</sup> Likewise, after the capitulation of Córdoba, Archbishop Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada recorded that the Christians shouted “God help us!” at the raising of the cross atop the mosque, which became a symbol not only of political but religious dominance in the reconquered parts of Iberia.<sup>144</sup> In 1267, reflecting on the defeat at Seville, the Moorish poet Al-Rundi wrote: “Over dwellings emptied of Islam that were first vacated and are now inhabited by unbelief; Mosques have become churches in which only bells and crosses are found...”<sup>145</sup>

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Quoted from James Brundage, Translated by, *The Crusades: A Documentary History*, (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1962), 97-104.

<sup>143</sup> Osbornus, *De expugnatione Lyxbonensi*, I: 20-23; Quoted from Brundage, *The Crusades*, 97-104.

<sup>144</sup> O’Callaghan, *Reconquest*, 204; Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, *Historia de rebus Hispanie sive Historia Gothica*, edited by Juan Fernández Valverde, *Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis* 72, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1987), 298, Book 9, chapter 16. Rodrigo also records the elevation of crosses over the mosques of Calso, Valencia, Jaen, and Seville. The cross that the Christians placed on the mosque in Cordoba in 1146 was removed when Muslims reconquered the city. When the city was retaken in 1212, crusaders placed the cross back on the mosque.

<sup>145</sup> *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, translated by James T. Monroe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 332’334. Lines 22-23 of Abu al-Baqa’ al-Rundi’s *Lament for the Fall of Seville* (1267).

According to Latin texts Muslims promised to fight against those who held the cross in esteem.<sup>146</sup> Before the decisive battle of Las Navas (1212), the caliph supposedly “said that he was powerful enough to fight against all those who adored the sign of the cross.”<sup>147</sup> To encourage crusaders and those that would financially support the *reconquista*, Pope Innocent III granted, “that all should be absolved from their sins, and this pardon was [granted] because the king of Morocco said that he would fight against those who adored the cross throughout the world.”<sup>148</sup> Just as other crusading preachers had done throughout Europe, the Spanish religious preached the taking of the cross against “the infidels, the enemies of the cross of Christ.”<sup>149</sup>

Crusaders believed in and priests preached the power of the cross in battle from early Christendom through the periods of conquest. In preaching the *reconquista*, a Spanish priest argued that:

[I]n this sign, if you do not hesitate, you will conquer. For if it should befall anyone signed with it to die, we do not believe that life has been taken from him, for we do not doubt that it is changed for the better. Here, therefore, to live is glory, to die is gain.<sup>150</sup>

Prior to the decisive battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, after Alfonso VIII had been defeated at Alarcos by the Muslims seventeen years earlier, a priest assured the king that his prior defeat “would be purged on that day by the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and his most victorious cross, against which the king of Morocco had blasphemed from his filthy mouth.”<sup>151</sup> Years later, during the Curia of Tortosa in 1225, Jaime I followed in the precedent set by his forerunners by

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<sup>146</sup> O’Callaghan, *Reconquest*, 67-68.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 180. One of the worst defeats suffered by the Christians was Alfonso VII’s loss at Alarcos to the caliph, al-Mansur on July 19, 1195.

proclaiming that, “[W]e have assumed the cross to attack the barbarous nations.”<sup>152</sup> In these statements the cross is held up as a symbol of Christian power and civilization. The reference to “barbarous nations” will be extended a few hundred years later to the heathen of the Americas.

### 3.3 Battle Preparation

Christian Iberian armies utilized the cross as a tool in the production of rituals performed before battles to unite soldiers politically and religiously. Prior to crusading battles it was typical for priests to accompany the army to the field and perform the sacerdotal duties of confession and celebration of the Eucharist. These priests who were able to instill hope in the soldiers also participated in the battle through the carrying of crosses that had been blessed for the specific purpose of securing victory.

As a precursor to death, or in this case a battle which could result in the same, medieval peoples sought out priests to give them confession so that on the future Day of Judgment they may appear guiltless before God. In this rite the penitent usually venerated and viewed a cross while the confession took place. Tradition dictated that the priest make the sign of the cross over the penitent while the priest prayed the prayers of absolution.<sup>153</sup> In some circumstances a simple sign of the cross along with the reception of the sacrament could suffice for penance. Typically if crusaders were to receive the indulgence of forgiveness of sins upon death, they were required to confess before the battle.<sup>154</sup>

After confession, the men crowded around make-shift chapels or huddled into the nearest churches as the priest celebrated mass. The walls held crucifixes, the sacred instruments were marked with cross symbols, the services were filled with references to the

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>153</sup> Henry C. Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, 3 Vols, (Lea Bros., 1896), I: 53.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., II: 185; O’Callaghan, *Reconquest*, 46.

cross, and the Christian's continual response was to cross himself.<sup>155</sup> The culmination of the mass was receiving the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ which he shed upon the cross. The *Latin Chronicle* states that crusaders "after hearing the solemnities of mass and being born again by the life-giving sacraments of the Body and Blood of our God, Jesus Christ, fortifying themselves with the sign of the cross, they quickly took up the arms of war and joyfully hastened to battle...prepared to die or to conquer."<sup>156</sup> Likewise, the prayers said during the mass of the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14) imply that the sins of the penitent who adored the cross would be remitted.<sup>157</sup>

On certain occasions during the pre-battle liturgy, the crusading king received from the bishop a golden cross containing a relic of the true cross. Often a priest would be designated to carry the cross into battle. Legend claims that in his first victory against the Arabs at the battle of Covadonga, King Pelayo carried an oaken cross, which was later to be called *La Victoria*. In the year 908, to commemorate a hundred years of the Asturian kingdom's victories and conquests, Alfonso III covered the cross in gold and precious stones and donated it to the Oviedo Cathedral as a symbol of the cross' victory over Muslims.<sup>158</sup> Soldiers also carried crosses to victory in the battles at Las Navas and Salado (1340) where it is recorded that "the sign of the Lord's cross" preceded the army.<sup>159</sup>

In this pre-battle process, the rite of confession, the celebration of the Eucharist, and carrying the cross into battle acted as a means of reducing the individual soldier into the greater

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<sup>155</sup> O'Callaghan, *Reconquest*, 71.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>157</sup> Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession*, I: 92.

<sup>158</sup> The golden cross *La Victoria* is the symbol of the flag of Asturias. Also upon the blue background is the Latin motto *Hoc signo, tuetur pius, Hoc signo vincitur inimicus* ("With this sign the pious is protected, With this sign you will defeat the enemy").

<sup>159</sup> O'Callaghan, *Reconquest*, 185-187.

force of Muslim destruction. What unified the men during this liminal rite of passage was the insistence on the divine power associated with the cross. It was the cross, symbolizing what they held dear and hoped for, that the men saw, revered, and wore into battle.

### 3.4 Crusading Cross and Spanish Jewry

Simultaneous to the crusades against Muslims was the persecution of the Jews that eventually led to the Inquisition. *Mainz Anonymous*, one of the surviving Hebrew chronicles, recounts the events of the First Crusade in 1096 from the Jewish perspective. The writer states that the Christians set out to reach “the sepulcher of the Crucified, ‘a trampled corpse’ ‘who cannot profit and cannot save, for he is worthless.’”<sup>160</sup> He continues by stating their motive as “to kill and subjugate all those kingdoms that do not believe in the Crucified. How much more so [should we kill and subjugate] the Jews, who killed and crucified him.”<sup>161</sup> The chronicle also notes that the Christians, both noble and common, distinguished themselves with “an evil sign upon their garments, a cross.”<sup>162</sup> Another Jewish chronicler, Solomon bar Simson, similarly referred to the cross as “a profane symbol.”<sup>163</sup> He also urged Jews to reject “a crucified scion who was despised, abominated, and held in contempt in his own generation, a bastard son conceived by a menstruating and wanton mother.”<sup>164</sup>

Each of these statements reflected Jewish antipathy towards the cross. It is easy to understand these insults coming from a people blamed, persecuted, and massacred by

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<sup>160</sup> Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 225.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Shlomo Eidelberg, Translated by, *The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades*, (Hoboken, New Jersey: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1996), 21.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.



Christians, but their diatribes also encouraged Rome to act more harshly towards them. In 1215, the Church decreed that “we ought not to ignore any insult to Him who blotted out our disgraceful deeds, we command that such impudent fellows be checked by the secular princes by imposing them proper punishment so that they shall not at all presume to blaspheme Him who was crucified for us.”<sup>165</sup> The cross, especially when merged within the root of the word “crucifixion”, defined something deep within the conscience of both Jews and Christians. For the Roman Catholic Church any infraction against Christians involving the cross became more than just a crime, but a blasphemy.

The annual crucifixion of Christians as part of a Jewish conspiracy was readily believed in Spain.<sup>166</sup> Spanish scholars of the late Middle Ages seemingly accepted and reproduced the complaints of the masses that Jews practiced profane rituals like the “crucifixion (sic) of Christian children on Good Friday in memory of the Passion.”<sup>167</sup> As early as 1182, Spanish Christians accused Jews of crucifying a boy in Saragossa.<sup>168</sup> Under the supervision of Alfonso X of Castile, *Las Siete Partidas* (*The Seven-Part Code*, 1265) officially outlined the belief that, “in some places Jews celebrated, and still celebrate Good Friday, which commemorates the

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<sup>165</sup> Fourth Lateran Council (1215), canon 68: Translation from H. J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*, (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1937), 236-296.

<sup>166</sup> Marc Saperstein, *Moments of Crisis in Jewish-Christian Relations*, (SCM-Trinity Press International, 1989), 20.

<sup>167</sup> Quoted in Benzion Netanyahu, *Toward the Inquisition: Essays on Jewish and Converso History in Late Medieval Spain*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 193.

<sup>168</sup> Jeffery Richards, *Sex, Dissidence, and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages*, (Routledge, 1994), 105.

Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by way of contempt: stealing children and fastening them to crosses.”<sup>169</sup>

*Las Siete Partidas* also invoked the age-old vindictive that the Jews “instead of showing Him [Christ] reverence humiliated Him, by shamefully putting Him to death on the cross.”<sup>170</sup> Spanish-Christian anti-Jewish propaganda is found in certain hymns used on the feast day of the cross in which the Jews are held directly responsible for the crucifixion of Christ: “Oh Jesus of Nazareth, who was suspended on that great tree by the Jews.”<sup>171</sup> European Christian thought was “liturgical knowledge” which Christians gained in daily ritual services highlighting the Jew as Christ-killer. The missionaries promoted this understanding in Mexico such as is seen in Fray Domingo de la Anunciación’s multilingual *Doctrina Xpriana breue y copendiosa por via de dialogo entre un maestro y un discipulo* (1565): “Oh my lord, oh my ruler, your enemies, the Jews, made you carry the cross on your shoulders.”<sup>172</sup> Such perceived violations of the cross encouraged hateful thoughts that would help lead to the Spanish Inquisition and the expulsion of many Jews from Spain.

When in 1492 the Grand Inquisitor Torquemada ordered the removal of unconverted Jews from Spain, the royal financial advisor, Don Abraham Senior, supposedly bribed King

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<sup>169</sup> Jacob Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Sourcebook, 315-1791*, (New York: JPS, 1938), 34-42; *Las Siete Partidas: Laws on Jews*, (1265), Law II. The laws did not go into effect until 1348.

<sup>170</sup> Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World*, 34-42; *Las Siete Partidas: Laws on Jews*, (1265), Law III.

<sup>171</sup> Louis van Tongeren, *Exaltation of the Cross: Toward the Origins of the Feast of the Cross and the Meaning of the Cross in Early Medieval Liturgy*, (Sterling, Va.: Peeters, 2000), 273, note 96: “O lesu Nazarene, qui a iudeis suspensus in ligno magno.”

<sup>172</sup> Louise M. Burkhart, *Before Guadalupe: The Virgin Mary in early Colonial Nahuatl Literature*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 126.

Fernando not to implement the scheme. Senior offered the monarch 30,000 gold ducats which appealed to the impoverished state of the royals. When Torquemada heard of this, he burst into the royal presence brandishing a cross and stating that as Judas had sold Christ unto crucifixion for 30 pieces of silver, the king would essentially do the same. He countered the Jewish bribe with rhetoric of the cross, and Fernando relented to Torquemada's demands. Although the anecdote is thought legend, it does reflect the key symbol of the cross image as a way of bringing persons, whether monarchs or crusaders, back to the straight and narrow of Christendom's overall goals.<sup>173</sup>

### 3.5 Crusading in Mexico

Markowski argues that "As crusade goals and conceptions changed, the geography of crusade changed."<sup>174</sup> Offering Spain as an alternative to the Holy Land in fulfilling crusading vows dispels the idea that crusades were limited geographically. Therefore European conquests in the Americas may also be considered as a type of crusade or, as a minimum, remnants of the crusading culture. In *The Conquest and Colonization of Yucatan*, Robert Chamberlain states that "there existed among the Spaniards the heritage of crusading zeal left by seven centuries of war with Islamic Moors in the Iberian Peninsula...[which] helped to turn Spain...into a fanatical champion of Christianity and the Roman Church."<sup>175</sup> This "crusading zeal" is reflected poignantly in the writings of Columbus as he believed himself to be the fulfiller of prophecy: "Jerusalem and Mount Sion are to be rebuilt by the hand of the Christian; who this is to be God declares by the mouth of His prophet in the fourteenth Psalm. Abbot Joachim said

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<sup>173</sup> Benjamin R. Gampel, *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391-1648*, (Columbia University Press, 1998), 90.

<sup>174</sup> Markowski, "Crucesignatus", 164.

<sup>175</sup> Chamberlain, *The Conquest and Colonization of Yucatan*, 311.

that he was to come from Spain.”<sup>176</sup> Columbus sought a new route to Asia, which was, many considered, not only a land of unbelievers, but also of Jerusalem. However, he inadvertently revealed a new opportunity and a new revelation for Christian Europe, specifically Catholic Spain.

Medieval mystics believed that the European discovery of the Americas was one of the signals that the end of the world was near. Surely once Christ could be preached on these continents, the scriptural mission to spread the gospel to all peoples would be fulfilled.<sup>177</sup> The failure of the crusades to permanently liberate Jerusalem created a need for a substitute goal, at least temporarily. The Mexican historian Enrique Florescano states that Gerónimo de Mendieta (1525-1604) “infused the American historical process with a mystic, eschatological meaning.”<sup>178</sup> In his late sixteenth-century work, *Historia eclesiástica indiana*, Mendieta argued that Cortés represented the one chosen by God to open the Americas to the preaching of the gospel. He also contended that the arrival in Tenochtitlan of the first Franciscan missionaries, who numbered twelve, symbolized a continuation of the twelve Apostles’ preaching in a “New Jerusalem.”<sup>179</sup> The conquering and holding of Tenochtitlan, the “New Jerusalem”, in some sense may have been a step toward the direction of attempting to retake Jerusalem.

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<sup>176</sup> Quoted in Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*, 21. *The Book of the Psalms of David*, 14: 7: “Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord brings back the captivity of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad.” The prophet Columbus refers to is Joachim of Fiore who divided history into three epochs each regarded by a member of the trinity.

<sup>177</sup> Florescano, *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico*, 82; John Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*, 21-23.

<sup>178</sup> Florescano, *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico*, 82.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.

Tenochtitlan could never replace Jerusalem as the historic and religiously fused city that it was, but it provided a goal for the glory of Christ.

Although the conquests in Mexico and Peru were primarily Spanish, lacking the multinational character of the medieval crusades, the indulgences promised were very similar. The Santa Cruzada was an ecclesiastical institution established in the fifteenth century to raise money to complete the *reconquista*. The Santa Cruzada sold indulgences and even after the Moors were driven from the Iberian peninsula in 1492, the Church continued to sell salvation for profit.<sup>180</sup>

Very early in Cortés' march across eastern Mexico, Bernal Díaz states that the Dominican friar Pedro Melgarejo de Urréa arrived from Seville with "a papal bull, by which we obtained absolution for all the sins we may have been guilty of during these wars."<sup>181</sup> As the commissary of the Crusade, he was empowered to administer the *Bulas de la Cruzada* which were indulgences that had been carried over since the time of the crusades to the Holy Land.<sup>182</sup> The Santa Cruzada bulls that justified indulgences continued until the end of the colonial period.<sup>183</sup>

In the 1761 uprising, Jacinto Canek led Maya insurgents against the oppressive *repartimiento*. Some of the indigenous specifically rebelled over the Santa Cruzada's bulls which forced the sales of indulgences on them.<sup>184</sup> Despite protests, crusading bulls and calls to

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<sup>180</sup> Robert W. Patch, *Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1648-1812*, (Stanford University Press, 1993), 82.

<sup>181</sup> Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Memoirs of the Conquistador Bernal Diaz Del Castillo*, Edited by John Ingram Lockhart, (J. Hatchard and Son, 1844), 32.

<sup>182</sup> López de Gómara, Francisco, *Historia general de las Indias*, 2 vols. (Barcelona: Iberia, 1954.), 2: 91n.

<sup>183</sup> Patch, *Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan*, 82.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-157.

arms continued. A 1767 document speaks of the indulgence referred to in “la Bulla de la Santa Cruzada”. Similar to the medieval crusading rhetoric it refers to the “Guerra contra infieles”, not in Jerusalem or Spain, but in Mexico.<sup>185</sup> The language of a 1783 papal document also recalls the crusading mentality of medieval chroniclers as it states “that each day the spirit of the said King [Carlos III] would increasingly be set aflame to wage war against the staunch enemies of the Cross and the Holy Name of the Lord.”<sup>186</sup> Just as crusading preachers referred to Muslims as *inimici cruces Christi* so did the religious decrees against the Native heathen in the eighteenth century, testifying to the transfer of the crusading spirit to Mexico throughout the colonial period.

While still in Spain, Hernán Cortés had two standards and banners fashioned in gold containing the royal arms, a cross on each side, and a proclamation that read “Brothers and comrades, let us follow the sign of the holy Cross in true faith, for under this sign we shall

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<sup>185</sup> UTA Special Collections, Franklin Madis Collection; folder #25 in box #1; a 1767 document reads – “la Bulla de la Santa Cruzada” speaking of indulgence in reference to the “Guerra contra infieles” in Colonial Mexico. Also see UTA Special Collections Alper Collection 1556-1950; in folder #3a(1) of box # GA 180 is a handwritten booklet mentioning the years 1593 and 1561 and numerous mentions of the holy crusade: i.e. “Bula de la Sta Cruzada” (pg.4 frontside).

<sup>186</sup> UTA Special Collections, microfilm records from *El Archivo de la Mitra, Decretos Y Oficios 1735-1807*, Roll 2: Clemente Papa XI, “Ad futuram rei memoriam” (1783): “y que por esta razon cada dia se encendia mas el animo del dicho Rey para hacer guerra a los acerrimos enemigos de la Cruz, y del Santo Nombre del Senor.” This document is a reprint of a 1741 version that which states that it is in agreement with the original document of Pope Clement XI (1700-1721) when Philip V was king. In 1783 Carlos III was king of Spain and Pius VI was the pope. In 1741 Benedict XIV was pope and Philip V was king.

conquer.”<sup>187</sup> With this inscription, Cortés is harkening back to the early fourth century when the Emperor Constantine I, upon the eve of battle, reportedly saw the cross of Christ superimposed on the sun with the text *in hoc signo vinces* beneath it. In the early sixteenth century, Cortés approached the Tlaxcalan forts in eastern Mexico and strengthened the morale of his men by crying out, “Let us follow our banner, which bears the sign of the holy cross, and through it we shall conquer!”<sup>188</sup> Disregarding the losses they suffered, the success of European armies both in the “Old” and “New” Worlds reinforced to Christians the idea of the power of the cross.

Following the precedent of placing crosses atop mosques during the *reconquista*, when the Spaniards first entered Tenochtitlán on November 7, 1519 Cortés asked Motechuzoma not only to give up all human sacrifice and the worship of idols, but also to allow him to erect a cross on the temple. At first Motechuzoma refused, but later relented after seeing the Spaniard’s devotion to the cross. He allowed them to place an altar, a cross, and an image of the Virgin in the Templo Mayor apart from the idols. Cortés ordered his men to keep watch over the Christian instruments of worship lest the Natives profane them, which in fact they attempted in Cortés’ absence.<sup>189</sup>

Although not standard during the conquest of Mexico, dress and military attire reflected crusading language and action. During the 1541 Mixtón war, Spanish cavalryman Juan de Camino rode a white horse into battle while wearing a red cross on his chest.<sup>190</sup> Instances like this, in combination with the bulls of crusade and uses of the cross, reflect how closely the

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<sup>187</sup> Quoted Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 47. Cortés’ standard bore the words: “Amici, sequamur crucem, et si nos fidem habemus, vere in hoc signo vincemus.”

Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest*, 15; Diaz del Castillo, vol. 2, 505.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>189</sup> Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest*, 19.

<sup>190</sup> López de Gómara, Francisco, *Historia general de las Indias*, vol. 2, Carlos Maria de Bustamente wrote an addition in 1527 with pages numbers that do not follow Gomara:33-34.

crusading mentality of the medieval period continued by means of the conquistadors, missionaries, and viceroys of Mexico.

### 3.6 Inquisition

Inquisitions became another extension of the crusades in both Spain and Mexico. The pattern of crusade followed by inquisition was set in the medieval period and spilled over into the colonial one in an attempt to ensure submission. Both crusade and inquisition are types of force, one the more overt, secular arm of the Church, while the other became a more internal judge, jury, and executioner. As the cross became a constant symbol during crusade, it was also present in the Inquisition. From the time of the first executions of the inquisition under Isabella and Fernando in 1481, the inquisitional banner flew. The centerpiece of this banner was a green cross of knotted wood flanked by a sword, representing justice, and an olive branch, representing mercy, with the inscription "Exurge Domine et Judica causam tuam. Psalm 73" ("Rise up, O Lord, and Pursue your cause"). Similarly, the Seal of the Mexican Inquisition contained the same inscription, the branch, the sword, and, on a sable field, a green cross, albeit it was two-barred.

With the sanction of the papal bull of Sixtus IV, Fernando and Isabella reinstated the Inquisition in Spain in 1480. In the first auto de fe held in Toledo in 1486, some 750 accused men and women marched through the streets bareheaded and unshod to the cathedral. As they entered the church, two chaplains made the sign of the cross on each of their foreheads and proclaimed: "Receive the sign of the cross, which you denied and lost through being deceived."<sup>191</sup> Over one hundred years later in the 1596 auto in Mexico City, clergy urged the Spanish Jew Don Luis de Carvajal to kiss the cross before being burned at the stake.<sup>192</sup> In

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<sup>191</sup> Quoted in Henry Kamen, *Inquisition and Society in Spain*, (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1985), 191.

<sup>192</sup> Martin A. Cohen, *The Martyr: The Story of a Secret Jew and the Mexican Inquisition in the Sixteenth-Century*, (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973), 254-258.



1659, when the eighty year old Jew Diego Díaz was urged to do the same as he prepared to burn in Mexico, he reportedly retorted: “Stop, padre, that stick can’t save anybody.”<sup>193</sup> A similar declaration had occurred during an auto in Valencia in 1564 when Gaspar de Centelles y Moncada, a Spanish Protestant, tore off the cross that the friars had placed around his neck, threw it to the ground and denounced “those who had made him worship idols.”<sup>194</sup> Through such ritual the accused were constantly forced to face the cross and make a decision verbally and physically, and hypothetically internally, to embrace it as an instrument and representation of salvation. The consequences of rejection meant, at least in the minds of the friars, burning in this life as well as the next.

To those numerous Jews who were given the perilous option of death or submission to the image which had been a sign of persecution, the decision was perhaps not unlike the choice many Natives of the Americas had to make. In the latter decades of the fifteenth century Christians, specifically the *conversos*, were required to display an image of the cross or the Virgin Mary in their homes, similar to the way in which Mexican Natives would have to display images as proofs of their submission and loyalty. It was perilous not to perform Christian rites, such as making the sign of the cross, in late fifteenth century Spain. The eyes of the Inquisition were everywhere. In 1490, Torquemada ordered that those who were reconciled should wear, during their entire life, a *sanbenito* of black or gray cloth eighteen inches long and nine inches wide with a large red cross to be worn on the front and back.<sup>195</sup> This involuntary “taking of the cross” was not only humiliating because it was distinct from normal dress, but it was perhaps

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<sup>193</sup> Quoted in Seymour Liebman, *Jews in New Spain Faith, Flame, and the Inquisition*, (Miami: University Press, 1970), 282.

<sup>194</sup> Quoted in Stephen Haliczer, *Inquisition and Society in the Kingdom of Valencia, 1478-1834*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 284-285.

<sup>195</sup> Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of Spain*, 4 vols (MacMillan, 1907), 3: 162.

too similar to the crusader's garb for those who had borne persecution from people wearing this symbol.

When inquisitors first came to a city, they called the residents to the local church on a certain day to hear mass, but more specifically to hear the "Edict of Grace". After either the congregation recited the creed or the priest delivered the homily, the inquisitor held up a crucifix and asked all to cross themselves, raise their right hands, and repeat a loyalty oath to the Inquisition and its ministers. At this time the inquisitor read the "Edict of Grace" which outlined a list of heresies and called all guilty to denounce themselves for a lighter sentence.<sup>196</sup> From the foundation of the Inquisition in the thirteenth century, penitents were required to wear two yellow crosses, one on the breast and the other on the back. The new Spanish Inquisition inherited the *sanbenito* and at the Toledo auto in 1486 required two hundred penitents, reconciled under the "Edict of Grace" and under threat of new accusations, to wear the yellow crosses for a year.<sup>197</sup>

During the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, many feigned conversion to Catholicism so that they could stay in Spain, while others sought religious freedom in New Spain. The Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition was independent of the Roman Catholic Church and maintained several branches throughout the kingdom. In its beginning, the Inquisition in Mexico mostly concerned itself with religious morality. The 1521 and 1522 papal bulls of Leo X and Adrian VI first established the Inquisition in New Spain by empowering Franciscans in Mexico to perform Episcopal functions, including the roles of ecclesiastical judges.<sup>198</sup>

The crown established a Mexican Inquisition to persecute heretics and people who disrespected religious symbols, especially the cross. In 1527, the inquisitor Domingo de

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<sup>196</sup> Kamen, *Inquisition and Society in Spain*, 161.

<sup>197</sup> Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of Spain*, 3: 162.

<sup>198</sup> Richard E. Greenleaf, *The Mexican Inquisition of the Sixteenth Century*,

(Albuquerque: University Press, 1969), 25.

