



Historical Importance of Certain Sculptures of the Passion of Christ from the Church of San Francisco de la Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción



Fernando Urquzú

Introducción

To build a historiographical narrative that highlights the material and immaterial value represented by certain sculptures of the Passion of Christ in our country's National Heritage is a somewhat challenging task. This is due to the lack of a General History of Art that scientifically links the works to their role in the society that created them, which is partly the result of the limited interest in our society in topics so valuable to the recovery of our collective memory.

On the other hand, there is a serious blockade of the Liberal History supported in our country since the Liberal Reform of 1871, which deliberately distorts the ideological role of the Catholic precepts in the formation of the national ideology, to which is added the materialistic version that leaves in second place the intellectual aspect of the works, which gives as a corollary that of our sculptures and ecclesiastical works of art, there are many versions of oral tradition based on non-existent data and few serious investigations.

The gathering of data is made difficult by the lack of access to them, as is the case with the waiting period that the Francisco de Paula García Peláez Archdiocesan Archive now suffers and the disappearance of documents due to natural catastrophes such as the great earthquakes that have devastated our country, which, together with the looting of the Church by locals and

outsiders, makes the research process more difficult.

Despite these counterproductive factors, the academic experience and the support for this type of topic where the bases of national unity are founded, the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, counts on the Center of Folkloric Studies that allows to join efforts that conjugate the experience and the academic preparation that would enable to present this writing based on scientific information, destined to prove the importance of some of the sculptures of the Passion of Christ of the Church of San Francisco in the city ideology from where it was projected to a wide sector of the country, strengthening the bases of a first ideological identity of religious character that later was transformed in base of the national identity.

The Organization of The Church and The Emergence of The First Confraternities in The City of Santiago de Guatemala

The first representative of the Catholic Church arrived in Guatemala with the Spanish invasion that began at the end of 1523. This was a priest named Juan Godínez, the chaplain of the troops, who was joined by Licenciado Francisco Marroquín, a Licentiate of Laws. In 1527, at the request of Fray Juan de Zumárraga in New Spain¹, both priests were appointed as joint parish priests, with shared duties over the Parish of Santiago de Guatemala.

The parish, initially operating in the forming kingdom, was elevated to the status of a cathedral on December 18, 1534, by a papal bull from Pope Paul II, becoming a suffragan diocese of Seville. Francisco Marroquín², closely associated with Pedro de Alvarado and the conquistadors, was appointed as bishop. This elevation symbolized the recognition of the first

¹Agustín Estrada Monroy. *Datos para la Historia de la Iglesia en Guatemala*, Vol. 1. Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, 1973, pp. 43-44.

² Ibid.

Spanish settlement, which was thus transformed from a town into a city.

This recognition further aligned the local power groups with those from the Iberian Peninsula and New Spain, who promptly initiated the formal transfer of Spanish institutions and laws, as well as customs and lifestyles. Spanish society emerged as the dominant group, while indigenous people were relegated to servitude, and stripped of all rights.

In this context, as part of the institutional transfer, the first Spanish brotherhoods were formed under the supervision of Bishop Marroquín, a preacher of the San Francisco Order. The Brotherhood of the Immaculate Conception (Inmaculada Concepción), recorded in several city council records starting on November 27, 1527, and the Brotherhood of the Santa Veracruz, founded on March 9, 1533, were among the first³.

The recognition of these institutions by the Church with the approval of the State implied permission to collect voluntary donations from the faithful and devotees of these advocations, who, through pious works, would reach Eternal Glory. Notably, the Immaculate Conception was one of Spain's patronal advocations, while The Cross symbolized the core of Christianity. This situation implicitly reinforced traditional gender roles, associating female virtues with the Virgin Mary and male ideals with Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

The growing influx of Spaniards to the kingdom also led to the expansion of indigenous enslavement by private individuals, necessitating a stronger presence of religious orders. In 1536, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas reopened the Dominican convent, joining Marroquín in studying indigenous customs and languages to prove their capacity to adopt Christianity. The Franciscan convent was reinforced in 1540 with the arrival of five members from Spain⁴. According to Domingo Juarros, the Brotherhood of Nuestra Señora del Rosario was established on November 1, 1559, by order of Bishop

Marroquín, an event that helps us understand a shared effort between Franciscans and Dominicans, rather than the rivalry suggested by some authors. This collaboration is reflected in artworks, such as the one referenced in Illustration 1, which depicts their shared commitment to spreading the Holy Gospel.

This period of material and spiritual growth in the second settlement of the former capital was interrupted by a major disaster on September 11, 1541, when a landslide devastated the area. This led to the capital's third relocation to the Panchoy Valley, now known as Antigua, Guatemala.

During this initial phase in the history of the Catholic Church in the former kingdom, we see the establishment of the first formal brotherhood devoted to the Holy Cross, an element of Christ's Passion. The Holy Cross was honored in three key celebrations on the Catholic ritual calendar: The Feast of the Holy Cross on May 3, commemorating St. Helena's finding of the True Cross; the Adoration of the Cross on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, marking Christ's sacrificial death on the Roman instrument of crucifixion that granted salvation from eternal death; and the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14, dedicated to contemplating the Sorrowful Mysteries depicted in the Stations of the Cross and the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin, as recounted in the Holy Rosary.

