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Aztec Vestal Virgins and the Brides of Christ: The Mixed Heritage of New Spain's *Monjas Coronadas*

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On several occasions in his career the Mexican-Creole scholar and priest don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora (1645–1700) wrote admiringly about elements of the Aztec past in order to help define the colonial present.[1] For example, in his *Paraíso occidental* (1683)—a history of the Mexico City convent of Jesús María and hagiography of some of its members—he quotes heavily from a document in his possession written by don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl (ca. 1578–1648), a descendant of the royal house of Texcoco, as well as an author and historian of the pre-Hispanic past.[2] This document, now lost, recorded the admonitions and incantations that were recited by an Aztec priest and priestess when a young maiden entered the temple as a 'vestal virgin.'

The inclusion of such an account in a book about a convent and its nuns may seem not only anachronistic but also detrimental to characterizing the nuns' Christian orthodoxy. After all, many Europeans regarded the Aztecs as a barbarous and pagan people, inferior to their Spanish conquerors in a number of matters, not the least of which was religion. From a Christian perspective, the *cihuatlamacazque*, or 'vestal virgins' that are the subject of Ixtlilxochitl's manuscript cited by Sigüenza y Góngora, certainly did not have a place in the new colonial order because they were part of the Aztec religious apparatus, which was considered to be, above all things, heretical. Nevertheless, Sigüenza y Góngora's objective *is* to use this account precisely to glorify the convent and its nuns, but in a manner that advanced the Creole discourse on New Spain's role in the Christian narrative.

In visual terms, that discourse was further consolidated in the eighteenth century when a new brand of portrait came into being: the 'crowned-nun' (*monja coronada*) portrait, as it is called today, which pictures women at the time of their religious profession (Figures 1–4). Crowned-nun portraits are based on the monastic tradition of picturing deceased nuns on their funeral biers and crowned with flowers

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Figure 1 *Sor María Engracia Josefa del Santísimo Rosario.* Anonymous artist. 1803. Oil on canvas. Photograph courtesy of the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

(Figures 5 and 6)—a custom that by the seventeenth century was practiced in different parts of the Hispanic world. Portraits of *living* crowned nuns, however, first developed in New Spain during the eighteenth century and flourished there until the early nineteenth century. Commissioned and collected by nuns' families (members, by and large, of the Creole elite), and exhibited in their homes, the portraits show their sitters dressed in their habits and wielding a number of religious trappings, of which the most notable is a floral crown. According to Sigüenza y Góngora, this symbol of a woman's virtue was also worn by the *cihuatlamacazque* on the day of their entry into the temple. Although no images portraying these Aztec maidens in their flowery crowns on the day of their initiation are known to exist, hundreds of crowned-nun portraits were made in the last hundred or so years of the colonial period, constituting a visual phenomenon exclusive to New Spain. Nowhere else did the entry of women into the convent result in the popular trend of capturing their likeness in such an iconographically rich and visually opulent manner.[3]

Sigüenza y Góngora's description of the Aztec vestal virgin ceremony opens up a previously unexplored avenue of understanding portraits of crowned nuns. His

Figure 2 *Sor Rosa María del Espíritu Santo*. Anonymous artist. 1775. Oil on canvas. Photograph courtesy of the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

account allows us to frame crowned-nun portraits within the Creole discourse regarding New Spain's role in the Christian narrative; a role that by the late colonial period distinguished the Americas in general, and New Spain in particular, as the site of the New Earthly Paradise.[4]

Creoles—eager to distinguish themselves on the world stage—emphasized their providential destiny and pointed to its symbols, one of which was the spiritually eminent nuns of New Spain, whom Sigüenza y Góngora established as the historical successors of the *cihuatlamacazque* of Aztec Mexico. This strategy drew upon particular elements of the pre-Hispanic past to bolster parallel elements of the colonial present in establishing a history of religious excellence in Mexico. Furthermore, this parallelism allowed the past to be articulated in a manner that was useful to Creoles: that is, as a myriad of events and historical figures that, when interpreted through a Christian framework, set a foundation for New Spain's greatness. This comes across in Sigüenza y Góngora's account in which the full historical value of New Spain's nuns is achieved when related to their impressive, but imperfect, predecessors: the *cihuatlamacazque*.

Figure 3 *Sor María Ignacia Candelaria de la Santísima Trinidad.* Anonymous artist. 1761. Oil on canvas. Reproduction with the permission of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, CONACULTA-INAH-MEX.

Although portraits of crowned nuns resonate with Hispanic and Aztec models of female virtue, they configure their sitters as distinct from their Aztec predecessors and counterparts in the Hispanic world. They accomplish this by expressing female religious excellence exclusively in Christian terms (thereby expressing the fruition of Christianity in a land long associated with its pagan past, to which the *cihuatlamacazque* belonged) and as alive and palpable (unlike that featured in the older Hispanic practice of picturing deceased crowned nuns). This apprehensive relationship to Aztec and Hispanic traditions—that is, as related to but distinct from—imbues the portraits with a sense of newness that is also present in other forms of Creole self-representation.

