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Tibesar Lecture

Placing the Cross in Colonial Mexico

In 1960 the May 3 feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross was removed from the liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church in order to reduce the number of major feasts and to focus devotion to the Holy Cross on September 14, the day commemorating its Exaltation. For many Mexicans, this change was more distressing than papal authorities had anticipated. People from various walks of life and places were not inclined to give up this favorite feast day, which they felt was a lifeline to well-being here and now and the promise of salvation hereafter. For them it was an essential practice, not a vestigial one. Workers in the building trades were conspicuous dissenters. Virtually every construction site in Mexico must have its protective cross, to be decorated and honored on May 3. And communities all over Mexico, especially in rural towns and villages, celebrated the day by decorating their special crosses in public and private places, attending mass, praying for rain and an abundant harvest, and celebrating with food, drink, fireworks, music, and dancing. For many, it was the only Day of the Holy Cross they had known. To steer clear of a prolonged dispute over popular traditions of faith, Mexican bishops successfully appealed to Rome for May 3 to remain a major feast there.

What made the May 3 feast day so vital in Mexico? Part of the answer is rooted in the long-standing importance of crosses there as both liturgical symbols and objects of devotion in religious practices going back to the early colonial period. References to outdoor festivities abound in early church chronicles, cathedral chapter minutes, parish archives, and civil and religious regulations and court records. Attempts by bishops and the Inquisition to police and reform May 3 celebrations in the seventeenth century provide a glimpse of how the day was

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observed in colonial cities. At Valladolid (now Morelia, Michoacán) in 1639, they included a mock battle of Moors and Christians that concluded with the victorious Christians wresting the cross from the infidels. During the festivities that year, a stone cross on the house of one of the cathedral dignitaries was damaged, leading to an inquiry into possible sacrilegious intentions.[1] This mingling of sacred and profane activities evidently was common, and a worry to authorities. Spirited gatherings mixing sorrow and joy in the presence of the cross during Holy Week and the subsequent May festivities were a concern of the Inquisition in March 1691 when it prohibited celebrations in the streets of Mexico City on the grounds that some crosses were placed in "indecent locations, and the celebrations with Mass, sermon, and processions were mixed up with farces, bullfights, and masquerades on the pretext of honoring the cross," which "results in serious scandal in the Christian Republic."[2]

Colonial era references to how May 3 was observed and how the cross was honored outside the cities are sketchy, but they usually mention fertility rites, a Moors-and-Christians pageant, and Calvary processions.[3] Recent ethnographic descriptions elaborate on the association of the cross with nourishment and sacrifice, and suggest some historical patterns of worship that invite further study.[4]

1. Archivo General de la Nación, México (hereafter AGN), Inquisición 366 exp. 16. This inquiry did not lead to a decisive result since the offenders were not discovered. A Moors-and-Christians pageant of this kind may have been a familiar feature of colonial May 3 celebrations, especially in Michoacán. See also the late eighteenth-century report for Tangancíquaro in which captains of Moros and Soldados led the way, along with their "Alférez, Embaxador, Gran Turco y danzantes," AGN Historia 578A, November 17, 1789.

2. "comedias, toros y máscaras," AGN Edictos, Inquisición 1 exp. 15, March 30, 1691. AGN General de Parte 17 exps. 34-35 records the archbishop's opposition in 1694 to traditional festivities on the Day of the Holy Cross at Querétaro, which included a Moors-and-Christians pageant "and various other profane diversions" including bullfights and farces. Processions of crosses in Querétaro again worried the church hierarchy in 1799, AGN Obispos 2 fols. 308–315. An earlier Inquisition decree meant to stop improper display of crosses in public places was issued on October 20, 1626, "para obviar el abuso de poner y pintar cruzes en rincones públicos y otros lugares indecentes." Harley L. McDevitt Inquisition Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections Department, Hesburgh Libraries, University of Notre Dame, Inquisition document #223.

3. For example, AGN Clero Regular y Secular 192 exps. 11–12. There are also incidental references in criminal trials. Judging by pastoral visit records of the Archdiocese of Mexico, confraternities dedicated to the Holy Cross were common in rural central Mexico by the late seventeenth century. Colonial bishops encouraged the use of hilltop crosses for Via Crucis processions. For example, in the early 1640s, when Puebla's Bishop Juan de Palafox y Mendoza began to promote a shrine at the site of the apparition of San Miguel to Diego Lázaro near Nativitas, Tlaxcala, he noted that "para maior devoción se han puesto a trechos cruces grandes conforme a los pasos de la Via Crucis del Santo Calvario, desde la yglesia parroquial del pueblo" up to the hilltop chapel. AGN Historia 1 exp. 7, fol. 160r.

4. The use of ethnographies and references to precolonial sources in this essay raises the interpretive issue of "upstreaming" (from the present) and "downstreaming" (from the precolonial past) by anthropologists, historians, and art historians. It needs a brief comment here. Among Mexican scholars, it has long been accepted practice either to infer or gloss over colonial Indian patterns of thought and practice by connecting ethnographies of "indigenous" communities with precolonial patterns extrapolated from archaeological evidence, precolonial pictographs, and early colonial narrative and pictorial sources, tacitly or explicitly positing fundamental continuity since precolonial times. Among recent examples are the essays in *Religiosidad*

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Here I draw from Octavio Hernández Espejo's modern-day description of the feast of the Holy Cross in San Francisco Ozomatlán, Guerrero.[5] The festivities there from May 1 through 3 center on offerings to crosses located on the hilltop of Tepehuizco. On May 1 household and neighborhood crosses are taken up and planted there, with food offerings and flowers piled high to form an altar. The faithful sing and pray on their knees, and the crosses are decorated with chains of flowers and bread. At about 3:00 a.m. hot chocolate and bread from the comestible altar are shared; shortly before dawn, *mole* and tamales are served; and at sunrise, the fruit and the first offering of flowers are distributed. Then the people come down from the hill and place their crosses at the town entrance. At noon they reassemble to pray a rosary and join in a procession to the church with a dancer dressed as *el tecuán* (the "man-eater" ocelot) running and jumping in the lead, followed by shepherdesses singing and other women praying, with the crosses and the band coming last. On May 3 the dancing and

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popular y cosmovisiones indígenas en la historia de México, coord. Johanna Broda (Mexico: INAH, 2009), which apply Broda's work on precolonial cosmovision and Félix Báez Jorge's views on syncretism to ethnographic descriptions. George Foster's *Culture and Conquest: America's Spanish Heritage* (New York: Wenner-Gren Foundation, 1960) rejected both upstreaming and downstreaming approaches, suggesting instead that much of what passes as indigenous peasant culture was drawn more directly from Europe than from precolonial practices and concepts. In effect, Foster substituted a transformation thesis for an *indigenista* continuity thesis. John Ingham, among others, charts a middle course. Mainly inferring rather than demonstrating a historical process in his ethnographic study of Tlayacapan, Morelos, he concludes that "I show that significant elements of the deep structure of the pre-Hispanic world view persist in present-day beliefs and practices, but I also show that they are embedded in, and subordinated to, Catholic beliefs and symbols," *Mary, Michael, and Lucifer: Folk Catholicism in Central Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 180.

Most foreign historians of Mexico have shied away from the use of ethnographic and archaeological scholarship to interpret colonial history. And historians, art historians, historians of religion, and historically minded anthropologists have usually treated each other's work on these matters as tangential to their own, thereby missing some relevant sources, common interests, shared understandings, and areas of disagreement. William F. Hanks's recent book, *Converting Words: Maya in the Age of the Cross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), is exemplary in combining ethnographic and historical materials to reckon with cultural change during the colonial period; Jaime Lara combines colonial pictorial and liturgical materials with scholarship on precolonial culture and medieval Christian theology and practice for a suggestive rendering of visual imagination and worship in sixteenth-century central and southern Mexico in both *City, Temple, Stage: Eschatological Architecture and Liturgical Theatrics in New Spain* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004) and *Christian Texts for Aztecs: Art and Liturgy in Colonial Mexico* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008). Among more historical studies, see Nancy M. Farriss, *Maya Society Under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); John K. Chance, *Conquest of the Sierra: Spaniards and Indians in Colonial Oaxaca* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989); and Eleanor Wake, *Framing the Sacred: The Indian Churches of Early Colonial Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

5. "La fiesta de la Santa Cruz en San Francisco Ozomatlán," *México Desconocido* 23:267 (May 1999), pp. 52–60. Ozomatlán, in the municipality of Huitzuco, Guerrero (south of Iguala 28 miles, then about 22 miles east of Highway 95) is featured in several Youtube videos of May 3 festivities showing religious ceremonies that include prayers before crosses covered with paper flowers. In one video a Catholic priest speaks of the rain having not yet arrived and invites those assembled to pray for favors (*"pedir beneficios"*) from God, and remember that through the Cross Jesus saved his followers. In another video, some Huitzuco men visit a hilltop spring on May 3 (*"el día de la Cruz del albañil"*) to appeal for rain and shoot off rockets.

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drama continue, with the tecuán again the leading figure. Eventually he is symbolically killed, which Hernández Espejo thinks is not so much to represent the victory of culture over nature as an offering to the jaguar deity and the representation of an ancient fertility rite. Hernández Espejo's informants, however, seem more inclined to focus on the crosses and explain the offerings to them as an appeal "to God Our Lord to bring us a good harvest, for the rainy season is anticipated."

Crosses as objects of devotion and familiar features in the landscape are one way to think about the early meeting of indigenous peoples and European Catholics, as I suggest below, but they are more than this. Crosses attracted devotees of all kinds and were a conspicuous feature of the landscape throughout the colonial period, to the extent that some communities, Cuernavaca for one, became known as "the town of crosses."[6] And they remain so. As Gilberto Giménez observed at Chalma, "the town is surrounded by hills and picturesque bluffs, all of them crowned with crosses."[7] In central and southern Mexico, these crosses in high places have sometimes made up networks of sacred sites visited by the faithful throughout the year, but especially during the Easter season and in early May.[8] Singly and together, crosses are still prominent in the Mexican landscape,

6. Robert Haskett, citing a 1743 report of the *alcalde mayor* for Cuernavaca, "Conquering the Spiritual Conquest in Cuernavaca," in *The Conquest All Over Again: Nahuas and Zapotecs Thinking, Writing, and Painting Spanish Colonialism,* ed. Susan Schroeder (Brighton, U.K.: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), p. 242. In a deeply researched forthcoming book on the Mixteca Baja of Oaxaca (tentative title: "'En el nombre de Dios': Religion, Society, and Provincial Conservatism in the Mixteca Baja, 1750–1962"), Benjamin Smith calls his chapter on the colonial period "The People of the Cross." He has good reason to do so since miraculous crosses were common there, and he describes the region's religious culture as "Christocentric." One cross in particular, the Sacred Cross of Santo Domingo Tonalá, gained a regional following and spawned "countless community Christ cults."

7. Gilberto Giménez, *Cultura popular y religión en el Anáhuac* (Mexico: Centro de Estudios Ecuménicos, 1978), p. 77. One of the paths to Chalma is famous for its "hill of crosses," where pilgrims have left thousands of wooden crosses, often bearing the name of a sick or deceased relative. See Héctor Espinosa, "Imágenes peregrinas que se negaron a llegar . . . ," an article posted on the website *ArKeopatías: Arqueología y Patrimonio* on February 20, 2012, and accessed on March 6, 2012.

In the Chiapas highlands, each of the barrios of San Juan Chamula has a nearby hill with one or more tall wooden crosses at the base and summit—the threshold and the center—that serves as its cemetery and the sacred place to which processions are made throughout the year, including Holy Week and May 3. Most are painted green. David Freidel, Linda Schele, and Joy Parker, *Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman's Path* (New York: Morrow, 1993), pp. 53, 118, and 124. Enrique Marroquín described in some detail "the insistent and ubiquitous presence of the cross" in the landscape and ceremonial life of rural communities of Oaxaca, *La cruz mesiánica: una aproximación al sincretismo católico indígena* (Oaxaca: Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez, 1989), especially pp. 41–42. Crosses also dot the landscape along pilgrimage routes to Talpa, Jalisco. According to Ricardo Ávila and Martín Tena, these have mainly commemorated deceased devotees who were unable to reach the shrine before they died. "Morir peregrinando a Talpa," in *Santuarios, peregrinaciones, y religiosidad popular,* coords. María Rodríguez-Shadow and Ricardo Ávila (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 2010), p. 234.

8. For examples from the Sierra de Puebla and the district of Huixquilucan, near the Valley of Mexico, see "Espacios, territorios y santuarios en las comunidades indígenas de Puebla," section coordinator Elio

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bearing the imprint of colonial practices, and more. I suggest that two especially strong patterns emerge in the devotional history of Mexican crosses during the colonial period. One is the deep appeal of more than a few particular crosses, especially natural crosses, as alive with the sacred for many kinds of people. The other is the localized setting of miraculous crosses. Their association with divine presence was inseparable from their location and nestled in a sacralized landscape, and their providential meaning did not travel far.