Teaching and reiterating the religious principles of this brotherhood likely required various relics, such as the Ignium Crucis, as well as sculptures and paintings of Jesus, the Blessed

³ Domingo Juarros. *Compendio de la Historia del Reino de Guatemala. 1500-1800*. Editorial Piedra Santa, Guatemala, 1981, p. 113.

⁴ Annis Verle Lincoln. *La arquitectura de la Antigua Guatemala 1543-1773*. Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 1968, p. 2.



Virgin, and other saints and figures integral to each religious mystery commemorated on the Catholic liturgical calendar. However, only written references from this early period have survived, serving as a preamble to the tangible works of art that we will fully identify through further analysis.

The First Assets of the Brotherhood of the Cross

The first Christian procession in the former kingdom of Guatemala was established by Bishop Marroquín on September 9, 1542, to commemorate the destruction of Santiago on September 11, the previous year. However, it was not held that year due to the incomplete relocation of the city⁵.

During this time, the Spanish Crown issued the “*Barcelona Ordinances or New Laws*” (*Ordenanzas de Barcelona o Leyes Nuevas*), while the political organization of the kingdoms took on a hierarchical form with two Viceroyalties, New Spain and Peru, followed by the Captaincies General. Under this new political structure, native villages were formed, composed of Indigenous people freed from slavery by the Crown and the Catholic Church from private ownership. These Indigenous people became tributary vassals, under the spiritual care of the Religious Orders.

At that time, only the Franciscans and Dominicans operated in the emerging Guatemalan kingdom. Under the guidance of preachers Francisco Marroquín and Bartolomé de las Casas, they began studies to launch *the first local Christian Crusade (Primera Cruzada Cristiana Local)*, which aimed to incorporate Indigenous peoples into Catholicism while maintaining the organization of religious worship introduced from the major Spanish cities.

In support of this mission, the Cathedral of New Spain was elevated to an Archdiocese, separated from the Cathedral of Seville, and the Bishopric of Guatemala came under its jurisdiction. Within this new canonical legal framework, Pedro Moya de Contreras,

Archbishop of Mexico, quickly convened the First Mexican Council in 1545 to establish guidelines for religious worship among both the Spanish and Indigenous cultures within his diocese.

This circumstance explains more than evidently the beautiful collections of art from New Spain, which came to our country as a reflection of this council, which was joined by two others and received the approval of the Holy See in 1589, made to unify the ideas regarding Christian doctrine, being its decisions above the *Council of Trent (Concilio de Trento)*, because it served a didactic of the Gospel proper to the area both in the Spanish culture and in the Indigenous culture.

In this organizational structure, the Nicaraguan bishopric, which held canonical jurisdiction over Costa Rica, was excluded and transferred to the Archdiocese of Lima, Peru, despite remaining politically under the Captaincy General of the Kingdom of Guatemala. This context helps clarify certain variations in the Franciscan religious practices, such as the devotion to the Blood of Christ, observed in the twentieth century.

Once the methods for spreading the Gospel were established, the convents were reinforced to train priests who would serve the indigenous villages, initially assigned to the Franciscans and Dominicans present in the kingdom.

Thus, the Franciscans took charge of the western part of the new kingdom, known as the highlands, covering the present-day departments of Suchitepéquez, Retalhuleu, Chimaltenango, Sololá, Totonicapán, and Quetzaltenango, while the Dominicans expanded



⁵ J. Joaquín Pardo. *Efemérides de la Antigua Guatemala 1541-1779*, Serviprensa Centroamericana, Guatemala, 1984, p. 3.

northward into the regions of Verapaz and Quiché. It is important to note that the kingdom's previous boundaries were more extensive, allowing both Franciscans and Dominicans to maintain convents in present-day Honduras and El Salvador. The Dominican convent was under the central headquarters in Ciudad Real de Chiapas, now in Mexico.

By 1547, Francisco Ximénez noted the observance of Holy Week in the province of Chiapas, indicating the regular presence of brotherhoods in towns where a sufficient Spanish population had begun to introduce their customs and beliefs to the former indigenous villages⁶. This marked the fulfillment of the first ideological crusade in the kingdom, aimed at universalizing these ideas throughout society.

Following this logical sequence, a key detail relevant to our topic emerges. On March 12, 1552, Fray Juan de Mancilla of the Franciscan Order granted permission to the Brotherhood of the Santa Veracruz to establish a chapel within the body of the San Francisco Church⁷. Possessing a chapel within a church conferred a significant financial advantage, as it allowed the sale and rental of burial niches, as well as the right to collect chaplaincy fees (including fees, rents, and other legacies left by relatives and devotees of this devotion to fund prayers for the eternal rest of their souls and to attain Eternal Glory).