Aztec Priestesses, Creole Nuns

Although the functions and importance of the priests of Aztec Mexico are well known, the priestesses and maidens who served in the temples have remained, comparatively speaking, in the shadows. The same assessment can be made of male

Figure 4 *Sor María de Guadalupe*. Juan de Villalobos. 1727. Oil on canvas. Photograph courtesy of the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Figure 5 *Sor Matiana Francisca del Señor San José*. Anonymous artist. Eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Photograph courtesy of the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Figure 6 *Sor Juana Magdalena de San Antonio.* Attributed to José del Castillo. 1765. New Spain. Photograph courtesy of the Palace of the Governors, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

and female religious of colonial Spanish America. This may be, in part, because in Aztec and Hispanic culture religion and society were patriarchal and favored men for the most powerful political and religious offices. But also, until recent times, scholars have focused on aspects of history and culture that were dominated by men, leaving the history and representation of women in pre-Hispanic and colonial Latin America relatively understudied. Recent scholarship, however, has shown that women and girls were integral to the religious systems of pre-Hispanic and colonial Mexico, and functioned on a number of official levels.[5] For example, before the Spanish arrival, the *cihuacuacuilli* (high-level priestesses) supervised lower-level priestesses called *cihuatlamacazque* (the 'vestal virgins' of Sigüenza y Góngora's account) (Kellogg 1995, 586). They were joined by a third group of maidens, the *ichpochtiachcauh*, who were advanced in age and virtue, and also served in the temples (Alberti Manzanares 1994, 178). The reasons that maidens entered official religious service varied; however, among the *cihuatlamacazque*, the primary reason given by colonial sources was that their parents made a personal and public vow to give their daughters up to the service of the gods (Sahagún 1951 [1580], 246). Furthermore, *calpolli* (polity ward) leaders who sent groups of maidens to serve in

various temples every year, probably determined the number of girls from Tenochtitlan's numerous *calpoltin* who were to serve.[6]

Some maidens, it seems, were destined to be sacrificed on special feast days. The group to which they belonged is unclear; however, Alberti Manzanares (1994, 179) has suggested that they came from polities subject to the Aztecs and were given to them as a kind of tribute. Folio 251 recto and verso from Bernardino de Sahagún's *Primeros memoriales* (1993 [1560])—a sixteenth-century cultural encyclopedia on Nahua culture compiled by a Franciscan friar and his native assistants—picture such maidens preparing for ritual human sacrifice. They are illustrated in an early colonial graphic style that was developed by native artists who incorporated some European pictorial conventions into their indigenous artistic repertoire.

The center drawing on folio 251 recto depicts a scene from the feast of Huey Tecuilhuitl in which two women dressed in blood-stained garments stand before temples—the only elements that situate the scene—presumably in a city's ritual precinct (Figure 7).[7] Baird (1988, 225) has identified these figures as deity impersonators—humans who were dressed and revered as gods, only to be sacrificed later. According to Baird, the figure on the left is dressed in a manner that indicates she is impersonating the goddess Cihuacoatl, while her companion to the right is impersonating Xilonen. The accompanying text explains that the ceremonies performed for Huey Tecuilhuitl were dedicated to these particular goddesses, and that the deity impersonators were ritually sacrificed in their honor. The blood splotches on the garments of these figures are meant to signify the women's role as sacrificial

Figure 7 *Huey Tecuilhuitl.* In *Primeros memoriales.* Fol. 251r. 1560. Detail. Ink and pigments on paper. Reproduced with permission of the Real Biblioteca, Madrid.

victims, while a priest standing before a temple in the lower-left portion of the scene holds up a blade, further reinforcing the sacrificial theme of the drawing. Above him a pair of women carrying sacrificial banners direct the viewer's attention to the temple scene by gesturing to it.

Another scene depicting the theme of sacrifice appears on folio 251 verso of *Primeros memoriales* (Figure 8). In this feast of Ochpaniztli, the only element that indicates a setting is a temple that appears in the upper-right corner. Like the previous illustration, this one depicts a scene that seems to take place within a ritual precinct. Across from the temple, in the upper-left corner, three women in white garments extend the limbs of a fourth—a gesture that indicates that the figure whose limbs are splayed is to be sacrificed. Above the victim a woman holds up a blade of sacrifice—similar in appearance to the priest's blade in the previous

Figure 8 *Ochpaniztli.* In *Primeros memoriales.* Fol. 251v. 1560. Detail. Ink and pigments on paper. Reproduced with permission of the Real Biblioteca, Madrid.