TRANSATLANTIC CONTEXTS

Distinctive Spanish, indigenous, and colonial threads are all important to the vitality of May 3 celebrations and a shared history of devotion to the Holy Cross. Inevitably, these threads inform and complicate what we might think about colonial crosses in particular places, as well as the 1960 turn of events. The Spanish, and more broadly the European, aspects of devotion to the cross are fundamental, but are often obscured by our fascination with indigenous understandings and use of the cross form before the arrival of Europeans. The cross was the universal, ever-present symbol of Christ and Christianity—signed as a blessing and displayed for protection and moral instruction, used in exorcisms as the instrument of God's love and strength in the perpetual struggle with Satan, and serving to mark gravesites and places far from home where fatal accidents and murders happened. Crosses were placed on or near churches (which often had a cruciform plan) and carried in processions, and were essential to rituals for the dead and dying.[9] They were signed in sworn testimony and acts of devotion, adopted by military orders as their insignia, and presented to the laity in paintings and devotional texts as emblematic of Christ's redemptive sacrifice, bridging life, death, and eternal life. According to Felipe Pereda's

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Masferrer Kan, in *Diáolgos con el territorio,* ed. Alicia Barabas (Mexico: INAH, 2004), II, pp. 73–75; and H. R. Harvey, "Pilgrimage and Shrine: Religious Practices Among the Otomí of Huixquilucan, Mexico," in *Pilgrimage in Latin America*, eds. E. Alan Morinis and N. Ross Crumrine (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), pp. 95–102. Fr. Diego Durán, O.P., *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e islas de Tierra Firme* (Mexico: CONACULTA, 1995), II, pp. 90–91 (tratado 2, cap. 8), described the main hill of Tlaloc surrounded by smaller hills—"little brothers"—all of them with names. Diego Prieto Hernández et al., "Mahets'I jar hai *(el cielo en la tierra). Los territorios de lo sagrado entre los Ñañho de Querétaro,"* in Barabas, *Diálogos*, II, pp. 235–249, note that the crosses on hills in San Pablo in the municipio of Tolimán, Querétaro have *padrinos* on other hills to which the faithful of the first hill go with offerings.

9. *Colección de las ordenanzas que para el gobierno de el obispado de Michoacán hicieron y promulgaron con real aprobación* . . . (Mexico: Zúñiga y Ontiveros, 1776), p. 225, dunned priests who did not go out with a cross to receive the dead for burial. Pastors were ordered to go out with *capa y cruz* irrespective of the social standing of the deceased. Examples of the mystique of the signed cross are virtually endless. Here is one: according to Francisco de Florencia, when Diego Lázaro (the Indian from Nativitas, Tlaxcala, who saw St. Michael and the miraculous spring in 1631) would make the sign of the cross it left a permanent mark and those favored by this wonder became devotees of the Holy Cross. *Narración de la marabillosa aparición, que hizo el archangel San Miguel a Diego Lázaro de San Francisco* . . . (Seville: Impr. de las Siete Revueltas, 1692), p. 141.

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study of images and the evangelization of Muslims and Jews in southern Spain during the fifteenth century, the cross in the upraised hand of a missionary became the great symbol of the evangelizing enterprise there before it took on that role in America.[10] Steeped in the lore of Emperor Constantine's providential vision of a resplendent cross in the heavens as he went into battle at Milvia and other apparitions of crosses during the Reconquista,[11] early modern Spaniards looked for signs of the cross in their expeditions of conquest and overseas colonization—and they found them.[12]

Pereda no doubt is right that the cross in Spain was mainly a liturgical symbol presiding over the altar at Mass and in processions, but individual crosses as cult objects were not unknown there or among early Spaniards in America. The survey of miraculous images of Christ and crosses for the Kingdom of Aragon by the Carmelite friar Roque Alberto Faci, published in 1739, identified three prodigious crosses. One miraculously appeared on top of an oak tree on the outskirts of the Villa de Aynsa during the Reconquista. Another, venerated at Castelnon, whistled when lightning was about to strike and was invoked to ward off storms. The third was a wooden cross in the Conceptionist convent of Miedes. The Virgin Mary was said to have given this legendary cross to one of the nuns, who presented it to her abbess when she was deathly ill. The abbess recovered and the good news spread.[13]

That early Spaniards in America were open to the idea of numinous crosses is suggested by the early seventeenth-century Franciscan chronicler Juan de Torquemada,[14] who described one from Columbus's second voyage to the

10. *Las imágenes de la discordia: Política y poética de la imagen sagrada en la España del 400* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2007), p. 300. For the Franciscans, this symbolism was rooted in the special association between their founder, St. Francis, and Christ, and was expressed in their early writings. For example, see *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, ed. Raphael Brown (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1958), p. 52: "Because St. Francis and his companions had been called by God and chosen to bear the Cross of Christ in their hearts and in their actions and to preach it by their words, they appeared to be and they were crucified men. . . . And because they were living branches of the True Vine, that is Christ, they produced great and good fruit in the souls that they won for God."

11. Francisco Xavier de Santa Gertrudis, *Cruz de piedra: imán de la devoción, venerada en el Colegio de Misioneros Apostólicos de la Ciudad de Santiago de Querétaro* (Queretaro: Ediciones Cimatario, 1946), pp. 14–15.

12. Kevin Sheehan, "Iberian Asia: The Strategies of Spanish and Portuguese Empire Buiding, 1540–1700," Ph.D. diss., University of California-Berkeley (2008), chapt. 2. Arturo E. de la Torre y López describes the cross in early colonial Peru as "the clearest emblem of Conquest" for Francisco Pizarro and others. "La cruz en el Perú," in *Las cofradías de la Santa Veruz Cruz*, ed. José Sánchez Herrero (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 1992), pp. 537–553.

13. *Aragón, Reyno de Christo y dote de María Ssma* . . . [1739], facsimile edition (Zaragoza: Diputación General de Aragón, 1979), pp. 43, 134, 151–152.

14. Torquemada's words from the second decade of the seventeenth century appear often in this essay. He had little to say about miraculous images or Marian devotion, but frequently mentioned crosses. The only miraculous image he discussed was the Cruz de Huatulco. A native Spaniard from the province of Palencia in

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island of Española: "He ordered a cross to be made from a sturdy tree in the city of Concepción de la Vega. This cross has everywhere been greatly venerated. Its relics have been much in demand by the faithful for it is widely believed to have worked miracles, and . . . with its wood many sick people have been cured."[15] Even as a symbol, the cross's mystique required a certain presentation and regard. Recalling Christ's crucifixion, it needed to be displayed *en alto,* in an elevated location, because, as a preacher put it in 1630, "He died on high."[16] In word and effect, the wooden cross was a metaphorical tree of life, as Christ was the redeemer and source of eternal life, and it must be treated as such.[17] In the words of the prelates attending New Spain's Fourth Synod in 1771, "the Holy Cross is the cross of our redemption, and we should worship it [*dar adoración de Latria*] as we do Jesus Christ. Accordingly, it should not be placed on anything profane. . . . Rather, it should always be placed in an elevated and decent location where it will not be treated irreverently."[18]

As the universal Christian symbol, the cross had another spatial dimension. Citing St. Jerome, among other authorities, Juan de Solórzano y Pereyra, the seventeenth-century Spanish commentator on the laws of the Indies, wrote: "the said four [cardinal] directions are represented by the ends of the Cross in which the mystery of our Redemption was achieved: the East shines forth at the top; the South in the left arm; the North in the right arm; and in the West the base of the trunk sinks into the earth below the feet of Christ."[19] For early

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Old Castile, probably born in the late 1550s, Torquemada went to New Spain as a child and studied Nahuatl and theology in the Franciscan convent in Mexico City. He was ordained in 1579, moved to the convent of Santiago Tlatelolco several years later, and became *guardián* (warden) there in 1600. Later he served as guardián at Zacatlán (Puebla) and Tlaxcala, and became chronicler of his Franciscan province in 1610. Torquemada also served as provincial of his order in New Spain from 1614 to 1617, and died in 1624. His monumental *Los veinte y un libros rituales y Monarchia indiana* (commonly called the *Monarquía indiana*) was first published in 1615. In this essay I cite the Mexico City Porrúa edition of the *Monarquía indiana*, a facsimile of the 1723 edition, published in 1969 in three volumes.

15. *Monarquía indiana* III, pp. 298–299 (libro 18, cap. 7). An early wooden cross in Jalapa, Veracruz, also apparently lasted throughout the colonial period as a providential sign of Spanish evangelization. During his travels in Mexico in 1763 Francisco de Ajofrín, a Spanish Capuchin alms collector, reported visiting this cross in front of the Franciscan church in Jalapa. He was told that it was made from the mast of Cortés's flagship and had not deteriorated in its nearly 350 years out in the open. *Diario del viaje que hizo a la América en el siglo XVIII el P. Fray Francisco de Ajofrín* (Mexico: Instituto Cultural Hispano Mexicano, 1964), I, p. 38.

16. "Murió en alto, pide alteza de lugar para su celebración." Pedro de Avendaño, *Sermones para las festividades de Christo Nuestro Señor* (Madrid: Viuda de I. Gonçalez, 1634).

17. For examples of the Christian tree of life, see Nelly Sigaut, "El árbol de la vida en el convento de Meztitlán," *Relaciones. Estudios de Historia y Sociedad* 47 (Summer 1991), pp. 7–29; Isidro Félix de Espinosa, *El cherubin custodio de el árbol de la vida, la Santa Cruz de Querétaro* (Mexico: Joseph Bernardo de Hogal, 1731), based on De la Rea's *Crónica* of 1639; and Faci, *Aragón, reyno de Christo,* p. 43 (Christ as eternal life).

18. *Concilio provincial mexicano IV celebrado en la Ciudad de México el año de 1771* (Querétaro: Imprenta de la Escuela de Artes, 1898), p. 167 (3-21-9).

19. *Política indiana* (Madrid: Atlas, 1972), I, p. 72, libro 1, cap. 7, num. 5: "Las quales quatro partes consideran también algunos Santos Doctores . . . que se quisieron significar en los quarto términos,

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Spanish missionaries it was also emblematic of evangelization and martyrdom. Seventeenth-century Jesuit missionary Andrés Pérez de Ribas recounted a detail about the death of Father Gonzalo de Tapia at the hands of natives of Tovoropa (near San Luis de la Paz, Guanajuato) that he took to be a heavenly sign. As he expired, Father Tapia's right arm remained elevated above the elbow with the thumb and index finger poised to make the sign of the cross: "Although dead, the priest's arm and hand raised high the standard of the Holy Cross."[20]

In precolonial Mesoamerican ritual symbolism, cross-like forms were potent signs invested with cosmic significance. They described the sacred landscape that connected a deep, ancestral past with the present. Typically, representations of the cosmos were divided into four quarters oriented to the cardinal directions, with a great silk-cotton tree at each end, supporting the heavens above. At the intersection of these four quarters in some representations was the World Tree of origin on a hill that covered a cave and spring. This was the navel of the universe, a spatial and temporal pivot point of creation, death, and divine power connecting the sky to an underworld inhabited by spirits, including community ancestors.[21] When Maud Oakes asked one of the spiritual leaders of Todos Santos Cuchumatán in western Guatemala during the 1940s what the cross signified, he responded "The world; it [the cross] has existed since the world was born." Another leader told her: "God said, 'This pueblo is the center of the world; it is the heart of the world.' [He] spread his arms out like a cross and turned halfway around so that he covered the four directions."[22]

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o estremidades de la Cruz, en que se obró el Mysterio de nuestra Redempción. Porque el Oriente resplandece en lo alto de ella, el Septentrión en su brazo derecho, el Austro en el izquierdo, y el Occidente en el tronco o remate, que se profundió en la tierra debaxo de las plantas de Christo."

20. *History of the Triumphs of Our Holy Faith Amongst the Most Barbarous and Fierce Peoples of the New World*, ed. Daniel T. Reff (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), pp. 124–126.

21. For Nahuas of central Mexico, see Alfredo López Austin, *Tamoanchan, Tlalocan: Places of Mist*, trans. Bernardo R. Ortiz de Montellano and Thelma Ortiz de Montellano (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1997), pp. 108, 223; and David Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), pp. 51–52. For a similar conception among Otomíes, see Sergio Sánchez Vásquez, "La Santa Cruz: culto en los cerros de la region Otomí Actopan-Ixmiquilpan," in *La montaña en el paisaje ritual*, eds. Johanna Broda and Stanislaw Iwaniszewski (Mexico: CONACULTA-INAH, 2001), pp. 444–447. Sánchez Vásquez also notes the relationship of hills, crosses, and ancestors, their bones transformed into numinous stones. In the San Pedro Tolimán area souls of the ancestors are still represented by wooden crosses, and are connected to devotional practices for souls in Purgatory, as noted by Alejandro Vázquez Estrada in "Territorio e identidad étnica. la peregrinación a El Divino Salvador," in *Santuarios, peregrinaciones y religiosidad popular*, p. 170. For similar practices by Mayas in southern Mexico, see Freidel, Schele, and Parker, *Maya Cosmos*, pp. 53–55, 124, 251, 254, and 457; and especially Miguel Angel Astor-Aguilera, *The Maya World of Communicating Objects: Quadripartite Crosses, Trees, and Stones* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010), p. 95.

22. Maud Oakes, *The Two Crosses of Todos Santos: Survivals of Mayan Religious Ritual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), pp. 54, 138, 234.

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Natural features, especially trees, water sources, and hills or mountains, are prominent in this cruciform cosmos. For modern Totonacs of Veracruz and Mayas of Yucatán past and present, among others, trees are "the living thing where sanctity especially resides" and the source of sustenance, as Alfredo López Austin puts it.[23] They are associated with life-giving water and Tlaloc, the lord of moisture and fertility.[24] Rain, rivers, and lakes are, in turn, paired with hills and mountains.[25] As early colonial chroniclers understood, mountains and hills were regarded as living entities and exalted symbols of place and creation in Mesoamerican conceptions of territory and community.[26] In describing the importance of hills in the Mesoamerican sacred landscape, the Dominican friar Diego Durán pointed to Tlalocan, the primordial place of Tlaloc, "where the clouds gather and storms with thunder, lightning, and hail form."[27] Torquemada, who had much to say about colonial crosses and their sacred places in his early seventeenth-century chronicle, also remarked on the association of mountains with the life force and celestial power in native lore. The mountains were, he said, understood to be the dwelling places of fire, clouds, fog, rain, and earthquakes. Their caves were veritable storehouses of life-giving crops, deer, and water, but they were also home to monsters and spirits. And their rocky outcroppings and stones were petrified ancestors.[28]

How European and Mesoamerican understandings of crosses came together in the colonial period resists generalization. There are always local variants and reasons, silences in the documentation, and surprises. The symbolic meanings of the cross form were different in Europe and precolonial America—closely related to the shape of cosmic order in Mesoamerica and to Christ's suffering

23. López Austin, *Tamoanchan*, p. 154; in *The Maya World of Communicating Objects*, Astor-Aguilera connects wood crosses in Yucatán with the Maya quadripartite cosmology and describes them as vital "communicating objects" with ancestors, for example, on pp. 37, 43, and 169.