Betanzos arrested Rodrigo Rengel as “a horrifying blasphemer.” One of the accusations brought against Rengel, Cortés’ camp master who served as alcalde in Veracruz and Pánuco, was that he had defiled crucifixes. His punishments included a weighty fine and contributions, incarceration in a monastery, and standing during mass with a candle in his hand.<sup>199</sup> Inquisitorial discipline varied, but was especially harsh on Jews, even in Mexico. On October 17, 1528 the inquisitorial scribe recorded that “Gonzalo de Morales [was] burned for heresy...Diego de Morales...[was] paraded in penitential garb.”<sup>200</sup> Although he denied the accusations, the inquisitors indicted Diego, the son of a *converso*, for stepping on and flogging a cross leading to the sentence of public penitence through the wearing of the *sanbenito*. However, his brother admitted not only to flogging, but to urinating on a cross which encouraged the sentence of death by burning.<sup>201</sup>

In 1536 the first archbishop of Mexico, Fray Juan de Zumárraga, denounced Juan de Toledo, alcalde of Tehuantepec, for saying that roadside crosses have no power.<sup>202</sup> In 1537, Zumárraga also judged the case of Alonso of Avila in Mexico City who was accused of resting his feet atop a desk in which there was a crucifix.<sup>203</sup> In the same year during the Inquisition in Michoacán, Zumárraga accused Gonzalo Gómez of using crosses to dry chili peppers and of

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 19-25.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 26-33.

<sup>202</sup> Richard E. Greenleaf, *Zumárraga and the Mexican Inquisition, 1536-1543*, (Washington, D.C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1961), 87; AGN, Edicto de Inquisición, Tomo I, exp. 12: que las cruces que se ponen en las calles...no se abian de poner.”

<sup>203</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol. 1A fojas 4 (1537); Averiguacion hecha por el santo oficio en lo de “Alonso de Avila”, a quien se acuso de tener un crucifijo debajo de su escritorio y poner los pies encima. Juez: Fray Juan de Zumárraga. Mexico.

breaking off the arms of crosses on Holy Thursday or Good Friday.<sup>204</sup> In 1563, the inquisition made an example of Juan de Balbao, who lived in Oaxaca, for wanting to burn a crucifix.<sup>205</sup> Although some Natives were prosecuted by the Inquisition, they were not initially the principal targets. Most people convicted by the Mexican Inquisition were Spaniards accused of crimes such as blasphemy. When Portugal and Spain united in 1580, many Portuguese Jews fled to New Spain and Judaizers became the Inquisition's most frequent victims.<sup>206</sup>

The Inquisition encountered certain crimes relating to the cross in New Spain which had been dealt with in Europe. In the Toral testimony concerning actions during the Yucatán inquisition in 1562, Deigo de Landa is attributed with prosecuting “blasphemers of the Divine Name and evangelical teaching, and sacrificers of innocents placed on crosses, giving them the name of Christ, our Redeemer, and then taking out their hearts.”<sup>207</sup> The accusation of child crucifixion is reminiscent of occurrences in Spain, most famously the 1491 implication of a dozen *conversos* and Jews in the ritual murder of a Christian infant in the province of Toledo. In their confessions extracted through torture, the accused conversos said that the child was crucified and that its heart was removed to be used to create a magic spell to destroy Christians.<sup>208</sup> The practice of child crucifixion by Jews was a horrific slander, but among the Maya the truth of the accusations are more likely and more evidence exists to validate such

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<sup>204</sup> Greenleaf, *The Mexican Inquisition*, 53-57.

<sup>205</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol. 3 fojas 6 (1563): “Proceso de la Justicia eclesiastica contra Juan de Balbao, vecino de Huatulco, por haber querido mandar quemar un crucifijo. Juez: Cristobal de Trujillo, Vicario. Fiscal Martin de Alfaro, Notario: Alvaro de Lemus. Oaxaca.”

<sup>206</sup> See Greenleaf, *The Mexican Inquisition of the Sixteenth Century* and Liebman, *The Jews in New Spain*.

<sup>207</sup> Landa, *Relación*, 116, note 533.

<sup>208</sup> Kamen, *Inquisition and Society in Spain*, 15-16. They were publicly executed in Avila in November 1491.

actions because the Spaniards forced the cross image on them and the Maya abused it in ritualistic defiance.

Pictorial examples of the cross being forced on Natives in the Spanish conquest also appear. The account written by Guaman Poma, a Peruvian chief who witnessed life under Incan and Spanish rule, used various illustrations to supplement his text. One such picture illustrates the 1533 execution of Atahualpa, the Incan emperor at the time of Francisco Pizarro. What is interesting to note, although this is not directly related to the Inquisition, is that while three Spaniards are restraining Atahualpa on a table and a fourth severs his head, a small cross protrudes from the victim's bound hands. The hands do not grasp at the cross, but rather are straight and it would seem that the Spanish had inserted the cross there. Whether a cross truly was in the hands of Atahualpa at his death the text does not say, but it may reflect upon the Spanish conscience that even while killing a man the Spanish gave him Christian hope as symbolized in the cross.<sup>209</sup>

Similarly, in the *Descripción de Tlaxcala* (1580s) are Native depictions of executions, hangings and burnings, performed by Cortés and two friars on those Natives who refused Christianity or accepted it and reverted to their previous traditions. Those being hanged each hold a cross while the three Spaniards looking on and pointing their fingers in judgment are not wearing crosses.<sup>210</sup> In both this and Poma's depictions, the Spanish are not the cross bearers.

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<sup>209</sup> Guaman Poma de Ayala, *Letter to a King: A Peruvian Chief's Account of the Life Under the Incas and Under Spanish Rule*, Translated by Christopher Dike, (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978), 112.

<sup>210</sup> Stephanie Wood, *Transcending Conquest: Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico*, (University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 31.

Rather the victimized Natives wear the sign of the cross, which is perhaps a protest by the indigenous artists concerning who the true martyrs were.<sup>211</sup>

In contrast to these indigenous illustrations where Natives unwillingly hold the cross at death, Spaniards, specifically royalty, embraced the image in the last moments of life. In 1591 King Felipe II of Spain revealed a box containing two candles and a crucifix to his secretary Juan Ruiz de Velasco and stated, "These candles and this crucifix belonged to my father, the Emperor (Carlos V), and he died with them, holding the crucifix in his hands. I plan to die the same way."<sup>212</sup> Felipe's wish was granted as he not only held the cross at his death, but also could contemplate Christ's death whichever direction he looked as a crucifix hung on each wall.<sup>213</sup>

In 1571, Felipe II officially established the Inquisition in New Spain with its center in Mexico City.<sup>214</sup> As in Spain, the inquisitors were not only interested in bloody offences involving the cross, like the crucifixions in Toledo and the Yucatán, but in any unholy act towards the revered image. In 1581 the Inquisition in Mexico City tried a Native miner from Sultepeque because he whipped and spat upon a crucifix.<sup>215</sup> Anti-cross demonstrations continued to be tried into the eighteenth century as in the 1735 inquisition which tried a man from Toluca for

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<sup>211</sup> It was typical for the inquisitorial confessors to order crosses to be tied to the hands of those condemned to encourage their confession and repentance (Cohen, *The Martyr*, 254).

<sup>212</sup> Quoted in Carlos M.N. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-century Spain*, (Cambridge: University Press, 2002), 277.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>214</sup> Martha Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives: Gender, Religion, and the Politics of Power in Colonial Guatemala*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 10.

<sup>215</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol 1487 f. 1-11 (1581): "Contra el minero de sultepeque porque azotaba y escupia un crucifijo. Ciudad de M."

whipping a crucifix.<sup>216</sup> In 1736, a mestizo from Cholula was accused of mistreating a crucifix and throwing a rosary.<sup>217</sup> In 1783, a man was tried in Mexico City for hitting a crucifix with a sword.<sup>218</sup> As late as 1798, the Inquisition denounced an Indian of Tlacotalpan for slapping a crucifix.<sup>219</sup>

### 3.7 Drama of the Crusading Cross

In comparatively more peaceful demonstrations of hegemony, although often violent in content, didactic reenactments of Christian victories over pagans complemented the crusades and inquisitions. The cross provided an obvious instrument in dramatic propaganda as the symbol of Christian salvation and the power of Spain. The effect of these productions reverberated in Spain as well as Mexico.

During the reign of Jaime II (ruler of Aragon-Catalonia, 1291-1327) a mock battle was staged in Zaragoza to celebrate the feast of Santiago in which Moors and Christians reenacted the recapture of the city during the *reconquista*.<sup>220</sup> The turning point in the battle was the appearance of Santiago who continued to hack down Moors until they surrendered. At this moment Santiago held up a banner with a cross on it as well as the historic phrase *In hoc signo vinces* and the Muslim actors begged to become Christian. The new converts then watched the

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<sup>216</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol. 1175 f. 438-450 (1735): “Contra...por decirse azotaba a un crucifijo. Toluca.”

<sup>217</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol. 880 f. 42-50 (1739): “contra un mestizo de cholula, por haber maltratado un crucifijo y tirado el Rosario, Cholula, Puebla”

<sup>218</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol. 1243 f. 97-120 (1783): “por haberle dado con una espada a un crucifijo. Mexico.”

<sup>219</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol 1395 f. 7-8 (1798): “Denuncia contra un indio de Tlacotalpan, por haberle dado de bofetadas a un crucifijo. Tlactotalpan, Vera Cruz”

<sup>220</sup> The original battle took place in 1118 when Alfonso I of Aragon led the Christians.

burning of the Islamic standard and were given in its place a large cross as well as white tunics each decorated with a red cross.<sup>221</sup>

The reenactment of *reconquista* battles carried over into colonial Mexico where Indians usually played the part of Moors reinforcing the concept that they, like the Muslims, were once pagan, but were enlightened by the Christian Spaniards and should remain loyal to that pledge.<sup>222</sup> Native actors were required to display appropriate respect for the cross and the Inquisition handled any infractions. In the early seventeenth century, Fray Juan of Jubilla recounted how in just such a reenactment in the jurisdiction of Justlabaca the participants had “broken a cross in the [mock] battle of Moors and Christians.”<sup>223</sup> In 1626 the malefactors were brought before the inquisitional tribunal in Justlabaca.

In addition to *reconquista* reenactments, authorities in Mexico encouraged the performing of histories of Christian supremacy in the Americas. A 1585 performance and an early seventeenth-century play entitled *Colloquy of the Last Four Kings* retells the story of the four Tlaxcala caciques who greeted and eventually allied with Cortés. According to the drama, the four Tlaxcalans worship an idol, fall asleep, and are awakened by an angel which reveals to them the Christian message. In response the caciques accept Christianity, send gifts to Cortés, and receive a special cross to replace their idol.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Max Harris, *Aztecs, Moors, and Christians: Festivals of Reconquest in Mexico and Spain*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 37-38.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>223</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol 366 F. 10 (1626): Carta de Fray Juan de Jubilla, con la lectura de los edictos de la fe, en la jurisdiccion de justlabaca; Informacion sobre haber roto una cruz en la batalla de Moros y Christianos. (Representaciones Teatrales y fiestas.) Justlabaca.

<sup>224</sup> Wood, *Transcending Conquest*, 31. See also Roland Baumann, “Tlaxcalan Expressions of Autonomy and Religious Drama in the Sixteenth Century”, *Journal of Latin*



In each production, the cross plays a crucial role as the symbol of the conqueror. The cross replaced the Moorish standard as well as the Native idol as the true image of divine beneficence on Spanish rule and religion. In these scenes where Muslims are transformed into crusaders and Natives are converted by angels, the cross features as both the instrument and representation of conquest.

### 3.8 Conclusion

The generations of Spaniards that came to Mexico during the colonial period inherited a long crusading and inquisitorial tradition that centered on the image of the cross. The medieval mentality had been so immersed in the development of European supremacy and Christian warfare that it was only natural that the image which succinctly revealed this became prominent. Justified by distorted religious arguments and victories associated with this symbol, Europeans sought to conquer Muslims and eradicate Jews to the extent that the cross evoked either devotion or scorn. With the transfer of this dichotomy to the Americas it is no surprise to see reactions from both Spaniards and Natives. Europeans forced the cross symbol into the center of controversy throughout the regions they encountered, making it an extension of their

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*American Lore*, 13, (1987), 139-53: 143-144. Another common type of play was "Saint Elena and the Holy Cross" in which the original cross that had become lost was mystical discovered (James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries*, (Stanford: University Press, 1992), 400).

dominance. Disgust, rebellion, and harangues against the cross were the natural response from Muslims, Jews, and those Natives that rebelled against everything Hispanic and Christian. However, for Spanish Christians the cross served a pivotal role in the subjugation of peoples as a historic link to divine power and the mockery of this image was one more excuse to punish the *inimici cruces Christi*.

CHAPTER 4  
MAPS, CROSSES, AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE UNIVERSE

From the plaza shall run four main streets, one from the middle of each side of the plaza.<sup>225</sup>

-*Royal Ordinances Concerning the Laying out of New Towns* (1573)

Both Amerindian and European mapping traditions utilized the cross in delineating perceived space. Spanish and indigenous perceptions, drawn and written, in which the cross figures as a cosmic, religious, and/or imperial motif reveals the power implied of cartography. As an important symbol of the religious worldview, the cross figured in both maps of the universe and specific locations. Traditional societies identify space as either secular or sacred. Part of the significance of illustrating place is the control the artist has in revealing one location as sacred and another as profane. Geographic reality may be sacrificed in order that the viewer associates the place with a superior spiritual truth. Symbols and motifs are crucial in establishing the connection between the physical and the divine. Therefore cartographic iconology can be used to signify a deeper level of symbolism associated with a specific area which effectively communicates political power.<sup>226</sup> As in reality, Native and Spanish cartographers recognized the cross as a symbol of religious and political dominance on maps that affirmed existing supremacy and influence.

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<sup>225</sup> Quoted in Zelia Nuttall, "Royal Ordinances Concerning the Laying out of New Towns," *The Hispanic Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4, (1921), 743-753: 750.

<sup>226</sup> J. B. Harley, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 54.

#### 4.1 Cosmology

In Nahua cosmology the major theme was avoidance of chaos. Aztecs ordered their world as a copy of the original divine establishment of the universe in order to maintain harmony and avert destruction. It was a communal effort, from the priests and kings down to the farmers and artisans, and therefore everyone fulfilled their duty knowing that they helped to maintain the order of the universe. Symbols are important in organization as they simplify the complex, eradicating confusion with a definite understanding. The cross motif functioned in this way for the Aztec, Maya, and Natives farther north.

According to Aztec creation stories, after the “fourth sun” vanished because of the great deluge, the current age of the “fifth sun” began when Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl restored the universe. Together with other creator-gods, they made four roads toward the center of the earth. This cross image is delineated on the calendar “Stone of Axayacatl” which symbolically represents the Aztec cosmos in general and the ceremonial center of Tenochtitlan in particular. On this calendar, the face of the sun god Huitzilopochtli is depicted surrounded by the four gates of the causeways.<sup>227</sup> In the *Crónica Mexicayotl*, one of the high priests of Huitzilopochtli articulates a verbal depiction of the cross as representational of the cosmos: “I shall proceed and behold all lands and I shall wait for people and meet them in the four main directions I shall give them drinks and food, for here I shall unite all the different peoples.”<sup>228</sup>

The cross symbol also played a part in the Aztec ritual of reactualizing creation. During the “New Fire” ceremony the peoples inhabiting Tenochtitlan and the surrounding area extinguished all fires in order that the world would be in darkness as if when creation took place. At dawn the priests declared that the sun had not died and that the people were assured of

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<sup>227</sup> Rudolph Van Zantwijk, *The Aztec Arrangement: The Social History of Pre-Spanish Mexico*, (University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 231.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 286; Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc, *Crónica Mexicayotl*, (Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas, 1949), 29.

another 52 years of light.<sup>229</sup> It was then that a sacerdotal celebrant relit the sacred fire and various priests came with torches to carry back fire to their own temples. These ceremonies erased the past. The actual moment of creation was reactualized, therefore cancelling the destructive movement of history and replacing it with a fresh orderly beginning.<sup>230</sup>

The *Codex Borbonicus* depicts priests igniting their torches during the ritual “New Fire” ceremony and visually displays the integration of the cross symbol on the temple walls and sacerdotal garments (fig. 2). Surrounding the sacred fire are three white crosses against a black background and on each of the priests’ white head garments are four black triangles that almost intersect, revealing the cross motif. Also the four priests each hold huge torches that form a cross symbol which may be a Nahuatl depiction of the world originally divided in quarters. The priests are dressed as gods which means that the cross images depicted on their garments in the *Codex Borbonicus* are related to the divine. There may also be a specific connection with Quetzalcoatl in that he was one of the creator-gods and the fact that indigenous artists depicted him in association with the cross image. Quetzalcoatl reinforces the connection between creation and the cross symbol.<sup>231</sup> Because the Indian mind was ordered by the idea of

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<sup>229</sup> Aztec depictions of a calendar from the *Manuscript Tovar* reveals a cross symbol surrounded by a circle based on the 52 year cycle – 13 signs belong to each of the four directions (4x13=52): Van Zantwijk, *The Aztec Arrangement*, 233. *Manuscript Tovar*, plate 30. In the *Relaciones Geographicas* manuscript for Meztitlan (1579) an indigenous calendar is depicted with a cross. The limbs of the cross point to the four symbols representing the divisions of the Aztec century – Reed, Flint Knife, House, and Rabbit (Barbara Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geographicas*, (Chicago: University Press, 1996), 40.

<sup>230</sup> Florescano, *Memory, Myth and Time in Mexico*, 22-27.

<sup>231</sup> Elizabeth Hill Boone, *The Aztec World*, (Montreal: St. Remy Press, 1994), 102. See chapter 5 for Quetzalcoatl’s connection to the cross symbol.

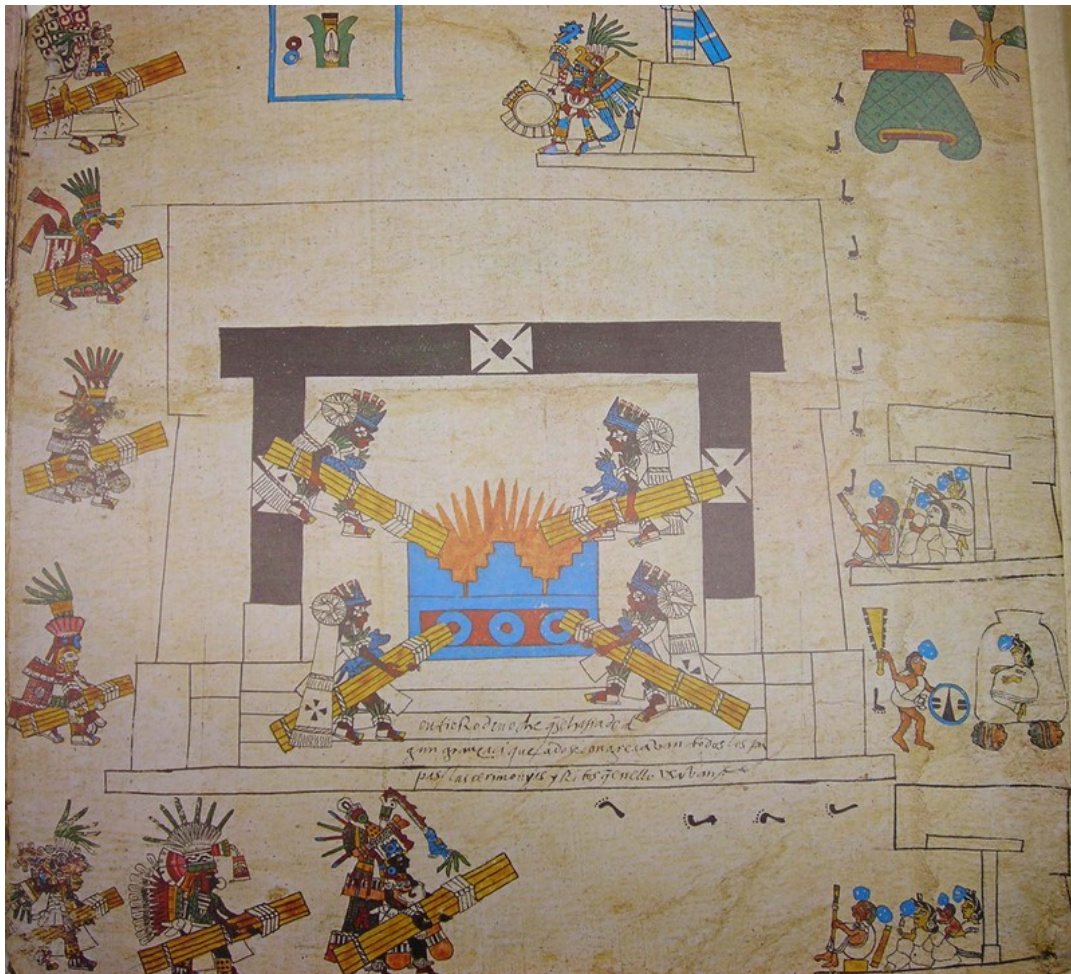


Figure 2. "The New Fire Ceremony", *Codex Borbonicus*, bark paper, 39x39.5cm, (Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale, Paris, preconquest or early colonial)

cyclical history in which the past was destroyed and a new creation began, the introduction of similar Christian eschatological concepts, such as the millennial kingdom of Christ, did not impede Mexican acceptance and comingling of American and European worldviews.

Among various indigenous groups, the cross was a pre-Columbian icon associated with astronomy and weather. Anthony Aveni argues that the use of crossed-sticks and cross glyphs became tools of Mesoamerican astronomy, explaining how these sighting devices take the form of a cross to tie this symbol into the religious worldview of the ancient Mexicans.<sup>232</sup> The cross also symbolized the four directions of the world. Aztec religious belief had assigned a specific color, animal, being, and god to each direction in which the cross points.<sup>233</sup> The *Codex Fejervary-Mayer* contains a representational understanding of the Mesoamerican cosmos dating from the fifteenth century (fig. 3). This pre-Columbian depiction, which acts as both a historical calendar and map of the Mesoamerican cosmos, stretches out in four directions to the four trees that hold up the sky. This complex drawing, centered upon the symbol of the cross, was known as a Maltese Cross which in Native understanding represented cosmological completion.<sup>234</sup>

The *Fejervary-Mayer's* calendar-map image contains a similar worldview to the tree-like cross on the seventh-century Mayan ruler Pacal's sarcophagus. The quadripartite motif was an integral part of Mayan cosmology relating to cosmic directions found on their agrarian/solar calendar. Also related are the numerous pots excavated from Mayan burial sites which contain

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<sup>232</sup> Anthony F. Aveni, *Skywatchers of Ancient Mexico*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), 18 & 226.

<sup>233</sup> James B. Greenberg, *Santiago's Sword: Chatino Peasant Religion and Economics*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 86.

<sup>234</sup> Harley and Woodward, *The History of Cartography*, vol. II, book 3, 230.

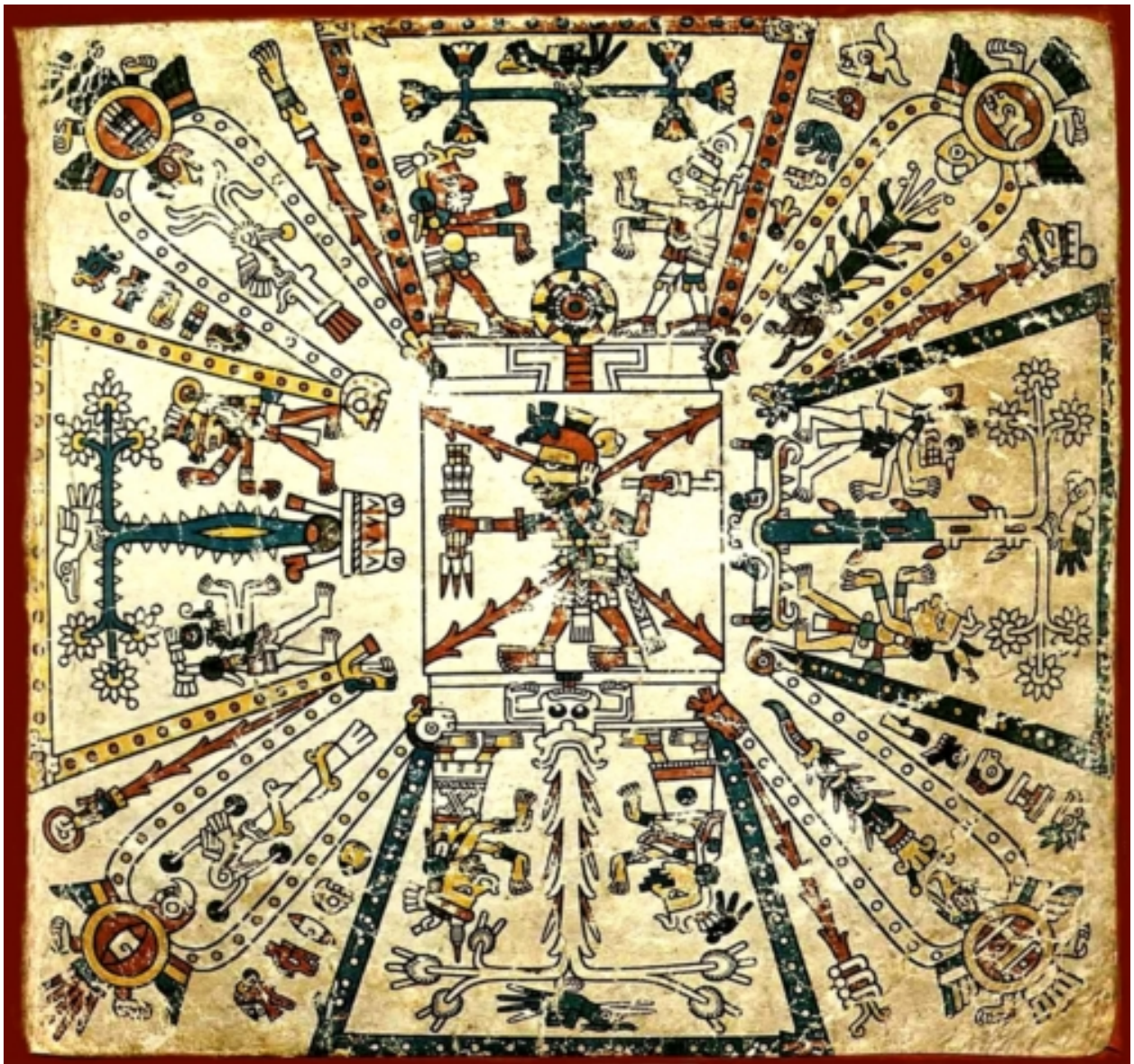


Figure 3. *The Codex Fejérváry-Mayer*, deerskin parchment, 16.2x17.2 cm, (Merseyside Museum in Liverpool, England, pre-Columbian).



cross symbols on the inside and at the bottom.<sup>235</sup> Besides the motif on vessels, excavations from the Late Formative period reveal the arrangement of images into quadripartite patterns.<sup>236</sup> Patricia McAnany argues that the quadripartite motif and partitioning of land is grounded in both agrarian and calendrical meaning.<sup>237</sup> In a larger cosmological sense, the quadripartite motif is evocative of the partitioning of the universe in reference to solar cycles.<sup>238</sup>

However, the connection between the cross and indigenous cosmology was not restricted to the Aztec and Maya, but existed amongst most of the peoples that fell under the claims of New Spain. In his *Historia de la Provincia de Texas, 1673-1779* Juan Agustin Morfi recounts a missionary's visit to one of the Hasinai temples dedicated to the continual burning of fire. Morfi states, "The sacred fire is in the middle of the temple, and they always keep it burning with four very long, thick, and heavy logs, which they constantly attend, arranging them in the direction of the four principle winds."<sup>239</sup> The Hasinai arranged the logs of the ceremonial fire in the form of a cross, revealing that the symbol possessed a religious significance in Caddo culture before the Spanish arrived.