illustration—while below another woman wields a fiery censer. Three additional women brandishing censers appear in the top-right corner in front of the temple and just below it. The accompanying text for this and the previous illustration does not identify any of these figures as temple maidens; however, it is probable that they are so because the scenes illustrate important religious ceremonies that take place in or near temples—a ritual space in pre-Hispanic times designated for priests and temple maidens, among select others. Furthermore, the censers—ritual implements used by temple maidens—in the Ochpaniztli feast support this identification.[8]

Before women could participate at this level in the great feasts of the Aztec ritual calendar, however, they first had to be initiated as temple maidens. The ceremonies that conferred them this title utilized rich symbolic imagery and were performed with a high degree of solemnity that underscored the importance of the occasion. Unfortunately, this ceremony is not illustrated in colonial sources; however, a number of textual sources—among which Sigüenza y Góngora's provides the richest detail—describe the events. In the first ceremony, parents who made a vow to give up their daughter to the service of the gods presented her to a priest who recited a prayer and officially recognized her as a future temple maiden (Sigüenza y Góngora 1995 [1683], 53). Then, a broom and incense ladle were placed in the infant's arms to signify her coming duties of cleaning the temple and burning incense (Sahagún 1951 [1580], 246). When the ceremony was complete, the child returned home with her parents until she was old enough to serve in the temple.[9]

The second ceremony, performed years later, initiated the young maiden as a *cihuatlamacazqui* and is referred to as a 'face-veiling ceremony' by Sahagún (1951 [1580], 53)—an expression that calls to mind the profession ceremony of nuns, which was called 'taking the veil' (*tomando el velo*). According to Sigüenza y Góngora (1995 [1683], 53), when a young maiden was ready to begin her religious service, her relatives gathered, she was crowned with flowers and dressed sumptuously, and then she was taken to the temple, where a great priest received her. A number of ritual incantations and admonitions directed at the initiate were then recited to instruct her on how she was to comport herself as a temple maiden. Namely, she was to understand that she would be strictly cloistered in the temple and the living quarters assigned to her and the other maidens; she was to observe chastity (for the gods favored those who were chaste); she was also admonished to be obedient to her superior, the high priestess, in all matters; and, finally, she was to live a life of privation.[10] After these guiding principles were imparted, her rich accoutrements were removed, her hair was ritually cut, and the chief priestess intoned another incantation and admonition whereupon the initiate began her sacred life among the *cihuatlamacazque* (Sigüenza y Góngora 1995 [1683], 54–55).

Observing chastity, privation, obedience, and enclosure as all temple virgins did, the new initiate was entrusted with sweeping the temple floors, tending the sacred fire, burning incense before the statues of the gods, performing self-sacrifice, and providing food and vestments for the gods and priests.[11] An illustration from Diego Durán's *Book of the Gods and Rites* (1971 [1579]) shows some of the implements that

the *cihuatlamacazque* used in their temple rituals (Figure 9). As with the illustrations of *Primeros memoriales* those in the *Historia* combine European and native graphic conventions in an early colonial manuscript that was authored by a friar and his native assistants. In this scene two temple maidens face one another in the grassy foreground of an otherwise mountainous landscape that recedes into the distance (a pictorial convention introduced by the Spanish). Both figures are clad in the simple white garments that were designated for native women: a *huipil* or blouse, and a skirt, both of which are embellished with fringe designs and a rectangular pectoral ornament. These garments are nearly identical to the ones worn by the women illustrated in *Primeros memoriales*. Additionally, the attire worn by the figure on the right includes bands of colorful feathers that appear on her forearms and ankles—embellishments, Durán (1971 [1579], 84) explains, that were worn by temple maidens on certain feast days. The other figure is pictured holding items that temple maidens regularly used: a vessel filled water with which they would sprinkle the temple floors, and a broom. Durán (1971 [1579], 83) and Acosta (2002 [1590], 283) call these women 'Maidens of Penitence' because they led chaste and penitential lives, fasting often and living in great modesty. Because of the quality of their tasks and way of life, a number of colonial authors likened the *cihuatlamacazque* to the vestal virgins of ancient Rome.[12]

Among the first Spanish chroniclers to draw this comparison was José de Acosta, a sixteenth-century friar and author of the *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias*. Acosta's assessment of the *cihuatlamacazque*, however, is decidedly unfavorable

Figure 9 *Aztec Temple Maidens*. In *Book of the Gods and Rites*. 1579. Detail. Ink and pigments on paper. Photograph courtesy of the Biblioteca Nacional de España.

because of their paganism. According to him (Acosta, 2002 [1590], 284) they demonstrate 'how the devil has been eager to be served by persons of chaste life, not because he likes chastity, for he is an unclean spirit by nature, but to deprive Almighty God in any way he can of the glory of being served with purity and chastity.' Motolinía (1951 [1858], 128), another early colonial friar and chronicler of native culture, agrees with Acosta's assessment: 'All these women were here serving the demon for their own interest: some that the demon might do them a favor, others that the demon might grant them a long life.'