24. Harvey, "Pilgrimage and Shrine," p. 99. The connection between colonial crosses and rain is made by Hermenegildo F. López Castro in his recent account of customs in his hometown of Pinotepa Nacional, Oaxaca: "Este cerro se llama *Kruu Táti*, Cruz del Viento [Hurricane Cross]. Mi mamá dice que es sagrado. . . . Con la llegada de los españoles adoptaron la cruz y la utilizaron como símbolo religioso, y cuando la pusieron en los cerros, la nombraron *Kruu Táti* . . . que ayuda a traer las nubes para la lluvia," in Hermenegildo F. López Castro and Ethelia Ruiz Medrano, *Tutu Ñuu Oko. Libro del Pueblo Veinte. Relaciones de la tradición oral mixteca de Pinotepa Nacional, Oaxaca* (Mexico: CIESAS/INLI, 2010), pp. 131, 133.

25. As James Lockhart explains, a Nahua community with its territory was known as an *altepetl*—water and mountain. *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 14.

26. In various publications, Johanna Broda has explored the importance of hills and mountains in Mesoamerican cosmovisions; for example, "The Sacred Landscape of Aztec Calendar Festivals: Myth, Nature, and Society," in *To Change Place: Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, ed. David Carrasco (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1991), pp. 74–120.

27. "Se fraguan algunas tenpestades de truenos, relámpagos y rayos y granizos," Durán, *Historia de las Indias*, II, 90 (tratado 2, cap. 8).

28. Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana*, II, pp. 617–619 (libro 14, cap. 41).

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and the redemption of humanity in Christian Europe—but even at the symbolic level it seems fair to say there was overlap and mutual intelligibility. For both, the cross form was associated with trees and ancestry—the "tree of life" and the Tree of Jesse for Christians,[29] the living vector of sacred time and space for Mesoamericans. And in both cases sacred trees or wooden crosses had a spatial dimension, located at the center and edges, on high, visible to all.[30]

COLONIAL PATTERNS

Crosses came to have an unusually important presence in colonial Mexico—enduring, opposing, disappearing, and combining in ways that go beyond these original meanings—but few of the obvious aspects of devotion to the cross in the colonial period were uniquely American. In both Europe and America, crosses had to do with fertility, the agricultural cycle, protection, and cosmic order.[31] What was unusual, if not unique, about colonial American crosses was, first, the extent of their presence in the colonial landscape as objects alive with the sacred. (At least 21 of roughly 225 miraculous images depicting or directly referring to Christ in New Spain were simple crosses, compared to two or three of the 104 miraculous images listed by Faci for the Kingdom of Aragon in 1739.) And, second, many of them were said to be natural crosses discovered in living trees and rocks. In this way, they were *of* nature as well as found in natural settings.

Throughout the colonial period, missionaries, pastors, and bishops demonstrated their devotion to the Holy Cross and actively promoted it as an emblem of Christian practice and protection. For example, Fr. Gonzalo de Salazar, the Augustinian bishop of Yucatán from 1608 to 1636, ordered the Indians of his diocese to keep crosses on their home altars; and Fr. Hernando Cortesero, a Dominican serving in the diocese of Puebla in the early seven-

29. Haskett, "Conquering the Spiritual Conquest," p. 243, citing Sahagún's *Psalmodia Christiana*; Sigaut, "El árbol de la vida."

30. On the locating of cosmogonic centers on elevated sites in precolonial and modern Mesoamerican communities, see Mercedes Guadarrama Olivera, "El espacio y el tiempo sagrados en tres comunidades totonacas de la Sierra de Papantla," *Procesos rurales e historia regional (sierra y costa totonacas de Veracruz)*, coord. Victoria Chenault (Mexico: CIESAS, 1996), p. 185.

31. I have found little evidence that colonial Indians and *castas* embraced the cross as a symbol of their own suffering, as interpretations in a liberation theology vein anticipate; for example, Richard Nebel, "The Cult of Santa María Tonantzin, Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico," *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land*, ed. Benjamin Kedar (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 255. The analogy certainly was available; crosses (and crucifixes especially) visualized Christ's suffering, and colonial sermons frequently referred to the Passion of Christ and the sufferings of mankind in the same breath, for example, Juan Antonio Oviedo, *Los milagros de la Cruz y maravillas del padecer* . . . (Mexico: Joseph Bernardo de Hogal, 1728). Documentation of such embrace is bound to be elusive in colonial records, but this silence is nonetheless surprising.

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teenth century, was famous for blessing and personally distributing many small crosses that were said to work miracles.[32] For early mendicant pastors, the cross was a central symbol and instrument of their evangelizing mission and struggle against the devil, whose handiwork seemed to be everywhere. For them, the cross signified conversion and redemption through Christ's suffering and sacrifice, fulfilling a biblical prophecy to raise high the sign.[33] Idol-smashing became an early ritual practice of the friars, as they called on their newly baptized flock to bring in their effigies to be destroyed in a public spectacle and replaced with crosses.[34]

Early missionaries encountered cruciform shapes in Mesoamerican imagery often enough to imagine that a previous Christian evangelization had paved the way for their mission. Seventeenth-century Dominican chronicler Francisco de Burgoa understood natives of the Huatulco region in Oaxaca to tell him that their famous wooden cross originally had been planted by one of Christ's apostles, perhaps St. Thomas.[35] A similar story of precolonial evangelization circulated in colonial Tlaxcala and was enthusiastically endorsed by Tlaxcalan leaders as proof that their province enjoyed special divine favor.[36] Another providential colonial narrative developed around a legendary cross on the island of Cozumel off the coast of Yucatán. In Torquemada's telling, the first Spaniards to reach the island found a cross of stone and mortar about seven feet high (ten and a half *palmos*) in a very fine, fortified patio next to an imposing temple. A few years before they arrived, a priestly lord of the island named Chilancalcatl was said to have prophesied that bearded white men would soon arrive from the east carrying the sign of the cross, which would vanquish the native gods. Chilancalcatl ordered a stone cross for the temple precinct, saying that it was the true

32. Gil González Dávila, *Teatro eclesiástico de la primitiva Iglesia de las Indias Occidentales* [1649, 1655], facsimile ed. (Mexico: Condumex, 1982), p 217; Alonso Franco, O.P., *Segunda parte de la historia de la Provincia de Santiago de México* [1645] (Mexico: Impr. del Museo Nacional, 1983), pp. 246–253.

33. Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana*, III, p. 143 (libro 16, cap. 2) quotes Isaiah, chapt. 11: "sobre el Monte oscuro y caliginoso, levantad el Signo, levantad la voz, y no temáis."

34. Ibid. The Franciscans' sense of mission was bound to the cross thanks to St. Francis's stigmata. As St. Bonaventure put it, "He was clothed in the armor of the Cross." *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies; English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis,* ed. Marion A. Habig (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1991), p. 747.

35. Francisco de Burgoa, *Geográfica descripción de la parte septentrional* . . . [1674], facsimile ed. (Mexico: Porrúa, 1989), fols. 343r-352r. Burgoa and Isidro de la Asunción (*Itinerario a Indias [1673–1678]* (Mexico: Condumex, 1992), p. 108, speculated that it was St. Thomas; Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana*, III, p. 205 (libro 16, cap. 28) mentioned St. Andrew (although he thought it more likely that Martín de Valencia, leader of "the Twelve" Franciscans who arrived together in 1523, planted this cross); and González Dávila, *Teatro eclesiástico*, p. 79, opted for St. Matthew.

36. Jaime Cuadriello, *Las glorias de la República de Tlaxcala, o la conciencia como imagen sublime* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes/Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas-UNAM, 2004), pp. 333–337.

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tree of the world. The new object supposedly attracted considerable attention and veneration.[37]

But indigeneous symbols rarely were viewed in such a favorable light. More often, Catholic pastors found the deep connections between indigenous conceptions of nature and the sacred threatening, misguided, or ridiculous, and attributed them to diabolical direction. Early missionaries peppered the colonial landscape with crosses as the symbol of Christian presence and protection wherever "idolatry" was suspected—a kind of topographical exorcism. As Torquemada put it, "the friars ordered them to make many crosses and place them at all the intersections and entrances to their towns, and on some high hills," and then he offered a personal story from his time as warden of the Franciscan convent at Zacatlán in the Sierra Norte of Puebla.[38] Hearing about a stone draped in cloth and other offerings in the nearby mountains, he went to inspect. The mountain was shrouded in a dark fog that day, and it started to rain hard as they ascended. He came upon a large, faceless stone on a heap of smaller stones, with offerings of *copal* (incense) and small blankets. He and his companions pushed the stone off the mountain; then they cleaned the site. "We made a cross from the tallest tree we could find, and singing the hymn 'Vexilla Regis prodeunt fuget Crucis Mysterium' [Abroad the royal banners fly, and bear the gleaming Cross on high], we raised it up on the spot where the idol had been," and the sky cleared. He assured his readers that the cross was still there, visible from a great distance.[39]

Colonial Indians often embraced the Christian cross and its meanings in ways that echoed the importance of great trees in the cosmic landscape and the idea that natural features and objects contained or could attract divine presence.[40]

37. Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana*, III, p. 132 (libro 15, cap. 49).

38. Ibid., II, p. 62 (libro 15, cap. 23). In his treatise to combat idolatry before 1656, Dr. Jacinto de la Serna (who had been the pastor of Tenancingo in the state of Mexico in 1626) took a dimmer view of what could be achieved by planting crosses in the mountains. Before describing in chapter 15 how Indians of the Valley of Toluca believed that trees were imbued with souls and had been humans in an earlier incarnation, he acknowledged in chapter 2 that "there are some crosses there today," but that they served as cover for "bad behavior in other ways" (*"obrar mal en las demás cosas"*). *Manual de ministros de indios para el conocimiento de sus idolatrías y extirpación de ellas*, in *Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España* (Madrid: Impr. de la Viuda de Calero, 1842–1895), vol. 104, p. 41. On Serna and his text, see José Luis González M., "Sincretismo e identidades emergentes: el *Manual* de Jacinto de la Serna (1630)," *Dimensión Antropológica* 13:38 (September-December 2006), pp. 87–113.

39. *Monarquía indiana*, III, pp. 203–205 (libro 16, cap. 28). The Vexilla Regis hymn, composed by Venantius Fortunatus, bishop of Poitiers, was first sung in 569 in the procession from Tours to Poitiers with a relic of the True Cross. It became a part of the Divine Office during Holy Week, *Catholic Encyclopedia* (online, www.newadvent.org), entry for "Vexilla Regis."

40. Gerónimo de Mendieta, *Historia eclesiástica indiana* [ca. 1597] (Mexico: CONACULTA, 1997), vol. 1, chapt. 49 (pp. 473–476): "De la gran devoción y reverencia que los indios cobraron y tienen a la santa

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They honored and maintained the crosses placed by their Catholic pastors in the hills and mountains, on the outskirts of their settlements, on their churches, and in their cemeteries; and they added others to complete the sacralization and protection of a landscape of boundaries, planted fields, springs, caves, and wondrous signs. Borrowing a phrase from the liturgy of the Mass, one colonial Indian text called the miraculous stone cross of the town of Querétaro "Our boundary marker forever and ever."[41] Crosses also came to mark the order inside colonial settlements and dwellings. Sometimes, as at Tlayacapan, Morelos, protective crosses were placed at cardinal points of the townsite, forming lines that crossed at the principal church.[42] Crosses were also placed at intersections of other pathways through the community, on every church and chapel, on houses and sometimes at each corner of a house, and on an altar table inside the house to complete at home the cosmic order of the five directions.[43]

Crosses also traversed and protected the local landscape—carried in processions into the fields and hills, to or from a particular church or shrine, or tracing the

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cruz del Señor, y cosas maravillosas que cerca de ella acaecieron." Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana* III, p. 200 (libro 16, cap. 26), speaks of "la mucha devoción que los Indios desde el principio de su conversión tomaron a la Imagen o Figura de la Santa Cruz" and the fact that on their own they began to place crosses in the landscape: "Tomaron ésto los Indios tan de gana que levantaron muchas Cruces en las Cumbres de las Sierras y Mogotes de los cerros y en otras muchas partes." On rocks and trees as numinous, Durán noted the dressing and ornamentation of stone images: *Historia de las Indias*, III, p. 90. Crosses were "dressed" during the colonial period and beyond, especially in Yucatán.

In this essay I concentrate on the materiality of crosses and their spiritual geography. Hanks takes another approach in his study of colonial texts and the cultural significance of linguistic changes in Yucatec Maya during the colonial period. In *Converting Words*, pp. 133 and 251, he notes extensive use of the Spanish term *cruz* in colonial Maya texts. The cross was routinely invoked in prayers, and to this day is signed at the beginning of all prayers and rituals, including curing ceremonies.

41. "nuestra mujunera para siempre jamás," Nicolás Muntáñez, *Relación histórica de la Conquista de Querétaro* [pre-1722], ed. Rafael Ayala Echavarri (Mexico: Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística, 1948), p. 151. For extensive use of crosses as boundary markers in the Valley of Mexico, see the record of inspection of Mexico City's *ejidos* in 1608, University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library M-M 272.