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<sup>235</sup> Patricia A. McAnany, *Living with the Ancestors: Kinship and Kingship in Ancient Maya Society*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 57-58, 85-86. The central axis of the cross motifs found in the vessels is a fifth point which creates an *axis mundi*.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>239</sup> Quoted in Juan Agustin Morfi, *Excerpts from the Memorias for the History of the Province of Texas*, Translated by Frederick C. Chabot, (San Antonio: Naylor Printing Company, 1932), 24. Peter Nabokov, "Orientations from Their Side: Dimensions of Native American Cartographic Discourse", *Cartographic Encounters: Perspectives on Native American Mapmaking and Map Use*, Malcolm Lewis, ed., (Chicago: University Press, 1998), 250-251: shows religious connection of fires in shape of cross in southern North America.

Other examples from pre-Columbian Caddo culture are the cross designs found on pottery and jewelry. One artifact that has been unearthed in former Caddo lands is an equal-armed metal cross within a circle that was worn around the neck.<sup>240</sup> In this symbol, the cross often represented the four cardinal directions of the world and the circle symbolized the four phases of the sun: dawn, noon, sunset, and midnight.<sup>241</sup> The representation of the cosmos as a cross inside a circle appears in a number of cultures worldwide which may be due to the structure of the human body. A person with arms outstretched represents the cross image and these cultures which define the universe as sprawling in four directions find in the body a microcosm of the cosmos.

The cross reminded the Christian observer that the universe was both made and sustained by God's love as described by St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians. The written cross described in this passage represents four dimensions, that is "the width, and length, and depth, and height" which the love of God encompasses. This concept can be found on later European maps and is comparable to uses of the cross on Native American maps.<sup>242</sup> Medieval Europeans could make strong connections with Native peoples as the cross not only represented the passion of Christ, but also the shape of the universe, which sprawled out in four directions. The concept that the world was originally divided into four parts forming a cross

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<sup>240</sup> Morfi, Excerpts from the *Memorias*, 69, note 25. The cross as a pre-Columbian decoration for pottery can also be found in the *Codex Borgia* in which a white cross decorates a red ceremonial pot on plates 24 and 60.

<sup>241</sup> Harley and Woodward, *The History of Cartography*, vol. II, book 3, 540-541. A directional cross can also be found in the *Codex Borgia*. On plate 72 the deity Tlazolteotl appears spread upon the cross similar to a crucifixion position (Gisele Díaz and Alan Rodgers, *The Codex Borgia: A Full-Color Restoration of the Ancient Mexican Manuscript*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), xxx & 6).

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, I: 334; St. Paul, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 3:18.

image is also found in the Judeo-Christian tradition recorded in Genesis. The description of the Garden of Eden includes an explanation of how four rivers, the Tigris, Euphrates, Pishon, and Gihon, flow in different directions from one spring.<sup>243</sup> Intimately relating these four rivers with the cross symbol is Rome's Basilica di San Clemente's twelfth-century apse. In this depiction the soul, illustrated as a stag, finds rest by drinking from the waters overseen by the cross. The mosaic reinforces the Venerable Bede's exegesis that the supreme baptism takes place in these four rivers.<sup>244</sup>

During the initial phases of colonization in the Americas, European thought was developing from a medieval perception of Christendom as depicted in *The City of God*, to a mathematical understanding of space. This cartographic transformation spurred on by Renaissance ideas displaced the medieval vision of the Christian universe. This new conception of the cosmos did not discount God, but rather forced cartographers away from traditional delineations. More realistic geometrical depictions based on empirical scholarship replaced the medieval representation of Jerusalem as the symbolic navel of the body of Christ.<sup>245</sup> However, scientific proofs do not often change religious perceptions or practices without the passage of much time. Although sixteenth-century Spanish charts of the Caribbean

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<sup>243</sup> *Genesis* 2: 10-14.

<sup>244</sup> Alessandro Scafi, "Mapping Eden: Cartographies of the Earthly Paradise", *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove, (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 58-59. Ignatius Donnelly argues in part IV chapter 5 of *Atlantis, the Antediluvian World* (1882) that the reason the cross is a universal symbol is that in the beginning the four rivers discussed in Genesis 2: 10-14 formed this image and indigenous around the globe continue to hearken back to that original as the symbol of the universe.

<sup>245</sup> Sergio Rivera-Ayala, "Riding High, The Horseman's View", *Mapping Colonial Spanish America: Places and Commonplaces of Identity, Culture, and Experience*, Edited by Santa Arias and Mariselle Melendez, (Bucknell University Press, 2002), 253.

and Gulf of Mexico reflect the practical need for accurate delineations, the Spanish that ventured into Mexico and built the colonial towns were more influenced by the medieval mindset concerning the sanctity of space.

#### 4.2 Sanctifying Space

According to Mircea Eliade, traditional society distinguishes two levels of existence: the sacred and the profane world. He argues that, to a religious person, material objects and places “acquire their reality, their identity, only to the extent of their participation in a transcendent reality.”<sup>246</sup> The profane world is only real in so much as it conforms to the sacred or the patterns established by the sacred order. In order for space to be sanctified, the sacred must manifest itself or be manifested there through symbolic ritual. Both in the pre-contact and colonial eras, inhabitants of Mexico utilized the cross to signify sacred space.

The Otomí revered the *puerto*, a mountain pass or harbor, as a kind of crossroads that was symbolically represented in the cross. In Otomí understanding, this central location, where the perpendicular and horizontal axes meet, was where communication took place between the other levels of the cosmos: heaven and underworld.<sup>247</sup> Similarly, Mayan temples and pyramids were called sacred mountains and the openings were regarded as portals to the supernatural realm. Within these “caves” the “World Tree” grew. Shamans and villagers made models of the natural world, traditionally the cross symbol, out of green saplings and corn stalks to be put in

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<sup>246</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 5.

<sup>247</sup> Phyllis M. Correa, “Otomi Rituals and Celebrations: Crosses, Ancestors, and Resurrection”, *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 113, No. 450, *Holidays, Ritual, Festival, Celebration, and Public Display* (2000), 436-450: 449.

fields, caves, and hills.<sup>248</sup> In a more general sense, the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan was sanctified by virtue of being at the crossroads of the universe horizontally, as is seen on the *Fejervary-Mayer's* calendar-map image, and vertically as the sacred umbilical cord that connected humanity with the gods.<sup>249</sup> The sanctity of Tenochtitlan, specifically the Templo Mayor, as the center of the Aztec's cross-shaped universe was also demonstrated by the throwing of a sacrificial victim's blood to the four corners of the world.<sup>250</sup>

Regardless of whether Natives envisioned sanctified space as a city, temple, or natural opening in the earth, the acceptance of their space as unique centers of the universe allowed them a sense of spiritual direction. According to Eliade, "In the homogeneous and infinite expanse, in which no point of reference is possible and hence no orientation is established, the hierophany [appearance of the Sacred] reveals an absolute fixed point, a center."<sup>251</sup> Christianity is a very mobile religion in that it does not require its adherents to worship at a specific geographic location, but rather where a space has been sanctified. This meant a place could be built on in such a way to evoke divine blessing. A pervasive example in Europe is the cross-shaped floor plan of medieval churches designed to draw the penitent into contemplation.

According to the sixteenth-century historian Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, the cross symbol played a miraculous role in the story of Alonso de Zuazo's shipwreck in the Caribbean (1523). After failing to find fresh water in the holes they had drilled, the castaways

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<sup>248</sup> Friedel and Schele, *A Forest of Kings*, 72. In 1761, Antonio Pérez, a Native from the Mexican highlands, claimed that he could frighten the wind by placing crosses on the mountains (Gruzinski, *Man-gods*, 117).

<sup>249</sup> At the ruins of Milta there is a subterranean gallery in the form of a cross under one of the palaces (Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America*, 5 Vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1875), IV: 412).

<sup>250</sup> Van Zantwijk, *The Aztec Arrangement*, 204-205.

<sup>251</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 21.

desperately decided to revise their strategies for finding water on the small island where they were stranded. Zuazo proposed to stop and reinstate the search in the form of an elaborate ritual. They confessed their sins to each other, asked God to forgive their offenses, offered vows of chastity, and then enacted a religious procession. While chanting and praying, they used their feet to draw a cross in the middle of the small sandy island, “as if it were a round loaf of bread divided in four equal parts, and forming with these dividing lines four quarters with a cross in the middle.”<sup>252</sup> At the point of the cross’ intersection, they knelt and dug with their hands until they found fresh water which saved them from certain death as they were not rescued for another 135 days.<sup>253</sup> The simple cross drawn on the unsanctified land not only produced a miracle in the eyes of the Spaniards, but reinforced the idea of the power of the Christian symbol in “baptizing” and claiming space for Spain.

Colonization went beyond conquest in the sense that it laid claim to space through a continued physical presence and the transformation of that space. The colonial project centered on ritualized expressions of urban space and religious iconography. Spanish policy concerning urban development intended to inscribe the victory of Christianity on the Mexican landscape. The crisscrossed city grids constituted a mold for the organization of a colonial

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<sup>252</sup> Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, *Historia General y Natural de las Indias*, 5 Vols, (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1959), 5:331: “como si se tomase un pan redondo e le partiesen en cuatro partes iguales, quedando por las partiduras o divisores cuatro cuarterones con una cruz en medio.”

<sup>253</sup> Alvaro Félix Bolaños, “A Place to Live, A Place to Think, and a Place to Die”, *Mapping Colonial Spanish America: Places and Commonplaces of Identity, Culture, and Experience*, Edited by Santa Arias and Mariselle Melendez, (Bucknell University Press, 2002), 278.

order through the victor's symbols.<sup>254</sup> Alvaro Félix Bolaños argues that Oviedo's shipwreck story embodied certain discursive markers, beginning with the icon of the cross. In describing Zuazo's shipwreck, Oviedo managed to make a powerful connection between writing about the conquest and the idea of a plaza. Oviedo's narrative tells of an imagined place in which a European square demonstrated the powerful ubiquity of Christianity in a representation of urban space.<sup>255</sup>

The omnipresence of the cross as a sign of mandatory submission became distinctly present in the middle of every colonial plaza.<sup>256</sup> On the 1585 map of Tarímbaro and Cuitzeo and the 1793 map of San Pedro Pareo, Pátzcuaro, the cross in each of the plazas is central and dominant.<sup>257</sup> The public plaza became a place in which Spaniards controlled indigenous political and cultural integrity. The leading Spanish pattern of the sanctification of urban space centered upon a plaza where religious as well as political meaning converged on a specified symbol which was most often the cross. The plaza, as a location to symbolically and physically westernize the non-European inhabitants, became an attempt to eliminate indigenous cultural identity.<sup>258</sup>

The reconfiguration of indigenous cities was meant to counter satanic seduction through the imposition of order. Thus, the burden put on Natives by the colonial system was

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<sup>254</sup> Serge Gruzinski, *Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization*, Translated by Deke Dusinberre, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 55.

<sup>255</sup> Bolaños, "A Place to Live", 277-78. Oviedo y Valdés, *Historia General*, V: 322–357.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>257</sup> Georgina H. Endfield, "'Pinturas,' Land and Lawsuits: Maps in Colonial Mexican Legal Documents," *Imago Mundi*, Vol. 53. (2001), 18 & 22.

<sup>258</sup> Bolaños, "A Place to Live", 289.

necessary in order to enforce Christian rule.<sup>259</sup> However, where acceptable, the Spanish allowed the interpretation of the symbolic organization to be multivocal. The founding of new villages united traditional ways of organizing urban space in the four cardinal directions, each point indicated with a cross.<sup>260</sup> The laying out of towns began with the erection of a large wooden cross and streets gridded around it as is recorded by the Franciscan missionary Fr. Beaumont concerning the establishment of Acámbaro in 1526.<sup>261</sup> This urban plan is easily seen on the 1585 map of Tarímbaro and Cuitzeo on which the center of town is dominated by a church and a large plaza with a sizable cross in the middle. As dictated in Philip II's 1573 *Royal Ordinance Concerning the Laying out of New Towns*, the major roads that intersect into the plaza form a cross symbol similar to Cortés' map of Tenochtitlan.<sup>262</sup> Even though the reason given in the *Royal Ordinance* for such an urban plan is for practical reasons, this arrangement functioned as a sanctification of space which satisfied both Christian and indigenous cosmology.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Rocío Cortés, "(De)mystifying Sacred Geographical Spaces", *Mapping Colonial Spanish America: Places and Commonplaces of Identity, Culture, and Experience*, Edited by Santa Arias and Mariselle Melendez, (Bucknell University Press, 2002), 77.

<sup>260</sup> Florescano, *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico*, 114; Alfonso Villa Rojas, "Los conceptos de espacio y tiempo entre los grupos mayas contemporáneos," *Tiempo y realidad en el pensamiento maya*, Edited by Miguel León-Portilla, (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1968), 128-132.

<sup>261</sup> George Kubler, "Mexican Urbanism in the Sixteenth Century," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1942), 163; Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest*, 139-140.

<sup>262</sup> Endfield, "'Pinturas,' Land and Lawsuits", 18.

<sup>263</sup> Nuttall, "Royal Ordinances Concerning the Laying out of New Towns", 750: "From the plaza shall run four main streets, one from the middle of each side of the plaza; and two streets at the corner of each plaza. The four corners of the plaza shall face the four principle



As soon as the friars arrived in Mexico, they immediately built churches on the sites of pre-Hispanic temples and assigned Christian patrons to create a new toponymy. As the Spanish reorganized indigenous towns, they combined a saint's name to the Native appellation in order to "baptize" it, yet not erase the historic and perhaps religious meaning for the Natives.

<sup>264</sup> The Spaniards accepted the urban division of the *calpolli* in Tenochtitlan, but assigned a Christian name to replace or at least coexist with pre-Hispanic toponymy: "and later the priests came from all the temples of each [*calpolli*]: those from Calmecac, Tlilancalco, Yupico, Huitznahuac, Tlacateopan, which are now neighborhoods of Mexico, named San Juan, San Pablo, San Sebastian, Santa María la Redonda."<sup>265</sup>

Within half a century after conquest, the widespread effect of the Christianization of space is readily seen on maps as a church dominates each town organized by the Spanish. In the map of Tarímbaro and Cuitzeo (1590) the several scattered villas as well as the towns each have small structures that surround a proportionately larger church almost always with a cross on it.<sup>266</sup> The cross-topped chapels on the Plan of Coatepec Chalco (1579) are even more dominant as they are the only representations of the surrounding villages.<sup>267</sup> However, the cross symbol was not restricted to church buildings on colonial maps, but could be used to indicate land grants as on the map of Comienbaro (1576) or the site of an estancia as on the map of Tarímbaro and Valladolid (1587).<sup>268</sup>

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winds. For the streets running thus from the plaza, they will not be exposed to the four principal winds which cause much inconvenience."

<sup>264</sup> Florescano, *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico*, 114; Villa Rojas, "Los conceptos de espacio y tiempo", 128-132.

<sup>265</sup> Quoted in Cortés, "(De)mystifying Sacred Geographical Spaces", 77.

<sup>266</sup> Endfield, "'Pinturas,' Land and Lawsuits", 13.

<sup>267</sup> Kubler, "Mexican Urbanism in the Sixteenth Century", 166.

<sup>268</sup> Endfield, "'Pinturas,' Land and Lawsuits", 17 & 19.

The cross was also a ubiquitous symbol throughout colonial Mayan society. It could be seen at the four pathways entering each town, atop boundary markers, and on the doorways of houses.<sup>269</sup> The 1557 Land Treaty of the town of Maní ordered the placing of crosses at the borders of the fields of the towns.<sup>270</sup> This use of the cross is seen on the 1579 map of Suchitepec on which a disproportionately large church and cross dominate the town center and in each of the four corners is situated a large cross atop a pyramidal structure.<sup>271</sup> In 1545, Spanish authorities ordered crosses placed at watering locations as landmarks which the Maya perhaps associated with the god of rain.<sup>272</sup> On the 1587 map of Tarímbaro, a cross on an altar independently stands near the sheep corral.<sup>273</sup> Roadside crosses continued throughout the colonial period as the 1790 description of a “cross on the road to Saci” demonstrates.<sup>274</sup> This sanctification of land also led to a syncretic development among the Maya in the rituals associated with farming. Before beginning the processes of clearing, planting, and harvesting the indigenous farmer would invoke the trinity (*Dios Yumbil, Dios Mehenbil, Dios Espiritu Santo*). In the same breath the farmer called upon various gods of the Mayan pantheon, specifically the four *pauahtuns*, rain spirits which held associations with the four cardinal directions and eventually acquired the names of Christian saints.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Farris, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule*, 315.

<sup>270</sup> Ralph L. Roys, *The Indian Background of Colonial Yucatan*, (Washington D. C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1943), 185.

<sup>271</sup> Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain*, 163.

<sup>272</sup> Ralph L. Roys, *The Titles of Ebtun: Spanish and Maya documents with English translations*, (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1983), 425.

<sup>273</sup> Endfield, “‘Pinturas,’ Land and Lawsuits”, 14.

<sup>274</sup> Roys, *The Titles of Ebtun*, 303. December 2, 1790

<sup>275</sup> Farris, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule*, 288.

Despite the distinctions between Christianity and indigenous religions, the cross symbol acted as a positive signifier of sanctified space for both Spaniards and Natives. Turner states that “The positional meaning of a symbol derives from its relationship to other symbols in a totality, a Gestalt, whose elements acquire their significance from the system as a whole.”<sup>276</sup> The cross symbol encapsulated Spanish and indigenous cosmography in such a way that it developed into the simplest and most pervasive image of sacred space satisfying Christian theology, Aztec astronomy, and Mayan perceptions of the universe. The fact that the dissimilar cultures interpreted the use of the cross image in the sanctification of space differently did not hinder colonial relations. Rather, the multivocality of the symbol encouraged limited, intercultural cooperation.

#### 4.3 Tenochtitlan versus Jerusalem

Tenochtitlan, the capital of perhaps the most powerful empire in the Americas at the arrival of the Spanish, was so similar to Jerusalem that certain Spaniards envisioned it as the New Jerusalem. European and Aztec artists depicted both cities as centers of the universe and used the cross symbol to represent this intersection of the divine and human. The actual layout of the cities was not as important to cartographers as the cosmological symbolism each represented in that at both of these junctions, humanity stood on sacred ground.

Elizabeth Hill Boone argues that the imperialism of Aztec images as well as the religious significance of placing Tenochtitlan at the crossroads of the universe is similar to the way that Jerusalem is figured on medieval European maps. Rudolf Arnheim argues that a viewer takes away from a map a simple mental image and therefore if a specific message is trying to be sent to a wide audience, the cartographer should use the most powerful and easily grasped image they can delineate.<sup>277</sup> Tenochtitlan, like Jerusalem, was not just a political

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<sup>276</sup> Turner, *A Forest of Symbols*, 51.

<sup>277</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, “The Perception of Maps” *The American Cartographer*. Vol. 3, No. 1. (1979). 6.

center but also a religious site and may have some similarities to how Christians viewed their holy city. Medieval maps often featured Rome and Byzantium as the center of the world, but far more common was the placing of Jerusalem as the axis of the Christian cosmos, especially on medieval T-O maps which accord well with Arnheim's arguments concerning a simple, recognizable image.<sup>278</sup>

The Hebrew prophet Ezekiel, who prophesied six centuries before Christ, described Jerusalem as "the center of the world."<sup>279</sup> Ezekiel also delivered the Lord's command to "Go through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark on the foreheads of the men that groan and that grieve for all the iniquities that are done in the midst of them."<sup>280</sup> The word "mark" in this verse is a translation of the Greek letter *tau* which is represented as T, a type of cross symbol. The early Church Father, Tertullian (160-230 AD), declared, "The Greek letter Tau and our own letter T is the very form of the cross. He [Ezekiel] predicted this would be the sign on our foreheads in the true catholic Jerusalem."<sup>281</sup>

Despite the fact that few medieval Christians, especially western Christians, lived near Jerusalem, they considered this historic city a sanctified place associated with the cross. Medieval churches faced east toward the city where Christ was crucified.<sup>282</sup> The Romans

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<sup>278</sup> Denis Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 61. The ninth-century manuscript map in Strasburg and the thirteenth-century Psalter mappaemundi are two examples of T-O maps placing Jerusalem as the center of the cosmos.

<sup>279</sup> Ezekiel 38:12

<sup>280</sup> Ezekiel 9:4; This is one of the earliest references to making the sign of the cross.

<sup>281</sup> Tertullian, "Tertullian against Marcion" *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, Translated by A. Cleveland Coxe, 9 vols. (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1887), III: 340-341.

<sup>282</sup> Harley and Woodward, *The History of Cartography*, I: 334. Mesoamerican maps were oriented east because it was the most important direction because of the sunrise and

inadvertently perpetuated the idea of Jerusalem as a sacred place by squaring the city, leaving intersections that reflected the Christian cross. Numerous medieval maps of Jerusalem, such as the one found in the Uppsala manuscript, illustrate it with a cross symbol dividing the city in quarters (fig. 4).<sup>283</sup> The twelfth-century Hague manuscript contains a *Situs Hierusalem (Map of Jerusalem)* which delineates the city walls as a circle and the two major intersecting streets forming a cross. The foreground features Christian crusaders, led by St. George dressed as a Templar with a red cross on his shield and banner, pursuing fleeing Muslims.<sup>284</sup> The artist labeled the churches and religious sites with crosses, small reflections of the great symbolic city of Jerusalem. These medieval renderings of Jerusalem were inaccurate in a strict cartographic sense, but remained true to current Christian ideology of the city being a microcosm of the universe.

The seventh-century bishop Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiarum sive Originum*, a tripartite world map, reveals the medieval view of the world as a circle inclosing a Tau cross which looks similar to the standard depictions of Jerusalem.<sup>285</sup> In the middle of the world-map, which is oriented east, is Jerusalem. The *Byzantine-Oxford T-O map* (1110), *Psalter mappamundi* (1225), Richard de Bello of Haldingham *Hereford mappamundi* (1290), and several other maps similarly place Jerusalem at the center of world. The Mediterranean Sea

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therefore the color red denoted east (Friedel and Schele, *A Forest of Kings*, 66-67). Natives continued to orient maps east throughout the colonial period despite European influence which by this time published most maps with north as the top. See the *Map of Tarímbaro and Cuitzeo* (1590) and that of *San Pedro Pareo, Pátzcuaro* (1793) in Endfield, "'Pinturas,' Land and Lawsuits", 13 & 22.

<sup>283</sup> Nitza Rosovsky, ed., *City of the Great King: Jerusalem from David to the Present*, (Harvard: University Press, 1996), 243.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>285</sup> The first printed map in Europe (1472).

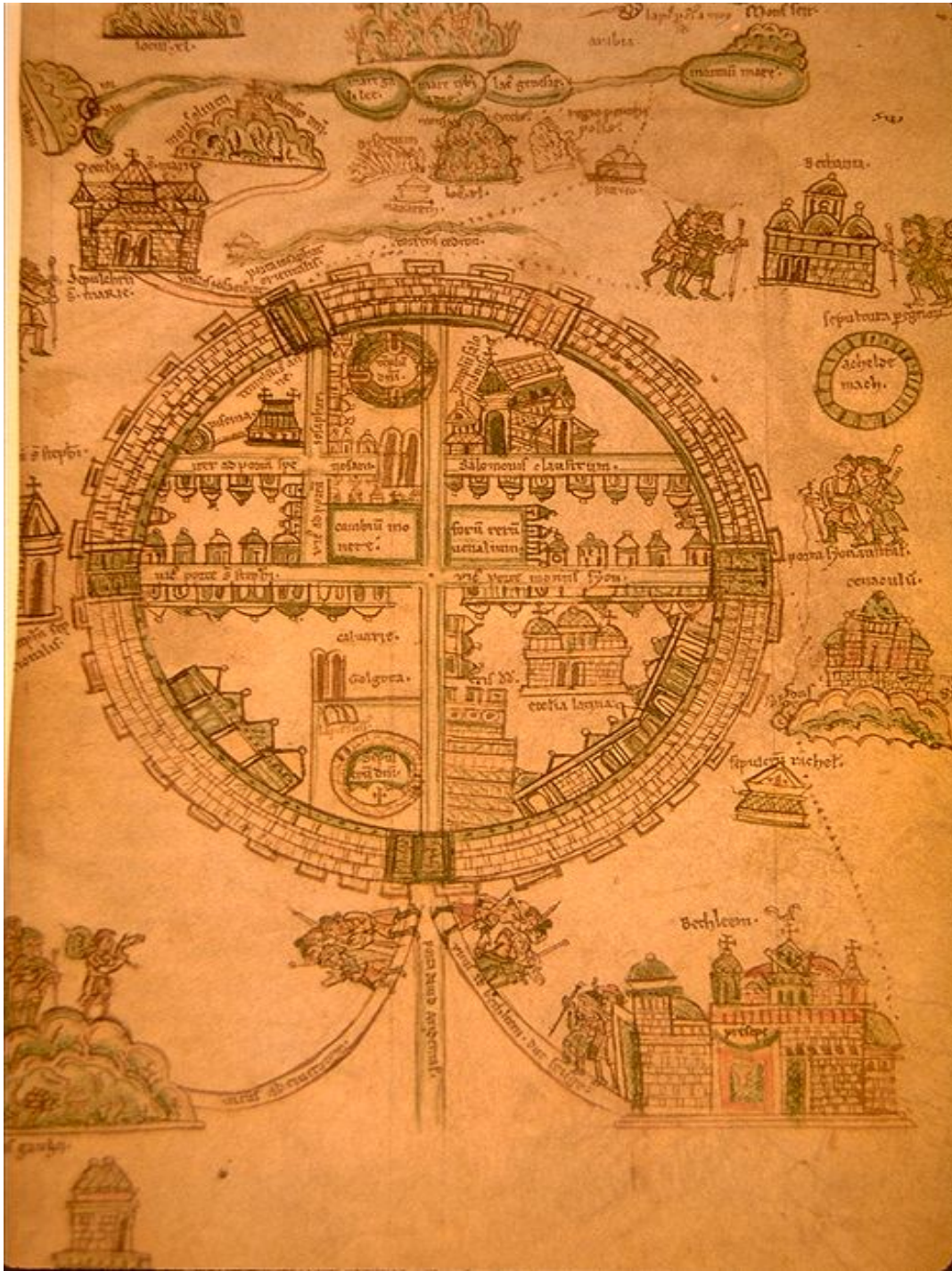


Figure 4. "Situs Hierusalem"(map of Jerusalem), Uppsala manuscript, 21.5 X 12.7 cm, (thirteenth century).

and the rivers that run north and south form a Tau cross on the T-O maps. Jerusalem forms the head of the cross giving the appearance of a man with his arms spread out as if impaled on a cross.