Although the *cihuatlamacazque* were likened to the vestal virgins of ancient Rome, Spaniards also drew similarities between them and nuns. Durán (1971 [1579], 83), for example, notes that Aztec temple maidens led a life of seclusion like nuns, and even calls their living quarters a 'cloister for nuns.' Sahagún (1951 [1580], 246), as noted, refers to the initiation ceremony of the *cihuatlamacazque* as a 'face-veiling ceremony,' implicitly linking it with the nun's profession ceremony called 'taking the veil.' Motolinía (1951 [1858], 128), on the other hand, explicitly likens the hierarchy of the temple maidens to that of nuns: 'One among them was like a mistress or mother who at times assembled the others and held chapter, as the abbess does with her nuns, imposing a penance on those who were found negligent. For this reason some Spaniards called them nuns.'

The analogy of the *cihuatlamacazque* with Rome's vestal virgins and Christianity's nuns is articulated in Sigüenza y Góngora's *Paraíso occidental* to a degree not seen in the accounts of early colonial authors like Acosta, Motolinía, Durán, and Sahagún. Part of this distinction is largely due to divergent objectives between the early chroniclers who were primarily interested in identifying idolatry and stamping it out, and Sigüenza y Góngora, who, writing roughly a hundred years later, was more interested in incorporating the Aztec past into New Spain's historical and religious narrative. The *cihuatlamacazque* allowed him to advance this objective in his history of the convent of Jesús María, one of New Spain's earliest convents, founded for the poor daughters and granddaughters of conquistadors, and funded by the Spanish Crown.

Jesús María was run by the Conceptionist Order, which by the end of the colonial period boasted eight convents in Mexico City alone. By the late eighteenth century, 56 nunneries of various religious orders were spread across New Spain, 22 of which were located in the viceregal capital. Regardless of convent and religious order, women first had to complete a probationary period ranging from one to two years as novices. Thereafter, they underwent an initiation ceremony—similar to the Aztec one described by Sigüenza y Góngora. A striking portrait of Sor Ana María de San Francisco y Neve (Figure 10) painted in 1759 by an anonymous artist shows its sitter wearing the white veil that visually identified novices. The inscription along the bottom edge of the painting relays that Sor Ana María was a novice at the prestigious Mexico City convent of la Concepción. She and the other novices of this convent would have been dressed in this manner while la Concepción's actual nuns would have worn black veils and blue capes over their white habits, as all nuns of this order

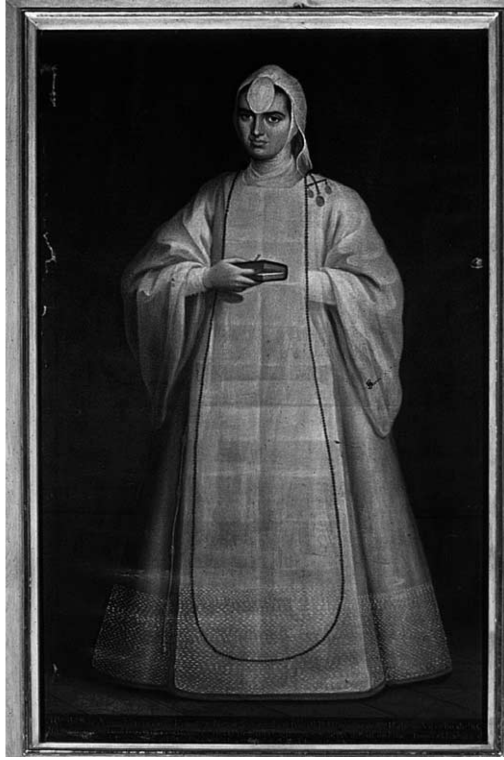

Figure 10 *Sor Ana María de San Francisco y Neve.* Anonymous artist. 1759. Oil on canvas. Photograph courtesy of the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

did (for example, see Figure 3). Novices could not don a nun's habit and black veil until they completed the ceremony of 'taking the veil.' Like the *cihuatlamacazque* of Aztec Mexico, in this initiation ceremony a novice would have professed the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and enclosure in a convent of her family's choosing.

Just days before a novice was to 'take the veil,' she returned to her parents' home to enjoy their company and experience the delights of secular life one last time before becoming cloistered. On the last day, her family hosted a grand party to bid farewell to their beloved daughter. An 1843 account by Frances Calderón de la Barca, wife of the Spanish ambassador to Mexico, recounts such an event that she attended at the home of a prominent Mexico City family. At the party, she notes, the young woman, on the eve of her entry into the convent was dressed richly 'in purple velvet, wearing diamonds and pearls, and a crown of flowers, the corsage of her gown entirely covered with little bows of ribbons of diverse colors' (Calderón de la Barca 1987 [1843], 264). The celebration came to an end when the aspiring nun and her mother departed in a carriage and paraded through the streets of Mexico City, in a tradition

called *el paseo*. The carriage then stopped at the convent in which the young novice was to make her vows.