42. For a brief consideration of chapels and sacred space at Tlayacapan in the sixteenth century, see Clara Bargellini, "Representations of Conversion: Sixteenth-Century Architecture in New Spain," in *The Word Made Image: Religion, Art, and Architecture in Spain and Spanish America, 1500–1600*, ed. Jonathan Brown (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1998), p. 98. She suggests that four of the barrio chapels dating from the sixteenth century connect at the great Augustinian convent church to form a cross.

43. Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana*, III, p. 200 (libro 16, cap. 26); Guadarrama Olivera, "El espacio y el tiempo sagrados," p. 187, describes three Totonac communities in Veracruz: "Hay una cruz en cada 'esquina' del pueblo, es decir, en cada punto cardinal, de tal manera que forma una cruz invisible sobre éste que 'ataja las enfermedades y los malos espíritus.'" Other domestic uses described in contemporary Oaxaca villages echo the blessings and appeal for protection and fertility. Marroquín, *La cruz mesiánica*, p. 41, mentions Zapotecs placing ceramic "police" crosses on the roofs of newly completed houses, forming the cross with plates or bits of tortilla and salt at the end of a meal, making offerings to crosses made of corn stalks at the end of the harvest season, and burning Palm Sunday straw crosses if the spring rains have not yet come. He also notes other locations for protective crosses.

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community's boundaries.[44] Torquemada described an early (1536) colonial procession during the feast of Corpus Christi at Tlaxcala in which the Christian cross became a key feature in a ritual enactment of sacred space bounded by mountains. Crosses were carried along a route strewn with greenery and flowers of all kinds through bowers, to the accompaniment of singing and dancing. The crosses passed through one intersection with artificial mountains installed at the four corners. Each of these miniature mountain tableaux teemed with natural life—carpets of grass and flowers, various trees in leaf and bloom, mushrooms, snakes, birds, deer, hares, rabbits, and coyotes, and men hiding in the vegetation with their bows poised.[45]

Great wooden crosses were erected at the friars' insistence soon after the Conquest, and several of them were famous in their own right as precious objects of divine presence. The earliest one, in Torquemada's telling, was at the site where the Tlaxcalan lords first received Cortés and his men. Cortés noticed this cross the night after that meeting, and no one could say how it got there. That same night a bright light in the form of a cross could be seen over Tenochtitlan all the way from Tlaxcala, and a native Tlaxcalan priest saw the Devil in the form of a pig scurry from a nearby temple. The Tlaxcalans called their cross *Tonacaquihuitl* or "wood that nourishes our life, . . . the thing that feeds our body."[46] According to other early colonial accounts of the legend, a cloud descended on this cross while the Tlaxcalan lords deliberated over whether to ally with the Christians, and they took it to be a sign.[47] Also in the 1520s a huge cross, "taller than any tower in Mexico,"[48] was erected in the patio of the first

44. Alicia Barabas, "Etnoterritorialidad sagrada en Oaxaca," in Barabas, *Diálogos*, I, 113, describes processions as rites tracing the boundaries and enclosing the pueblo or *municipio* in order to keep dangerous forces from entering, especially on May 3. On protective roof crosses in Chiapas, see Virginia Ann Guess, *Spirit of Chiapas: The Expressive Art of the Roof Cross Tradition* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press), 2004.

45. Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana*, III, pp. 230–232 (libro 17, cap. 9), borrowed from Toribio de Benavente (Motolinía), *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España*, tratado 1, cap. 15 (Madrid: Historia 16, 1985), pp. 128–129.

46. "Madero que da el sustento de nuestra vida . . . la cosa que alimenta nuestro cuerpo," ibid., III, p. 200 (libro 16. cap. 27).

47. Rodrigo Martínez Baracs, *La secuencia tlaxcalteca: orígenes del culto a Nuestra Señora de Ocotlán* (Mexico: INAH, 2000), p. 93, citing Tadeo de Niza, Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, and Diego Muñoz Camargo. A related story of a miraculous cross is told in the Mapa de Cuauhtlantzinco (Tlaxcala) and related sources, studied by Stephanie Wood. This "mapa" depicts a cross as a living plant with a sword as the cross member: *Transcending Conquest: Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003). pp. 88, 89, 97, 104. Minatory Indian miracles that the early seventeenth-century Nahua chronicler Chimalpahin associated with colonial crosses are mentioned by Lockhart, *Nahuas After the Conquest*, p. 245.

48. Fr. Agustín de Vetancurt, *Teatro mexicano. Descripción breve de los sucesos ejemplares históricos y religiosos del Nuevo Mundo de las Indias; Crónica de la Provincia del Santo Evangelio de México* [1698], facsimile ed. (Mexico: Porrúa, 1982), part 4, tratado 2 ("de los sucesos religiosos"), p. 41; Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana* I, p. 303 (libro 3, cap. 26).

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Indian chapel in Mexico City, San José de los Naturales. It was made from an ancient tree harvested in the woods of Chapultepec, the royal retreat where Moctezuma kept his collection of wild animals. Torquemada, citing native elders, reported that "the Mexicans regarded it as a deified thing; in the time of their heathendom, they cleaned and pruned it often and with the greatest care. And after the friars came and settled, they cut down this . . . tree and raised a cross made from it in the middle of the [chapel's] patio."[49] The placement of this great tree-cross recalls the precolonial festival honoring Tlaloc in which a small forest was erected in the patio of the temple; the tallest of the trees, called *tota* ("our father"), was considered lord of the mountains, forests, and waters.[50] This cross apparently was still considered an object of special importance when it fell over during a storm in 1571. Torquemada says that splinters from it were widely distributed as relics.[51] Early Franciscan chroniclers singled out another cross at Cholula for a special place in the drama of evangelization and celestial struggle during the sixteenth century. The first friars destroyed the temple on top of Cholula's great pyramid and replaced it with a "very tall" cross, which would later be replaced by a chapel to Our Lady of los Remedios, much visited and revered by local Indians. According to the early Franciscan evangelizer Motolinía, the first cross was struck by lightning, as were its two replacements. When "many idols" were discovered buried there, Motolinía says he "confounded the Indians by saying that because of the many sins committed in that place, God did not wish his cross to stand there."[52]

Maud Oakes's account in the mid-1940s of the two crosses in the churchyard of the western Guatemalan town of Todos Santos Cuchumatán provides an ethnographic perspective on why large wooden crosses may have been enthusiastically received by colonial Indians, building on the precolonial symbolism of great trees and cosmic order. Oakes asked the Chief Prayermaker of the community why there were two crosses, one "tall and commanding in appearance,

49. "Lo tenían los mexicanos por cosa deífica, y así lo limpiaban y escamondaban muy de ordinario y con sumo cuidado en tiempo de su gentilidad y luego que entraron los religiosos y tuvieron casa, cortaron dicho ciprés y levantáronlo en cruz, en medio del patio," Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana*, I, p. 303 (libro 3, cap. 26).

50. Solange Alberro, *El águila y la cruz: orígenes religiosos de la conciencia criolla. México, siglos XVI–XVII* (Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999), p. 61, drawing on Durán.

51. Ibid., pp. 62–63, citing Torquemada and Vetancurt.

52. Motolinía, *Historia de los indios*, p. 116 (libro 1, cap. 12). Guy Rozat Dupeyron, *América, imperio del demonio: cuentos y recuentos* (Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1995), p. 90, suggests that the friars took the lightning strikes as a sign the Devil was defending his place at all costs. See also Javier Ayala Calderón, *El Diablo en la Nueva España: visiones y representaciones del Diablo en documentos novohispanos de los siglos XVI y XVII* (Guanajuato, Gto.: Universidad de Guanajuato, 2010). Torquemada recounted another struggle between the cross and the Devil at the chapel of San José de los Naturales in Mexico City, *Monarquía indiana*, I, p. 303 (libro 3, cap. 26).

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made of ancient wood, the other one made of stone and much smaller." He told her that a few years earlier the *intendente* (intendant; an outsider appointed by the state government to oversee local affairs) had ordered that the venerable wooden cross be pulled down and replaced with a smaller one made of cement. The Prayermaker told him the people did not want the new cross and begged him not to remove the great wooden cross because it belonged to the ancestors. But the intendant ignored him and replaced the old cross with the new one. Soon an ill wind blew, the weather turned very cold, and the rains ceased. There was no maize harvest that year; animals and people were starving. The prayermakers went to the mountaintops to pray for rain, but to no avail. Then the people went to their shamans (*chimanes*) and asked them to perform their rituals for rain. The chimanes consulted the *dueño del cerro* (the spirit of the mountain) to find out why the people were being punished. The dueño answered: "You have cast down the big cross . . . that came with the creation of the world. . . . Put the big cross up again in the same place. Otherwise all the people and all the animals will die." While they were replacing the ancient cross a new intendant threatened to arrest them for using wood without permission. They explained why they had to replace the cross, and added, "If you imprison us, you will win and we will win. Send us to prison; we have no fear." The intendant let them proceed, but insisted that the new cross be left in place, and so there are now two crosses.[53] The wooden cross was understood to embody the ancestors and represent the world order both in its form and in its antiquity.[54]

Most often, the colonial Mesoamerican crosses celebrated as wonder-working objects of devotion were said to have appeared fully formed in the forests and wooded hilltops, as did the Cruz de Maye near Ixquilipan, Hidalgo; the cross of Teccistlan near Jocotepec, Jalisco; the Señor del Encino of Yahualica, Jalisco; the cross of Ahuacatlan, Jalisco; the providential cross celebrated in the Nahuatl *Códice Municipal* of Cuernavaca, which appeared when a black zapote tree was cut open; the cross of Jacona, Michoacán, discovered inside a guayabo tree; the cross of Tamazula, Jalisco, found in the root of a huizache bush; and the cross in front of the new shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe at Tepeyac in 1709 with its inscription, "This cross was found on a mountain in the form you see it here."[55] News of such natural crosses circulated even in the late colonial

53. Oakes, *Two Crosses of Todos Santos*, pp. 23–25. According to Ronald Wright and his North American informant, this wooden cross was removed again and then reinstalled in the 1980s during the height of Guatemala's bloody civil war, "and people told me that from then on things began to improve." *Time Among the Maya: Travels in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), pp. 225–226.

54. Crosses, trees, and ancestors are linked by Freidel, Schele, and Parker in *Maya Cosmos*, pp. 124 and 457; and by Astor-Aguilera, *The Maya World of Communicating Objects*, especially pp. 73, 95, 96, and 110.

55. For the Cruz de Maye as originally a tree, see Sergio Sánchez Vásquez, "La Santa Cruz: culto en los cerros de la región Otomí Actopan-Ixmiquilpan," in *La montaña en el paisaje ritual*, pp. 442, 447.

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period when official policing of miracles and miraculous images intensified and there was a growing separation between official and popular notions of proper devotion.[56] If not discovered under mysterious circumstances, they were said to tremble or show other signs of life,[57] and celebrated crosses sometimes were painted green as a sign that they were alive with the sacred in the present and remote past, as well as symbols of the promise of life everlasting.[58]

Examples of natural and animated crosses come from various parts of Mexico and different times during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they were

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Sánchez Vásquez recounts the story that giant ancestors carrying the Cruz de Maye stopped there and got drunk. While they were in a stupor the cross grew and could not be moved again. For the Cuernavaca cross, see Haskett, "Conquering the Spiritual Conquest," pp. 242 and 253–254; for Jacona, in 1662, see the addition to Diego Basalenque, *Historia de la Provincia de San Nicolás Toletino de Michoacán, del Orden de N.P.S. Agustín*, ed. José Bravo Ugarte. (Mexico: Editorial Jus, 1963), p. 174; for Teccistlan, see in the cathedral archive of the Arzobispado de Guadalajara, unclassified 1721 file, "Autos pertenecientes a la cofradía del Santo Cristo de la Expiración del pueblo de Jocotepec"; for Tamazula and Yahualica, see Higinio Vásquez Santa Ana, *Cristos célebres de México* (México: n.p., 1950), pp. 69–72; and for the cross of Ahuacatlan, see Sigismundo Taraval, *El milagro más visible o el milagro de los milagros más patentes. La santísima cruz de Tepique* (Guadalajara: El Colegio de Jalisco, 1992), p. 24. The cross at Tepeyac is depicted in José de Arellano's 1709 painting of the new shrine to Guadalupe on the occasion of its dedication, ("esta cruz se alló en un monte de la forma que se ve"). In addition to the crosses of Jacona, Tamazula, and Jocotepec, Fr. Matias de Escobar, O.S.A., *América thebaida:* vitas partum *de los religiosos hermitaños de N.P. San Augustín de la Provincia de San Nicolás Tolentino de Michoacán* [1729], 2nd ed. (Morelia, Mich.: Balsal Editores, 1970), pp. 464–466, names six other miraculous natural crosses and crucifixes at San Pedro Piedra Gorda, Santiago Ocotlán, San Miguel de Atotonilco, Villa de León, Tupátaro, Ziragüén, and in the Santuario de Guadalupe of Valladolid.

56. For example, in a piece of mulberry split for firewood in the home of D. Felipe Yestes, Barrio Santiago, Querétaro, reported in the *Gazeta de México* issue of October 20, 1784; and inside a rock that was split open at San Cristóbal Ecatepec, reported in the *Gazeta de México* issue of March 20, 1792, "formó la Naturaleza." Sánchez Vásquez, "La Santa Cruz," p. 447, notes that the crosses most revered in Otomí communities of Hidalgo are understood to be *"cruces vivas"* and *"naturales."*

57. See the discussion of particular crosses later in this essay, also the wooden cross of Rosario, Sinaloa, which reportedly shook for several days in 1683 and became the object of ardent devotion, mentioned in a note to Francisco Sedano, *Noticias de México* (Mexico: Impr. de J. R. Barbedillo, 1880), tomo 1, pp. 166–168; and the trembling stone cross of Zapotla in the jurisdiction of Tacuba in 1741, AGN Bienes Nacionales 749, exp. 16.