Tenochtitlan was also laid out as a microcosm of the universe in which four roads formed an axis.<sup>286</sup> Cortés' depiction of the Aztec capital outlines Tenochtitlan as divided by the causeways forming a cross similar to the maps of Jerusalem (fig. 5).<sup>287</sup> Tenochtitlan was divided into four sections which in a larger sense represented the world. The northeast quarter was associated with Tetxcoco, the northwest with Tlacopan, and the southeast and southwest with Mexico-Tenochtitlan.<sup>288</sup>

The *Fejervary-Mayer* codex has a cross which indicates the horizontal order of the world so that the earth is divided into four parts and unites in the center to form a fifth known as the navel of the universe, Mexico-Tenochtitlan, specifically the Templo Mayor. The Templo Mayor was the intersection of the vertical cross which divided heaven, earth, and the underworld and therefore was the confluence of sacred forces making it the focal point of human sacrifices to feed the sun and the gods.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Burr Cartwright Brundage, *Fifth Sun: Aztec Gods, Aztec World*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 4-5. Aztecs colored four sacrificial victims according to the directions in the year-end feast.

<sup>287</sup> Van Zantwijk, *The Aztec Arrangement*, 62; Donald Wigal, *Historic Maritime Maps, 1290-1699*, (New York: Parkstone Press, 2000), 127.

<sup>288</sup> Van Zantwijk, *The Aztec Arrangement*, 211.

<sup>289</sup> Florescano, *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico*, 13-14.

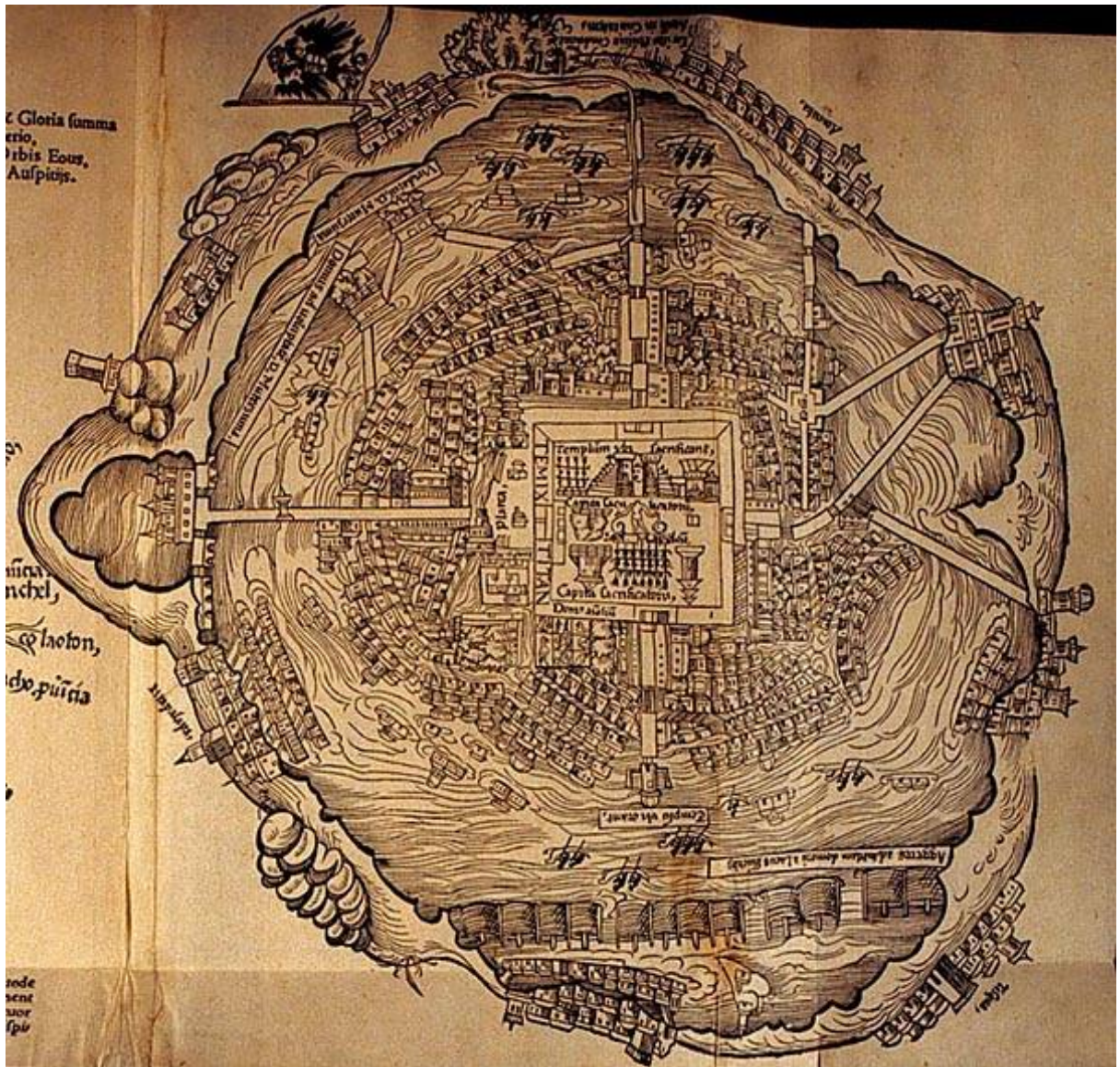


Figure 5. Tenochtitlan (detail), *Praeclara Ferdinandi Cortesii de nova maris oceani hispania narratio*, Woodcut, (Latin Edition of Hernán Cortes' letters, Nuremberg, 1524).



Boone demonstrates the imperialistic outlook of Aztec culture by noting not only the image of the Maltese Cross found in the *Codex Fejervary-Mayer* but also the frontispiece from the *Codex Mendoza*, both of which she contends places the city of Tenochtitlan at the center of the universe. In the Mendoza map the city is represented as an eagle perched on a cactus, while in the *Fejervary-Mayer* map the Aztec god Xiuhtecuhtli, the patron of the annual cycle, is in the center (fig. 6). In both maps a cross divides the land into quarters. Boone's interpretation is based on the conclusion that the pictographs appear to have no boundaries, but rather place the four quarters of the world within Aztec cosmography and influence.<sup>290</sup>

The Aztecs built Tenochtitlan as a symbolic reflection of the sacred realm. In Tenochtitlan's main square stood the Great Temple. The number of steps and the orientation of the stairs incorporated the symbols of time, space, and the calendar. Each of the temples in the main square faced one of the cardinal points, according to the patron gods they represented. Tenochtitlan's urban organization mirrored the relationship between Aztec cosmology and the division of the city. The city was divided into four *calpolli* which followed the four cardinal points.<sup>291</sup> The *calpolli* divisions might also have been reflections of the spatial distribution of the earth and underworld levels.<sup>292</sup>

The depictions of Tenochtitlan and Jerusalem illustrate the importance of religious sites on both European and Aztec maps. The key to placing these cities at the crossroads of the world is the symbol of the cross. On the medieval mappaemundi, the Mediterranean Sea, the Nile, and Don Rivers form a Tau cross dividing the earth's landmass into thirds.

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<sup>290</sup> Elizabeth Hill Boone, "Maps of Territory, History, and Community in Aztec Mexico", *Cartographic Encounters: Perspectives on Native American Mapmaking and Map Use*. Edited by G. Malcolm Lewis. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 129-130.

<sup>291</sup> Cortés, "(De)mystifying Sacred Geographical Spaces", 73-74.

<sup>292</sup> Van Zantwijk, *The Aztec Arrangement*, 1981, 82.



Figure 6. *Codex Mendoza*, European paper, (Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza, c.1541).

Jerusalem figures as the head or the top part of the vertical beam of the cross. Similarly, the Mendoza map uses water to divide the land into fourths forming a St. Andrew's cross. In these types of maps, actual geography does not matter as much as cosmic placement. It is worth noting that the cross symbol is the key in representing their respective religious cities as the towns built during the colonial period reflect this image in their development and layout.

The conversion of Mesoamerica was a utopian project aimed at creating a new Christian society, which began by sanctifying the land. Once the Spanish had eradicated the idolatrous, Mesoamerican beliefs, a New Jerusalem could be built without the vices and mistakes that had afflicted European Christians.<sup>293</sup> Geronimo de Mendieta argued in his *Historia eclesiastica indiana* (1571-1596) that God chose Cortés as the new Moses and that Tenochtitlan was to be the "New Jerusalem".<sup>294</sup> However, Cortés and later Spaniards had to reduce Aztec claims to the sacredness of Tenochtitlan and other indigenous cities in order to imbue them with Christian sanctity.<sup>295</sup> With this in mind the missionaries of the early colonial period set out to reconstruct pagan space into microcosms of the Christian universe.

#### 4.4 Colonial Maps

Cartography is an expression of how cartographers understand the world in their own minds or at least how they want to conceive the world. Maps are not objectively outside society, but something used to define the status quo within a certain historical context. J. B. Harley argues that maps, just as much as soldiers and ships, have been used as "weapons of

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<sup>293</sup> Cortés, "(De)mystifying Sacred Geographical Spaces", 77.

<sup>294</sup> Florescano, *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico*, 82-83. Moses is also connected to the cross symbol in that when he held his arms up to form a cross with his body during the Israelites battle against the Amalekites, the Hebrews would win (Exodus 17: 11-12).

<sup>295</sup> Ricardo Padrón, *The Spacious Word: Cartography, Literature, and Empire in Early Modern Spain*, (Chicago: University Press, 2004), 109.

imperialism.”<sup>296</sup> The advantage to materially graphing this understanding of place is the cartographers are empowered to delineate for others their space in the world. This power enables the cartographer to have a greater perspective and perhaps even more control.

The crowns of Europe, specifically the Holy Roman Emperors, used certain symbols full of potency, such as the globe, to signify the universality of their power. Artists often portrayed these rulers holding a globe topped by a cross revealing their divine right to rule over worldly matters.<sup>297</sup> Jerry Brotton states that the powerful iconography of the globe as an abiding symbol of imperial authority made it a compelling choice for both crowns (Spain and Portugal) to define claims in distant domains.<sup>298</sup> The Hapsburgs, particularly Spain, spread this symbol of God-sanctioned political authority across oceans.

Harley’s argument concerning the use of maps “...to legitimize the reality of conquest and empire” is reflected in the first European charts of the American continents.<sup>299</sup> The Portuguese Miller map of Brazil (c.1519) is filled with Natives, trees, birds, and beasts, but not crosses. The crosses are on the sails of European ships heading for the pagan mainland.<sup>300</sup> Similar to Harley, Denis Cosgrove argues that those cartographers with the “Apollonian gaze”

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<sup>296</sup> Harley, *The New Nature of Maps*, 57.

<sup>297</sup> Cosgrove, *Apollo’s Eye*, 10-11. An 1137 image depicts the marriage of Spanish rulers each holding an orb topped by a cross (Gabriel Jackson, *Making of Medieval Spain*, (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 118).

<sup>298</sup> Jerry Brotton, “Terrestrial Globalism: Mapping the Globe in Early Modern Europe”, *Mappings*, Edited by Denis Cosgrove, (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 82-84; The Treaty of Tordesillas was initially delineated on a flat rectangular map. With the sighting of the Pacific Ocean by Balboa in 1513 and Magellan’s actual sailing into said water mass, a global perspective was demanded in defining the treaty.

<sup>299</sup> Harley, *The New Nature of Maps*, 57.

<sup>300</sup> Wigal, *Historic Maritime Maps*, 84.

use such projections as “...essential instruments for political strategy, academic study, and trade, if not practical navigation.”<sup>301</sup> The map of Brazil readily displays the idea of indigenous submission simultaneous to Portuguese control.

Working off of Michele Foucault’s notion that knowledge generates power, Harley states that “Maps are preeminently a language of power, not of protest.”<sup>302</sup> Cartographically, the cross designated Spanish influence in the Americas on indigenous maps. Administrators throughout the Spanish empire created the *Relaciones Geográficas* between 1578 and 1585 in response to a questionnaire developed for Felipe II of Spain who required a *pintura* of all the regions of his empire in addition to the manuscript reports. Natives produced many of the maps which reveal neither predominately indigenous nor European influences, but a blending of both artistic styles. The use of the cross to denote a Christian town on a map dates from European maps in the fourteenth century. The 1375 map of Hispania by Jewish cartographer Iresques of Majorca reveals this pre-contact use of the cross symbol.<sup>303</sup> This easily drawn icon would continue to be used by Native and Spanish map-makers in the Americas.<sup>304</sup> On the map of Culhuacán (1580), as well as on most of the maps of the Americas from the *Relaciones Geográficas*, churches topped by a cross mark the sites of Spanish missions (fig. 7).<sup>305</sup>

Sixteenth-century indigenous maps of land claims often oriented themselves around churches, structures which were easily recognized as they were comparatively larger than other buildings and topped by at least one cross. On the *Títulos* of San Matías Cuixingo and

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<sup>301</sup> Cosgrove, *Apollo’s Eye*, 114.

<sup>302</sup> Michel Foucault: “Knowledge was thus a form of power, a way of presenting one’s own values in the guise of scientific disinterestedness” ( J. B. Harley, *The New Nature of Maps*, 54).

<sup>303</sup> Jackson, *Making of Medieval Spain*, 123

<sup>304</sup> Harley and Woodward, *The History of Cartography*, I: 397.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, book 3, 212.



the form of faces or persons connected to the church by a certain distance of road.<sup>306</sup> As with most maps from this period, the major symbol of Spanish presence on the Map of the Lands of Juan de Azanda (Temascaltepec, 1579) is the cross both on a church and standing alone at a juncture.<sup>307</sup> Despite the various indigenous artistic conventions in the maps of Ixtapalapa (1580) and Texúpa (1579), such as indicating paths with hand-drawn feet, the prominent feature is a church illustrated with the European introduced bell and a cross.<sup>308</sup>

Franciscans utilized a gridiron of blocks in their new 1533 plan for the Spanish settlement of Puebla de los Angeles. The blocks were oriented with their corners facing the cardinal points. Franciscans quartered the town by having two major streets function as intersecting axes forming a cross.<sup>309</sup> The gridiron plan with the major axes is easily seen on the Plan of Nochistlan (1581) on which the feet symbols form a cross at the central intersection.<sup>310</sup> The use of the cross symbol within the pattern of the gridiron town plan can be seen on the maps of Suchitepec (1579), Tarímbaro (1587), Guacao, Maya, and Cuitzeo (1595), Huexotla (1580, and Tenango del Valle (1582). The only structures that disrupt the orderly intersections

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<sup>306</sup> See the *Títulos* of San Matías Cuixingo and Zoyatzingo; Wood, *Transcending Conquest*, 112-114.

<sup>307</sup> Dennis Reinhartz and Gerald D. Saxon, Editors, *The Mapping of the Entradas into the Greater Southwest*, (University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 48.

<sup>308</sup> UT, Benson Latin American Collection, (JGI xxxiv-8); Joyce W. Bailey, "Map of Texúpa (Oaxaca, 1579): A Study of Form and Meaning," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol 54, No. 4, (1972), 454.

<sup>309</sup> Kubler, "Mexican Urbanism in the Sixteenth Century", 161-162.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

of these streets are the church and the plaza which fulfill the 1573 *Royal Ordinance* “that everything may be distributed in good proportions for the instruction of religion.”<sup>311</sup>

All maps are abbreviations because they are selective not just in terms of space, but what is recorded in that space. Again Harley speaks best to the issue when he states that, “(b)oth in the selectivity of their content and in their signs and styles of representation maps are a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world which is biased towards, promoted by, and exerts influence upon particular sets of social relations.”<sup>312</sup> Joyce W. Bailey argues that because the indigenous cartographer had to cater to the demands of clarity as well as accuracy, they used symbols rather than drawing the objects themselves which produced a “synthesis of an illusionistic and symbolic reality.”<sup>313</sup>

Natives utilized the gridiron plan prior to contact with the Spanish, as is seen in the Plan of Tenochtitlan, but for the Europeans it represented the dream of the planned city.<sup>314</sup> The plan of Cholula (1581), a site important for Tolteca-Chichimeca religion and one of the largest population centers in Mesoamerica at the time of Cortes’ conquest of Tenochtitlan, divides the city into a 5 x 5 grid separated by broad avenues into rectangular units (fig. 8). The colonial situation afforded the Spanish opportunities to found new population centers replacing, or more often “baptizing” indigenous urban centers. Each of the cross-topped chapels on the Cholula

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<sup>311</sup> Endfield, “‘Pinturas,’ Land and Lawsuits”, 14. Kubler, “Mexican Urbanism in the Sixteenth Century”, 165; Nuttall, “Royal Ordinances Concerning the Laying out of New Towns”, 751; Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain*, 163.

<sup>312</sup> Harley, *The new Nature of Maps*, 53.

<sup>313</sup> Bailey, “Map of Texúpa (Oaxaca, 1579)”, 469.

<sup>314</sup> Kubler, “Mexican Urbanism in the Sixteenth Century,” 167.





map is located on or near a Native religious pyramidal platform.<sup>315</sup> Archaeology reveals that the Cholula map was not faithful to the actual layout of the city, but rather reflected an ideal form.<sup>316</sup>

#### 4.5 Conclusion

Although Spaniards sought to bring Natives under their control through the structure and layout of colonial towns, their urban development plans did not necessarily disrupt indigenous cosmology. Instead, the establishment of cities in Mexico supplied a model satisfying to all involved, while cartography revealed Native influence on Spanish plans. The role of the cross allowed a bipartite understanding as a multivocal signifier and eventually a syncretic acceptance of Mexican cultural development. As an image important in the reactualization or at least reiteration of the important events of history, i.e. creation and the crucifixion of Christ, Christians, Aztecs, Mayas, and others infused the cross as a symbol of cosmic, religious, and/or political power on delineations of the universe in general and sacred space in particular.

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>316</sup> Gruzinski, *Mestizo Mind*, 137.

CHAPTER 5  
THE SYNCRETIZED CROSS

It has been said that crosses have been found in that country. Their significance must be ascertained.<sup>317</sup>

Diego Velázquez' instructions to Hernán Cortés

Syncretism is an obvious topic in understanding the religious culture of colonial Mexico. However, the broad spectrum that the fusion of Native and Spanish religion represents must be dealt with in confined approaches to present a synthesis. Therefore, a discussion of the cross symbol in relation to the indigenous concept of the "Tree of Life", to the god Quetzalcoatl, multi-lingual catechisms, worship at patio and roadside crosses, and reenactments of the crucifixion in passion plays, provides a focused yet comprehensive look at syncretism in colonial Mexico.

James Lockhart argues that the conquered indigenous expected to have to honor the gods of the conquerors and therefore, as far as religious conversion, convincing was not as important as explanation. However, the Spanish attempt to convert the indigenous failed in the strict sense of the word. Rather, as Louise Burkhart states:

having undergone no spiritual 'conversion,' [Natives] saw no contradiction in reevaluating both Christian and traditional practices and discourses and concocting from them new formulae, for the most part consistent with accustomed modes of eliciting sacred experience, that suited their colonial circumstances at any particular time and place.<sup>318</sup>

It is not correct to say that the Spanish missionaries absolutely failed in their goal of the Christianization of Mexico, but rather that that Christianization took on a new character or

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<sup>317</sup> Quoted in Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest*, 16.

<sup>318</sup> Burkhart, *Before Guadalupe*, 4.

vener. Spanish authorities at times condemned and at others condoned the unique religiosity which emerged during the colonial period.

Regardless of the departure from orthodoxy with which Mexican religion developed, what occurred was a *modus vivendi*. Concerning the blending of Hispanic and American cultures, Lockhart states that there developed, “forms that cannot be securely attributed to either original parent culture, but that were accepted all along as familiar to both.”<sup>319</sup> The usage and understanding of the cross image is consistent with this analysis, especially as an instrument connecting the divine to humankind.

Caroline Bynum argues that, “the practices and symbols of any culture are so embedded in that culture as to be inseparable from it.”<sup>320</sup> The image of the cross was one symbol which the Spanish did not force away from Natives, but attempted to reinterpret its connection to the divine. However, as Gruzinski states, “The dividing line thus did not run, as one might think, between Christianity and indigenous paganism, but much more between what Indians considered to be in their sphere, their religious domain.”<sup>321</sup> The cross image bridged the gap between Spanish and indigenous culture, allowing for a singular culture to develop.

#### 5.1 Tree of Life

Native Americans often used the cross symbol in representing the world in the form of a “Tree of Life”. On the sarcophagus lid of Pacal, a Mayan ruler of Palenque in the seventh century AD, a relief depicts Pacal being drawn into the underworld and a cross-shaped earth growing out of his body.<sup>322</sup> On this ritual coffin the cross, as the “World Tree”, acts as an axis

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<sup>319</sup> Lockhart, *Nahua After the Conquest*, 446.

<sup>320</sup> Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (University of California Press, 1988), 299.

<sup>321</sup> Gruzinski, *Man-gods*, 100.

<sup>322</sup> Harley and Woodward, *The History of Cartography*, vol. II, book 3, 237. Although, Pacal’s tomb was not discovered by westerners until the twentieth century it represents a

which the Maya perceived as connecting the heavens through the surface of the earth to the underworld below. Representations of the “Great Mouth of the Netherworld” into which the king descended, such as the monument from Chalcatzingo, are in a quadriform design, i.e. the cross symbol.<sup>323</sup> The Mayan king depicted plays a crucial role in this cosmic relief as life springs up out of his death. The Maya understood the “World Tree” cross symbol to be sacred as is seen on various representations found on the Mayan temples at Palenque. These “World Tree” depictions, such as the Foliated Cross, are marked with the symbol of a deity enforcing the belief that the “World Tree” image was holy.<sup>324</sup>

The center axis of the “World Tree”, called *Wacah Chan* (“raised up sky”), coexisted in all three vertical domains of the universe. The roots represented the underworld, the trunk the world, and the branches heaven. The center axis was materialized in the king himself whose outstretched hands formed a cross figure. Maya kings wore ceremonial dress which figured each as the “World Tree” as they were the vertical axis made flesh that penetrated all three layers of the universe. The axis of the “World Tree” served as a portal for the deceased and the gods to travel to and from the otherworld. In another sense the king himself was a manifestation of this portal not only as the primary practitioner, but literally as the pathway itself.<sup>325</sup>

For the Spanish friars that did not see the “World Tree” depicted on Mayan temples, codices made this image portable. The Spanish not only found “World Tree” depictions among the Maya (Codex Dresden), but also among the Mixtec (Codex Vindobonensis) and the Nahua

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general understanding in Mayan culture on which the Spaniards could have based explanations.

<sup>323</sup> Enrique Florescano, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 76.

<sup>324</sup> Friedel and Schele, *A Forest of Kings*, 409 & 418.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67, 90, & 243.

(Codex Borgia). Most missionaries found the precontact existence of the cross, despite the fact that the Mexicans did not regard it in a European Christian way, beneficial. What Spaniards interpreted as a perverted Christian image could be used during the liminal process of conversion as a medium that satisfied both indigenous and European beliefs. What Spanish Catholics ultimately wanted to see was the Natives “graduating” in their understanding of the cross into a Christian view.

Based on the annotations of the friars, Samuel Edgerton argues that it is certain they made the connection between “World Tree” and cross.<sup>326</sup> Edgerton also states that the religious chose “from the vast store of European artistic motifs and Christian stories just those that would evoke in Indian eyes reassuring resemblances to certain indigenous preconquest concepts.”<sup>327</sup> This may be true in general, especially with the “World Tree” cross symbol. However, it is arguable that the cross was already so prevalent in Spain that it was only natural to carry the image to the Americas and disperse it accordingly. It may only have been happenstance that so many parallels could be made between the Christian cross and the indigenous “World Tree” or it may be the cleverness of the religious although no text asserts this conscious overlap of concepts.

The image on the lid of Pacal’s sarcophagus represents his fall down the great trunk of the “World Tree” into the jaws of *Xibalba*. However, there is a hope of resurrection in the image because Pacal is accompanied on his decent by a half-skeletal monster head carrying a bowl of sacrifice marked with the glyph of the sun. This glyph is meant to emphasize the belief that, like the sun, Pacal would rise again in the east after his sojourn through Xibalba, cheating death of

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<sup>326</sup> Samuel Y. Edgerton, “Christian Cross as Indigenous ‘World Tree’ in Sixteenth-Century Mexico: The ‘Atrio’ Cross in the Frederick and Jan Mayer Collection,” *Exploring New World Imagery*, Edited by Donna Pierce. (Denver Art Museum, 2005), 15.