On some occasions, portraits of novices on the eve of profession were commissioned by families. These are distinct from crowned-nun portraits and were meant to commemorate the novice's last day with her family and record her final appearance as a laywoman. The portrait of Juana María Cortés Chimalpopoca (Figure 11) is a case in point. It shows the extravagant appearance of a young woman on the eve of her profession—the last time that she would have worn the sumptuous secular garb popular among elite women of New Spain. In her portrait, Juana María's cultural identity is pictured by the presence of elite indigenous and Spanish elements of New Spain. For example, in addition to her rich vestments highlighted by an elaborate *huipil* (the same kind of garment worn by the temple maidens pictured in *Primeros memoriales* and Durán's *Book of the Gods and Rites*), and an undergarment with Spanish lace, her appearance is highlighted with necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and a hair band made of pearls. Furthermore, the family crest in the upper left portion of the composition, and the *chiceador*, or artificial beauty mark on her temple, denote Juana María's high social standing. Her surnames are also significant:

Figure 11 *Juana María Cortés Chimalpopoca*. Anonymous artist. Eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Photograph courtesy of the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

the Cortés and Chimalpopoca lineages (of Spanish and native origin, respectively) were among the oldest and most prestigious in New Spain. In this portrait, visual elements associated with the indigenous and Spanish realms of colonial society are brought together seamlessly in a manner that locates the sitter at the juncture of the two worlds. The only visual indication denoting that Juana María is pictured on the eve of her profesion is the long candle that she is pictured holding in her right hand—a symbol that denotes her status as an aspiring nun on the eve of her profession.[13]

The circumstances and appearance of novices just before their professions are strikingly similar to those of the aspiring 'vestal virgins' of Aztec Mexico described by Sigüenza y Góngora: both were dressed sumptuously and wore floral crowns (although Juana María is pictured instead with a single flower in her hair, above her ear) and both were taken to a holy site by their families where they were received by religious officials who presided over a ritual that consecrated these women. As well, the admonitions recited by Aztec and Spanish religious officials at these ceremonies emphasized the initiate's personal sacrifice in her new life as a temple maiden or convent nun. Both nun and temple maiden, furthermore, adhered to the rules of privation, chastity, obedience, and enclosure. Yet, unlike the *cihuatlamacazque* who served in the temple until they were of age to marry—at which point they reentered secular life—nuns vowed to remain unmarried and cloistered until death.[14]

The profession ceremony of nuns, as it is recorded in colonial documents, was, by all accounts, an extravagant and socially important event that brought together in the convent members of the nun's family, her friends, male and female religious, and sometimes even government officials. Just before the novice and her family arrived at the convent's chapel, the religious trappings that were central to the ceremony had already been prepared by the convent's nuns and displayed for those present (Montero 2002, 169). These usually included a statue of Christ—either as a child or crucified—a flowery crown, a floral palm frond, a black veil, and a ring. A solemn mass was presided over by a priest and the bishop, who praised the young woman for her decision and lifelong commitment to it (Montero 2002, 133–78).

After the sermon, the novice disappeared temporarily behind a black curtain. When it was drawn again, she appeared prostrate on the floor, dressed in the habit of the religious order to which she was professing. Then, after a formulaic and solemn dialogue between her and the priest, she professed the vows of her order verbally, her white veil was exchanged for the black one, the nuptial ring was placed on her finger—a symbol of her marriage to Christ—and she was crowned with flowers and given various other religious accoutrements that denoted her virtuousness. A late eighteenth-century manual of the religious life for nuns of the Franciscan Order explains that all of these accoutrements were symbols of a nun's mystical marriage to Christ (Arbiol 1791). Specifically, the black veil signified her betrothal (ibid., 58), while her flowery crown was a symbol of her virtue, fragrant and sweet (ibid., 213). It was at this point that a newly professed nun, clothed in the sumptuous regalia that identified her as one of Christ's brides, disappeared behind the convent's walls and became symbolically 'dead to the world.' Once she entered the cloister, her crown and

palm frond were removed, only to be worn again when, years later, she lay on her funeral bier.

Picturing Christ's Brides

The *tomar el velo* ceremony, as it is described in colonial sources, was precisely what Juana María (Figure 11) and Sor Ana María (Figure 10) would have gone through upon taking their religious vows. And though no portraits of these women show them as nuns, numerous portraits of crowned nuns (Figures 1–4) capture their subjects' appearance as newly professed brides of Christ, donning their crowns—symbol of their virtue and spiritual supremacy—and other accessories. The relative opulence or austerity present in each portrait depends largely upon the religious order to which the sitter belongs. Generally, nuns of reformed orders such as the Carmelites (Figure 2) and Augustinians adhered to an ascetic way of life. Consequently, in their portraits they appear more modest in demeanor and bear fewer iconographical elements than those belonging to unreformed orders such as the Conceptionists or Jeronymites. Nuns of the unreformed orders lived in relative comfort, if not luxury, compared with their reformed sisters and generally appear more sumptuously adorned in their portraits (Figures 3 and 4). Regardless of order and way of life, however, all subjects in crowned-nun portraits are shown wearing a black veil and holding one or more religious items ranging from statues of the Christ Child, to flowery palm fronds, candles, or a combination of these—all attributes that denote a nun's mystical marriage to Christ and her virtuous qualities that made such a union possible.