58. William B. Taylor, *Shrines and Miraculous Images in Mexico Before the Reforma* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010 [2011]), p. 75. Delia Costentino describes a European/Franciscan tradition of green crosses that combined the ancestral Tree of Life with the Crucifixion. "St. Bonaventure described a special tree in a thirteenth-century treatise entitled *Lignum Vitae.* There he wrote about a vision that he had of Christ crucified on the Tree of Life, which produced fruits representing the Lord's virtues": *Las joyas de Zinacantepec: arte colonial en el monasterio de San Miguel, Zinacantepec* (Mexico: El Colegio Mexiquense, 2003), p. 73.

For green crosses in Mexico, see Harvey, "Pilgrimage and Shrine," pp. 95–96; and Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs,* pp. 251, 252. On green crosses in Yucatán and Chiapas, see Freidel, Schele, and Parker, *Maya Cosmos,* pp. 55, 174, 254, and 401. A green cross associated with an apparition of Christ was prominent in the revitalization movement in Tlacoxcalco, Oaxaca, in 1911: Edward Wright-Ríos, "Envisioning Mexico's Catholic Resurgence: The Virgin of Solitude and the Talking Christ of Tlacoxcalco, 1908–1924," *Past & Present* 195 (May 2007), pp. 197–239, especially 222, 225, and 239. See also the discussion of the green cross of Tepic and the green cross of Tequisquiapan later in this essay.

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most often reported in central and western Mexico, and Yucatán. Augustinian friars, famous for devotion to the Cross, were prominent pastors in the center and west, but there was no Augustinian deus ex machina at work in this concentration of living crosses. All the orders, as well as the diocesan clergy, were devoted to the cross: Yucatán was a Franciscan province, not an Augustinian one,[59] and local enthusiasms were always a shaping, if not determining, consideration.[60] Crosses have had an especially important place in Mayan ritual life, and the fact that they are often clothed and painted green suggests, again, that they are more than liturgical symbols.[61] Natural crosses have long been prized in Yucatán and Chiapas, but whether and when devotees thought they spoke or were animated in other ways during the colonial period is not clear. The literature on the famous speaking crosses of the Caste War period (1847–ca. 1901) suggests that their fame as conveyors of spoken messages may date from that later time.[62]

Miraculous crosses made of wood predominate, and wooden ceremonial objects were much esteemed in precolonial times, particularly in Yucatán,[63] but they are more perishable than stone crosses and few that were left outdoors lasted many

Crosses were sometimes depicted entwined in vines as another way to indicate that they were alive. For example, see the print depicting the cross of Mexico City's Cofradía de la Santísima Cruz located in the Colegio de San Pedro Pasqual de Bethlen, reproduced in *Los costos de la salvación: las cofradías y la Ciudad de México (siglos XVI al XIX)*, eds. Alicia Bazarte Martínez and Clara García Ayluardo (Mexico: CIDE/IPN/AGN, 2001), p. 343.

59. Augustinians were, however, bishops of the diocese of Yucatán from 1608–1636, 1696–1698, and 1753–1760.

60. For numinous crosses not mentioned elsewhere in this essay, see Luis Weckmann, *The Medieval Heritage of Mexico*, trans. Frances M. López-Morillas (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), p. 291 (a cross near Paso del Norte, Chihuahua. alleviated physical pain; a Moqui, New Mexico, cross, given by the Lady in Blue, restored a girl's sight). *Gazeta de México* for July 1732 (in León, *Bibliografía mexicana*, pp. 334–335) reported a prodigious black cross at Mizquic in the Valley of Mexico; the miraculous cross of Rosales, Chihuahua, reportedly survived a fire and and other vicissitudes, as found in Jesús José Lerma Almanza, *Santa Cruz: símbolo, misión y pueblo de Rosales, Chihuahua* (Chihuahua, Chih.: Doble Hélice, 2006); Taraval, *El milagro más visible*, p. 27, mentions a miraculous wooden cross at Huejotzingo in the sixteenth century; miraculous crosses at Sayula, Autlán, and Zacoalco, Jalisco are mentioned in William B. Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 268–269, 663 n. 134, and 669 n. 13; and a stone cross at an intersection in Totolapa, Morelos, was said to tremble on May 3, 1728, and later worked healing miracles, as found in Ricardo Melgar Bao, "Cristocentrismo, una constelación veneracional en Morelos," in Barabas, *Diálogos*, II, pp. 323–324. (See text paragraphs below for discussion of similar events at Tlayacapan, Morelos, also in 1728.) More recent cases of living crosses in Oaxaca are mentioned in Marroquín, *La cruz mesiánica*, p. 42.

61. This is a theme of Astor-Aguilera, *The Maya World of Communicating Crosses*, which he associates with ancestor veneration and propitiation; see especially pp. 73, 95, 96, and 110.

62. Terry Rugeley, *Rebellion Now and Forever: Mayas, Hispanics, and Caste War Violence in Yucatan, 1800–1880* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 3, 5, and chapt. 3; Victoria Reifler Bricker, *The Indian Christ, the Indian King: The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 102–103; and the cross's instructions to the governor in 1851, pp. 208–218.

63. Fr. Diego de Landa, *Yucatán Before and After the Conquest* [1566], trans. William Gates (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), p. 47.

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years. The carved stone crosses that were placed in church courtyards early in the colonial period survive in greater number, and their survival speaks both to the durability of the material and to the care taken to preserve them. Some clearly were treated as objects of devotion, such as the stone cross of Querétaro, which is featured in the next section. Whether many of the early atrium crosses were considered numinous in themselves—more than material symbols of Christ's Passion—is not clear. María de los Ángeles Rodríguez Álvarez thinks not. She suggests that they had two functions: as symbols of faith, and as the special insignia of a cemetery.[64] And a directive from a council of Mexican prelates in 1539, stating that crosses should be smaller, expertly crafted, and made of stone if possible, suggests that they were encouraged by the clergy as a substitute for the monumental enchanted wooden crosses of the first years.[65] Samuel Edgerton and Jaime Lara, on the other hand, posit that the function and symbolism of these churchyard crosses was as much indigenous as Christian, representing the precious center of creation in a schematic quincunx framed by the four-cornered walled courtyard.[66]

64. *Usos y costumbres funerarias en la Nueva España* (Zamora, Mich.: El Colegio de Michoacán/El Colegio Mexiquense, 2001), p. 60.

65. "Copia de un original muy precioso de la junta que se hicieron en la ciudad de Thenuxtitlan México" [1539], appendix to *Concilios provinciales primero, y segundo, celebrados en la muy noble, y muy leal ciudad de México* . . . ed. Francisco Antonio de Lorenzana (Mexico: Imprenta de el Superior Gobierno de Joseph Antonio de Hogal, 1769), p. 329.

66. Samuel Y. Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion: Religious Architecture and Indian Artisans in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), chapt. 2, and his "Christan Cross as Indigenous 'World Tree' in Sixteenth-Century Mexico: The 'Atrio' Cross in the Frederick and Jan Mayer Collection," in *Exploring New World Imagery: Spanish Colonial Papers from the 2002 Mayer Center Symposium*, ed. Donna Pierce (Denver: Denver Art Musuem, 2005), pp. 11–40; Lara, *City, Temple, Stage*, chapt. 5.

Eleanor Wake's *Framing the Sacred* also discusses the symbol-studded stone atrium crosses and is even more emphatic in emphasizing indigenous roots: "a greater part of the religious art and architecture of Indian Mexico expressed not only native religious responses to the conversion program but also native cultural responses to its introduction and imposition," p. 3. Like Lara, Edgerton, and other authors who recognize native conceptions in early colonial architecture, she highlights the orientation of new construction according to sacred features in the landscape and the five-part precolonial conception of the cosmos (with an even greater emphasis on the great central tree of Tamoanchan), but she criticizes Edgerton for viewing this organization of space as mainly an opportunistic strategy of the early mendicant evangelizers, thereby denying "any autonomy of native thought and action," pp. 4, 228–232. See Marroquín, *La cruz mesiánica*, pp. 42–45, for another work that emphasizes the precolonial quincunx and associates the planet Venus with the central direction.

All of these important recent works by art historians focus on the visual, especially the symbols on the stone crosses, with less attention to the ever-present plain wooden crosses. Within her emphasis on precolonial continuities and crosses as "ritualized cosmic trees" (p. 229), Wake sees the early stone crosses as an example of native *horror vacui*. If that is so, what is one to make of the many crosses in the colonial landscape with no decoration permanently inscribed on them? If the plain crosses were new, and represent the opposite of a preference for inscribing the entire surface, could this be evidence of Christian conceptions of the cross finding their way into colonial Indian practice, reworked in ways similar to the incorporation of the word "cruz" into colonial Maya texts discussed in Hanks, *Converting Words*? Wake seems to close off this possibility, suggesting that while the word "cruz" was adopted in Nahuatl "native perception of the cruz did not change" from its precolonial meanings, p. 217.

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Carol Callaway also finds parallels between these symbol-studded stone crosses and precolonial understandings of space, time, and sacrifice that may suggest some were treated as cult objects. Callaway's most compelling examples have mainly to do with precolonial conceptions transposed into Christian terms of sacrifice and salvation. In an unusual cross from Topiltepec, Oaxacan precolonial forms were used to represent Christ's death as the arrow sacrifice of a figure dressed as Xipe Totec, "an earth god associated with the moon, young corn, rain, and fertility."[67] Her other example is a cross from Tepeapulco, Hidalgo, with a crown of thorns at the intersection that looks "like the rays of a pre-colonial image of the sun," with a recessed center that may have held an obsidian disk; Callaway notes that this is "a characteristic of atrium crosses that follows a pre-colonial custom of adding such a stone to give them the force of life."[68] As with many of these early atrium crosses, blood appears to spurt from the arms and base of the cross but the body of Christ is not represented, adding to the sense that the stone itself bleeds. Tepeapulco was the home of at least four early stone crosses of this kind. The fact that one of the Tepeapulco stone crosses was sent to Mexico City in 1648 to be displayed in the cemetery of the cathedral also suggests a special devotional status of the object in itself, called then "this wondrous cross" (*"esta prodigiosa cruz"*). But apparently Archbishop Mañozca had found the cross neglected in Tepeapulco's cemetery during his pastoral visit.[69] If these striking objects *were* important objects of devotion, it is puzzling that some of the many others in use were not described as such in colonial documentation, in contrast to other kinds of stone and wooden crosses that were said to come to life. Perhaps these early inscribed crosses were rarely mentioned in this way because their appeal was so rooted in a particular community,

67. "Callaway, "Pre-Columbian and Colonial Mexican Images of the Cross: Christ's Sacrifice and the Fertile Earth," *Journal of Latin American Lore* 16:2 (1990), pp. 211–220, and p. 213 for Callaway's understanding of Xipe Totec, drawing from Seler.

68. Ibid., p. 222.

69. In a dedication booklet that regarded this cross as an early missionary creation, Miguel de Bárcena described it as an "hermosísima cruz de piedra de cantería colorada . . . grabada con mucho primor de arte que plantaron los primeros religiosos," *Relación de la pompa festiva y solemne colocación de una santa y hermosa cruz de piedra, que el ilustrísimo señor don Juan de Mañozca, arzobispo de México . . . trasladó al cementerio de esta Iglesia Cathedral de México* . . . (Mexico: Hipólito de Rivera, 1648). According to Bárcena, Archbishop Mañozca found the cross in pieces in the atrium-cemetery of the church complex of Tepeapulco during his pastoral visit there. Before long, Indians from the town paid a visit to the archbishop in Mexico City and ceded the cross to him "a pesar de que la estimaban en mucho, pues creían que la había levantado el famoso Fr. Francisco de Tembleque." He sent them on their way with expense money and 100 pesos to repair their church. The cross was placed in the cemetery directly in front of the main door of the cathedral and covered with flowers and sedge for the dedication ceremony on the Day of the Exaltation of the Cross, September 14, 1648. Later known as the "cruz de Mañozca," it was moved again in 1792 during the reconstruction of the Zócalo, after being reworked into a plain, cylindrical cross, its low-relief carvings obliterated. Information about this cross after 1648 comes from the archdiocesan website at http://www.arquidiocesismexico.org.mx/Hist Fabrica Material La Cruz.html, accessed December 14, 2010.

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expressing a highly localized sense of being situated at the vital center of the universe. The fact is that we know little about how they were regarded and used outside liturgical contexts.

Crosses were as compelling and present in the landscape at the end of the colonial period as they had been in the sixteenth century. What changed most was the official view of where they belonged and how they should be honored. For the most part, news of animated, wonder-working crosses was viewed with suspicion by ecclesiastical authorities in the late eighteenth century,[70] and there were moves to confine the display of crosses to urban settings, preferably indoors. But the archbishop's call in 1792 for Indian parishioners to bring into the parish church the crosses they kept out in the open, in the mountains and other remote places, had little effect.[71] Places of the cross and open-air ceremonies had become too important for these objects to be removed from a community's territorial landscape without creating a scandal.

THREE RENOWNED CROSSES: HUATULCO, QUERÉTARO, AND TEPIC

Three crosses—the wooden cross of Huatulco, the stone cross of Querétaro, and the verdant cross of Tepic—gained greater recognition than others, thanks to some strategic support and promotion by bishops and friars across ethnic lines. Woven into the fabric of missionary evangelization and providential imperialism, their legendary beginnings were broadcast in early seventeenth-century chronicles, but they came from different parts of Mexico, with somewhat different histories and significance to devotees.