It is worth recalling that this was a Spanish brotherhood generally composed of royal officials, prominent merchants, landowners, or descendants of the conquistadors, who possessed considerable wealth and spared no expense in their donations to belong to it, in their burial within its chapel, or in their efforts to secure their souls' salvation through substantial postmortem donations.

This revenue generation was immediately reflected in the commissioning of a sumptuous altarpiece for the chapel, centered on the tabernacle. Burial niches were priced according to their proximity to this sacred site, reserved for

members, benefactors, and officials of the brotherhood. Unfortunately, no complete chapel or altarpiece from this devotion has survived in the country, but we can envision it by considering the religious festivals overseen by the brotherhood, such as the Feast of the Holy Cross, commemorating the search and discovery of this sacred relic, likely featuring a statue or painting of Saint Helena. The Adoration of the Holy Cross celebrates the institution of the Cross as Christ's throne, symbolizing His sacrifice and resurrection, which involves an *Ignium Crucis*, a symbolic artifact of the Cross's creation for the crucifixion of Our Lord. This relic would remain in vigil on Maundy Thursday night and in adoration on Good Friday, as brotherhood members took part in various activities and special ceremonies like the Crucifixion, the Descent, and the Holy Burial. On Holy Saturday, they observed the Visitation of the Virgin to the Tomb and held a vigil until the first hour of Easter Sunday, commemorating the Resurrection. These rituals also required a specially crafted Cross and a sculpture of Christ in Penitence with movable joints at the arms, legs, and head to complete the reenactment, enriched with statues of the Blessed Virgin, Saint John, Mary Magdalene, and other figures from the Gospel involved in Christ's suffering, death, burial, and resurrection. The Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross required statues and paintings to aid in the contemplation of the sorrowful mysteries of Christ's life, passion, and death, as well as the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady. For meditation on these mysteries, additional chapels, like the Stations of the Cross in the city and the Church of El Calvario, housed numerous artworks with an educational function, intended to guide the faithful.

⁶ Francisco Ximénez. *Crónica de la Provincia de Chiapas y Guatemala*.

⁷ Joaquín Pardo. Op. Cit., p. 7.



To facilitate meditation on the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin, several churches were dedicated to this devotion. Among them was Santa Clara, with seven stucco angels on its facade representing these Sorrows, as well as the Chapel of Virgen de los Dolores de Cerro, where this iconography is also evident, along with the Dolores de Manchén in Antigua Guatemala.

Since the Brotherhood of the Veracruz of Santiago consisted of Spaniards and was directly associated with the Passion of Christ, it was one of the first to acquire educational artistic elements essential for conveying its religious messages. They spared no expense after obtaining the right to establish a chapel within the main body of the San Francisco Church.

This circumstance should not lead us to assume it was the only brotherhood dedicated to the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, as by 1559, the Rosario Brotherhood in Santo Domingo was also active, formed by wealthy Spaniards, and, in Guatemala, primarily composed of royal officials. The main devotion of this Brotherhood was to Our Lady of the Rosary, which included the recitation of the Holy Rosary (*Nuestra Señora del Rosario*), a prayer instrument made up of strings of beads divided into five groups of ten, designed to keep count of the "Mysteries" and the prayers of the Our Father and Hail Mary. Through this practice, they contemplated and recited the "Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious Mysteries," the Dominican form of commemorating the Life, Passion, and Death of Christ. For this reason, in this early period, it was this brotherhood that managed the worship of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ in another church in the city, with ceremonies and didactic elements, such as paintings and sculptures like those used by the Franciscans, aimed at teaching the Gospel.

This shared mission in teaching Catholic doctrine led to the emergence of new brotherhoods dedicated to the worship of Christ's Passion. During Lent and Holy Week, other

brotherhoods, not exclusively focused on the Passion, also joined in these observances.

The Splendor of the Cult of the Passion of Christ in the Order of Preachers of San Francisco

In our country, there are very few elements available to accurately reconstruct the rituals and processions that have been practiced since the 16th century. However, fragments of an intricate puzzle remain, which can be pieced together if enough evidence and a research corpus are available to organize and explain these ceremonies and their evolution up to the present.

To gain insight into the original splendor of the 16th-century Franciscan cult, let us begin by examining the most substantial visual record of processions from this region: the mural paintings of the Church of San Miguel Arcángel in Huejotzingo, Puebla, Mexico (Illustration 3). To understand their significance, it is helpful to reference commentary from Mexican experts Cecilia Vásquez Ahumada and Margarita Piña Loredó, which sheds light on their relevance based on existing material evidence in our country.

The spiritual conquest of New Spain formally began in 1524 with the arrival of the Franciscan mendicant order and its "Twelve Apostles," who divided into four groups to establish monasteries in the provinces of Mexico, Texcoco, Tlaxcala, and Huejotzingo.

Among these, the convent of San Miguel Huejotzingo distinguished itself as the first site where the sacraments of baptism, communion, and marriage were administered in New Spain.