<sup>327</sup> Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion*, 2.

full victory like the Hero Twins of Mayan mythology.<sup>328</sup> It is easy to see how Spanish missionaries, eager to elucidate Christianity, could use this indigenous image to explain Christ's descent into hell, the underworld, and his resurrection, the new life that grows out of his body and blood.

A very similar image appears in the pre-Columbian *Codex Borgia* (Aztec) in which a "Tree of Life" *axis mundi* protrudes upwards from the bowels of a king. On either side of this large green maize plant, representing the earth in cross form, are the gods of life and of death, Quetzalcoatl and Macuilxochitl. They perform an auto-sacrifice by lacerating their loins and allowing the blood to spurt upon the life-giving cross.<sup>329</sup> According to the *Codex Vaticano Latino* which reveals Quetzalcoatl piercing his tongue, ears, and penis, Natives believed that this deity of life initiated the sacrificial giving of one's own blood.<sup>330</sup> This mimicking of the gods, the auto-sacrifice of the sacred liquid, fertilized the "Tree of Life" and kept the universe in balance.

Clendennin argues that in ritual Maya sacrifice the point was not to rapidly kill the victim, but to draw blood, whether with knife or arrow.<sup>331</sup> Blood-letting was at the heart of Mayan ritual as the sacred fluid, brought forth from the tongue or penis, was meant to propitiate the divine.<sup>332</sup> Fray Landa discusses Mayan autosacrifices, specifically of males, who formed a line in the temple and "each made a pierced hole through the member, across from side to side, and then passed through as great a quantity of cord as they could stand." Although Landa called this "a filthy and grievous sacrifice" it is of interest to note that the blood offering comes

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<sup>328</sup> Friedel and Schele, *A Forest of Kings*, 225-226.

<sup>329</sup> Diaz and Rodgers, *The Codex Borgia*, xxvii & 25, plate 53. Similar images of the "tree of life" cross can be found on plates 49-52 of the *Codex Borgia* and also within the Maltese Cross in the *Codex Fejervary-Mayer*.

<sup>330</sup> Florescano, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl*, 170.

<sup>331</sup> Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, 181.

<sup>332</sup> Friedel and Schele, *A Forest of Kings*, 89-90.

from the penis as in the Nahuatl image of Quetzalcoatl and Macuilxochitl shedding blood on the “World Tree” cross.<sup>333</sup>

The Maya viewed this blood, especially from the genitals, as containing great fertilizing power and therefore these sacrifices can be understood in an agricultural sense of participating in the balance of the cosmos.<sup>334</sup> The cross was also a symbol of fertility among the Mexicans which is revealed in its Mexican name *tonacaquahuitl* (“tree of one life, or flesh”).<sup>335</sup> Similar to the image from the *Codex Borgia*, the Foliated Cross depicted in a Mayan temple at Palenque is a maize tree. On this “World Tree” ears of maize are manifested in the image of human heads paralleling Mayan belief that human flesh was made from maize dough. The metaphor for Mayan life was reflected in the life cycle of maize. The continued well-being of the universe required active participation. Maize cannot seed itself without human intervention and the cosmos cannot continue in orderly form without ritual human sacrifices.<sup>336</sup>

The symbol of the “Tree of Life” contained the major religious and agricultural understandings for the Maya and Aztecs. Within this cross image was the explanation of life and death and the necessity of human devotion to the celestial. The redemptive quality of divine blood echoed not only in indigenous religion, but also Christian as, “It pleased the Father that in Him [Christ] all the fullness should dwell...having made peace through the blood of His cross.”<sup>337</sup> Even if Spaniards were not able to interpret the “World Tree” for the benefit of explaining Christianity directly, the concepts of the gods’ self-sacrificial blood being spilt, life

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<sup>333</sup> Diego de Landa, *Yucatan Before and After the Conquest, With Other Related Documents, Maps and Illustrations*. Translated With Notes By William Gates, (The Maya Society, 1937), 47-48.

<sup>334</sup> Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, 181.

<sup>335</sup> Bancroft, *Native Races*, III: 470.

<sup>336</sup> Friedel and Schele, *A Forest of Kings*, 240 & 19.

<sup>337</sup> St. Paul, *Letter to the Colossians* 1:19-20.



coming forth out of death, and the religious concentration on the symbol of the cross begs the question of how prepared indigenous Mexicans might have been to receive the cross-bearing Christians and their story of the crucified God.

## 5.2 Quetzalcoatl

Another example of the cross in pre-Columbian America is related to messianic beliefs about the promised return of Quetzalcoatl to Mexico. Quetzalcoatl was the patron god of the Aztec priesthood, of learning and knowledge.<sup>338</sup> The two highest Aztec priests bore the name Quetzalcoatl and depictions of the god in priestly clothing, as in the *Codex Borbonica*, reveal the cross symbol on his bag of copal incense.<sup>339</sup> The cross of Quetzalcoatl, a Maltese cross with a diamond center, adorns the pillars of the temple in a depiction of the Aztec New Fire ceremony.<sup>340</sup> Luis Weckmann argues that Natives readily accepted the cross the Spanish presented them because in the Mexican mind it represented fire and hence the sun whose messenger was Quetzalcoatl. Weckmann also points out that the ceremonial braziers used in the worship of Quetzalcoatl had cross-shaped perforations.<sup>341</sup> The symbolic representation of

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<sup>338</sup> David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition*, (Chicago: University Press, 1982), 172.

<sup>339</sup> Florescano, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl*, 54-55.

<sup>340</sup> Gertrude Kurath and Samuel Marti, *Dances of the Anahuac*, (New York: Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology, No. 38, 1964), 206, figure 133; Emil Haury, *The Hohokam: Desert Farmers and Craftsmen: Excavations at Snaketown, 1964-65*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1976), 319; Florescano, *Memory, Myth, and Time in Mexico*, 25.

<sup>341</sup> Luis Weckmann, *The Medieval Heritage of Mexico*, Translated by Frances M. López-Morillas. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 190.

Quetzalcoatl as “Venus” or “Morning Star” is an equilateral cross enclosed within a cross-shaped bubble.<sup>342</sup>

More intriguing are the descriptions of Quetzalcoatl's garments as being covered in crosses. Charles Braden mentions indigenous stories which held that when the Mexican god Quetzalcoatl returned, he would be wearing a robe embroidered with red and black crosses.<sup>343</sup> Manly Palmer Hall recounts the ancient stories of Quetzalcoatl, wearing a garment covered in red crosses, coming out of the sea bearing a mysterious cross.<sup>344</sup> Likewise Lewis Spence argues that the ancient Mexican *pinturas* portray Quetzalcoatl wearing a long black gown fringed with white crosses.<sup>345</sup> The Toltec tradition held Quetzalcoatl to be a white man with black hair and a heavy beard who always wore a mitre and a long white robe decorated with crosses.<sup>346</sup> The Mexicans decorated the mantle of Quetzalcoatl with crosses as the cross not only symbolized the four directions of the wind, but also the rain.<sup>347</sup> Jacques Lafaye argues that the crosses on his mantle represented the dual principle in creation.<sup>348</sup> Regardless of the color of the crosses on Quetzalcoatl's attire, the continual portrayal in word and picture of the cross

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<sup>342</sup> Gonzalo Ortiz de Zarate, *Petroglifos de Sinoloa*, (Mexico, DF: Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1976), 61-62, 117.

<sup>343</sup> Braden, *Religious Aspects*, 37.

<sup>344</sup> Manly Palmer Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages: An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbalistic and Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy*, (New York: Philosophical Research Society, 2003), 603.

<sup>345</sup> Spence, *Mexico and Peru*, 7.

<sup>346</sup> Bancroft, *Native Races*, III: 274.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, III: 455.

<sup>348</sup> Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe*, 153-154.

appears to designate some significance to it as a religious symbol in Mexico, especially as it is associated with the god of life.<sup>349</sup>

The name of Quetzalcoatl is a combination of *quetzalli*, a brightly colored Mesoamerican bird, and *coatl*, meaning serpent. Quetzalcoatl's association with snakes allows various other connections to the cross symbol. The Mayan equivalent of Quetzalcoatl is Kukulcan which is also translated "plumed serpent". It is a "Vision Serpent" which forms the cross-bar of the Maya "World Tree" representing the communication between the supernatural and the human world.<sup>350</sup> Also, the Kan-cross Waterlily Monster was a Mayan version of the waterlily glyph distinguished by the Kan-cross on the forehead.<sup>351</sup> This is similar to the belief among the Yaqui people of Sonora concerning a large serpent with a cross on its forehead that lives under a hill in a water hole in the valley of the Río Yaqui. Similarly, there is a Mexican

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<sup>349</sup> Depictions of crosses on Aztec garb, specifically on sacerdotal garments, exist in surviving codices and other documents which may reflect the influence of Quetzalcoatl's cross. The wedding of Tecpatl and Ehecatl recorded in the *Codex Nuttall* depict two celebrants, most likely priests, wearing black tunics covered in rows of white crosses (Jorge R. Acosta, ed., *Esplendor del México Antiguo*, (México: Editorial del Valle de México, 1976), 707. *Codex Nuttall*, plate 19). Other depictions of a white cross set against a black background can be found in the *Codex Borgia* on plates 14, 36, and 38. Also numerous depictions of white crosses decorating either hair or head-pieces can be found in the *Codex Borgia* on plates 10, 43, and 42. On various pages of the *Codex Nuttall*, Mixteca clothing containing various designs are depicted, specifically variations of the cross symbol from the intersection of two thin lines to a round bubble-like cross (Acosta, *Esplendor del México Antiguo*, 466. *Codex Nuttall*, plate 84).

<sup>350</sup> Friedel and Schele, *A Forest of Kings*, 90. Moses lifted up a bronze serpent on a staff in the wilderness.

<sup>351</sup> Friedel and Schele, *A Forest of Kings*, 411.

legend about a big black snake in Sonora that has a golden cross on its forehead.<sup>352</sup> Even when not depicted as a serpent, Quetzalcóatl often bore a cross symbol on his head representing the four directions of space as was befitting the god of wind, Quetzalcoatl-Ehécatl, on whose temple was a cruciform design.<sup>353</sup>

In 1519, when Hernán Cortés happened to land in the same place where Mexicans believed Quetzalcoatl had departed, they trusted that the god, or at least his messenger, had returned to them.<sup>354</sup> Moteczuzoma confided to the war-leaders of Tenochtitlan that “It is said that our lord [Quetzalcoatl] has returned to this land. Go to meet him. Go to hear him.”<sup>355</sup> This belief must have been reinforced by the fact that Cortés brought banners with him that displayed the symbol of the cross and the Spaniards probably wore crosses around their necks. Moteczuzoma’s ambassadors offered Cortés the regalia of Quetzalcoatl including a serpent mask, shield, and cloak.<sup>356</sup> The Aztecs brought many other gifts, but these three specifically have connections to the cross image. The serpent mask perhaps contained a cross image on the forehead, as was discussed previously, and taken together with a pre-Columbian depiction of Quetzalcoatl’s head-piece in the *Codex Borgia*, on which a white cross is set against the red background, it is a good probability that the mask presented to Cortés contained the cross symbol.<sup>357</sup> In the *Codex Magliabecchiano* and in a *pintura* from Cospi, Quetzalcoatl’s shield is

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<sup>352</sup> James Griffith, *Beliefs and Holy Places: A Spiritual Geography of the Pimeria Alta*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 8.

<sup>353</sup> Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe*, 153-154.

<sup>354</sup> Quetzalcoatl was forced out of ancient Mexico by Toltec warriors and it was prophesied that he would return from the east to the place from where he had departed.

<sup>355</sup> Quoted in Miguel León-Portilla, ed., *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 23.

<sup>356</sup> Brundage, *Fifth Sun*, 51. León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 23-24.

<sup>357</sup> Díaz and Rodgers, *Codex Borgia*, xxviii & 22, plate 56.

decorated with a cross and also, as previously discussed, although color is not consistent, Quetzalcoatl's cloak is almost always described or drawn as having crosses.<sup>358</sup> Also of interest is the "crooked staff of Ehecatl" that the messengers gave Cortés as part of the finery of Quetzalcoatl which resembles a bishop's crosier.<sup>359</sup>

In his account of the Francisco Hernández de Córdoba expedition, Fernández de Oviedo cast doubt on the findings of the cross among the indigenous peoples. Oviedo states that:

If, however, there were crosses, I do not think they made them with the thought of what they were making because in truth they are idolatrous and experience has shown that among that race there was no remembrance of the cross or passion of Christ. If crosses exist among them they would not know for what they were made and if they at one time had such knowledge (as may be believed) they have now forgotten it.<sup>360</sup>

Oviedo identified a pre-Hispanic Christian cross in the native plant he called "higu ero," (calabash tree) the leaves of which were shaped in the form of a cross.<sup>361</sup> Oviedo argued that this was a foretelling for the Natives of the appearance of Christianity: "it appears to me as a

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<sup>358</sup> Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire*, 171; Brundage, *Fifth Sun*, 109. In a drawing of the deity Xipe Totec in the *Codex Borbonicus* a cross decorates the upper portion of his shield (Boone, *The Aztec World*, 113). In a mid-sixteenth-century depiction of Cortés among the Tlaxcala, Marina, the Native translator, and Tlevexolotecutlí, a Tlaxcala lord, wear cloaks that have cross motifs covering them (UT Austin, Benson Latin American Collection, Tlaxcala Manuscript/Lienzo).

<sup>359</sup> León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 24.

<sup>360</sup> Francisco Hernández de Córdoba, *The Discovery of the Yucatan, a Translation of the Original Texts*, Translated by Henry R. Wagner, (Berkeley: The Cortes society, 1942), 37.

<sup>361</sup> Bolaños, "A Place to Live", 279. Oviedo y Valdés, *Historia General y Natural de las Indias*: The "Laminas" in volume 5 contains illustrations by José Amador de los Ríos that accompanied the printing of Oviedo's *Historia* (lamina III, fig.4).

notable thing, in which testimony of the Cross appears, and which could have not been ignored by these people.”<sup>362</sup>

In Peter Martyr’s 1520 account concerning the expedition under Hernández de Córdoba, he claims that crosses existed amongst Natives who called the land Eccampi, somewhere in the northeastern coastal region of the Yucatán peninsula. Martyr states that through interpreters he was able to discern the meaning of the cross emblem among them: “some of them answered that a very beautiful man had once lived among them, who had left them this symbol as a remembrance of him; others said that a man more radiant than the sun had died upon that cross.”<sup>363</sup>

Impressed by the discovery of the cross symbol in indigenous culture, Spanish missionaries began interpreting the figure of Quetzalcoatl as the Apostle Thomas who allegedly journeyed to the Americas a millennium and a half earlier to bring Christianity to Native America.<sup>364</sup> The Spanish believed that the images of the cross they found were degraded vestiges of the Christianity taught indigenous Americans by the Apostle Thomas.<sup>365</sup> One of these corrupted images is a crucified Quetzalcoatl found in the *Codex Borgianus* where the Mesoamerican god is nailed to a cross and cut into pieces.<sup>366</sup> Even though the claims of the Apostle Thomas visiting the Americas are unfounded, it is interesting to note that Quetzalcoatl’s garb resembles very much the vestments of Christian clergy, a full-length garment of a solid color covered with equidistant crosses.

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<sup>362</sup> Oviedo y Valdés, *Historia General y Natural de las Indias*, I: 252: “me parece un notable muy señalado, en que parece el testimonio de la Cruz, e que no la han podido ignorar estas gentes.”

<sup>363</sup> Hernández de Córdoba, *The Discovery of the Yucatan*, 34.

<sup>364</sup> Spence, *Mexico and Peru*, 6-7.

<sup>365</sup> Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe*, 190.

<sup>366</sup> Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, 603-604.

Spaniards heralded any semblance of the cross as a sign from God that he had chosen these peoples to learn the full faith from them. Excitement over pre-Columbian uses of the cross can also be seen in Peru when, in the sixteenth century, a group of Spaniards found a wooden cross hidden in the mountains. They perceived the newly-discovered cross to be a divine and miraculous sign. They carried it in procession to the town and placed it in the church to be venerated as holy. Once again this encouraged the theory that the Apostle Thomas carried the image of the cross to the Americas.<sup>367</sup>

Although the missionaries believed that demons had perverted St. Thomas' teaching, they were willing to tolerate the cult associated with Quetzalcoatl.<sup>368</sup> Quetzalcoatl was believed to have been manifested in the tenth-century Toltec priest *Topiltzin* who preached no human sacrifice and penitential salvation.<sup>369</sup> Averted by the violence associated with the cult of Huitzilopochtli, the Spanish allowed more freedoms to the cult of Quetzalcoatl, despite the fact that by the sixteenth century Aztecs made human sacrifices in the temples dedicated to Quetzalcoatl.<sup>370</sup> The Mayan cult of Kukulcan, which was based on the god Quetzalcoatl, believed that the god had died, descended into the underworld, rose again, and expected to return to earth to establish his kingdom.<sup>371</sup> The belief that Quetzalcoatl was the Apostle Thomas continued into the eighteenth century with the work by Mariano Fernández de Echeverría y Veytia. Key to his argument concerning the visitation of the Apostle Thomas to the Americas were the pre-Hispanic crosses found (especially at Huatulco), the veneration of

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<sup>367</sup> Spence, *Mexico and Peru*, 273-275; The discovery of the collection of stars forming the Southern Cross near the southern celestial pole further acted as a symbol of God's blessing on European colonization in the New World (Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession*, 104).

<sup>368</sup> Edgerton, "Christian Cross as Indigenous 'World Tree'", 16.

<sup>369</sup> Brundage, *Fifth Sun*, 114-115.

<sup>370</sup> Van Zantwijk, *The Aztec Arrangement*, 95.

<sup>371</sup> Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule*, 303.

these crosses, and the common depiction of the saint wearing a white robe covered in red crosses.<sup>372</sup>

### 5.3 Indoctrination

Despite military use of the cross as a victorious icon, the original and continually invoked usage of the cross was for religious conversion and contemplation. With the rediscovery of the “true cross” in the fourth century, the Church instituted a new feast day known as the Exaltation of the Cross. On this annually celebrated feast (September 14) the pious not only saw the decorated crosses in the church, but also sung hymns about the power of the cross. One example of this is found in the Spanish missal for the Vespers service of the Exaltation of the Cross: “Raise us up by the virtue and victory of the holy Cross, give to us strength to bear affliction, because to you supplication was paid on behalf of us.”<sup>373</sup> The cross was an external symbol meant to provoke Christians to internalize Christ’s death and resurrection so that they might conquer both spiritual and physical sufferings.

The texts and hymns surrounding this feast day of the cross developed differently in the various regions of Christendom. In one medieval Spanish text the penitent expresses the desire to comprehend the cross in all of its dimensions: “And (the omnipotent God) concedes to you that, with all the saints, you may be able with a devoted mind to comprehend what is the

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<sup>372</sup> Antonio Rubial García, “Icons of Devotion: The Appropriation and Use of Saints in New Spain”, *Local Religion in Colonial Mexico*, Edited by Martin Austin Nesvig, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 59.

<sup>373</sup> Tongeren, *Exaltation of the Cross*, 294: “erige nos in virtute et victoria sancte Crucis, da nobis salutis esse premium, quod tibi pro nobis fuit penale supplicium.” The Feast Day of the Cross is traditionally celebrated on September 14.



length, width, height, and depth of this same cross.<sup>374</sup> In his *Spiritual Exercises* (1539-41), Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, included a contemplation of Christ's torment on the cross to draw the Christian to true piety and self-sacrifice.<sup>375</sup> The crucifix, a cross which contains the dying body of Christ, was used especially during intense times of concentration on Christ's redemptive suffering.<sup>376</sup> Christians viewed the cross as the instrument of salvation as is echoed in this liturgical prayer: "We pray perpetually to the Lord to guard us in peace, who through the wood of the holy cross you have made worthy to redeem."<sup>377</sup>

In a Latin catechism published in Madrid in 1669, a religious rendering of what the cross meant to Spanish Christians is given:

For that price has been paid by the Lord Christ on the cross, and through the sacrament, again, even through desire, and through longing it is produced and imparted to us, to such a degree that it achieves and consummates us, because by this petition we request that our sins be remitted.<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Tongeren, *Exaltation of the Cross*, 263, note 48: "Concedatque vobis ut, cum omnibus santis, quae sit eiusdem crucis longitudo, latitudo, sublimitas et profundum, mente devota comprehendere possitis."

<sup>375</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, Edited by George E. Ganss, (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 170-171, 196.

<sup>376</sup> Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 330.

<sup>377</sup> Dom Alejandro Olivar, *El Sacramentario de Vich*, Monumenta Hispaniae Sacra, serie liturgica, vol. IV, (Barcelona, 1953), 144: "Perpetua qu(ae)sumus domine pace custodi, quos per lignum sanctae crucis redimere dignatus es."

<sup>378</sup> UTA, Special Collections: *Catechismus Romanus: Catechismus as Parochos ex Decreto Concilii Tridentini Editus*, (Madrid, 1669), 491: "Nam pretium illum in cruce a Christo Domino persolutum, & nobiscum per sacramenta, re, vel studio, ac desiderio adhibita, communicatum, tanti est, ut nobis impetret, & conficiat, quod hac petitione postulamas, ut peccata nostia remittantur."

As Christ conquered sin and death by His death on the cross, so are Christians, literally “little Christs”, supposed to conquer sin and redeem the pagan sinners from eternal damnation by the spiritual power that the cross represents. St. Paul states, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”<sup>379</sup> Spain, one of the few Catholic nations to stand firm against the Protestant Reformation, triumphed in the belief that they held the one true religion. Embedded in their traditions and mystical beliefs was the tenet that the cross was not an instrument of death so much as an instrument of life.

In fulfilling this mission to spread “the message of the cross”, Spanish missionaries produced catechisms that rendered this same meaning. To accommodate the indigenous without an alphabetically written language, the Spanish religious worked with Natives to produce catechisms written in hieroglyphs.<sup>380</sup> The indigenous perceived a strong bond between text and picture in that one provided a commentary of the other.<sup>381</sup> The cross symbol was already a common Mayan glyph with connections to cosmology. Those glyphs that include the Latin cross (+) are the words for “himself”, “precious”, “a royal title”, and “god”. Those bearing the Saint Andrew’s cross (X) are “spouse”, “a female title”, and “creation verb”.<sup>382</sup> The fact that the Mayan language utilized the cross image, especially in association with divinity and creation, allowed for a smoother transition or perhaps an easier disguise for the continuation of indigenous beliefs. The Native would see the sequence of illustrated symbols reminding the reader of the prayers already memorized in Spanish, Latin, or possibly his own native tongue.

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<sup>379</sup> St. Paul, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 1:18.

<sup>380</sup> “Testerian hieroglyphics” were used to render the Lord’s prayer. The cross symbol is everywhere (Edgerton, “Christian Cross as Indigenous ‘World Tree’”, 19, figure 7).

<sup>381</sup> Michael D. Coe and Mark Van Stone, *Reading the Maya Glyphs*, (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2001), 7.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, 109 & 162-164.

The cross is a key feature in these hieroglyphic catechisms not only in the depiction of Christ suffering on the cross, but also in the illustrated daily use by the priest and faithful.<sup>383</sup>

Because the pattern in pre-Hispanic times was that the conquered accept the gods of the conqueror, Lockhart argues that colonial era Nahua needed more instruction rather than persuasion in becoming Christian.<sup>384</sup> The Spanish accepted half-hearted conversion, at least temporarily, during the transitional period of the sixteenth century. Alfredo Lopez Austin argues that:

as long as the conquered people displayed a veneer of conversion and as long as the coercion was maintained and native thought and customs did not present the dangers of subversion, resistance to oppression, aversion to political reform, or signs of religious scandal, survival of Indian ideology was tolerated.<sup>385</sup>

Adoration of the cross was a convenient “veneer of conversion” for the indigenous to covertly practice traditional beliefs.

Methods of indoctrination ranged from the ascetic examples of individuals to organized demonstrations of public participation. Fray Antonio de Roa tried to inspire Natives by his own example of piety. Whenever he saw a cross, he would have himself cruelly whipped and would explain to those around that God had suffered innocently in order to make salvation possible to all.<sup>386</sup> More common in the early decades of conquest were the monitors who on Sundays and feast days called the indigenous out of their houses bearing crosses and reciting prayers. After

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<sup>383</sup> *Los Códices de México: Exposición Temporal Museo Nacional de Antropología, México, 1979.* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1979), 120-123.

<sup>384</sup> Lockhart, *Nahuas After the Conquest*, 203-204.

<sup>385</sup> Correa, “Otomi Rituals and Celebrations”, 437. Alfredo Lopez Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, Translated by Thelma Ortiz De Montellano & Bernard R. Ortiz De Montellano, (Salt Lake City: University Press, 1988), 17.

<sup>386</sup> Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest*, 103.

roll call, the people assembled around the cross in the atrio outside the church where missionaries delivered sermons and held Mass.<sup>387</sup>

#### 5.4 Patio, Roadside, and Church Crosses

In order to more quickly indoctrinate Natives, Spaniards utilized indigenous labor and skill. In 1528, the city of Texcoco staged the first Roman Catholic procession organized by the Natives for which indigenous artisans crafted the crosses.<sup>388</sup> Crosses had been utilized in processions for centuries, but the use and décor of these processional crosses began to be more regulated after the Protestant Reformation. Spanish sculptors had to closely adhere to the Counter Reformation demands of the Council of Trent (1563). The council directed that art should be simple, clear, and didactic, pulling on emotion rather than reason to sway the sinner to penitence.<sup>389</sup> The council stated “that no one be allowed to place, or cause to be placed, any unusual image, in any place, or church, howsoever exempted, except that image have been approved of by the bishop.”<sup>390</sup>

However, the artistic demands of the Council of Trent encountered a new set of criteria in the minds of indigenous craftsmen who willingly constructed crosses acceptable to Christians, but integrated their own symbolism, making the images multivocal. In Huejotla, Natives came to church to venerate the pagan symbol of the cardinal points which the

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 96-97.

<sup>388</sup> Gruzinski, *Man-gods*, 35.

<sup>389</sup> Examples of Spanish artisans and their works that followed the direction of the council were Juan de Mesa’s “Jesús de Gran Poder” (1620) and Juan Martínez Montañe’s “Jesús de la Pasión” (1615).