The cross of Huatulco, apparently the most famous of the three during the seventeenth century,[72] was also the most European in its Counter-Reformation story as a relic resisting sacrilegious attack by Protestants. In 1579 or 1587

70. Examples of surveillance and restriction, and in one case removal, include the cross of Huaquechula in 1806, Taylor, *Shrines*, pp. 49–51; the found cross of Teccistlán, Jalisco in 1721, cathedral archive of the Arzobispado de Guadalajara, unclassified 1721 expediente, "Autos pertenecientes a la cofradía del Santo Cristo de la Expiración del pueblo de Jocotepec"; and the "cross of justice" at San Francisco Galileo, Querétaro, in 1817, AGN Inquisición 1465 exp. 7, fols. 85-87. Found crosses were reported again in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The example of El Señor de la Misericordia in Tepatitlán (in the Altos de Jalisco), a cross that appeared in an oak tree to a campesino from the El Durazno ranch in 1839, is discussed in Chapter 4 of Kinga Novak's forthcoming dissertation in History at UC-Berkeley.

71. Archivo Histórico de la Mitra, Arzobispado de México L10B/28, fol. 107. Eighteen years earlier, Archbishop Alonso Núñez de Haro y Peralta sent a letter to his parish priests notifying them of his forthcoming pastoral visit in which he ordered the local *cofradías,* "even Indian cofradías," not to go out with crosses and images to meet him until he was "very near the church," Archivo Histórico de la Mitra, Arzobispado de México L10/11, 1774, *carta circular* at the beginning of the volume.

72. Weckmann, *Medieval Heritage*, pp. 289–290.

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(early chroniclers give different dates), English pirates sacked the port of Huatulco on the coast of Oaxaca and tried to destroy the settlement's large, sweet-smelling wooden cross.[73] They pulled it down, covered it with tar, and set it aflame. The tar burned, but not the cross. Failing in their attempt to destroy the cross, the pirates left Huatulco and news of this miracle caused an immediate stir in the region. Ships calling at the port took slivers of the cross to cast into the sea for protection during violent storms.[74] Local people considered the tiniest bit of wood from the cross to be a potent medicine, mixing it in water for the sick to drink. Splinters were so much in demand for these purposes in the early years that the original cross soon dwindled to five feet in height.[75] Around 1610 the bishop of Oaxaca ordered it sent to his cathedral church in Antequera for safekeeping and public display, and there it remained, working more miracles of healing and rescue. "Of this kind, the numbers are infinite," wrote Torquemada before 1615.[76] Substantial pieces of the original cross also went to Pope Paul V before his death in 1621,[77] and to the Carmelite convent in

73. For the Cruz de Huatulco, I am drawing especially from Torquemada, the earliest printed source, *Monarquía indiana*, III, pp. 203–206 (libro 16, cap. 28). Two other miraculous crosses from western Mexico with similar stories occurring at about the same time are associated with Colima and Autlán (Jalisco): Weckmann, *Medieval Heritage*, pp. 289–290, and http://culturautlan.blogspot.com/2008/04/la-cruz-del-astillero.html.

74. On the connection to ocean travel and the port of Huatulco, there are several late seventeenth-century sources appealing to the cross of Huatulco to protect the port and ships against the "perfidious heretic." Nicolás Gómez de Cervantes, *Sermón de la Exaltación de la Cruz Sacrosanta, en la solemnidad que esse día celebra la Iglesia Cathedral de la Ciudad de Antequera Valle de Oaxaca, en memoria del triumpho, y Victoria del milagroso y Santo Madero del Puerto de Guatulco contra el pérfido herege* (Mexico: Francisco Rodríguez Lupercio, 1671); 1685 news of pirates burning the port of Huatulco again, Juan Antonio Rivera, *Diario curioso del capellán del Hospital de Jesús Nazareno de México* (Mexico: Vargas Rea, 1953), I, 40; and for some years thereafter prayers being offered to the cross when news was received of the annual fleet's safe arrival in Spain, Fr. Angel Maldonado, *Oración evangélica en la solemnidad que a la Santa Cruz de Huatulco dedica todos los años la Santa Iglesia Cathedral de la Ciudad de Antequera, Valle de Oaxaca, día de la Exaltación de la Cruz. En ocasión que llegaron de España las noticias de la flota* (Mexico: Francisco de Rivera Calderón, 1703).

75. One *braza* (about 5 1/2 feet). This extraordinary demand for bits of the Huatulco cross as wonder-working relics (and also of the great wooden cross of the chapel of San José de los Naturales in Mexico City mentioned earlier) makes me wonder why splinters of the True Cross—the Ligno Crucis—were not more popular in colonial Mexico. It was not for lack of certified relics of the True Cross exported to the New World, but they were far less plentiful than in Europe, and for the most part were safeguarded in cities by the religious orders. By the late seventeenth century, relics of the True Cross were reported in Mexico City's cathedral, two Franciscan convents, the Dominican convent, the convent of Regina Coeli, the Jesuit Colegio de San Ildefonso, and the Confraternity of the Holy Cross; in the Puebla and Valladolid cathedrals; in the Jesuit colegio in Valladolid; and in the church of the missionary Franciscans of Pachuca, Hidalgo. An exception to the guarded veneration of pieces of the Ligno Crucis was the one belonging to the Pachuca church in the late colonial period after the secularization of the Franciscan *doctrina* there, which was displayed for public veneration on the September 14 feast day, and around which controversies about proper devotion and damage to the relic swirled. AGN Clero Regular y Secular 125 exps. 2-4,1807, Tulane University Viceregal and Ecclesiastical Mexican Collection 66 exp. 13, 1808–1809; *Gazeta de México,* May 19, 1784, May 30, 1786, and July 22, 1797.

76. *Monarquía indiana*, III, p. 205 (libro 16, cap. 28).

77. Jacobo Dalevuelta [pseud.], *Oaxaca, de sus historias y sus leyendas* (Mexico: Andrés Botas e Hijo, 1922), p. 71.

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Puebla,[78] but one piece evidently remained in Huatulco. A mid-eighteenth-century source reported that a chapel about two leagues from Huatulco housed a small cross made from "the one to which the great marvel happened,"[79] and the parish church of Huatulco still advertises such a cross. Although widespread popular devotion to the cross of Huatulco seems to have waned since the eighteenth century,[80] its appeal lingered in Oaxaca thanks to the printed accounts, the removal of the largest fragment to the cathedral, and a famous seventeenth-century painting there of the foiled sacrilege.

The stone cross of Querétaro had the earliest following of the three and was the most closely related to Indian evangelization, but its beginnings are obscured by the fact that surviving written sources and active promotion date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Formal investigations into the creation of this cross and miracles associated with it may have been made as early as 1639 and 1650, on orders of the bishop of Michoacán,[81] but records of these investigations have not been found. The earliest dated reference comes from the Franciscan chronicler Alonso de la Rea's 1639 history of his province.[82] He admitted that "the origin of this relic is not known because over time [memory of] it has been erased,"[83] but he extolled it as a "tree of life in the middle of Paradise" (*"Lignum vitae in medio Paradysi"*), famous for miracles, situated on the brow of the Sangremal hill just outside the city of Querétaro and housed in a richly furnished chapel. De la Rea proceeded to mention several exemplary miracles "so that they are not erased from memory." They included the cross grow-

78. González Dávila, *Teatro eclesiástico*, p 79. Isidro de la Asunción, *Itinerario*, p. 108, said it made a complete cross roughly 12 inches tall (said to be a *palmo y medio* high; a palmo being about 8 1/4"); he also claimed to have "un pedazo muy grande envajado en una cruz" to ward off lightning strikes and exorcise demons. Yet another fragment went to the Mercedarian church in Mexico City and eventually to the Colegio de San Pedro Pascual de Belén (founded in 1784). It was said to be large enough to be fashioned into a small cross, Dalevuelta, *Oaxaca*, p. 71.

79. "con que sucedió el prodigio," Antonio de Alcedo, *Diccionario geográfico de las Indias Occidentales o América* [1786–1789], vol. 206 (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1967), II, 207, drawing from Villaseñor y Sánchez.

80. Judging by the scarcity of documentation after the late seventeenth century, this devotion began to decline then. Jaime Cuadriello noted its virtual extinction in the twentieth century, *Las glorias de la República de Tlaxcala*, p. 396.

81. Santa Gertrudis, *Cruz de piedra*, pp. 23–24, 33–34. Antonio Rubial García, "Santiago y la cruz de piedra. La mítica y milagrosa fundación de Querétaro, ¿Una elaboración del Siglo de las Luces?" in *Creencias y prácticas religiosas en Querétaro, siglos XVI–XIX*, coord. Juan Ricardo Jiménez Gómez (Mexico: Plaza y Valdés, 2004), pp. 27–28, cites a May 3, 1649, notarial record by De la Rea that refers to the chapel there being built 40 years before and attracting both Spaniards and Indians.

82. *Crónica de la Orden de N. Seráfico P.S. Francisco, Provincia de San Pedro y San Pablo de Mechoacan en la Nueva España . . . año de 1639*, 2nd ed. (Mexico: Imprenta de J. R. Barbedillo, 1882), pp. 287–295.

83. "El origen de esta reliquia no se sabe porque con el tiempo se ha borrado." In a 1649 notarial record located by Antonio Rubial García, he also failed to mention miraculous apparitions or a founding battle: "Santiago y la cruz," p. 28.

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ing in size and trembling, especially on Fridays; a moribund girl brought back to life; a rosary that miraculously stuck to the cross; and a gentleman of the city who took a mortal fall from his horse yet survived unscathed.[84] Clearly the devotion was growing when the investigations were ordered and De la Rea wrote about it. Witnesses in 1650 apparently urged the bishop and the crown to support the devotion;[85] in 1654 an impressive new church was completed on the site; and its popularity continued to grow in the late seventeenth century with news of miraculous healings, an institutionalized feast day,[86] and tireless alms collections by the local Franciscans.[87]

But in 1694, in the aftermath of the notorious Mexico City riots, the archbishop of Mexico would not allow the people of Querétaro to celebrate their great public feast in honor of the stone cross. The city fathers and other prominent citizens, totaling 47 signatories, seven of them *dones,* appealed to the viceroy to overrule the archbishop's order because the celebration was "so deeply rooted and such an ancient custom among the residents."[88] They pleaded that the celebrations were urgently needed because of present calamities. Unmoved, the archbishop again prohibited the celebrations, threatened a stiff fine for violators, and urged the viceroy to punish the petitioners for their insolence. The viceroy directed his representative in Querétaro to call these men together, issue a stern warning about disobedience, and order them to obey the archbishop's decree and acknowledge their ignorance.[89] This tough stand by the highest colonial authorities could have been the beginning of a steep decline in the popularity of Querétaro's stone cross, but it was not. In addition to the

84. De la Rea, *Crónica*, pp. 287–292. He also mentioned that this fallen horseman had survived another accident that should have killed him. The growth and movement of this cross are recurring themes in this literature. Writing in 1680, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora understood that the growth was ongoing but that the trembling had lapsed for many years, until May 5, 1680, at 3 p.m.; he further understood that the new movement was an "obsequio cariñoso de su amante Madre," and that the cross "pretendía festejar a la inmaculada Reina del Universo" at the time of the dedication of Querétaro's church of the Virgin of Guadalupe. *Glorias de Querétaro (1531–1680),* (Querétaro: Gobierno del Estado, 1985), pp. 29–31.

85. Santa Gertrudis, *Cruz de piedra*, p. 23.

86. Judging by the urgent application of Querétaro's leaders in April 1694 for permission to hold their annual feast of the Holy Cross, and responses by the archbishop and viceroy before the end of the month, the feast day in the seventeenth century would have been May 3. AGN General de Parte 17 exps. 34-35, fols. 29v-32. If so, it had become September 14 by the turn of the nineteenth century. Ruiz Narváez, *Sermón de la exaltación*. Or perhaps this cross was honored on both feast days of the Holy Cross.

87. Santa Gertrudis, *Cruz de piedra*, p. 23. For completion of a more capacious church in 1654 and a new convent in 1666, see José María Zeláa e Hidalgo, *Glorias de Querétaro: en la fundacion y admirables progresos de la muy insigne y venerable congregación eclesiástica de presbíteros . . .* (Mexico: Zúñiga y Ontiveros, 1803), pp. 37–39. Sigüenza y Góngora, in *Glorias de Querétaro*, pp. 29–31, spoke of the new construction and growing devotion, crediting Fr. Jose Santos, the *guardián* in 1680, with collecting 120,000 pesos in alms over the course of 12 years of travel in the province.

88. "tan radicada y costumbre tan antigua en sus moradores"

89. AGN General de Parte 17 exps. 34-35, fols. 29v-32.

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depth of local popular devotion, the establishment of a new missionary college—a *colegio de propaganda fide,* named for the cross, El Colegio de la Santa Cruz—on the site in 1683 by Spanish Franciscan reformers with a new evangelical fervor contributed to its staying power.[90] Members of the college actively promoted the devotion during the eighteenth century—searching for historical records to fill out its legendary past, embellishing the church, and publicizing the cross in their chronicles, devotional histories, and sermons. Later chroniclers of the order mentioned "many and great additions" to the physical plant by the missionary friars during those years, including a "famous library" of some 7,000 volumes.[91] And in 1702 a sermon by Fr. José de Castro celebrating the stone cross and the rebuilding of the church was published.[92]

What may be the earliest written account of this cross, perhaps dating from the 1550s, is found in a 1717 manuscript from the library of the Querétaro college.[93] The warden of the convent and colegio at the time claimed that the original record was in poor condition and a copy was needed in order to preserve its contents. It is unclear whether the original document was composed before 1639 since De la Rea did not consult it when he wrote about the cross.[94] Whenever it was composed, the author of this text identified himself as don Nicolás Muntáñez, an Otomí lord from Tula and one of the Christian captains who led the conquest of Querétaro against Chichimec heathens in 1551. His rambling narrative set out the origin story for the stone cross as it would be recounted after 1722, placing the symbol of the cross at the center of the story of conquest. He described the heavenly apparition of St. James and a refulgent cross during the decisive battle; then, at the beginning of July 1552, a great pine cross nearly 35 feet high was raised on the hill where the battle had been fought and the peace made. But when the Chichimecs objected that it was not the kind of cross they wanted, the Franciscan pastor promised that within 24 hours the Chichimecs would have their cross. On July 3, stones for the cross were brought from a quarry more than 10 miles away "by 1,000

90. The new college was founded by Fr. Antonio de Linaz and 27 Franciscan missionaries who accompanied him to Mexico. Rubial García, "Santiago y la cruz," pp. 30–37, also emphasizes the role of the Franciscan missionary college in the development and promotion of the miracle stories.