One of the most effective evangelization strategies, as chroniclers described, was the use of paintings on canvas and murals within religious buildings, appealing to the Indigenous people's appreciation for visual representations.

Mural painting in the interior of the church

As previously mentioned, one of the methods used to spread the new faith was the establishment of religious associations, or

confraternities, which were groups of lay people organized around the veneration of an image. These groups promoted the formation of new neighborhood identities and incorporated Indigenous people into Christian doctrines through visual imagery and dramatic rituals.

The confraternities, in addition to being responsible for the decoration of the posas chapels, where the responsories were sung, actively participated in devotional practices.

By the late 16th century, it was known that New Spain had a large number of confraternities. Documents from Huejotzingo provide historical evidence of these organizations and their practices of penitential processions and dramatic representations of the Passion. The murals in the church of San Miguel Huejotzingo are a testament to this.

This pictorial work, displayed on the church's north and south walls, survived for many years under thick layers of lime until restoration work in 1980 brought them to light. These polychrome murals, dating back to the late 16th century, depict a penitential procession and a Holy Week ritual. It appears that these murals were created by Indigenous people under the guidance of friars.

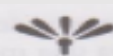
The mural on the south wall depicts a penitential procession made up of black- and white-hooded figures, many of them flagellants atoning for their sins. It is known that there were only three or four friars in Huejotzingo, who appeared in the central row, accompanying the confraternity's leaders. The penitents in the upper and lower rows wear Franciscan cords around their waists. Both groups are accompanied by children who, according to chroniclers, also practiced self-mortification. The hooded figures in black, who carry symbols of the Passion of Christ—such as the reed, nails, tunic, dice, coins, and so on—are followed by a group carrying carved sculptures of a dead Christ flanked by the thieves Dismas and Gestas, with hooded penitents surrounding him.

The shields of the five wounds carried by the penitents suggest that this is the confraternity of the Vera Cruz, an institution of Franciscan origin identified from Seville with the colors green, white, and ochre. Documentary evidence provides an inventory of the objects of this confraternity, which match those illustrated. The program begins with the mural where the four Franciscans lower the Christ from the Cross. Archaeological remains have shown that there once was a space in front of the porziuncola door, which was occupied by an open chapel with three arches where the ritual of the descent of Christ was probably performed, a sculpture with hinges that allowed it to be positioned for the next scene, the Holy Burial. This idea is reinforced by the fact that the porziuncola door is decorated with passion-related elements and is topped with floral ornamentation, featuring 52 rosettes. The ritual continued with the introduction of Christ into the church, followed by friars, leaders of the confraternity, and penitents. There they lined up, as illustrated in the murals, and made the first of the five stops in this procession to deposit the body of Christ on the main altar. In this place, a sermon was delivered, and according to the documents of the confraternity, the members were asked to cooperate with a 'gift for the priest'.

The procession left through the atrial door and began its route through the posas chapels; in each one of them, the body of Christ was placed, in the same way as in the celebration of Corpus Christi.

At the end of the ritual, the body of Christ was deposited inside the cloister.

The processional route, the chronicle of the murals, the architecture of the spaces of the church, the chapels, and the atrium, are all part of a logical iconographic program, which shows the importance of the rituals of Holy Week⁸.



⁸ Cecilia Vásquez Ahumada and Margarita Piña Loredó. *Pintura mural de la iglesia de San Miguel Arcángel Huejotzingo, Puebla*, Informative pamphlet. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, CONACULTA, INAH, México, 2000.

The careful analysis of the information should be considered starting from the concept of ideological unity proposed by the Catholic Church in its organization, which is based on uniformity in the rituals of local churches. In this specific case, they were dictated by the Mexican Council, whose local significance was still above the Council of Trent, which encompassed the Universal Church and respected the conditions of worship of each region, described and illustrated to approach and prove our first contribution to this historiographic discourse.

The splendor of the 16th-century Franciscan ceremonial in the Church of San Francisco in the city of Santiago was quite like the one described in this text because we have sufficient material scientific evidence to prove it, which we will quote in order for its correct interpretation.

The organization of 16th-century Franciscan churches had a similar layout in the area of New Spain and Guatemala, which included: The atrium cross, the use of posas chapels, open chapels, a church, and a cloister for the convent. In both, the Divine worship was organized in an analogous way, coinciding with the existence of the Confraternity of the Vera Cruz as the main layarm of the priests to support the worship of the Passion of Christ.

The first material evidence would become the use of a similar anagram represented by The Five Wounds of Christ, present in the main cloister and interior chapels of the convent of San Francisco in Antigua Guatemala, now in ruins. However, the south corridor still has two chapels in which the vaults still display four sculptures in each, carrying the insignia of the Passion, bringing us closer to the idea of an interior procession to the convent where the Holy Burial rested. These angel sculptures wear femoral tunics similar to those of the posas chapels in Huejotzingo.