The earliest-documented portrait featuring a Mexican nun in this manner is mentioned in a 1675 hagiography of Sor Isabel de la Encarnación by Pedro Salmerón. According to Salmerón (1675, 117r), when Sor Isabel died in 1633 a flowery crown was placed on her head, a floral palm on her body, and a local painter was commissioned to record her likeness in death. Though the whereabouts of Sor Isabel's death portrait are not known, similar ones made in New Spain, Peru, Nueva Granada (modern-day Colombia), and Spain provide an idea of what it may have looked like.[15]

The eighteenth-century Mexican portraits of Sor Matiana Francisca del Señor San José (Figure 5) and Sor Juana Magdalena de San Antonio (Figure 6) show their subjects as Salmerón describes Sor Isabel in death: wearing sumptuous floral crowns and wielding flowery palm fronds. In addition, Sor Matiana Francisca is pictured with a sprig of lilies—the traditional symbol of purity associated with the Virgin Mary—sprouting from her clasped hands. In Christian terms, the message of these portraits is that upon death virtuous nuns finally joined their heavenly spouse and reaped the rewards of their mystical marriage to him. Part of the inscription that appears on Sor Juana Magdalena's portrait corroborates this visual message in a cryptic rhyme. It reads, 'Towards [the Lord's] center she walks, she who saw herself outside of him. In him she found rest and forever towards him she leans, for the

Carmelite cloister joins [things together], like my love to its object. And if in him I communicated all my passion in life, it follows that I will be even better off there dead.'[16] Holy death—and what it imparted to the brides of Christ, namely union with God—was the ultimate goal of a nun's life. Furthermore, it was a subject deemed worthy to record visually, especially when the deceased was regarded as exceptionally virtuous. Unlike portraits of living crowned nuns, death portraits were probably made for convents and hung on the walls of the cloister to commemorate the sanctity of their subjects and provide inspiration for living nuns to live equally virtuous lives (Ruíz Gomar 1978, 100). Because these portraits were intended exclusively for a cloistered audience, they were largely out of public view and circulation.

Portraits of recently professed crowned nuns, however, were made for a lay audience, as they hung in the homes of Mexican-Creole families whose daughters entered the convent.[17] The first extant portrait on record—signed and dated 1727 by the artist Juan de Villalobos—pictures Sor María de Guadalupe as a donor figure, kneeling at the foot of her patron saint, Saint Barbara (Figure 4). Sor María's lavish bridal iconography suggests that the custom of donning professing nuns with flowery accoutrements was already fully developed when Villalobos painted Sor María's portrait. It also suggests that this portrait is not the first to picture a living nun fully bedecked in the iconography of her nuptials. Yet portraits of living crowned nuns do not appear in New Spain's pictorial repertoire until the early to mid eighteenth century and are considered a late colonial phenomenon, though made to fulfill their secular patrons' interests. While convents in Spain and colonial Spanish America collected portraits of some of their deceased sisters, lay Mexican-Creoles were interested in capturing the likeness of their daughters as living nuns, crowned with flowers and clothed with the symbols of Christian virtue and spiritual eminence. In this regard, their subjects are pictured in a manner similar to images of the first American saint, Rose of Lima—a figure who was celebrated in the Americas as a symbol of Creole distinction.

One of the earliest images of Saint Rose is attributed to the Peruvian artist Angelino Medoro (1567–1633), and was painted shortly after the saint had expired (Figure 12) (Vargaslugo 1979, 70). In it, Medoro captured Rose's appearance in death, although it may seem otherwise, since her eyes and mouth are partially open, as if she is in an ecstatic trance. Furthermore, like the subjects of crowned-nun portraits, she is shown wearing a wreath of roses.[18] A copy of this portrait was said to have been sent to Rome to help facilitate Rose's canonization. This strategy yielded high dividends when in 1671 the Church formally declared Rose of Lima the first saint of the Americas (Vargaslugo 1979, 70). Creoles immediately celebrated this honor, and images of Saint Rose of Lima were soon disseminated throughout Spanish America and Europe.