91. Zeláa, *Glorias*, pp. 37–39.

92. *Sermón que en el día primero de su celebridad, en la mui plausible fiesta de la ampliación de el Cruzero y reedificación del Templo de la milagrosa Santíssima Cruz de Piedra de la Ciudad de Querétaro* (Mexico: Francisco Rodríguez Lupercio, 1702), sponsored by Isidro Félix de Espinosa.

93. A different reading of the text is given by Serge Gruzinski, "Mutilated Memory: Reconstruction of the Past and the Mechanisms of Memory Among Seventeenth-Century Otomis," *History and Anthropology* 2 (1986), pp. 337–351.

94. Rubial García infers that the Muntáñez narrative was set down in writing in the late seventeenth century, and that it drew from earlier indigenous oral tradition, "Santiago y la cruz," pp. 42–43. Another possibility is that the text was created for the Franciscans from oral tradition and other sources in 1717.

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men," and a mass was celebrated for the Chichimecs, as promised. The text says that it was a miracle to find such excellent, multi-colored, sweet-smelling stones that fit together perfectly in the form of the cross. The author repeated that this cross itself was a miracle, but he made no mention of it growing or trembling, as De la Rea did.[95]

A streamlined story of origin and devotion, informed by Muntáñez's text, appeared in print in 1722. The author, Fr. Francisco Xavier de Santa Gertrudis, chronicler of the college, summarized the providential apparition of the cross and Santiago in the heat of the battle described by Muntáñez, elaborated on the search for the right stones, and placed the Querétaro cross into the wider context of the Christian cross as "glorious conqueror of the universe," alluding to various visions of the True Cross in battles for Christianity. He also mentioned several miraculous crosses and apparitions in New Spain. Taking a page from De la Rea, Santa Gertrudis highlighted among its miracles trembling movements that traced the sign of the cross "like a tree in the wind." America was, he added, "the land of the cross" and true "lodestone" of souls.

Other promotional writings followed before the end of the colonial period. In his discussion of miraculous images in Querétaro in 1739, Francisco Antonio Navarrete, S.J., turned first to the stone cross, marvelous because of its propensity to grow and the many miracles it had worked for devotees—so many that to count them would be like "counting the rays of the sun."[96] Isidro Félix de Espinoza included a chapter in praise of the miraculous stone cross of Querétaro in his history of the college published in 1746, although he suggested that the Christian Otomí conqueror was Hernando de Tapia and the miracles happened in 1531 rather than 1550;[97] the late eighteenth-century history of holy people and miraculous images in Mexico by José Díaz de la Vega, O.F.M., which circulated in manuscript copies, also devoted a chapter to the Querétaro cross, and concluded that "this is the most prodigious relic and the most estimable treasure with which Divine Providence enriched the Most Noble city of Querétaro."[98] José María Zeláa e Hidalgo's *Glorias de Querétaro* (1804) also described and

95. *Relación histórica de la Conquista de Querétaro*, pp. 139, 142, 143.

96. *Relación peregrina de la agua corriente* . . . [1739], facsimile ed. (Querétaro: Presidencia Municipal de Querétaro, 1998), pp. 17ff.

97. These two versions of the founding miracles—Tapia's, said to date from 1531, and Muntáñez's, said to date from 1550—are juxtaposed by Rubial García in "Santiago y la cruz," pp. 25–58. He attributes both to native traditions, but places their narrative formulation and promotion in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the hands of Franciscans of the Santa Cruz colegio.

98. Bancroft Library M-M 240, part 3, "Memorias piadosas de la nación indiana," 1782, pp. 68–84: "ésta es la más prodigiosa reliquia y el más estimable tesoro con que la divina Providencia quiso enriquecer a la Novilísima queretana ciudad," p. 83.

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praised the stone cross.[99] More construction projects at the site and other written references to devotion to this stone cross suggest that during the eighteenth century it enjoyed growing popularity, as well as increasing promotional activity. And while replicas of this cross were not reported elsewhere, the founding legends of two prodigious stone crosses in former Otomí communities in the nearby state of Guanajuato echo its story of early sixteenth-century battles between Chichimecs and Christian Otomíes (one took place on the hill of "San Grimal") and Chichimec surrender when a resplendent cross appeared in the sky.[100]

Chroniclers' accounts of the tradition of the green cross of Tepic, Nayarit, in western Mexico share with the cross of Huatulco a providential precolonial beginning: both were said to have been planted by one of Christ's apostles. In other respects, their histories are quite different.[101] Tepic's cross was a patch of unusual grass in the form of a cross about 40 feet long, with a 22-foot cross arm, said to remain green year round and to regenerate itself endlessly. The first brief mention of the discovery and fame of this cross, recorded in 1621 by Domingo Lázaro de Arregui, a priest born in Spain but long resident in the diocese of Guadalajara and most recently in the small town of Tepic, speaks of a young man driving his mules near Tepic in 1619. The animals suddenly halted and would not move further in the direction of the unseen cross, which the young man soon discovered. Later chronicles embellished the story. One added that the outline of the cross was caused by an ancient wooden cross having fallen on the ground and perpetually fertilizing it; others described the miracles associated with this cross. Antonio Tello, the mid seventeenth-century chronicler of the Franciscan province of Xalisco, located the cross one-quarter league (about a half mile) from Tepic and added that after the young man told everyone in Tepic about it, there was a rush of people to see for themselves and pray there, and they began to take bits of it for medicinal use.[102] The prolific Jesuit chronicler of miraculous images, Francisco de Florencia, picked up the story in

99. Zeláa, *Glorias*, pp. 41–44. Two unpublished sermons by members of the Colegio de la Santa Cruz at Querétaro in the early 1740s suggest that Franciscans there were already promoting the devotion and feast day of the Exaltation of the Cross, perhaps at the expense of the feast of the Invention of the Cross: untitled volume of 34 handwritten Mexican sermons and "pláticas religiosas" dating from the mid-eighteenth century, deaccessioned from the St. Francis Xavier College Library, New York City, and purchased by the University of Dayton Marian Library in 1970, fols. 4–10 (sermon preached by Fr. Tomás de Urive Larrea in 1741) and 11–14.

100. Phyllis M. Correa, "Otomí Rituals and Celebrations: Crosses, Ancestors, and Resurrection," *The Journal of American Folklore* 113:450 (Autumn 2000), pp. 436–450; Yolanda Lastra, Joel Sherzer, and Dina Sherzer, *Adoring the Saints: Fiestas in Central Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

101. The available documentation on this tradition is digested in Pedro López González, *Album histórico del ex-convento de la Cruz de Zacate*, 2nd. ed. (Tepic: Ayuntamiento de Tepic, 2000), and put to good use in Guillermo García Mar, "La Santísima Cruz de Tepic. Construcción, difusión, amplitud y permanencia en el occidente de la Nueva España, 1619–1812," M.A. thesis in History, Universidad de Guadalajara (2011).

102. *Crónica miscelánea de la Santa Provincia de Xalisco* (Mexico: Ed. Font, 1942), III, p. 45.

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his *Origen de dos célebres santuarios de la Nueva Galicia, Obispado de Guadalajara en la América septentrional,* published in 1694 (and republished in 1757 and 1766).[103] He added little to the narrative, but his publications circulated more widely than Arregui's or Tello's then-unpublished chronicles, and he included a visually striking engraving of the verdant cross in its landscape that included a set of purported footprints impressed in stone from a mountain above the neighboring town of Xalisco that were thought to have been made by Christ or one of his apostles.[104] Several runs of prints from this engraving circulated in western Mexico as devotion to the Tepic cross grew during the eighteenth century. The small shrine maintained at the site by Franciscans during the seventeenth century was later enlarged with a hospice of 10 cells to accommodate visitors, and more was written (although not published) about this cross, including the Jesuit Sigismundo Taraval's "El milagro más visible: o el milagro de los milagros más patentes. La Santíssima Cruz de Tepique" and Fernando Bustillo Varas y Gutiérrez's "Representación hecha al Rey Nuestro Señor Don Fernando Sexto, por los indios de la Nueva España sobre que Su Magestad les funde un colegio privativo a su nación" (ca. 1752).[105] Including the print

103. Mexico: Impr. de Juan Joseph Guillena Carrascoso, 1694, pp. 6–8.

104. In the mid-eighteenth-century, another Jesuit, Francisco Javier Alegre, added to the idea of a prior Christian evangelization when he wrote that there were precolonial crosses in the region and an ancient image of Christ carved into a local rock face: *Historia de la Compañía de Jesús en Nueva España, que estaba escribiendo el P. Francisco Javier Alegre al tiempo de su expulsión* (Mexico: Imprenta de J. M. Lara, 1841–1842), I, p. 201.

Beginning in the 1720s there is direct evidence of the verdant cross attracting attention outside its home area. In 1722 Santa Gertrudis referred to it in his devotional history of the stone cross of Querétaro, and in its December 1729 issue the *Gazeta de México* reported that the bishop of Guadalajara had made it a point to visit the shrine during his pastoral visit to Tepic, adding that the site was celebrated for its perennially green cross of grass in an arid spot, present even during the winter. León, *Bibliografía mexicana*, p. 154. García Mar suggests that the devotion was spreading with the encouragement of Bishop León Garabito from 1694, if not before. Bishop Gómez de Parada (r. 1736–1751) also promoted the devotion: García Mar, "La Santísima Cruz de Tepic," chapt. 3.

105. Taraval's text is known in a manuscript copy in the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, cited by López González, *Album*, pp. 72–73; it is also discussed in García Mar, "La Santísima Cruz de Tepic," chapt. 3. Francisco Xavier Alegre added a bit to the aura of crosses in the Tepic area in his *Historia de la Compañía de Jesús en Nueva España*, which was still in manuscript when he and other Jesuits left Spanish America in 1767. Speaking of Tepic as "famoso por el prodigio de la Santa Cruz que allí se venera," Alegre mentioned that in April each year beautiful sounds of a bell coming from the same mountain (Sierra de Chacala) where the face of Christ was located could be heard throughout the valley, Alegre, *Historia*, I, p. 201. The Bustillo manuscript is in the Bancroft Library, MSS 99/374m, fols. 48v-49r. Another then-unpublished mid eighteenth-century source, Francisco de Ajofrín, muffled the story of discovery in 1619, saying "there is no memory from the time this prodigy appeared." He also described the size and nature of the grassy plot: the grass was half a vara high (about 16 inches), 21 2/3 feet wide (8 1/8 varas), and 40 feet long (15 varas), with arms extending 12 1/3 feet (4 5/8 varas) on each side. The grass was unlike any that grew in the area and was always green even though the site was naturally arid. Like Bustillo, he stressed that much grass was taken away as relics, yet the cross somehow was never diminished. *Diario del viaje que hizo a la América,* I, pp. 220–221, 280.

Skepticism about the authenticity of this cross's miraculous greenery and regeneration surfaced in a 1770 treatise by a canon of the cathedral church in Guadalajara: Dr. Mateo José de Arteaga y Rincón Gallardo, discussed in García Mar, "La Santísima Cruz de Tepic," pp. 313, 320–322.

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from Florencia as a kind of talisman, Bustillo enlarged upon Arregui's basic story by focusing on the cross itself and its miraculous regeneration in spite of incessant harvesting by relic seekers:

> Faced with the vagaries of the weather, that wondrous grassy cross remains evergreen and beautiful even when the surrounding land is bone-dry. And it is so prolific that almost as soon as some of it is cut for relics—which happens every day and in great amount—the next day it is whole again. This is not an end to its wonders, for part way down the vertical member of the cross there is a hole like a wound corresponding to the one in Our Divine Lord's side, with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of whitish earth. Much of it is taken away for relics and medicine, yet it is always full. Even more marvelous, even though many attempts have been made to put a roof over the chapel that encloses [the cross], it has never lasted, . . . as if this wondrous sign wanted only the canopy of heaven.[106]

TWO CROSSES OF LOCAL FAME: TLAYACAPAN AND TEQUISQUIAPAN

A less-famous miraculous cross was investigated very soon after it reportedly came to life, before a neat summary account like those for the crosses of Querétaro, Huatulco, and Tepic could smooth over doubts and local interests.[107] It merits some attention as another kind of historical record of devotion as well as a late colonial example of a living cross. On May 3, 1728, the parish priest of Tlayacapan, Morelos, about 40 miles east of Cuernavaca, wrote to the archbishop of Mexico with sensational news.[108] The day before—that is, the eve of the feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross—parishioners in the Tepetenchi neighborhood urged him to come see something amazing. As they were cleaning and decorating a large stone-and-mortar roadside cross, it began to shake.[109] The priest reported that from about 2:30 that afternoon until vespers, he and many others witnessed this marvel. The archbishop immediately dispatched the ecclesiastical judge (*juez eclesiástico*) of Chalco to investigate and, if

106. Bancroft MSS 99/374m, fol. 48v.

107. AGN Clero Regular y Secular 215 exp. 29; University of Texas, Latin American Library, García Collection, folders 74, 75. Another acclaimed late-colonial cross that led to a different kind of early investigation and report and a very different outcome is the Cruz de Huaquechula in 1806, discussed in Taylor, *Shrines and Miraculous Images*, pp. 49–50. Enthusiastic devotion to this cross was spreading far beyond the town, but there was nothing particularly unusual about the image itself other than that no one seemed to know how it came to be there. And the times had changed. Regalist bishops in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were reluctant to endorse new shrines and miraculous images, and quicker to contain what Durkheim called "the contagiousness of the sacred" in the name of episcopal authority and decorous faith.