The passage of this anagram from the Renaissance and Baroque stucco sculptures of the convent of San Francisco de la Antigua to the

church of the same invocation in Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción can be located in the south transept, above a door on the East side, which connects to a small chapel that must have belonged to the same brotherhood, demonstrating the continuation of the cult and ceremonies. On its counterpart, in the right transept, there is in the same place a shield of the Holy Sepulcher derived from the previous one, which connects the brotherhood of the Vera Cruz directly with the Commemoration of the Adoration of the Cross. It included the ceremonial of the Velación del Ignium Crucis, and the prayer of the Via Crucis, which was done with a sculpture of Jesus Nazarene. Also, the ceremony of the Crucifixion, Sermon, Descent, and procession of the Holy Burial was performed with a Christ of the Penitence, which ended in this chapel where the Holy Sepulcher was located and where other Holy Week ceremonies took place, such as the visit of the Virgin of Solitude and the proclamation of the Resurrection and Easter Sunday Florida, in which other brotherhoods existing in the church also participated.

Material evidence that also supports the life of this brotherhood from the XVI to the XXI centuries is a standard bearer from the XIX century, where the anagram of The Five Wounds, which identifies the brotherhood of the Vera Cruz, is carved, represented similarly to the plasterwork shield of the South transept. This evidence testifies to the continued splendor of the Franciscan cult until the Liberal Reform of 1871.

It is convenient to bring to account the existing agreements between the Orders of Religious of San Francisco and Santo Domingo, which state: "The competition that took place with the Fathers of San Francisco in the year 1595 was resolved so that the descent would be done at the convent of N.P. S. Francisco and they would take out the procession at three in the afternoon, only through the atrium, and ours (Santo Domingo) would go out as it had always gone out through the streets of Guatemala⁹.

This reference suggests that the Franciscan cult was undermined, but we must keep in mind that these agreements were made to obtain the royal patronage of the commemorations, that is, that they were paid for by the local city council because the king was the patron or sponsor of the Church and therefore, through his local governments, he financed some ceremonies that had to be attended by the local authorities. In this case, the religious Orders simply divided the sponsorship of the Ceremonial of the Adoration of the Cross (*Adoración de la Cruz*), allocating the Descent from the Cross to the Franciscans and the Holy Burial of Christ to the Dominicans.

This can be seen as an undermining of the Franciscan cult to the extent that in the 20th and 21st centuries, external manifestations of faith became more important than internal ones. This shift suggests a decrease in the splendor of the Adoration of the Cross ceremony, which continued in San Francisco with considerable significance, likely behind closed doors. This was especially the case when the church faced direct clashes with the liberal governments of Justo Rufino Barrios and Manuel Lisandro Barillas, who attacked it due to its strategic position on what was then Calle Real, now Sexta Avenida, a prime area of commercial traffic. We must also remember that its properties included numerous lots, such as the Via Crucis chapels in that sector, which were expropriated.

However, the ideological positioning of the Cofradía de la Vera Cruz must have been so prominent that in the reorganization of the Catholic Church in Guatemala at the end of the 19th century, led by Archbishop Julián Raymundo Jacinto y Riveiro, the Adoration of the Cross ceremony in San Francisco was included as an important part of the reorganization of Lenten and Holy Week commemorations¹⁰.

It is essential to consider this information, as the most important aspect of the life of the Confraternities in our country is not their

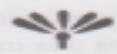
sculptures and assets, but rather their role in the transmission of the Gospel's teachings. In this case, the focus is particularly on maintaining the cult of the Passion of Christ as expressed in His surrender on the cross, which, as we have shown, transcends from 1535 to the present day, continuing a role that is reproduced throughout the country and in other churches, as we will demonstrate below.

The projection of the Brotherhood of La Vera Cruz to the interior of the country

To understand the transcendence of the ceremonies carried out by the Brotherhood of the Vera Cruz in the Church of San Francisco in Guatemala, let us consider the photograph in this text as illustration 3, where we can appreciate the mural painting of the procession of the Holy Burial of Christ in the town of San Miguel Arcángel in Huejotzingo, Puebla, Mexico, where there is also an urn containing a sculpture of a Christ of Penitence specifically for the Ceremony of the Adoration of the Cross.

In it, we can easily appreciate the presence of penitents carrying some iconographic elements of the Passion of Christ, such as the cloth with which Veronica wiped the face of Our Lord on the way to Golgotha, as well as a cup representing the consolation received by Jesus on the Mount of Olives before His arrest.

These elements also appear as primary in an anonymous photograph taken in the second half of the 20th century in the town of San Juan Comalapa, where we can observe the same iconographic elements, with the difference that in Comalapa they are carried by people wearing the local Mayan attire.



⁹ Miguel Álvarez Arévalo. *De Ramos a Pascua*. INGUAT, Guatemala, 1992, p. 28. Cites Fray Francisco Ximénez, *Historia de la Provincia de San Vicente de Chiapas y Guatemala*, Sociedad de Geografía e Historia, Guatemala, 1930, Vol. II, Book IV, p. 266.