The eminent artist Juan Correa (active 1666–1739) painted one of the first Mexican images of Saint Rose in 1671, the very year she was canonized (Figure 13). In his elaborate painting, framed with vignettes that contain notable scenes from the saint's

Figure 12 *Death Portrait of Saint Rose of Lima.* Angelino Medoro. 1617. Oil on canvas. Photograph courtesy of Ramón Mujica Pinilla.

life, Rose is shown under a rainbow and in a garden setting, wearing the religious habit of the Dominicans, the order to which she belonged.[19] As in her death portrait by Medoro, she is pictured wearing a floral wreath on her head. In addition, she holds a lily branch and three roses in one hand while in her other hand she wields a circlet of flowers that frames an image of the Christ Child. This manner of portraying Saint Rose of Lima quickly became standardized and likened her visually to Saint Catherine of Siena—another Dominican saint who is commonly pictured wearing a crown of thorns, which Saint Rose is said to have worn occasionally in emulation.[20]

Understandably, Creoles throughout colonial Spanish America took great pride in Saint Rose of Lima—after all, she too was a Creole—and she soon became a symbol of colonial Spanish America's religious excellence. By the eighteenth century Saint Rose's legacy had a profound effect on the way that Mexican-Creloes regarded themselves and especially their nuns: namely, as the spiritual heirs of Saint Rose. This perception comes through visually in portraits of crowned nuns, which feature, to various degrees, much of the same iconography present in images of Saint Rose of Lima (Montero 2002, 339–74).

Portraits of Dominican nuns especially resonate with images of this order's most famous American saint. A case in point is the 1803 portrait of Sor María Josefa Engracia de la Santísima Trinidad by an unknown artist (Figure 1). In this half-length portrait, the sitter is shown wearing the traditional black and white habit of the Dominicans. She appears in an undisclosed setting, posing in a frontal view, and engaging the viewer directly with her gaze. Iconographically, this portrait is similar to images of Saint Rose of Lima. Here, however, Saint Rose's wreath has become a resplendent floral crown that contains a miniature religious figurine. The saint's lily

Figure 13 *Saint Rose of Lima.* Juan Correa. 1671. Oil on canvas. Photograph courtesy of the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

branch has become a long candle embellished lavishly with flowers and a religious figurine, and, just as in the Correa painting, Sor María Josefa holds up a floral circlet that frames the figure of the Christ Child. Were it not for the inscription appearing on a black field along the bottom edge of the portrait that identifies Sor María Josefa, one might initially regard the painting as another representation of Saint Rose of Lima.

In their portraits, even crowned nuns of other religious orders are generally pictured in the same manner. The full-length portrait of Sor Rosa María del Espíritu Santo, for example (Figure 2), pictures its sitter in a dark, undisclosed setting similar to the one in the previous portrait. Sor Rosa María appears in the austere habit of the Carmelites—an ascetic religious order that was renowned for its emphasis on privation and poverty (qualities instituted in the sixteenth century by Saint Teresa of Ávila). Despite the fact that the only visible part of Sor Rosa María's body is her face, this portrait successfully conveys the gentle piety of the sitter—a sharp contrast to the unembellished quality of her brown and white habit and the stark setting. Furthermore, Sor Rosa María, who here has just professed (as the portrait's inscription in the upper-left corner indicates), wears a great floral crown and holds

an elaborately decorated candle that includes a circular plaque featuring a religious scene. She bows her head and casts her gaze downward, as nearly all Carmelite nuns do in their profession portraits, in a sign of humility.

Unlike Sor Rosa María, who in her portrait exemplifies quiet piety, Sor María Ignacia Candelaria de la Santísima Trinidad (Figure 3) is portrayed as a sumptuously garbed nun of the Conceptionist Order, directly engaging the viewer with her steady gaze. As in the previous portraits, the setting is dark and obscure, though a red swag of cloth appears in the top-right corner, adding a sense of decorum. Sor María Ignacia's spectacular blue and white habit denotes her religious order, named in honor of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, who appears in art with a white tunic and blue cape (Muriel and Romero de Terreros 1952, 20). In addition to her floral crown she bears an elaborately decorated palm frond in her left hand, featuring a circular plaque that contains an image of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception. Another plaque, called an *escudo de monja*, appears beneath Sor María Ignacia's chin, again bearing an image of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception.[21] In her right hand Sor María Ignacia supports a statue of the Christ Child on a book (probably a Bible or the rules and constitutions of the Conceptionist Order). The small statue is dressed in a rich red gown and is wielding an orb in one hand while holding up his other hand in a sign of blessing. As in the previous portraits, flowery crown, bouquet, and image of the Christ Child denote the Sor María Ignacia's bridal status and deliberately link her to Saint Rose of Lima.

Signs of Creole Eminence

In addition to Saint Rose's iconic relevance in the Americas, the miraculous apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe to the native Juan Diego on a hill in Tepeyac in 1531 were regarded by Mexican Creoles as proof of the divine favor that God had bestowed on New Spain. Recognizing this favor, when Pope Benedict XIV (1740–58) first heard of the story of Guadalupe he is said to have quoted a passage from Psalms 147: 'Non fecit talliter omni nacioni,' or 'Nothing like it has been done with another nation' (Poole 1995, 2). This passage appealed to the Creole objective of distinguishing New Spain on the world stage as a place favored by God, and is sometimes included in colonial images of Guadalupe such as Sebastián Salcedo's 1779 painting (Figure 14). The Latin text is emblazoned on a flowing scroll held up by fluttering angels along the upper edge of the composition.