<sup>390</sup> Roman Catholic Church, “The Council of Trent: The Twenty-Fifth Session”, *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, Translated by J. Waterworth, (London: Dolman, 1848), 236.

indigenous workmen had stylized in the form of a cross.<sup>391</sup> Edgerton argues that Native artisans depicted indigenous understandings of the universe within the cross symbols they carved. Most crosses in the *conventos* were sculpted by indigenous artisans using both autochthonous and European traditions and techniques. These patio crosses were normally eight to ten feet tall and stood in the “atrio” of the *conventos* where the indigenous heard mass.<sup>392</sup>

Patio crosses almost never had the body of Christ on them, but integrated Christian and indigenous religious symbols on to the sculpture.<sup>393</sup> If Natives represented the body of Christ, it was in, rather than on the cross. Patio crosses often featured Christ’s head in the

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<sup>391</sup> Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest*, 277.

<sup>392</sup> Edgerton, “Christian Cross as Indigenous ‘World Tree’”, 14-16. Spanish merchants eventually sold indigenous artwork containing the cross: “Mr. Court Commissioner, D. Jose Ignacio Calapiz, says that they were presented before the merchants. ..Beregaña, and D. Antonio Perez and they delivered to him some Indians that the first one bought from the second and this one bought from a secreted third, O. N. Briera, in Veracruz; the merchants request a license to efface from the Indians the crosses that they bring as drawing to be able to sell them.” (AGN, Edicto de Inquisición Vol 1469 F. 72 (1819): “(29 de Octubre) El Sr. Comisario de Corte, D. Jose Ignacio Calapiz, dice que se presentaron ante el las comerciantes...Beregaña, y D. Antonio Perez y le entregaron unas indianas que el primero compro al segundo y este compro en tercios cerrados en Veracruz a O. N. Briera; piden licencia los comerciantes para borrar de las indianas las cruces que traen como dibujo para poderlas expender. Mexico.”)

<sup>393</sup> There are exceptions such as the patio cross on the island of Cozumel which is a large stone crucifix. An exception also exists among the Maní (Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, 174; See footnote #25 on page 225. See also John McAndrew, *The Open-Air Churches of Sixteenth-Century Mexico: Atrios, Posas, Open Chapels, and Other Studios*, (Harvard University Press, 1965), 247-254, plate 115.)

center and the cross arms complete with floral relief. This cross bore typological connection to sacred trees such as the “Tree of Life” in Genesis and Mexican cosmology.<sup>394</sup> Like the Mayan priests who bridged the gap between the divine and the profane, Christ was viewed as the “World Tree” symbolic of the center of the quincunx universe.<sup>395</sup>

Native artisans depicted the chalice that caught the blood on the cross from the heart of Christ as similar to the heart of the “World Tree”. There were often stylized blood drops on these crosses similar to those drawn in Native codices. The skull which often figured at the bottom of the Christian cross easily compared to the head/body at the bottom of the “World Tree” depictions. Although interpretations varied from the Christian concept of conquering death through death to the indigenous understanding of the continual death/life cycle, patio crosses allowed a measure of syncretism pleasing to the indigenous population.<sup>396</sup>

Similar to the way Natives utilized patio crosses to purport indigenous beliefs and practices, roadside crosses also acted as a means of continued pagan worship under the veneer of Christianity. At the bases of roadside crosses Natives placed images of their deities either as a reaction against Christianity or to syncretically maintain indigenous traditions.<sup>397</sup> The platforms on which the indigenous builders stood the crosses resembled pre-conquest altars, revealing the ability of Natives to syncretize religious beliefs and practices. Perhaps the cross atop the altar can be considered as a symbolic representation of Christian dominance over indigenous religion; however, more likely than willingness based on conversion was syncretic acceptance.

Missionaries were taken aback at the discovery of idolatry and animal sacrifice in association with patio, roadside, and church crosses. In 1562, a witness from the pueblo of

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<sup>394</sup> Edgerton, “Christian Cross as Indigenous ‘World Tree’”, 23, figures 8-9.

<sup>395</sup> Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion*, 67.

<sup>396</sup> Edgerton, “Christian Cross as Indigenous ‘World Tree’”, 17-18, 24.

<sup>397</sup> Gruzinski, *Man-gods*, 36.

Kanchunup confessed to seeing the sacrificing of dogs and other animals before a cross where Natives had placed idols. The indigenous also burnt crosses as offerings in and of themselves to the gods.<sup>398</sup> The witness from Kanchunup also affirmed that Natives had used animal blood in the burning of a small cross taken from a church altar.<sup>399</sup> In the 1562 confession of Francisco Chuc of Sahcaba, the witness stated that he and leading men from his village sacrificed a pig in a church, took a small cross from the altar, burned it in front of an idol, and then quenched the fire in the blood of the “pig that had been crucified.”<sup>400</sup>

Edgerton argues that the religious practiced a “proselytizing strategy of emphasizing just those Christian doctrines and rituals that bore the closest similarity to preconquest native traditions.”<sup>401</sup> However, the use of the cross to bridge the gap between indigenous and Christian belief did not often work in the sense of conversion to a European form of Christianity, but to a syncretic or illusory type. Later visitors to Cozumel found the cross that Cortés had originally erected in one of the main temples amidst the restored traditional deities. This reveals that Natives were receptive to Christian beliefs and practices concerning the cross, but mainly on their own terms.<sup>402</sup>

Natives, especially the Maya, eventually lost, or perhaps never fully understood, the Christian meaning of the cross as an instrument through which God brought salvation. Rather, they usually accepted it as a god in and of itself. In 1559 Franciscan linguist Fray Maturino Gilberti published his *Diálogo de la doctrina Cristiana en lengua Tarasca* in order to instruct the

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<sup>398</sup> Landa, *Relación*, 163, note 853, & 183, note 955.

<sup>399</sup> *Don Diego Quijada Alcade Mayor de Yucatan*, I: 89.

<sup>400</sup> Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, 201.

<sup>401</sup> Edgerton, “Christian Cross as Indigenous ‘World Tree’”, 23.

<sup>402</sup> Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule*, 303.

Tarascons not to worship images and crosses as idols, but rather to pray to who they represent.<sup>403</sup>

We do not worship any image, even though it be that of the Crucifix or St. Mary, for, when we represent the Crucifix or St. Mary or the Saints, it is only to remind ourselves of the great mercy of God, who gave us His Son for our redemption, and...although we kneel before the Crucifix in an attitude of worship, it is nevertheless not the Crucifix that we worship, for it is only made of wood, but God Himself, Our Lord who is in Heaven.<sup>404</sup>

Part of the problem was that the cross image was already worshipped by certain indigenous peoples. The principal feature of the Mexican feast of the "maturity of fruit", dedicated to the god of fire Xiuhtecutli, was a tall straight tree stripped of its branches on which a 30 foot beam was fastened forming a large cross which was set in the court of the temple.<sup>405</sup>

The Maya could accept the larger crosses, those raised outside the church especially, as a deity.<sup>406</sup> The Maya in Cozumel worshipped the 10 foot cross, called *vahomche*, as a god of rain. Natives laid gifts of quail and other offerings before this image.<sup>407</sup> In 1519, Cortés placed a cross on the island of Cozumel and demanded that the Natives reverence it. Cogolludo stated that instead of heeding Cortés' directions, the Natives of Cozumel worshipped the cross as the god introduced to them by the Spaniards.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> Greenleaf, *The Mexican Inquisition*, 124.

<sup>404</sup> Quoted in Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest*, 103.

<sup>405</sup> Bancroft, *Native Races*, III: 508-509. The cross symbol figured on the shield of the Mexican fire god Xiuhtecutli (Bancroft, *Native Races*, III: 385).

<sup>406</sup> Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, 182.

<sup>407</sup> Bancroft, *Native Races*, III: 470. All those who dealt with water worshipped the goddess Chalchihuitlicue who was depicted holding as a scepter a vessel in the shape of a cross (Bancroft, *Native Races*, III: 369).

<sup>408</sup> Cogolludo, *Historia de Yucatán*, I: 356-358.



Indigenous leaders often legitimized their positions under Spanish authority through the established worship of either a cross or a saint.<sup>409</sup> The cross became not just a universal symbol, but every church had a cross associated with it that took on its own personality. Crosses, always covered with flowers and foliage during rituals, were important symbols of the Sierra Natives.<sup>410</sup> Crosses with distinct characteristics became central to Otomi religious traditions.<sup>411</sup> Among the Otomi peoples, crosses of wood were made with the faces of Christ on them. However, these representations were a blending of traditional Christ-like features with an ancestor's face, giving the crosses a god-man type of representation not unlike the *ixiptla* practices among the indigenous of Mexico.<sup>412</sup>

### 5.5 *Ixiptla* and Passion Plays

From the sixteenth until the middle of the eighteenth century the Spanish missionaries had the Natives reenact the crucifixion during holy week.<sup>413</sup> The political intrusion of the Spanish did not disrupt indigenous society to the extent that the missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church threatened to do. Natives were willing and expecting to accept the God of the Christians as they were powerful and so must be their God. However, to ask them to get rid of their pantheon of gods and religious rites was paramount to suicide as Mexican belief taught

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<sup>409</sup> Correa, "Otomi Rituals and Celebrations", 437.

<sup>410</sup> James W. Dow, "Sierra Otomi Religious Symbolism: Mankind Responding to the Natural World", *Mesas and Cosmologies in Mesoamerica*, Edited by Douglas Sharon, (San Diego, 2003), 27.

<sup>411</sup> Correa, "Otomi Rituals and Celebrations", 438.

<sup>412</sup> Correa, "Otomi Rituals and Celebrations", 444.

<sup>413</sup> Gruzinski, *Man-gods*, 153; "Las representaciones teatrales de la Pasion," *Boletin del Archivo General de la Nacion*, 5.3 (1934): 332-52; AGN, Inquisicion, vol.1072, "Consulta del comisario de Chalco sobre las representaciones teatrales de la Pasion," 1768-1770, and vol.1182, fols.81r et seq.

that there was a delicate balance in the universe, a sacred umbilical cord connecting mankind with the gods.

The Aztec practice of *ixiptla*, which the Maya also practiced, included the belief that a god became incarnate in a man who wore his regalia and eventually was sacrificed. Eliade claims that, "For archaic man, reality is a function of the imitation of a celestial archetype."<sup>414</sup> The reactualization discussed in Eliade can also be seen in Gruzinski's definition of *man-gods* in colonial Mexico. According to Gruzinski, the *man-god* was the one who embodied the deity worshipped. In Nahua thought, which perceives as whole the concept of the *ixiptla*, the man is the very god adored.<sup>415</sup> Eliade argues that where the sacred intersects our world, it appears in the form of ideal models such as the actions of gods or mythical heroes. All things become truly "real" by imitating these models, which helps explain the connection Natives made with the reenactments of Christ's crucifixion.

Eliade indicated that if the sacred's essence lies only in its first appearance, then any later appearance must actually be the first appearance. Thus, an imitation of a mythical event is actually the mythical event itself, happening again. Myths and rituals carry one back to the mythical age. Eliade states, "In imitating the exemplary acts of a god or of a mythic hero, or simply by recounting their adventures, the man of an archaic society detaches himself from profane time and magically re-enters the Great Time, the sacred time."<sup>416</sup> The Spanish forced those Natives that fell under their control into a liminal stage, desiring to see them converted to Christianity. The whole process of missionary endeavors reflected the ways in which the Spanish sought to bring Natives through this transitional period. However, the transition was one not of change from Mexican pagan to European Christian, but a fusion of the cultures overseen by Spanish Catholics yet worked out among peoples that did not so easily forsake

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<sup>414</sup> Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 5.

<sup>415</sup> Gruzinski, *Man-gods*, chapter 1.

<sup>416</sup> Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, 23.

their religious understanding. This amalgamation of pagan and Christian rituals included all-to-realistic reenactments of the crucifixion.<sup>417</sup>

In 1562, investigations conducted in Yucatán under the supervision of Fray Diego de Landa discovered that Natives who had been catechized and trained by Christian clergy were performing gruesome practices that commingled Christian and pagan beliefs in churches, most notably the crucifixion of children.<sup>418</sup> Unauthorized reenactments of the passion continued into the mid-eighteenth century, when Antonio Pérez, an Amerindian shepherd from Popocatepetl developed himself into a divine persona claiming to have God in his body: “He moved forward on his knees, a cross on his shoulders; he said he was doing penance for all the people of the world...”<sup>419</sup> Just as the *ixiptla* drew their divinity from one source, “the fire was one and the man-gods many”, so did those Natives who sought deification through Christ understand their transformation and status.<sup>420</sup>

Indigenous adaptation of actions related to the Christian cross stem partially from the passion plays that the Spanish wrote and directed for Natives to reenact on Good Friday. This was meant to be didactic in both a religious and political sense. In a 1768 handwritten passion play entitled “Pasio Domini nostri Jesuchristi”, the cross is omnipresent. Throughout the drama all the people continually cry out “Crucifiquelo” (“Crucify Him”), for which the root word is *cruz* (cross). “A Jew” says mockingly, “Raise yourself up bewitching hypocrite, you should not have said that you were the son of God as you do not have the strength to carry that Cross...”<sup>421</sup> The

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<sup>417</sup> Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule*, 287.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>419</sup> Gruzinski, *Man-gods*, 122.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>421</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, vol 1072 f. 204-220 (1768), “Pasio Domini nostri Jesuchristi”, A handwritten script of a passion play. 218: “Lebantate hipocrita hechicero no decias que eras hijo de Dios como no tienes fuerzas para llebar esa Cruz...”

play encouraged anti-Semitism as the Mexican Inquisition simultaneously sought out any unconverted Jew who continued to deny the power of the cross.

Yet, the cross in the play does pose a problem. It not only appears as a physical burden for Christ, but also as an emotional and spiritual one for those that care for him as the Virgin implores, "I cannot lighten for us the weight of the Cross."<sup>422</sup> The final scene is Christ outstretched on the cross while the centurion declares "Truly this Man was the Son of God" and the narrator explains that this sacrifice is "the glory of Your Creator and Redeemer."<sup>423</sup> In a 1733 version, the centurion's statement is followed by a sermon; all the while the cross image stands in the background as a testament of divine power.<sup>424</sup>

The cross erected high on the stage of the play was meant to follow the Council of Trent's mandate to lure peoples to repentance through emotional appeal. However, Natives did not always understand the power of the cross to be merely an instrument of salvation. Rather, indigenous interpretation that the cross acted as a medium of deification provoked a warning in 1768 concerning the passion plays which the religious stated they presented: "among many braying, begging Peoples of idolatry or superstition."<sup>425</sup> Post-colonial effects of the passion plays occur during the Caste War of the nineteenth century in which Maya leaders encouraged Natives not to worship white gods, but rather to crucify one of their own race in order to provide a savior for their people. On Good Friday of 1868, Maya in Chamula nailed Domingo Gomes Checheb, a 10-11 year old boy, to a cross in the plaza of Tzajalhemel.<sup>426</sup> A similar event

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 218: "No puedo alibia nos del peso de la Cruz"

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 220: "la gloria de Su Criador y Redemptor."

<sup>424</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, vol 1072 f. 276-294 (1733).

<sup>425</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol. 1073 f. 221 (1768): "entre Gentes roznonantes muchos exxores de ydolatria o superstycion."

<sup>426</sup> Victoria R. Bricker, *The Indian Christ, the Indian King: The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual*, (Austin, University Press, 1981), 121 & 155.

occurred among the Maya in the highlands of Guatemala who moved from symbolically crucifying an image and began to sacrifice a member of their people on Good Friday. These Natives tormented and crucified San Jerónimo el Ingenio in the same way as Christ had been, revealing a truly syncretic understanding of the power of the cross.<sup>427</sup>

## 5.6 Edicts Concerning the Cross

Misuses and misunderstandings concerning the cross led to edicts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Spaniards recorded indigenous abuses of the cross from the early sixteenth century, but felt that through continued punishment of blatant offenders and through better instruction, the proper Christian use would dominate. In an edict from Mexico City on October 20, 1626, the inquisition stated that it would fight against, “the abuse of placing and painting Crosses in public corners and other indecent places.” The edict went on to say that all crosses that are in irreverent places should be “erased and removed.” Failure to comply with these injunctions meant that the inquisition would, “proceed against the rebels with the harshest penalties, as the jurisdiction of justice” permitted.<sup>428</sup> However, said abuses continued and the inquisition in Mexico City issued another edict in 1641 “prohibiting the festivals of the Holy Cross, because they [the festivals] cause the [Natives] to place and paint crosses in indecent

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<sup>427</sup> Bricker, *The Indian Christ, the Indian King*, 342.

<sup>428</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol. 358 f. 21 (1626): “Por quáto al servicio de Dios Nuestro Señor, y bien de la Republica Christiana conuiene obiar el abuso de poner, y pintar Cruzes en rincones publicos, y otros lugares indecentes,...y conuenir que no se pinten, ni pongan las diches Cruzes y las que lo esta se borren, y quiten.... que passado el dicho termino no lo cumpliendo, de mas de quareys incurrido en las dichas censuras, se procedera contra los rebeldes a mayores penas, como fuere de justicia.” Mexico City 1626 (Oct. 20)

places.”<sup>429</sup> Such malfeasances forced the Inquisition to dictate in 1701 that the cross be removed from the town of Tecpa.<sup>430</sup>

Inquisitorial edicts concerning the cross continued into the eighteenth century, but began to focus on the misuse of the holy images on jewelry and other objects of personal use.<sup>431</sup> In Campeche on January 8, 1768, the Inquisition declared that it was the duty of local political and religious leaders to stop the practice of making “very strange and ridiculous sculpture[s], in that they provoke derision and mockery.”<sup>432</sup> Furthermore they “...prohibit[ed] the Paintings, or Sculptures of figures, histories, fables, or other such things that are lascivious, dishonest, provocative, below instruction and rules, that they [Natives] have been given.”<sup>433</sup> The edict continues by stating that “many spineless and evasive People have had recourse

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<sup>429</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol 1 f. 16 (1641): “Edicto prohibiendo las fiestas de la Santa Cruz, porque ocasionan que se pongan y pinten cruces en lugares indecentes. Mexico.”

<sup>430</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol. 718 f. 231-233 (1701): “Edicto sobre cruces. Autos sobre que se quite la cruz que se halla en el Tecpa de los Indios.”

<sup>431</sup> AGN, *Clave de Registro*: 197957 (1778) Volumen: 1167, Expediente: 29, Fojas: 406, 408-409: Descripción: Expediente sobre la introducción de alhajas y efectos de comercio con pinturas y marcas de imágenes y otros signos de religión. Campeche. Edicto prohibiendo las piezas que sirven para adorno personal si contuvieren hechuras de la reverencia cristiana; reglas, medios, y providencias en todos y cualesquiera de los puntos que contiene, sobre el abuso de las imágenes de cristo y maria santísima y cruces que se esculpen, pintan y graban en alhajas y otros objetos de uso personal. 8 de enero de 1768.

<sup>432</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol. 1167 F. 408-9 (Jan 8 1768), 409: “...escultura muy extraño, y ridícula, y que mas provocan a irrisión, y escarnio...”

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*: “...prohibe las Pinturas, o Esculturas de figuras, historias, fabulas, u otras cualesquiera cosas deshonestas, lascivas, y provocativas, bajo de las instrucción, y reglas, que se les den.”

to...[make]use of jewelry, decorations, houses, and other things of this kind on which they [Spaniards] have found cross figures or Sacred Images.”<sup>434</sup>

In the 1770s an edict by, “We The Apostolic Inquisitors against the heretical perversity, and Apostasy in...New Spain” stated that:

But nevertheless concerning this careful vigilance, we have known with a lot of pain, that, for a little time past, they have tried to introduce, and have introduced in these kingdoms, jewelry of the most common, profane, and indecent use, like shirt buttons, keys of clocks, stamps, and charms put in their earrings, on which is marked [and] carved the Sacred Image of Our Redeemer Crucified, serving in the seals of bracelet[s], and in all made of less worth of what should be the main object of our religion.<sup>435</sup>

Lastly, this edict reinstated the seventeenth-century concern, “That they do not paint, carve, [or] place the Holy Cross in places, and spots, [that are] filthy and exposed to irreverence.”<sup>436</sup>

By the nineteenth century the Mexican inquisition was so paranoid with indigenous use of the cross that they regulated the use of the cross motif on clothing. In an 1811 edict in

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid.: “Y ultimamente teniendo en consideracion, que con motivo de la publicacion del citado Edicto han ocurrido muchas Personas timoratas, y escurupulosas con varias dudas nimiamente delicades en orden a el uso de alhajas de adorno de casas, y otras de esta especie en que se hallan figuradas cruces o Imagenes Sagradas;”

<sup>435</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol. 1167 f. 406 (1778-1768?): “Nos Los INQUISIDORES APOSTOLICOS contra la Heretica pravedad, y Apostasia en...Nueva España”; “Pero sin embargo de esta cuidadosa vigilancia, hemos sabido con mucho dolor, que, de pocos tiempos a esta parte, se han intentado introducir, e introducido en estos Reynos, alhajas del mas comun, profano, y menos decente uso, como botones de camisa, llaves de relojes, sellos, y diges para poner pendientes de ellos, en que se registra esculpida la Sagrada Imagen de Nuestro Redemptor Crucificado, sirviendo en los sellos de manilla, y en todo de hacer menos precio de lo que debe ser el principal objeto de nuestro culto.”;

<sup>436</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol. 1167 f. 406 (1778-1768?): “Que no pinten, esculpan, no coloquen la Santa Cruz en sitios, y parajes inmundos, y expuestos a irreverencia.”

Campeche, the inquisition inquired into a merchant selling, “shawls with crosses, in the middle a row of crosses; likewise...a piece of purple under clothe also with crosses.”<sup>437</sup> The edicts did very little to control the masses who had accepted the precontact and colonial cross as a symbol of power. Whether the Natives who painted and carved crosses in indecent places meant to defy Spanish rule or accomplish an indigenous rite, the cross was now an integral and integrated symbol of colonial Mexico.

## 5.7 Conclusion

Lockhart states that, “Even when the end result looked more Hispanic than indigenous, the Nahuas, without second thoughts and with good reason, regarded the concept, pattern, or institution as their own.”<sup>438</sup> Although the “Tree of Life” cross image affirmed a similar understanding between Christian and indigenous religious concepts, its associations with Quetzalcóatl and the patio and roadside crosses allowed Natives agency in connecting their independent past with their present colonial status. As with Clifford Geertz’s critique of the Balinese, the Mexica, “cast their most comprehensive ideas of the way things ultimately are, and the way men should therefore act, into immediately apprehended sensuous symbols...rather than into a discursively apprehended, ordered set of explicit ‘beliefs.’”<sup>439</sup> One of the most powerful “sensuous symbols” in colonial Mexico was the cross. Because it was already integrated in indigenous cultures it allowed the development of religious understanding within the Native’s worldview in spite of Christian dominance.

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<sup>437</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición* Vol 1452 F. 114 (1811) Campeche: “Señor el dia veinte y seis del mes proximo pasado embarque en estar plaza una partida de pañuelos con cruces, y en medio un crusifilo; asi mismo en diez parados una piesa de genero fondo morado tambien con cruces; de cuyo hecho doy guenta a V.S. L. en cumplimiento de su, superiores ordenes.”

<sup>438</sup> Lockhart, *Nahua After the Conquest*, 446.

<sup>439</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, (Princeton University Press, 1981), 103.



Natives saw this, their sacred image, incorporated in the catechisms and passion plays of the conquerors and accepted certain teachings and roles within the Christian churches. This is especially true of the passion plays which allowed indigenous participation in deification as they understood the continuation of the role of the *ixiptla* in their religious rituals. The theory of the “eternal return” put forth by Eliade, which was enacted in the colonial passion plays, does not suggest that traditional societies are stagnant and unimaginative, nor does it lead them to “a total cultural immobility.”<sup>440</sup> Instead, established religion allows a foundation to build on and concrete symbols, like the cross, act as a means of keeping humans rooted in the historic/mythic past so that they can move forward into an unknown future. The ability of Natives to utilize the cross in a process of religious stabilization and continuity within the colonial context led to the development of a unique Mexican Catholicism.

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<sup>440</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, Translated by Willard R. Trask, (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 140.

CHAPTER 6  
THE CROSS MIRACULOUS

That same night that we arrived, some Indians came to Castillo and said to him that they suffered a malady of the head, begging him to cure them. And after he had made the sign of the cross over them and commended them to God, at that point the Indians said that all the sickness had left them.<sup>441</sup>

The 1542 *Relación* of Cabeza de Vaca

Belief in the cross symbol as an instrument of healing and miracle-working power influenced both European and American societies. Missionaries preached the power of the cross and there are many examples of indigenous acceptance of this teaching based on the power they perceived in this symbol. To verify the miraculous actions associated with the cross symbol is impossible and beyond the scope of this study. However, what the peoples in Mexico believed concerning the miraculous attributes of this symbol does reveal the powerful hold the cross had and continues to have in Mexico.

The cross was already associated with the regeneration of life by indigenous peoples, which aided their acceptance of the Christian cross. However, the miraculous demonstrations related to the cross reinforced the symbol's power and indigenous acquiescence. A common occurrence which spoke to both Spaniards and Natives was the issue of blood from crosses. Reports from Spain and Mexico, especially in the sixteenth century, testify to the miracle of blood flowing from sanctuary crosses emphasizing the veracity of the cross' power.<sup>442</sup> This potent image served as a common transatlantic occurrence that fit in to the greater theme of the

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<sup>441</sup> Quoted in Vaca, *The Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca*, 114.

<sup>442</sup> Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 480; Gruzinski, *Man-gods*, 131.

miraculous. Even if self-initiated blood oozing from crosses seems not only impossible but senseless, the actions stemming from the belief in such episodes can place these cultures within a certain religious context.

Natives developed unprecedented ways of using the cross in healing practices and understood various distinct crosses to have miraculously come alive and act as a medium of divine power. Also integral to the belief of the cross as miraculous was the image of the cross seen in the sky by Constantine. This image was also seen during battles in the *reconquista* in Spain and by indigenous warriors in Mexico, always leading the viewers to victory. The Spanish viewed this powerful image as justification for the conquest of Mexico and was integral to the development of indigenous religion.