¹⁰ This continuity in Franciscan worship can be further explored by consulting Jesús Fernández Concha. *La Semana Católica*, March-April, 1896 and 1987.

At first glance, this might seem like a simple coincidence, but when we review two other photographs of the “Mokan” ceremony (Throne of the deceased in the Cakchiquel language) from the same town, where we can observe an urn similar to the one in Huejotzingo, we realize the reproduction of a ceremonial tradition within the country that survived intact well into the twentieth century. Through this, we can provide material evidence of the transcendence of the Franciscan cult of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ.

Following this line of research, if we were to examine the entire highlands of the country, we would find, one by one, the features of Franciscan teaching in this regard. Preparation for the administration and instruction of these communities was carried out in the convents of San Francisco de la Antigua y la Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción, respectively. Mastery of the Indigenous language of the community to be served was essential for priestly candidates in these villages, to ensure an effective assimilation of the Gospel.

To reinforce the training of Franciscan priests and other religious Orders, specific treatises were prepared, such as the book by Fray Diego de Valadés, *Christian Rhetoric (La Retórica Cristiana)*¹¹, whose first edition was published in Latin in Italy, directed at the intellectual world of that time to be used as a didactic tool for the Gospel.

This work was immediately adopted as a key reference in the training of priests administering the Archdiocese of New Spain. For the topic at hand, we find in its pages interesting engravings that explain the unity of ideas regarding the Mysteries of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, which were taught to Spaniards and Indigenous peoples using the most advanced methods of the time, thus embedding them in the collective memory for over five hundred years. Its recapitulation was required through religious commemorations led by specific brotherhoods, such as the Vera Cruz of

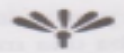
San Francisco. Their intellectual and material contributions served as an example for the rest of the former kingdom and, later, the nation.

The Christ of Penitence of San Francisco

In our country's popular tradition, sculptures of Jesus suitable for the ceremonies of the Adoration of the Cross are called Christ of the Penitence. The Vera Cruz Brotherhood, being the oldest known, logically suggests that the sculpture used for these long-standing rituals, which remain in the first north chapel of the church—now dedicated to Christ's Sepulcher—may have been used since the latter half of the sixteenth century.

Its main feature, revealing its antiquity, is its Renaissance style with Gothic elements that situate it in the second half of the sixteenth century. This resemblance is also seen in sculptures like the Christ of the Kings in the Catedral Metropolitana, the Buried Christ of San Felipe, and the Christ of Penitence from the Church of the Escuela de Cristo in Antigua Guatemala. In these works, didactic purpose prevails over a focus on beauty or anatomical perfection, unlike the Cristo de la Penitencia de la Recolectión, where the distinctly baroque style of eighteenth-century Guatemala is visible.

The term Christ of Penitence could be a variant used to distinguish these sculptures from the Lord Buried, which represents Jesus in his sepulcher. These sculptures are appropriate for altarpieces and ceremonies of the Holy Burial or Velation, celebrated on Good Friday and Holy Saturday night, awaiting the Gloria chant at dawn on Easter Sunday. Another explanation for the title may lie in the diversity of sculptures used for didactic purposes in the Archdiocese of Mexico and the numerous brotherhoods dedicated to different moments of Christ's Passion, as detailed in various religious chronicles¹².



¹¹ Diego de Valadés. *Retórica Cristiana*. Universidad Autónoma de México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 1989.

¹² These details can be identified in the second book of *Historia de la Fundación y Discurso de la Provincia de Santiago de México por las vidas de sus fundadores insignes de la Orden de Predicadores*, by Agustín Dávila Padilla. Impresora Litográfica Azteca, S.A., México, 1955, pp. 561-568.

In this context, Christ of Penitence sculptures symbolize the fulfillment of the ultimate atonement for sins entrusted to man: 'to suffer at the hands of mortals (to be scourged, crowned with thorns, and tortured), to die crucified, and to rise gloriously after burial.' The existing sculpture in the San Francisco temple represents these church doctrines, taught by friars and reinforced through the festivity of the Adoration of the Cross, aided by the Vera Cruz brotherhood.

To continue with the previously described ceremonies, we begin by noting the circular holes in the hands and feet, designed to allow crucifixion, as well as the movable joints in the arms, making them suitable for use in the first part of the Crucifixion ceremony. The head's mobility is intended for the Sermon of the Seven Words, during which the sculpture must look forward, while the priests' profound sermons guide the people to meditate on this memorable sacrifice of Christ. At this stage of the ceremony, additional sculptures were also required: Saint John, the Blessed Virgin, Mary Magdalene, and the centurion Longinus, who with his spear ended Christ's life, spilling His last drop of blood by piercing His heart.

This moment in the ceremony connects to the anagram of the Five Wounds, representing the brotherhood responsible for the cult of the Cross. Currently, the cross serves as Christ's throne of immortality, while His Precious Blood saves the faithful from eternal fire and sin. This tradition gave rise to another Franciscan devotion. To understand its significance, we refer to the Christian Rhetoric of Friar Diego de Valadés, depicting the artistic views of that era and providing context for the practical, didactic sculptures used in Gospel teachings¹³.