108. AGN Clero Regular y Secular 215 exp. 29, and University of Texas, Latin American Library, García Collection folders 74, 75. The AGN case is summarized with a different purpose by Edward Osowski, "Passion Miracles and Indigenous Historical Memory in New Spain," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 88:4 (2008), pp. 607–638.

109. The cross was said to be 2 3/4 varas tall—about 7 1/2 feet.

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possible, discreetly transfer the cross to the parish church. Upon arrival, the judge recognized that he would not be able to take possession of the cross without an uproar when a crowd of people—Indians, Spaniards, and other non-Indians—met him at a neighborhood chapel where the cross was being guarded around the clock. In the company of the district governor, the resident Augustinian friars, and local Indians he went to the place where the cross had been, then adjourned to the friary to begin to inform himself about the reported marvel and why the cross had been moved.

A few days later, the judge forwarded to the archbishop a petition by five Indian elders. The petitioners earnestly explained that the cross had been moved to the chapel as a place for proper veneration, at least until the pedestal at the original location was rebuilt. The villagers were becoming disconsolate, the elders said, because the cross was "of our very being" (*"por ser de nuestra naturaleza"*) and they "feared being deprived of what we consider an inestimable relic to ward off storms and what lurks outside after dark." They added that the movements of this marvelous cross had renewed their faith, and they were eager to build a fitting chapel on the spot and sponsor an annual fiesta on its May 3 feast day in order to "celebrate the triumph of our redemption," and "promote devotion in this *barrio* and in the whole community . . . as a witness to our conversion." They shrewdly observed that the famous shrines to the images of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Our Lady of los Remedios had been built on the sites of the Virgin's apparitions, not moved elsewhere.[110]

Meanwhile, the judge proceeded with his investigation, interviewing the parish priest and 13 other Spaniards living in the community. He also received an inspection report from the local royal governor.[111] Everyone testified to having seen the cross move for the better part of three days—shaking back and forth, then side to side, as if signing the cross. They shared the opinion that the people of Tepetenchi were deeply moved by this portent and eager to build a chapel on the spot. Their testimony effectively confirmed everything the elders had said in their petition.[112] And the warden of the Augustinian convent offered an

110. AGN Clero Regular y Secular 215 exp. 29.

111. The *teniente general del partido,* appointed by the *alcalde mayor.*

112. According to the pastoral visit records of the Archdiocese of Mexico, the "Spaniards" of Tlayacapan had their own confraternity dedicated to the Holy Cross as early as 1716; it was still in place in 1757. This pattern of popular beliefs and practices being widely shared across classes and ethnic groups in Tlayacapan is taken up in Ingham, *Mary, Michael & Lucifer,* p. 38. In 1743, about 10 percent of Tlayacapan's families were Spaniards and mestizos. The social gulf between them and the majority Indian population was reduced by the fact that few of the non-Indians were large landowners. Many were shopkeepers and artisans, and most of those among them who farmed and raised livestock were renters. They had an interest in protecting village lands, and although it was in their interest to perpetuate ethnic distinctions, they were rarely in open conflict with their Indian neighbors.

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acceptable explanation for why he had ordered the removal of the cross and had the pedestal unearthed. He said the site needed to be excavated in order to determine whether there was some natural or diabolical cause for the movement—whether some individuals had hidden under the pedestal and manipulated the cross, as had happened at Atlixtac (near Iguala, Guerrero, southwest of Tlayacapan); whether there was a cavity underneath the pedestal that might be causing the ground to shift and the cross to move; or whether idols were hidden there.

Pleased with his forensic methods, the district governor submitted a surprisingly favorable report. When he and two acquaintances arrived at the scene on the afternoon of May 2 a crowd had gathered, speaking out all at once about the holy cross's movements. Ordering everyone back from the pedestal so he could see for himself, he touched the arms of the cross with a branch and could see definite movement from time to time—forward and back, side to side. He then ordered a ladder brought to the pedestal so he could climb up for a closer inspection. At that point, the movement of the cross became so violent he thought it would fall over. Everyone—*"toda la gente deste numeroso pueblo de todas calidades y de ambos sexos"*—came closer to see it move. He and all the witnesses concluded that there was no natural explanation for the cross's movements. The case record ends with the vicar general's judgment on August 2, 1728, that the movement of this cross was a genuine miracle—that the ground underneath the pedestal was solid and that many people had seen the cross move. "Considering that [this cross] can be a most efficacious instrument of yet greater wonders," wrote his legal adviser, it should be declared miraculous and kept in the neighborhood chapel for the time being.

Five months later Mexico City's monthly newspaper, the *Gazeta de México*, reported that devotion to the cross of Tepetenchi was on the rise. The cornerstone of a chapel to house the cross at its original site was placed on Christmas day with all the proper licenses, sponsored by the local royal governor who had made the fulsome endorsement the previous May, and the town's 16 barrios promised to support the building project.[113] Eight years later another item in the *Gazeta de México* announced that a glorious procession through Tlayacapan had taken place on May 28, 1737, to celebrate completion of one of the vaulted sections of the chapel. The festivities were meant to elicit more donations to finally finish the chapel. As the reporter put it, "it is hoped that the devotion of

Other examples of multiethnic devotion to miraculous crosses and figures of Christ for the Mixteca Baja of Oaxaca in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are mentioned in Smith, "'En el nombre de Dios,'" chapts. 1 and 2.

113. *Gazeta de México,* January 1729, in León, *Bibliografía mexicana*, p. 91.

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the townspeople and neighbors will carry the project to completion."[114] Apparently it eventually did, or so the present-day chapel of Santa Cruz de Altica with its plain stone cross at the altar and May 3 feast day would suggest.[115]

As close in time as this record of Tepetenchi's trembling cross is to the events it describes, and as welcome as the local voices in it are, many of the questions we would want to ask of its devotees and promoters go unanswered. How was the cross remembered and celebrated? How was the devotion organized and how did it develop after May 1728? What stories of divine presence and favor were told, by whom and when?[116] To suggest that recent practices and memories can be projected back in time as if the past were little more than an earlier version of the present is a doubtful proposition, but ethnographies and oral histories that are not tailored to demonstrate continuities between the present and the precolonial or colonial past sometimes suggest meanings of devotion or connections and developments that historians can only guess at otherwise. For this subject of devotion to the True Cross and particular crosses, Bibiana Ugalde Mendoza's *Xitaces con sentimiento y tradición: historia del culto a la cruz verde de Tequisquiapan en la voz de un pueblo creyente* is a welcome source.[117] In 1995 and 1996, the author surveyed more than 100 families and interviewed 38 adults from seven settlements in and near Tequisquiapan, Querétaro, who had jointly participated in the feasts of the Holy Cross there for many years.[118] Her informants ranged in age from 35 to 97, more than half of them over 70. Most

114. "se espera finalize la devoción de los vecinos y comarcanos," reported the article; *Gazeta de México* for May 1737 (in León, *Bibliografía mexicana,* p. 698). This cross and its wondrous movement also merited mention by the author of the *relación geográfica* for the Chalco Tlalmanalco district in 1743, who summarized the judicial record in two paragraphs. Francisco de Solano, ed., *Relaciones geográficas . . . 1743,* I, p. 46.

115. Tlayacapan is famous for its many neighborhood "chapels," some of them substantial little churches. The most detailed study of them is by Claudio Favier Ordendáin, *Ruinas de utopia: San Juan Tlayacapan; espacio y tiempo en el encuentro . . .* (Cuernavaca, Mor.: Gobierno del Estado, 1998). In addition to the sixteenth-century Augustinian church, there are reported to be 26 chapels, 18 of them still in use. Judging by Favier Ordendáin's discussion, no barrio chapel today is called Santa Ysabel, nor is Tepetenchi the name of a barrio.

116. Ingham's *Mary, Michael & Lucifer* offers a valuable engagement with issues of folk religion and how religious symbols and meanings still pervade social relations in Tlayacapan, but he sheds little light on my questions or barrio-level devotions. He notices in passing (p. 103) that crosses in churches, chapels, homes, and fields protected against the ever-present Devil, but focuses mainly on Carnival and Holy Week observances, in community-wide terms.

117. Bibiana Ugalde Mendoza, *Xitaces con sentimiento y tradición: historia del culto a la cruz verde de Tequisquiapan en la voz de un pueblo creyente* (Querétaro: Hear Taller Gráfico, 1997). The ethnographic literature on miraculous crosses is scattered, but considerable. For recent studies of former Otomí communities in Guanajuato, see Correa, "Otomí Rituals and Celebrations"; Elizabeth H. LeFlore, "The Force of Devotion: Performing a Transnational Spirituality," Ph.D. dissertation in Anthropology, University of Texas at Austin (2009); and Lastra, Sherzer, and Sherzer, *Adoring the Saints.* Here again, May 3 is the principal feast day in these places, and hilltop crosses are the focal point.

118. Barrio San Juan, Barrio Magdalena, Barrio El Cerrito, Santa Rosa Xajay, San Francisco Hidalgo, San Joaquín, and Maguey Verde. Other communities that participated in the fiesta cycle are mentioned. Informants from the barrio of San Juan predominate in Ugalde Mendoza's group of informants.

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had helped to sponsor the devotions and participated in the processions and dances or supplied the fireworks and refreshments.

Their stories about the devotion and special rites revolved around a marvelous tree cross and celebrations of the Holy Cross going back to the 1770s. Most informants spoke of an oak tree in the shape of a cross appearing on the Cerro Grande, a hill above the town. Local people went to see the cross and pray, and the site became known as Cruz Verde, the living cross. But the rancher who owned the hill eventually closed the site to visitors, and his foreman cut down the tree and dragged it into town as far as the San Juan barrio where it either became too heavy to move further, or his horse died and he abandoned his burden, or he was thrown from his horse and died on the spot. Several informants from San Juan emphasized that however the cross came to rest there, it was a sign that it "wanted this place for its chapel." Everyone who commented on the provenance of various crosses associated with this devotion agreed that San Juan has the largest piece of the famous tree cross. The San Juanino informants call theirs "the original and principal cross,"[119] but they acknowledged that wood from the original cross was given to two other communities for smaller crosses. Some of the informants spoke of particular miracles associated with these crosses. Others added a detail or two not mentioned by anyone else—that the first cuts on the tree healed overnight, for instance, or that the sculpted cherubs accompanying the true cross in processions turn pale when they are angry.

No official origin story for this natural cross has been published or accepted in a way that silences local variations. With their proprietary claims to being the keepers of the main cross and its chapel, people of San Juan were especially eager to tell the author about their leading role in the history of the devotion, while devotees from other places sometimes expressed a more theological interest in purification rites like the cleaning of the chapel and cherubim or how the bleeding tree dragged into town paralleled Christ's Passion, and how the tree cross triumphed in the end. Some informants perceived changes in the devotion and lamented recent disrespect for the Holy Cross among young people who attended just to clown around.

But for all their differences in perspective, these devotees of Tequisquiapan's green cross and participants in the May and September festivals never lost sight of place in the story. Despite San Juan's claim to have the largest piece of the original cross, people from other communities considered their local cross to be

119. Not surprisingly, the informants from San Juan had the most elaborate stories to tell about the legendary beginnings, among them members of the local Bárcenas family coming out as the overseer dragged the cross past their house, crying "Ahí va mi papacito," and pleading with him to leave it with them.

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the most important relic.[120] And the hilltop site of the apparition has been as important to the devotion and belief in the regeneration of divine presence and favor as whether or not they possess a piece, large or small, of the celebrated tree cross. Another thread in the informants' words also returns to place: the original cross was natural, a living cross, and it appeared right here.

CONCLUSION

The personal and collective stories of the Green Cross of Tequisquiapan recall for one place in the recent past the main patterns of devotion to the cross that I have described for the colonial period. Here is the deep appeal of crosses in themselves, alive with the sacred, many of them natural crosses. May 3 remains the main Day of the Holy Cross in Tequisquiapan and in much of Mexico, despite the official promotion of September 14. And this is not just a history of native peoples and early mendicant missionaries. All kinds of people participated in the devotion during the colonial period, not just those identified as "Spaniards" and "Indians." In the long run, it was more important to the devotional history of particular crosses where you were from than what ethnicity you claimed or accepted, which leads to the most basic shared pattern of all—that the history of miraculous crosses is especially about presence in place, in a localizing way. The divine was understood to be present in association with a cross in its home setting.

None of these crosses, even the most celebrated, became the site of a great regional or national shrine. As at Tequisquiapan, the traditions called attention to the place of origin or where the cross chose to remain. And that is where it was celebrated. The cross of Tequisquiapan sprang from that soil and is nestled in a sacred landscape there, much as the sixteenth-century crosses planted at the urging of the early missionaries marked a protected landscape and the cruciform symbol described a local vision of the architecture of the cosmos, with "the people" and their settlement at the navel of a universe that spreads out in the cardinal directions, each with a great tree of life supporting it. These historical patterns, anchored in place as they are, may help to explain why the long-standing devotion to particular crosses in Mexico has not translated to the faith practices of Mexicans in the United States as readily as have more portable devotions to the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos, or the Santo Niño de Atocha.

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120. Donancio González from Santa Rosa Xajay averred that while San Juan's cross is the main one (*"la principal"*), theirs is the most important to them: "nosotros tratamos como principal la que tenemos, aunque sea una peregrina." Ugalde Mendoza, *Xitaces*, pp. 69–70.

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