#### 6.1 Cross in the Sky

On October 28, 312 AD, Constantine I defeated Maxentius in the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Prior to the engagement, Constantine had his soldiers place on their shields the labarum symbol, a combination of the first two letters of Christ in Greek: *Chi* (X) and *Rho* (P). According to the historian Lactantius, in a dream the night before the battle, God told Constantine to paint the labarum on his soldiers' shields. However, the historian Eusebius, also a contemporary of Constantine, attributed another vision to Constantine. The day before battle as Constantine prayed about noon, a cross of light appeared in the sky along with the message *In hoc signo vinces*. He and his whole army were struck with amazement at the sign. When Constantine slept that night, the Christian God came to him with the same sign and commanded him to make likenesses of it to be used in battle.<sup>443</sup>

Constantine's victory placed the cross as the symbol of a revitalized empire that would adopt Christianity as its religion. Constantine's famous vision of the cross in the sky set the

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<sup>443</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, "Life of Constantine the Great", *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, Translated by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vols. 14 (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1890), I: 490.

precedent for further miraculous appearances of the cross. However, Christians interpreted the cross in the sky as a fulfillment of the words of Christ. In speaking of his second coming, Christ stated that, "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky."<sup>444</sup> Several early Church Fathers, including the fourth-century archbishop John Chrysostom, interpreted the sign in this passage to be a luminous cross that would outshine the sun.<sup>445</sup> Modern skepticism concerning miracles is irrelevant in that what is crucial is the perception of contemporary peoples and the beliefs that followed down through the generations. Alleged manifestations of the cross in the sky would occur not only in Italy, but also Jerusalem, Iberia, and even Mexico.

Heavenly appearances of the cross did not always occur previous to battle, but on special occasions as if to commemorate or condemn. In 351, Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem wrote to Emperor Constantius II:

now, sire, in the reign of your most godly majesty, as if to mark how far your zeal excels your forebears piety, not only from the earth but from the skies marvels appear: the trophy of victory over death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, even the holy Cross, flashing and sparkling with brilliant light, has been seen at Jerusalem.<sup>446</sup>

Cyril also taught that the sign to precede Christ's return would be a luminous cross. Christians throughout Jerusalem who had seen it interpreted it as a sign of God's approval not only of Constantius' reign, but of Cyril as recently appointed bishop; however, a decade later Cyril and others interpreted a cross sighting as a signal of divine disapproval.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 24: 30.

<sup>445</sup> Oliver Nicholson, "Constantine's Vision of the Cross", *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 54, No. 3. (2000), 309-323: 312.

<sup>446</sup> Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross*, (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1992), 82.

<sup>447</sup> Nicholson, "Constantine's Vision of the Cross", 313.

Emperor Julian favored the Jews and the rebuilding of their temple in Jerusalem during his short reign from 361 to 363.<sup>448</sup> During the reconstruction of the temple, a natural disaster, accompanied by a cross in the sky, halted the work. The fifth-century ecclesiastical historian Theodoret recorded that, “On that night and also on the following night the sign of the cross of salvation was seen brightly shining in the sky, and the very garments of the Jews were filled with crosses, not bright but black.”<sup>449</sup> This appearance not only confirmed in the minds of Christians God’s displeasure with Jews, but also with Julian, who became known as the Apostate because he was a polytheist and therefore rejected Christianity.<sup>450</sup>

Sightings of the cross continued into the *reconquista* period, strengthening Christian belief in the power of the cross in battle against infidels. Edward Gibbon recorded an incident in which Portuguese Prince Afonso Henriques, before the Battle of Ourique in 1139, stated that he had seen a cross suspended in the sky. Christ, who held the cross, assured the Christian king of victory over the Almoravid Moors led by Ali ibn Yusuf.<sup>451</sup> However, instead of Christ, originally Christian soldiers claimed to have seen St. James the Great, who reportedly had been

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<sup>448</sup> Averil Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire: A.D. 284-430*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 97.

<sup>449</sup> Theodoret, “The Ecclesiastical History”, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, Translated by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vols. 14, (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1892), III: 103. On Good Friday 1492, the abrasive preacher Savonarola announced in the Church of San Lorenzo that he had seen a vision of Rome topped by a black cross with the inscription *Ira Domini* (“God’s Wrath”) and a golden one rising from Jerusalem entitled *Misericordia Domini* (“God’s Mercy”) (Girolamo Savonarola, *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola: Religion and Politics, 1490-1498*, (Yale University Press, 2006), 68).

<sup>450</sup> Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire*, 97.

<sup>451</sup> Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (P. F. Collier & Son, 1899), chapter 20.

supporting Christian victory since the Battle of Clavijo in 845, and later another warrior saint, St. George. Despite the reidentification of which person appeared, what remained the same in these versions of the event was the cross. Soldiers also made claims of a cross in the sky precluding the Christian victory over Muslim reinforcements during the siege at Alcácer do Sal in 1217.<sup>452</sup>

Over 300 years later during the initial Spanish conquest and conversion of Natives in Mexico, the cross in the sky again emerged. The focal point of Otomi religious practice in the state of Guanajuato is the Sacred Cross of Calderón Pass. According to tradition, on September 14, 1531, a band of non-Christian Chichimecs battled Christian Otomi and Chichimec warriors in a streambed near Calderón Pass. The battle lasted for fifteen days until the sky suddenly grew dark and a shining cross appeared in the sky. When the non-Christian warriors saw the sign they shouted, "He is God" and were reconciled to their Christian opponents. These Chichimecs adopted the Catholic Faith and carved a four-foot cross out of stone that was placed on a visible area of the Calderon Pass where a chapel would be built. The cross was covered with a layer of tin on which religious images were impressed. Also a small woodenhead of Christ was inserted into the cross at the point where the two axes met so that the person of Christ seems enveloped in the cross.<sup>453</sup>

Although the Otomi and Chichimec accepted this miraculous sign, others utilized this belief in the cross in order to manipulate the Spanish. In 1683, Jumano chief Juan Sabeata, who in his youth had been baptized, journeyed to El Paso del Norte where he asked Governor Domingo Jironza Pétriz de Cruzate to establish missions among the Jumano. To entice the Spanish, Sabeata told the governor that thirty-three Indian nations, including the Jumano, eagerly awaited baptism. According to the chief, the reason for this outbreak of religious fervor among the Natives was the result of a miracle that had changed the course of a fierce battle

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<sup>452</sup> O'Callaghan, *Reconquest*, 79.

<sup>453</sup> Correa, "Otomi Rituals and Celebrations", 439.

with the Apache. Some two hundred allied Indians in New Mexico faced 30,000 Apache. When it looked as if the Jumano were going to be defeated, a cross mysteriously appeared in the sky encouraging the grossly outnumbered Jumano and allies to defeat the enemy.<sup>454</sup>

Sabeata did not make such a startling revelation known to the Spanish simply for religious reasons, but for political gain and protection. Sabeata later admitted that his story about the appearance of the cross during the battle was pure fabrication. In addition to protection from the Apache, Sabeata desired security for the Jumano against the Spanish slave hunters who were always on the lookout for Natives to work the mines of Chihuahua.<sup>455</sup>

Again the empirical proof that the cross did or did not appear in the sky was unnecessary to those who ascribed the victory to supernatural intervention and were later converted to Christianity.<sup>456</sup> Along with accounts relating to the cross in the sky, the growing number of other miraculous stories strengthened both Spanish and Native American faith in the supernatural power of the cross. However, miraculous sightings of the cross in the sky were not limited to specific events, but ingrained in indigenous prophecy.

Religious fervor often led to misleading Spanish translations of Indian prophecy and tradition. Father Lizana recorded the prophecy of the Mayan priest Chilan Balam as this:

At the end of the thirteenth age, when Itza is at the height of its power, as also the city called Tancah, the signal of God will appear on the heights, and the Cross with which the world was enlightened will be manifested. There will be variance of men's will in future times, when this signal shall be brought.... Receive your barbarous bearded guests from the east, who bring the signal of God, who comes to us in mercy and pity. The time of our life is coming...<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> John, *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds*, 175-81.

<sup>455</sup> Jack Forbes, *Apache, Navaho, and Spaniard*, (University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 195-98 & 213-15.

<sup>456</sup> Weckmann, *The Medieval Heritage of Mexico*, 266.

<sup>457</sup> Quoted in Spence, *Mexico and Peru*, 8.

As Lewis Spence asserts, this Mayan prophecy is couched in very specific European terms and meanings that are only generally set forth in the books of the Chilán Balam from which the prophecy comes. What can be said with certainty is that the Spaniards wanted to place the cross as the emblem of the one true God in the minds of both Native Americans and Europeans. This translation of the indigenous prophecy was not for the Maya, but for contemporary Spaniards and for all of posterity to know that God had prepared the indigenous peoples to receive the cross-bearing Europeans as divine messengers, affirming existing Spanish religious and political intentions.<sup>458</sup>

A similar recording comes from Juan de Torquemada's *Monarchia Indiana* originally published in 1615. Torquemada recorded how king Necahualpilli of Tetzcuco told of the cross foreshadowing the coming of a powerful people from the east.

It is said of this king, that when that great sign of splendor appeared in the Heavens, which was divided into three crosses, rising up in the East and going towards the West (as we said in the end of this book) this king said, as people from strange lands and unknown regions had to come--and that they were white, bearded people--that they had to come to possess this land, and be lords over it, because they were invincible...<sup>459</sup>

Again it appears that the Spanish may have manipulated an indigenous prophecy, but for what purpose? If the Natives knew the true prophecy, Spanish distortion would not have changed

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>459</sup> Juan de Torquemada, *Veinte i Un Libros Rituales i Manarchia Indiana*. Part I. (Madrid: N. Rodriguez Franco, 1723), 188: "Dicese de este Rei, que quando aparecio en el Cielo aquella gran senal de Resplandor, que se dividia de tres Cruces, levantandose de la parte del Oriente, a la del Poniente (como en el sinde este Libro decimos) este Rei dijo, como avian de venir Gentes de estranas Tierras, y Regiones no conocidas, y que eran una Gentes blancas, y barbadas, que avian de venir a poseer esta Tierra, y ser Senores de ella, porque eran invencibles,..." From the section entitled: "Donde se dicen Condiciones naturales del Excelentissimo Rei, y monarca Necahualpilli, de Tetzcuco, que son mucho de notar."



their minds. It seems, especially as the document was written in Spanish, that Torquemada's work is to affirm Spanish colonialism.

In both of these prophecies the symbol used for this justification was the cross image. More specifically, the verbal description of Lizana and Torquemada is an appearance of the cross in the sky perhaps harkening back to Constantine and the divine right of Christianity to dominate. If so, this religious validation of the Spanish conquest is similar to Juan Sabeata's manipulation of this persistent image. Perhaps the record of cross sightings is tainted with overeager interpretation and pure fabrication, but the power of this manifested image, real or imagined, created a discourse that extended over a millennium on three continents.

## 6.2 Perceived Power

From the very beginning of the conquest of Mexico, there were reports of crosses with supernatural power. According to the legend recorded on the mid-sixteenth-century *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, the four Tlaxcalan lords that first greeted Cortés were baptized within twenty days after Spanish arrival on the mainland in 1519. At the spot of the baptism a cross was erected that came to be held as miraculous. The legend became so popular that several villages laid claim to being the site of the baptism and the miraculous cross so as to be considered blessed.<sup>460</sup>

In colonial times there were many crosses that were ascribed miraculous. One of the most famous was the cross of Huatulco, which stood at this Oaxacan seaport on the Pacific Ocean. According to the Roman Catholic authors, in 1587 English pirates led by Sir Francis Drake, upset at not finding goods to steal at Huatulco, tried to destroy the cross by axe and fire but it suffered no damage. From that time on Spaniards and Natives alike revered it as

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<sup>460</sup> Wood, *Transcending Conquest*, 88. Charles Gibson, *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century*, (Stanford University Press, 1952), 30. UT Austin, Benson Latin American Collection, Tlaxcala Manuscript/Lienzo.

miraculous.<sup>461</sup> When the Spanish converted the pilgrimage center of Izamal into a religious seat, they dismantled the existing structures to build a convent. A high wind struck the shrine attached to the convent and destroyed it, but miraculously left the three crosses standing within.<sup>462</sup> Other miraculous crosses that resisted destruction were those at Colima and Autlan.<sup>463</sup>

Spaniards and Natives did not hold all crosses to be miraculous for most were used and venerated without any supernatural power occurring through them. However, there were reports that certain crosses that had stood or been used as ordinary suddenly came to life, such as the crucifix of Totolapan and the cross of Tlayacapan.<sup>464</sup> In 1583, the Mexican Inquisition tried the Augustinian friars of the school of San Pablo for publishing indiscretly the miracles concerning the "holy crucifix of Totolapan."<sup>465</sup> Statements from the inquisition asserted that:

On the Saturday evening of the Most Holy Trinity the shaft of the holy crucifix becomes [alive when] they leave Pablo traveling to San Agustin and on the following Sunday celebrate the festival. And one will preach, it is provincially known, to charge the faithful followers that found it, to its adoration because the holy *Tieliquia* will reveal the honor and Glory of God.<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> Bancroft, *Native Races*, IV: 374.

<sup>462</sup> Carrillo y Ancona, *El Obispado de Yucatan*, I: 286.

<sup>463</sup> Weckmann, *The Medieval Heritage of Mexico*, 289-90.

<sup>464</sup> Gruzinski, *Man-gods*, 112.

<sup>465</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol. 133 fojas 212-261 (1583): "Informacion sobre el santo crucifijo de Totolapan y milagros que los frailes de San Agustin de Colegio de San Pablo, con indiscrecion publicaban. Totolapan y Mexico."

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*: "el sabado bropera de la sanctisima trinidad se haze la hastacion del santo crucifixo dejan Pablo a San agustin y el domingo siguiente se selebra la fiesta. Y predicara sepe provincial en cargase a los fieles epianos se hallen a la adoracion porque se enseñara la santa Tieliquia a honnar y Gloria de dios."

The censure of these friars, who gloried in this miraculous cross as an instrument to convert Natives, was not meant to stunt the growth of Christianity, but to protect it from those indigenous that worshiped cross images as gods. By the end of the sixteenth century, Spanish religious learned that miraculous crosses did not always advance the faith, but encouraged idolatry.

In 1728, the Mexican courts dealt with another case involving a miraculous cross that supposedly lived and moved. Spanish authorities told how at 2pm on Sunday, May 9, 1728, “The Most-holy Cross...standing at an intersection [of Tlayacapan]...” appeared in different places throughout the city. It moved after being adorned with pictures and flowers and “all the Narzon people who were standing [and] looking at the movements that it made” were astonished and believed it to be miraculous. The people examined this miracle from 2:30 in the afternoon until evening prayers. According to testimony, “The movements that it makes are in the shape of the Cross, from east to west and from south to north directing itself toward...the step before the altar.” When questioned concerning the origins of the cross the interrogated answered that, “There is no one who says that they have seen it made because the old men have said that they have always seen it as it is.”<sup>467</sup>

As in the 1583 trial concerning the crucifix of Totolapan, the religious feared that this miracle was a hoax or the work of a demon that would lead to idolatry. A collection of Franciscans wrote in 1728 that the events surrounding this supposed miraculous cross of Tlayacapan would be brought before the tribunals and each person that claimed the cross was

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<sup>467</sup> AGN, *Bienes Nacionales*, Vol. 992, exp 23, f. 1 (1728): “La Santissima Crus...estando en una encruijada...toda la gente de Narzon quienes estando mirando los mobimientos que haria, y los que bi y estabe exsaminando desde las dos y media de la tarde hasta Senca de la oracion y los...” “los mobimientos que harze son en forma de Cruz de oriente aponiente y de sur anorte meneadose a Vatos asta la peana...” “No ay quien diga haberla bisto haser porque los biejos d- -sen, que siempre la han bisto assi...”

miraculous would be examined individually for clarity.<sup>468</sup> Doubting its authenticity, the Franciscans demanded that, “the cross be expelled and removed from its step before the altar.” They asserted that “the Holy sign of the Cross has Virtue to defend us,” but this cross of Tlayacapan might prove to be other than Christian.<sup>469</sup>

The judges cast further doubt on the supernatural actions of the cross, insisting that those people who claimed to have seen the “movement of the Holy Cross” tried to demonstrate its power to shift itself by hiding underneath the altar step and moving it. Further investigations revealed “idols under the altar” linking this belief in the cross not to faith in Christ, but a syncretic blending of pagan beliefs with an image acceptable to the Spanish.<sup>470</sup> They argued that this continuation of paganism must have been the motivation for the willing devotion to and celebrations of mass for the cross from the Natives. Still, certain persons considered the apparent movements of the cross of Tlayacapan as a mystery.<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> AGN, *Bienes Nacionales*, Vol. 992, exp 23, f. 2 (1728).

<sup>469</sup> AGN, *Bienes Nacionales*, Vol. 992, exp 23, f. 3 (1728): “auiendor e quitado la cruz de su Peanna creemes fiel y verdaderamente, que otra se me Santa senal de la Cruz tiene Virtua para defendernos, no obstante, por nuestra Rudera...hemos graduado en la cruz de el Prodigio ruedido, nuestra devocion y procunando su mayor culto.”

<sup>470</sup> AGN, *Bienes Nacionales*, Vol. 992, exp 23, f. 5 (1728): “Dijo que aviendo visto los succesius del movimiento de la Santa Cruz, y conciderando que podía moverse para demostrar, con este signo, algunos ido los que se ocultar en debajo de su Peanna, como su?edio en A?thistara? que moviendose por si el ara de el altar en que se celebraba, investigando la causa se hallaron idolos debajo del altar.”

<sup>471</sup> AGN, *Bienes Nacionales*, Vol. 992, exp 23, f. 8 (1728): “que se quedo en la estimacion de misteriors, que la cruz se consersa en la capilla de Santa Isabel proxima a el lugar donde estaba, con mucha devocion de todos, de se le han celebrado misas enacimiento de gracias que esto es publico...”

Although the colonial courts begrudged acknowledgement of miraculous crosses among the Natives, Spaniards demonstratively claimed the power of the cross against their enemies both in Spain and Mexico. According to the bishop historian Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, a banner bearing the images of the cross and Virgin miraculously passed over Muslim lines during the Battle of Las Navas in 1212. Alfonso VIII claimed that though the Muslims threw stones and shot arrows at the banner, it remained unharmed during the battle and the Muslims took flight.<sup>472</sup>

Bernal Díaz provides a similar account concerning interactions with the Aztecs in Tenochtitlan. He stated that those who refused to acknowledge the Christian God would flee from the presence of the cross and in doing so indirectly ascribed power to it. Bernal Díaz recounts how, in a peaceful correspondence with Motechuzoma, Cortés tried to explain the importance and power of the Christian cross:

We had then told them that we were Christians and worshipped one God alone, named Jesus Christ, who had suffered his passion and death to save us; and that what they worshipped as gods were not gods, but devils, which were evil things, and if they were ugly to look at, their deeds were uglier. But he had proved to them how evil and ineffectual their gods were, as both the prince and his people would observe in the course of time, since, where we had put up crosses such as their ambassadors had seen, they had been too frightened to appear before them.<sup>473</sup>

In another place Bernal Díaz described the Mexican revolt to reclaim Motechuzoma, in which Pedro de Alvarado claimed that a certain Aztec named Huichilobos "...who was angry because we had placed the image of Our Lady and the cross in his house" ordered that these Christian symbols be removed from the altar. However, Alvarado claimed that the Natives were unable to remove the cross, which they recounted as a "great miracle" and decided to leave it.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> O'Callaghan, *Reconquest*, 191.

<sup>473</sup> Quoted in Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 222.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

Fray Diego de Landa stated that the cross was an object mystically empowered with the blood of Christ, which not only struck fear in the hearts of the pagan, but also in the very idols that they worshiped:

I believe in the virtue of the cross in the malice of the devil which would not allow the cross to be seen among idols for fear that some day its virtues would break them and they would flee from it to him and would confound him as the ark of the Scripture did Dagon, although it was not consecrated with the blood of the Son of God and dignified by His divine limbs as was the holy cross.<sup>475</sup>

An account given in Fray Juan de Torquemada's *Monarquía Indiana* (1615) confirmed Landa's statement in which radiant light produced by a cross that the Spanish had set up in an Aztec temple caused the Tizatlan idol, Camaxtle, to flee.<sup>476</sup>

Torquemada also recorded a miracle associated with the raising of a huge cross in Mexico City. Here he reinforces the idea of syncretism between indigenous perceptions of divine trees that link heaven and earth and Christian belief that the cross was the instrument that bridged the gap between God and Man. Torquemada stated that:

Here, by the Chapel of San Jose, patron saint of this New Spain, there was in the spacious patio, a cross, higher than the highest tower in the City [of Mexico], visible to passers-by in all the neighboring streets...[the cross] was made from a very tall cypress tree that grew in the forest of Chapultepec almost a league west of the city. The elder Mexicans regarded this tree as a deified thing, and so they cleaned and debarked it with more than usual care, in keeping with its preciousness. The religious [friars and their Indian converts] cut the tree and prepared to raise it up in the center of the patio. But it happened that in spite of the large number of Mexicans who were there (including many *principales*), they were unable to lift the cross off the ground. At that moment, there was an elderly holy man at prayer in the chapel choir, who saw in a revelation that the demon was holding the cross down and afflicting its movement. The old man rushed out into the patio, pushed the people aside, and shouted, "How can you raise this cross when it is being prevented by the demon?" And then running around to the head of the cross, shouted again, "Get away you evil one, they are raising the cross of Jesus Christ! The banner of our faith shall be lofted!" Suddenly, in

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<sup>475</sup> Landa, *Relación*, 207.

<sup>476</sup> Weckmann, *The Medieval Heritage of Mexico*, 290. See I Samuel 5: 1-4 for the biblical account of the Philistine god/idol Dagon and its destruction relative to the Hebrew Ark of the Covenant.

plain view, everyone saw the demon run away, and, after that, they easily raised the huge tree.<sup>477</sup>

The miraculous vision of the demon's attempt to inhibit this sacred connection opens the eyes of the people that this struggle is just as much spiritual as it is physical. With the proclamation that the banner of Christianity, that is the cross, will be raised for all to see and venerate, the demon flees revealing the triumph of the cross once again.

In the early seventeenth century Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin, also called Don Domingo De San Anton Munon, chronicled two miracles related to the image of the cross revealing just how much certain indigenous peoples accepted its powers. Chimalpahin recorded that in 1613, certain residents in the district of Xoloco desired to erect a cross at an intersection not far from their church San Antonio Abad. As the workers built the platform that would hold the cross, they were arrested because a local woman, Maria, complained. The viceroy overruled Maria's objections and Chimalpahin recorded that she almost immediately died. The public considered this to be divine retribution for her opposition to the cross. Chimalpahin recorded a similar event that occurred in the same year when a Spanish couple wanted to get rid of a cross that had been erected years earlier by the Xoloco community. The woman, who used bad language in public and sought the cross' removal, was struck ill and died soon after.<sup>478</sup>

For many Natives, the cross was integrated into their personal lives and possessions. One Nahua Indian proclaimed, "...the crucifix standing here is my own property, and I declare that it is not to be taken somewhere else but to stand here at my home."<sup>479</sup> The household crucifix became an important family icon, which symbolized the piety of that family and guaranteed benefits for the worshippers. As is seen in this proclamation, the cross as a religious object could be attached to a certain place and acquire local meaning and importance.

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<sup>477</sup> Quoted in Edgerton, "Christian Cross as Indigenous 'World Tree'".

<sup>478</sup> Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 245.

<sup>479</sup> Quoted in Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 243.

The seventeenth-century Mexican nun Ana de los Angeles utilized the cross image in self-mortification.<sup>480</sup> At the time of her death she was found to have an iron cross fully embedded into her skin, which her contemporary biographer stated was an “adornment that enriched her life.”<sup>481</sup> The eighteenth-century Mexican ascetic Sebastiana Josefa de la Santísima Trinidad also used the image in her self-torture by wearing an iron cross covered in barbs next to her bare chest until her confessor commanded that she move it to her back.<sup>482</sup> Her eighteenth-century biographer, José Eugenio Valdés, recounted that her usual bodily expression during prayer was with her arms outstretched in the form of the cross.<sup>483</sup> Although these crosses were not regarded as miraculous they do reveal the perceived power associated with the symbol.

Certain indigenous individuals sought to manipulate this perceived power in ways that were self-beneficial. From the end of the sixteenth century the indigenous miracle-workers of clouds and storms mixed the sign of the cross and invocation of the Trinity with autochthonous practices gathering the powers related to both European and Native religions. In the mid-eighteenth century, Antonio Pérez initiated an anti-Spanish cult with his holy objects borrowed from Christianity in the jurisdiction of Atlatlahucan. During his interrogation by the inquisition in 1761 he explained how he used the cross symbol. He recounted how he had placed a “big cross” inserting rosemary, tobacco, and tacopac into it on the Mountain of Limestone in order to “frighten the air.” He also had placed three crosses at an opening through which the air was being tunneled by the wind, ordering the wind to stop. Lastly, he confessed to placing three

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<sup>480</sup> Kristine Ibsen, *Women's Spiritual Autobiography in Colonial Spanish America*, (Gainesville, Florida: University Press, 1999), 74.

<sup>481</sup> Augustín de Vetancourt, *Crónica de la Provincia del Santo Evangelio de México. Teatro mexicano*. Vol. 4, (Mexico City: María de Benavides, 1697), 71.

<sup>482</sup> Ibsen, *Women's Spiritual Autobiography*, 89.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.



crosses on Black Mountain to “frighten the hail” and on a volcano called Devil’s Face to “frighten the air.”<sup>484</sup>

In order to maintain autonomy in their own towns, indigenous lay-leaders projected the catholicity of their town via images and miraculous assertions. There were claims of stone crosses that mysteriously moved of themselves, which proved God’s blessing on the pueblo and the lack of a need for Spanish interference.<sup>485</sup> One important cross, held as miraculous because people believed that San Guillermo had appeared on it in Totolapan, was transported to Mexico City to receive veneration and bring God’s blessing.<sup>486</sup> In the eighteenth century, in order to collect money to support local shrines and chapels, the indigenous would obtain a license giving them permission to take miraculous and otherwise important images, including crosses, from their homes and travel to other communities, often rural, for several months at a time. The images would be paraded through pueblos and then set up in homemade shrines to be venerated by the residents who would also offer money to be collected by the image carriers.<sup>487</sup>

### 6.3 Healing

Miraculous crosses not only resisted destruction and frightened away demons, but also reportedly cured the sick, brought children back to life, and alleviated the pains of childbirth.<sup>488</sup> Native acceptance and interpretation of the cross varied, but was often quickly integrated into indigenous culture if they believed spiritual or physical power was connected to the symbol.