Unfortunately, we have not found chronicles describing these rituals in the former kingdom of Guatemala. However, these preliminary references will aid in locating them within the Francisco de Paula García Peláez Archdiocesan Archive or the General Archive of

Central America in future research. For now, we continue with the characterization of the Christ of Penance of San Francisco in Nueva Guatemala.

The neck's mobility allows it to incline toward the chest at the moment of His death at three o'clock in the afternoon, enabling a new Sermon of Condolences to the Blessed Virgin and continuing with the ritual of the Descent from the Cross. Christ's body was then presented to His mother with more sermons, shrouded in a white alb, and covered by a matching veil. A leg's movement plays a crucial role in laying Him in the Virgin's arms, and later, in an urn serving as a refined coffin for the Holy Burial ceremony¹⁴.

Currently, Christ's Sepulcher is in the first south chapel, near the church's main entrance, where an altarpiece below houses a niche designed for the Holy Burial of Christ ceremony. This niche holds the urn bearing the Holy Christ's sculpture, similar to those found in Mexican churches such as Santo Domingo de Puebla and Huejotzingo, contrasting with the Guatemalan sculptures that remain free from urns due to the absence of the ancient rituals previously described.

A special feature of the sculpture in question is its hollow torso, a trait that connects it with those described in Quote No. 14, which notes that sculptures used in this ceremonial, aside from having multiple movable parts, were also crafted from lightweight materials. This quality is balanced by the hollow torso, enabling the dramatic handling of the sculpture required for these rituals.

Historical Importance of Sculpture

Based on the statement above, we consider that the historical value of the sculpture



¹³ Diego de Valadés. Op. Cit., p. 499.

¹⁴ Further details about the measurements of platforms, the use of sculptures, and other aspects can be found in Agustín Dávila Padilla. Op. Cit., pp. 561-668.

rests in its didactic role in disseminating the Gospel. Given its style and iconography, it is likely the oldest Passion sculpture still revered in our region. Furthermore, it served as a crucial reference for other artistic creations of the same devotion used in similar ceremonies across the country. This significance justifies its physical preservation and underscores the need for continued, expanded research on the sculpture in the future.

Christ of the Precious Blood

The devotion to the Precious Blood of Christ dates back to the 16th century in the Archdiocese of New Spain, as suggested by illustration No. 12, which depicts angels collecting Christ's blood in cups. This blood is brought to humanity through the Mass, during the wine consecration ceremony, transforming it into a symbolic element that nourishes Christians both physically and spiritually.

The teaching of this intricate process led to the creation of truly didactic artworks, placed on special altarpieces, with a feast marked by the Church on the Fifth Thursday of Lent, and later on July 1st each year. Both dates were widely celebrated in these kingdoms to promote spiritual enrichment through this precept.

In the church of San Francisco in Antigua Guatemala, there must have once been an altarpiece dedicated to the Precious Blood of Christ. This conclusion can be inferred from the presence of a painting dedicated to this devotion, located above the side entrance that opens onto 13th Street in Zone 1.

This painting is related to others dedicated to the same devotion, one located in the Museum of Colonial Art in Antigua Guatemala and another that was once in the Church of San Pedro las Huertas, a village on the outskirts of the same city, bringing us closer to understanding the scope of this devotion.

The patronage of these chapels was connected to the Brotherhoods of Souls, as this devotion is directly linked to Christ's redemptive

death on Calvary, primarily motivated by liberation from the sin of death. This connection explains the presence of San Gabriel in the painting at the temple of San Francisco in Nueva Guatemala, where the Blessed Virgin also appears, assisting as the Mother of humanity, to whom all ask for favors—in this case, the redemption of the souls of the faithful departed.

In this context, the traditional and popular teachings of the Brotherhoods of Souls sometimes used a depiction of Christ to explain this Mystery of Redemption, as almost all churches in the old archdiocese of Mexico had these Brotherhoods responsible for funeral ceremonies, burials, and prayers for the eternal rest of souls.

In the same vein, we can contextualize the sculpture now known as the Christ of the Precious Blood, located in the temple of San Francisco in Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción, which was recorded as the Crucified Christ in an 1851 inventory¹⁵.

The historical value of this sculpture lies in its role in spreading the Gospel under this invocation, celebrated on the Fifth Friday of Lent with a penitential procession and naturally on the Day of the Dead (Día de Difuntos) when the faithful departed are remembered. The Precious Blood of Christ sculpture is in the Baroque style, with aspects reminiscent of a "Christ of Souls," which also enhances its current didactic utility, establishing it as a valuable piece of National Heritage.



¹⁵Haroldo Rodas. *Art and History of the Temple and Convent of San Francisco in Guatemala*. General Directorate of Anthropology and History. Guatemala, 1981, pp. 133–134.

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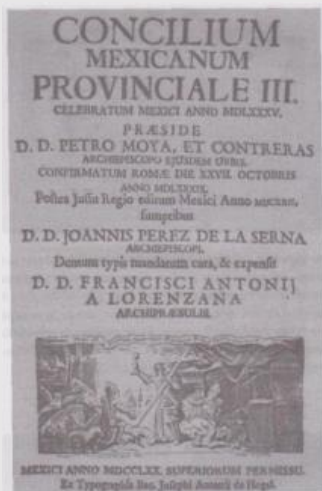
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Appendix:



A painting depicting the fusion of the Franciscan and Dominican religious orders during the crusade led by Friars Francisco Marroquín and Bartolomé de las Casas, which contributed to the ideological unity achieved by Catholicism during the Spanish domination of Guatemala from 1524 to 1821.

(Haroldo Rodas. *Arte e Historia del templo y convento de San Francisco de Guatemala*. Dirección General de Antropología e Historia, Guatemala, 1981, p. 160.)



Front cover of the *Concilium Mexicanum Provinciale III* - Third Mexican Council - which concluded on October 16, 1585, and became the first Mexican council to receive approval for its declarations from the Apostolic See in Rome on October 27, 1589. This council was convened and presided over by Archbishop Don Pedro

Moya de Contreras of Mexico, with participation from diocesan bishops, including representatives from Guatemala.



Detail of the mural paintings in Huejotzingo, Puebla, Mexico, showing penitents carrying the *Arma Christi* and a Renaissance-style urn at the bottom containing the image of the *Cristo de la Penitencia* clothed in a white alb. (Photograph by Fernando Urquizú, 2002.)



Upper section of a niche in the southeastern chapel of the cloister at the monastery of San Francisco in Antigua Guatemala, featuring a site marked by the anagram of the *Cofradía de la Vera Cruz* where the Holy Burial procession rested. Noteworthy is the presence of angels bearing the insignia of Christ's Passion. (Photograph by Fernando Urquizú, 2002.)



Stucco anagram of the Holy Sepulcher located on the door of the eastern chapel in the southern transept of the church of San Francisco in New Guatemala of the Assumption. (Photograph by Fernando Urquizú, 2007.)



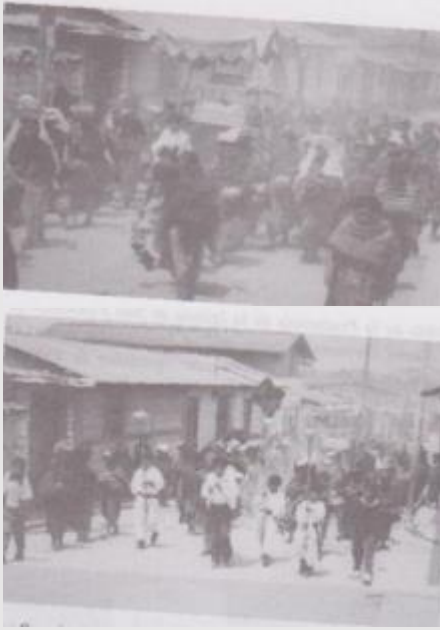
Banner stand featuring the anagram of the *Cofradía de la Vera Cruz* from the church of San Francisco in New Guatemala of the Assumption.



Stucco anagram of the *Cofradía de la Vera Cruz* on the door of the eastern chapel in the northern transept of the church of San Francisco in New Guatemala of the Assumption. (Photograph by Fernando Urquizú, 2007.)



Anonymous photograph showing women carrying the insignia of Christ's Passion during the *Jesús Nazareno* procession in San Juan Comalapa, Chimaltenango, Guatemala. This representation recalls mid-20th-century ceremonies similar to those depicted in the mural paintings of the church of San Miguel Arcángel in Huejotzingo, Puebla, Mexico, as seen in Illustration No. 3.



Anonymous photograph of the transfer ceremony of the *Señor Sepultado* urn, resembling the one in the church of San Miguel Arcángel in Huejotzingo, Puebla, Mexico, for comparison with Illustration No. 3.



Teaching the Gospel in the Kingdoms of New Spain in the 16th Century. Diego de Valdés, *Retórica Cristiana*, Universidad Autónoma de México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico, 1989.



Christ at Calvary, 16th-century engraving (Diego de Valdés, *Retórica Cristiana*, Universidad Autónoma de México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico, 1989, p. 499.)



Cristo de la Penitencia from the church of San Francisco in New Guatemala, with a style and iconography intended for special Good Friday ceremonies, similar to those described in Huejotzingo, Puebla, Mexico, by Cecilia Vásquez Ahumada and Margarita Piña Loredó (*Pintura mural de la iglesia de San Miguel Arcángel Huejotzingo, Puebla*, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, CONACULTA, INAH, Mexico, 2000.) (Photograph by Guillermo Vásquez.)



Cristo de la Preciosa Sangre. (Haroldo Rodas. Arte e Historia del templo y convento de San Francisco de Guatemala. Dirección General de Antropología e Historia, Guatemala, 1981, p. 144.)