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<sup>484</sup> Gruzinski, *Man-gods*, 117.

<sup>485</sup> Edward W. Osowski, “Carriers of Saints: Traveling Alms Collectors and Nahua Gender Roles”, *Local Religion in Colonial Mexico*, Edited by Martin Austin Nesvig, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 159.

<sup>486</sup> Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 243.

<sup>487</sup> Osowski, “Carriers of Saints”, 160.

<sup>488</sup> Weckmann, *The Medieval Heritage of Mexico*, 291.

Bernal Díaz recorded that one night during the siege of Tenochtitlan, a soldier by the name of Juan Catalan made a cross and said prayers over the Spanish wounded. When the Tlaxcalan allies saw Catalan, “curing us by making the sign of the cross over our wounds and broken heads, they went to him too; and there were so many of them that he could hardly attend to them in a day.”<sup>489</sup> Catalan’s use of a material cross as well as signing the cross in the air over the heads and chests of the wounded displays the versatility of the cross image in healing ritual.

Cabeza de Vaca also recounted how Natives accepted the powers of the invisible cross, drawn with the fingers in the air, as an instrument of healing. Cabeza de Vaca stated that much of his success in establishing Spanish claims in western Texas and New Mexico was based on the fact that the Natives revered him and his companions as “physicians” whose primary medium of curing was the sign of the cross. Cabeza de Vaca claimed that all the Indians wanted Spanish blessing to do or eat anything, which was given by signing the cross, and blowing on the people and/or the item they wished blessed.<sup>490</sup>

In 1619 a cross made of grass and earth reputedly grew out of the ground.<sup>491</sup> The people of Tepic reported this miracle of the *Cruz de Zacate* which kept its green appearance without cultivation. Those that revered it pulled off pieces of grass to make medicinal concoctions, and yet the cross never lacked for grass.<sup>492</sup> However, Spanish authorities did not always accept the cross as miraculous if associated with indigenous religious practice. Such was the case for Mateo de la Cruz, a Sonoran Indian healer in Babonyaba, who used crucifixes in his healing ceremonies. In 1705 Spanish authorities had him whipped 200 times and exiled to hard labor in the mines.<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Quoted in Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 365.

<sup>490</sup> Vaca, *Narrative*, 143-144.

<sup>491</sup> Some historians argue that this miraculous cross was first reported in 1540.

<sup>492</sup> Weckmann, *The Medieval Heritage of Mexico*, 291.

<sup>493</sup> Deeds, *Defiance and Deference*, 117-118.

In 1721, the inquisition investigated a slave called Domingo Romero accused of stealing fifty pesos. However, the witnesses focused on his healing practices which mixed Christian symbolism and invocation with indigenous application. Father Jacinto Joaquin stated that:

he has cured and is used to curing people bitten of snakes, in this way: he makes a cross in the lower part of the sting, and another in the high one, saying, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph and then gives to the person some herbs to drink,...they take grass of the four corners invoking the holy Trinity, he has a maiden ground the herbs, and then he sucks on the sting to extract the poison,...and also he gives them to drink the head of the same snake or ground snake; and to the ones that he has cured to health, in order to protect them from the sting, he makes on them crosses with the fang of one, with which he goes scratching them on the hands, arms, tongue, head, and any other decent parts of the body invoking God our Lord etc.<sup>494</sup>

The priest went on to say:

his cousin has shown him how to cure or to cut the erysipelas in this way: making crosses on the part where the person suffers and saying thus: I cure you red spot of the skin by the poisonous one, by the crossing of oneself, by the Mass book, by the

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<sup>494</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol 1328 F. 297-306 (1721): "Llamado Domingo Romero, esclavo de la hda. de s. Nicolas, para saber quien habia hurtado cincuenta pesos. Jacinto Joaquin, padre libre, dice que ha curado y suele curar a algunas mordidos de culebras, en esta forma: hace una cruz en la parte baja de la picadura, y otra en la alta, diciendo, Jesus, Maria, y Jose y luego le da a beber algunas yerbas, las que cogen rezando el credo, toman Zacate de las cuatro esquinas invocando a la sna. trinidad, las yerbas las ha de moler una doncella, y luego les chupa en la picadura para extraerles el veneno, y los encomienda a ntra. Senora de la Concepcion de ese pueblo; hace prender una candela que la han de comprar de limosna, y tambien les da a beber la cabeza de la misma vibora o culebra molida; y a los que ha curado en salud, para preservarlos de la picadura, les hace cruces con el colmillo de una, con que les va aranando en las manos, brazos, lengua, cerebro, y otras cualquier partes de las decentes de su cuerpo invocando a Dios nuestro Senor etc."

altar, that you return to your place where the rooster does not sing, neither dog barks, and then he goes making crosses on the person with saliva.<sup>495</sup>

The way in which the priest describes Domingo Romero's healing rituals is reminiscent of the Bernal Díaz and Cabeza de Vaca's accounts with the addition of indigenous application specifically in the use of the fang to make crosses and the drinking of the liquidated head of the snake. It was these types of aberrations from the orthodox use of the cross that not only made Christianity acceptable to Natives, but also spurred on inquisitorial witch hunts.

Maria Tiburcia Reynantes, a *curandera* well known in the Toluca area, also called Maria la Gachupina, was notorious for both her appearance and her healing abilities. She was born in Andalucía and emigrated with her father to Mexico in the mid-eighteenth century. After her parent's death she became a servant and believed herself gifted with the insights of healing. According to the 1783 inquisition she stated that: "One time Jesus of Nazareth Himself appeared to her, and she helped him carry the Cross."<sup>496</sup>

However much she was revered as a *medica*, her appearance was scandalously syncretic. She arrived in towns holding a large cross, having a cross shaved on her head, wearing a large crucifix, a rosary and religious medals, and carrying a bag containing a dead hummingbird (a representation of the Aztec god Huitzilopochtli).<sup>497</sup> In healing Fr. Luciano

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<sup>495</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, Vol 1328 F. 297-306 (1721): "petrona de la cruz, dijo que un primo suyo la habia enseñado a curar o cortar la erisipela en esta forma: haciendo cruces en la parte donde se padece y diciendo asi: yo te curo rosa por la venenosa, por el santiguar, por el misal, por el altar, que te vuelvas a tu lugar donde gallo no canta, ni perro ladra, y luego le va haciendo cruces con la saliva. Juan Cortes, natural de dicho pueblo."

<sup>496</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, vol. 1300 f. 177 (Sept 4 1783), 177: "...una vez se le aparecio Jesus Nazareno, y ella le ayudó a llevar la Cruz."

<sup>497</sup> Luz María Hernández Sáenz, *Learning to Heal: The Medical Profession in Colonial Mexico, 1767-1831*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 240-241. AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, vol.

1300 f. 177 (Sept 4 1783), 177: ayudada para mejor persuadir su vix\_tud se cargar consigo en

Santillan, Maria Tiburcia made the sign of the cross over the liver, heart, and other parts of the body which is related to the Aztec belief that a healthy body requires the balance of the three vital organs: the liver, heart, and head.<sup>498</sup> However, witnesses sought to condemn her practice saying that she told how “she put a curse on something; she combined her useless medicinal crosses, prayers, [and] invocations of Saints.”<sup>499</sup>

Although the Mexican Inquisition persecuted Maria Tiburcia Reynantes, Domingo Romero, Mateo de la Cruz, and all the other known healers that allegedly misused the cross, the inquisitorial arm was not able to quell the syncretic use of the cross in indigenous curing ceremonies. Syncretism can be seen in certain healing rites that have persisted even to this day. As part of a curing ritual among the Mayo people of Sonora, a rabbit’s chest is sliced open in the shape of a cross and the blood applied to the patient, blending the Christian symbol of the cross and the indigenous practice of animal sacrifice in the art of healing.<sup>500</sup>

#### 6.4 Conclusion

From the sixteenth into the seventeenth century, the Baroque church encouraged Natives in accepting religious objects that were miraculous and tried to adopt what they could from indigenous culture to further the Spanish hold in New Spain. This is true of Spanish acceptance of indigenous prophecies and statements concerning miraculous crosses appearing in the sky or growing out of the earth. However, the Enlightened church of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century sought to quell indigenous cults of images even if it separated the

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los Pueblos, y caminos un grande Crucifixo descubierta pendiente del cuello, un rosario con muchas medallas, una Cruz abierta en la cabeza a Narasa y una espada...”

<sup>498</sup> Hernández Sáenz, *Learning to Heal*, 242-243.

<sup>499</sup> AGN, *Edicto de Inquisición*, vol. 1300 f. 177 (Sept 4 1783), 177: “diciendoles estarlo se maleficio, mezclado con sus inutiles medicinas cruces, oraciones, invocaciones de Santos...”

<sup>500</sup> N. Ross Crumrine, *The Mayo Indians of Sonora: A People Who Refuse to Die*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977), 73.

Natives from the Church as is seen in the inquisitorial persecution of healers and preachers of miraculous crosses. Gruzinski attributes this development to the transition from the regular clergy (Franciscan, Augustinian, and Dominican) to the secular clergy who he argues tended to care more about their position of power rather than the souls of the Indians.<sup>501</sup> However, the trend of discouraging the acceptance of miraculous crosses in late Colonial Mexico is also due to the unorthodox application of the cross image in indigenous culture which led not only to non-Christian religious teachings, but also anti-Spanish propaganda.

What is most important is perception. Spanish dedication to the cross as miraculous was unrivalled before the sixteenth century. Their perception of the cross' power in battle and the confirmation of Spanish imperialism interpreted in prophecy encouraged the propagation of the symbol as miraculous. Native acceptance seemed to only strengthen the Spanish hold on Mexico; however, the indigenous mainly accepted the cross on their own terms. The blending of the Hispanic cross with non-Christian ritual perpetuated the realization of the cross as a religious instrument deeply embedded in precontact culture. Eighteenth-century Spanish skepticism threatened to end indigenous acceptance of the miraculous cross, but Native perception endured into the nineteenth century.

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<sup>501</sup> Gruzinski, *Man-gods*, Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 7  
LEGACY OF THE CROSS

Since in the human realm perhaps all progress consists in returning to the point of departure, one keeps returning to Christ – to the crucified Christ who pardons and captivates, He of the naked feet and the outstretched arms.<sup>502</sup>

-José Martí, “The Poem of Niagara” (1880)

According to the late nineteenth-century Cuban literary figure Jose Martí, it is Christ, the human and divine person who formed an everlasting and pervasive motif of life through death on the cross. It is “He of...the outstretched arms” who Martí says is the “point of departure”, that is to say the crux of human understanding of the world. However, the power of this image in Mexico stems not only from Christian Europe, but from similar preconquest symbols and concepts among various Native groups. Not unlike the syncretic patio crosses created by indigenous artists, Martí describes Christ as the embodiment of the cross. This simple image represents a perennial and powerful history of Mexican as well as Hispanic culture and religion.

A nine-foot high whitewashed cross marks the place where Columbus supposedly first landed on the island now called San Salvador on October 12, 1492. As one of the simplest yet most powerful symbols in history, various monarchs, nations, and peoples have utilized the cross image for thousands of years. The Spanish empire was certainly one of the prime examples of a nation that embraced the cross as a political and religious icon. As conquistadors and missionaries ventured into the *terra incognita* of America, they bore the cross

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<sup>502</sup> Jose Martí, “The Poem of Niagara”, *On Art and Literature*, Edited by Philip Foner, Translated by Elinor Randall, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982), 308-327: 312.

around their necks and on their banners. Surprisingly for the Spanish, many of the indigenous peoples of America also used the cross as a symbol in their religious traditions long before the first Spanish Christians arrived.

The relatively small country of Spain did not run a worldwide empire based on numerical power, but rather on strategic victories, skilled diplomacy, and innovative use of existing symbolism. Spanish diplomacy and victory often relied upon alliances, and the key to any alliance is a commonality of purpose. Henry Kamen argues that Spain did not wield its power based simply on its own assets but had to develop the resources of the regions it controlled, including the Netherlands, much of Italy, and its territories in America. The forging and maintenance of such a vast enterprise was not a unique achievement of Spain, but a collaborative effort as the power of Spain depended on its allies.<sup>503</sup>

As a deeply embedded image in both Spanish and Native culture, the cross was a point of departure for the first encounters that often led to alliance or defiance. The Spanish confronted Natives with the cross, forcing them into a decision of acceptance or rejection. Indigenous allies proceeded through a liminal process which included the destruction of their images and challenges to their religious practices. Despite the religious significance of the cross symbol for Spaniards and Natives prior to contact, this symbol figured intimately in the political alliances that ensued in addition to the major indigenous rebellions during the colonial era.

The conquistadors of Mexico inherited a long crusading and inquisitorial tradition that centered on the cross. Immersed in the medieval mentality of European supremacy and the justifications of Christian warfare, the Spanish carried over to the Americas this most prominent image. The medieval crusading goal developed geographically from the Middle East, to Iberia, Africa and then to the Americas so that the conquest of Muslims and the eradication of Jews

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<sup>503</sup> See Henry Kamen, *Empire: How Spain became a World Power, 1492-1763*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003).



extended to the Aztecs, Maya, and other peoples of Mexico. Europeans forced the cross symbol into the center of controversy throughout the regions they encountered, making it an extension of their dominance. The newly identified *inimici cruces Christi* (“enemies of the cross of Christ”) had already accepted the cross image into their culture before the conquest, but Christians redefined how Natives should view this symbol. The cross thus became a polarizing symbol evoking either devotion or scorn.

The liminality of the colonial period produced a fusion of Spanish and Native society which found its new expression in throwing off the status of colony for that of nation. The collective experience in colonial Mexico, specifically in relation to the cross, benefited the unification of diverse peoples. Indigenous and Spanish culture developed from a divergent nonentity into a more politically, linguistically, and religiously unified body. Variances in colloquial language and culture as well as internal conflict continued to exist in post-colonial times as the Caste Wars of the nineteenth century demonstrate. However, the majority of people in Mexico in the early nineteenth century were neither fully Spanish nor indigenous but somewhere in between, which reflects back to the cross image as a symbol of alliance.

In spite of Christian dominance, the development of religious understanding progressed within the Native’s worldview because the indigenous cultures had already integrated the cross into their belief system. Although the “Tree of Life” cross image affirmed a similar understanding between Christian and indigenous religious concepts, its associations with Quetzalcóatl, the patio, and roadside crosses allowed Natives agency in connecting their independent past with their present colonial status. Natives witnessed their sacred image incorporated in the catechisms and passion plays of the Church and accepted certain teachings and roles within Catholic institutions.

Spaniards tried to utilize the development of colonial towns to disrupt indigenous culture. Instead, the establishment of cities in Mexico inadvertently supplied a model which satisfied both Natives and Spaniards. The multivocal role of the cross in these city plans

allowed a bipartite understanding concerning the reactualization of the important events of history, such as creation and the crucifixion of Christ.

The early acceptance of the syncretized cross gave way to a trend toward discouragement of miraculous crosses in late colonial Mexico due to the unorthodox applications of the cross image. Native acceptance seemed to only strengthen the Spanish hold on Mexico; however, Natives primarily accepted the cross on their own terms. The blending of the Hispanic cross with non-Christian ritual perpetuated the image of the cross as a religious instrument deeply embedded in precontact culture. The ability of Natives to utilize the cross in a process of religious stabilization and continuity within the colonial context led to the development of a unique Mexican Catholicism, despite outcries from Spanish clergy.

#### 7.1 The Speaking Cross

One of the important aftermaths of the Mexican colonial era was the Caste War of Yucatán (1847–1901). This revolt of the eastern Yucatán Maya against the Yucatecos, those of European descent, for political and economic control became tied largely to the cross symbol. Tired from years of struggle, the Maya regained confidence from a talking cross found deep in the jungles of eastern Yucatán. In the late 1850s, the revolutionary José María Barrera led a band of people to a small cenote in an uninhabited forest where they discovered the Speaking Cross carved into a mahogany tree. The cross resembled the Maya “World Tree” and eventually appeared in Chan Santa Cruz.<sup>504</sup>

Barrera said that the cross transmitted a message to him which was later delivered as a sermon by Juan de la Cruz. Only the select could act as “interpreters” of the cross as, though people claimed to hear it speak, the language was not a familiar one.<sup>505</sup> Barrera used a ventriloquist, Manuel Nahuat, as the mouthpiece of the cross and through this directed the

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<sup>504</sup> Bruce Vandervort, *Indian Wars of Mexico, Canada and the United States, 1812-1900*, (Routledge, 2006), 157-158.

<sup>505</sup> Dumond, *The Machete and the Cross*, 257.

Maya in their war effort, urging them to take up arms against the Mexican government, and assuring the insurgents that through the cross they would attain victory.

From this speaking cross a cult evolved in Chan Santa Cruz, the inhabitants of which were called *Cruzob* (“followers of the cross”). The Speaking Cross “dictated” letters to its followers and to its enemies. In one letter of the late 1850s, signed Juan de la Cruz, the author speaks as the cross, Christ, and God proclaiming the divinity of the Speaking Cross and issuing military and political instructions. Another letter written to the Mexican authorities in Valladolid and Mérida again asserted the cross’ divinity and demanded the return of village lands to its people.<sup>506</sup>

The cross was an irresistible symbol of power. Maya priests of the Cult of the Speaking Cross led Mayan efforts to maintain autonomy and cohesion in their struggle against Mexico with this image.<sup>507</sup> The supremacy of the cross image as miraculous led to other claims of speaking crosses in eastern Yucatán.<sup>508</sup> Although the nineteenth-century Chan Santa Cruz Speaking Cross is the most famous, references to talking crosses among the Maya date back to their “conversion” to Roman Catholicism in the sixteenth century.<sup>509</sup> The developed Mayan perception of the cross image which included the precontact “Tree of Life” understanding as well as three hundred years of Christian colonial influence instilled a devotion to and preoccupation with the cross symbol. The heritage of this symbol which connected ancient sacrifice with colonial resistance and strivings for independence produced a powerful syncretic instrument that is still very visible today among the Mayan peoples.

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<sup>506</sup> Ibid., 183-184.

<sup>507</sup> Vandervort, *Indian Wars of Mexico*, 113.

<sup>508</sup> Dumond, *The Machete and the Cross*, 213.

<sup>509</sup> Vandervort, *Indian Wars of Mexico*, 158.

## 7.2 Virgin of Guadalupe

The only image that challenges the cross' supremacy in Mexico is the Virgin of Guadalupe. All Roman Catholic countries have adopted virgins and crosses into their realm of images, but the Virgin of Guadalupe is unique to Mexico. There is no distinct Mexican cross, although many crosses have taken on local personalities. The prominence of either the cross or the Virgin is debatable, but a culture does often show more adoration for a female image, especially a mother, rather than a geometric symbol. Eric Wolf concluded that the cross symbol, specifically the crucifix, was essentially a symbol of death and despair, especially as compared to the Virgin of Guadalupe which represented life, hope, and health.<sup>510</sup> Likewise, Stafford Poole argues that Guadalupe continues to be the most powerful and loved symbol of Mexican nationality and religion.<sup>511</sup> However, Mexicans do not usually look to a maternal figure for comfort unless they are suffering and it is in this way that the cross and the Virgin complement each other. The Virgin does not disdain the cross as an image of divine sacrifice, but rather embraces it and points to the need for human participation in that suffering. Devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe would not exist with the mandate of expiatory pain presented in the cross.

Despite its prevalence, the cross is often overlooked as perhaps too common. Since the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego in 1531, this multivocal image has evoked pious love and reverential hope.<sup>512</sup> The success of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a cult image tolerated by the Spanish and eventually recognized as canonical rests in a similar

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<sup>510</sup> Eric R. Wolf, "The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol", *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 71, No. 279 (1958), 34-39: 36-37.

<sup>511</sup> Stafford Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531-1797*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), 225.

<sup>512</sup> Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe*, xxv.

category as the cross.<sup>513</sup> As with indigenous acceptance of the cross based on precontact understandings and symbols, the Virgin of Guadalupe also satisfied Natives and Spaniards as a bipolar image. The Virgin replaced the Aztec goddess Tonantzin as the great mother goddess. Though outwardly she appeared as the compassionate Mary, Natives understood that inwardly she retained the earlier awesome and powerful persona.<sup>514</sup>

Crosses are embedded in the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The bow around her waist, which appears as a four-petaled flower, was a sign of her virginity. To Natives this was the flower of the sun, a symbol of plenitude. The cross-shaped flower was also connected with the cross-sticks, which produce fire, the symbol of fecundity and new life. A cross-shaped image symbolizing the cosmos is said to be inscribed beneath the image's sash. Her hands are clasped in prayer with the realization that she was not God, but rather petitioned Him penitently. Her fingers point to the gold-encircled black cross broach under her neck, which symbolized sanctity.<sup>515</sup>

Although the Virgin of Guadalupe held precedence as an ancient protective image among the Otomí, Tlaxcalans, and Aztecs and eventually developed into the national symbol of an independent Mexico, certain crosses still served as the assurance of divine grace to other indigenous peoples. Among the Chichimecs the Most Holy Cross of Querétaro and among the Tarascans the Cross of Tepic were unifying religious icons.<sup>516</sup> In 1810, Fr. Miguel Hidalgo rallied Mexicans toward independence under the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe, but as a

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<sup>513</sup> Ibid., xxvii. In 1737 the Virgin of Guadalupe was sworn "Principal Patroness" of Mexico City. On April 24, 1754, the Bull of Pope Benedict XIV recognized the Guadalupan religious tradition as canonical.

<sup>514</sup> Patricia Harrington, "Mother of Death, Mother of Rebirth: The Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (1988), 25-50: 26-27.

<sup>515</sup> Jody Brant Smith, *The Image of Guadalupe*, (Mercer University Press, 1994), 48.

<sup>516</sup> Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe*, 284.

priest utilized the cross symbol which was omnipresent and important to those fighting.<sup>517</sup> The Virgin of Guadalupe continued to be linked to the cross in the Mexican mind even after colonization. Typically during the feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe, devotees would and will carry not only a large Marian banner, but also a cross. Most celebrants end the parade in front of the local cathedral and make the sign of the cross over themselves.<sup>518</sup>

Even today the Virgin of Guadalupe is not separated from the cross image. The five hundred year old image is housed at the modern Basilica de la Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in Mexico City. Most visitors are simply curious to view the original image, copies of which they have seen on various types of paraphernalia including lawn ornaments and the back windows of trucks. However, the pious approach the basilica on their knees continually making the sign of the cross over themselves and bowing as they inch forward. Erected high on the front of the huge circular basilica is a cross. The first image one encounters upon entering the basilica is a large wooden cross on which the crucified Christ hangs just above the main altar. Behind the altar to the right hangs Juan Diego's *tilma* containing the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe encased in bulletproof glass. Although the *tilma* is the main attraction, a large wooden cross protrudes from the wall and dominates the space above Our Lady of Guadalupe.

### 7.3 Conclusion

The universality of the cross image within the transatlantic confrontation meant not only a hegemony of culture, but of symbolism. When people experience something new, they do so in terms of the old. In both European and American cultures, the cross became integral in religious ceremony, priestly decoration, and cosmic maps. The similarities in uses and associations of the cross in the transatlantic world before contact, specifically in relation to self-sacrifice, the shedding of divine blood, and renewal of life through death, stretch the mind's

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<sup>517</sup> Ibid., xxviii.

<sup>518</sup> Timothy Matovina, *Guadalupe and Her Faithful: Latino Catholics in San Antonio, from Colonial Origins to the Present*, (JHU Press, 2005), 75 & 25.

imagination. In this context, Spanish hypotheses about the Apostle Thomas' visit to the Americas are not completely random or hegemonic, but rather an interpretation based on their basic understanding of religion. However, the cross does become a representation of hegemony as Spaniards forced the indigenous to accept their cross, meaning Spanish religion and law, or suffer the consequences of rejecting what the Spaniards perceived as the true message of the cross.

Those indigenous groups that willingly accepted the Christian cross often ascribed miraculous powers to specific local images. The age of miraculous crosses appears to have ended in New Mexico and Texas by the end of the seventeenth century as more and more tribes viewed the cross as a symbol of political alliance rather than a supernatural image. However, in central Mexico and even more so in the Yucatán, the belief in the miraculous power of the cross continued into the nineteenth century fueling the anti-Mexican propaganda of the Speaking Cross at Chan Santa Cruz.

As a symbol of life and death, of human and divine suffering, of religious and political acquiescence, no other image in history, specifically between Europe and the Americas, has held such a perennial, powerful message as the cross. The Virgin of Guadalupe satisfies the longing for maternal care and feminine mystery, but the cross endures as the pervasive symbol of Mexican religion. The dichotomy found in the compassionate virgin symbol with that of the sacrificed deity is rather a balance of maternal and paternal images. Somewhere between the suffering of god-men and the compassion of earth-goddesses, reoriented for the Natives by Christians as Christ and the Virgin Mary, lies balance in the universe and ultimately salvation.

For many Natives the meaning associated with the cross transformed or at least was renegotiated during the colonial years resulting in a syncretic, emotional attachment that persists in modern Mexico. Meaning itself is a slippery notion, but at the core of Christian and indigenous beliefs concerning the cross is the idea of redemptive sacrifice. Psychological attachment to the idea of the cross influenced religious ideology. In Latin American countries,

more so than in Roman Catholic European nations, there is a morbid delight in suffering. The hedonism of the Western world stands in stark contrast to the aggressive willingness of the Mexican penitent to receive a penance that is not only spiritually rigorous, but also physically exhaustive and painful. What westerners may perceive as masochistic in this demonstration of piety is for the penitent a means to both individual and communal harmony. It is participation in divine work and with this indoctrination one's gut-feeling on seeing the cross is a realization of guilt and a need for expiation. The modern westerner observes the cross with a sense of atheistic disgust, religious acknowledgement, or agnostic apathy, but not usually the sensuous devotion of a Mexican Catholic.

For Martí, the image of Christ crucified, that is the cross icon, is a "point of departure" for humankind. To understand this statement rationally is to forego the deeper irrational fervor for which this symbol stands. The well-spring of emotions pregnant in the cross has been accumulated for centuries and the reduction of the cross as a symbol of Christianity is a misnomer. For colonial Mexico, which felt the brunt of Spanish initiative, the symbol of the cross penetrated the autochthonous culture out of which the independent nation and indigenous church were born.



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