To further emphasize the Virgin's association with New Spain in general, and Mexico City in particular, Salcedo has incorporated a number of textual and pictorial references including the title *María Santísima de México* (Most Holy Mary of Mexico City) in the top-center vignette just above the Virgin's head. Bordering the bottom edge of the painting, a landscape features the Basilica of Guadalupe and surrounding buildings near the hill of Tepeyac, linking the Virgin to the specific locale of her apparitions. Finally, in the bottom-right portion of the painting, an allegorical image of America, dressed in a *huipil*, crowned with a feathered diadem, and holding an

Figure 14 *Virgin of Guadalupe*. Sebastián Salcedo. 1779. Oil on copper. Photograph courtesy of the Denver Art Museum.

Aztec obsidian-bladed club, genuflects before Guadalupe. As well, the figure of America gestures to a crest at her knees, inscribed with a European royal crown and an eagle perching on a cactus (the Aztec pictograph for Tenochtitlan/Mexico City). Each of these elements calls attention to Mexico City's privileged relationship to the Virgin of Guadalupe. In a society where religion was of the utmost importance, the figures of Saint Rose of Lima and the Virgin of Guadalupe became more than spiritual advocates for the pious—they became iconic representations of Spanish-American greatness and religious identity, and indicators of New Spain's distinct role in the Christian narrative.

According to Miguel Sánchez's 1648 account of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the apparitions took place in 1531, only ten years after Tenochtitlan fell to the Spaniards. However, a number of colonial authors—among whose ranks Sigüenza y Góngora belonged—argued that God made himself known to the natives of ancient Mexico even before the Virgin's apparitions.[22] Specifically, Saint Thomas the Apostle was said to have traveled to the Americas to evangelize among the natives of those lands. Sigüenza y Góngora—ever eager to link the pre-Hispanic past with the Christian present—gave the Saint Thomas myth a decidedly Mexican flavor by identifying the saint with the ancient hero and mythic leader of Tollan, Quetzalcoatl (Lafaye 1976,

155). The result was that, for Mexican Creoles, the Saint Thomas/Quetzalcoatl phenomenon, combined with Saint Rose of Lima and the Virgin of Guadalupe, firmly placed the Americas in the Christian narrative and distinguished New Spain among all other nations of the world.[23]

Sigüenza y Góngora was not the first to argue for the religious relevance of New Spain, however. In the sixteenth century a brand of spirituality propounded by Joaquim de Fiore—a twelfth-century Cistercian abbot and mystic—influenced the vision of some of the first mendicants to arrive in New Spain (Phelan 1956, 42). Friars like Gerónimo de Mendieta (1525–1604), the author of *Historia ecclesiastica indiana*, believed that the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas were closer than Europeans to the original human state of grace that existed before the Fall of Man (Phelan 1956, 63). For these friars, America was the last frontier for Christianity and the future site of an earthly paradise whose core population consisted of mendicants and their native subjects. Furthermore, this paradise resembled a monastery, as Mendieta points out, in which its friars and natives would interact to create an environment imbued with a perfected form of Christian fellowship (Phelan 1956, 58). In this paradise the natives were to become *gens angelicum*—angelic in nature.

An illustration of such a monastery is included in Diego de Valadés's *Rhetórica Christiana* of 1579, an account of the evangelization of New Spain by the Franciscan Order and a guidebook for friars working in native communities (Figure 15). Inside the walls of the monastery's great churchyard, Franciscans and natives are pictured congregating in small groups to study the various sacraments and Christian concepts such as penitence (left of center), matrimony (right of center), and the creation of the world (upper-right corner), among others. Furthermore, a number of natives are pictured participating in the sacraments of marriage (lower-right corner), baptism (center-bottom), penance, communion, and extreme unction (in the portico along the bottom edge of the yard). A funeral takes place in the center-top portion of the yard, and in each of the side chapels (called *posas*) friars preach to seated groups of captivated natives. At the center of this composition 12 friars support the church on a litter and are joined by Saint Francis of Assisi (the founder of the Franciscan Order) and Fray Martín de Valencia (the leader of the original 12 Franciscans to arrive in New Spain). The Latin inscription below the friars identifies them as 'The first to bring the Holy Roman Church to the New World of the Indies.' Overall, this vision of an ideal monastery is characterized by an orderly arrangement of activities, all of which relate to the observation of key Christian principles set in motion by the cooperative efforts of mendicants and natives. A number of friars active in the sixteenth-century regarded such a place as the foundation for establishing the New Earthly Paradise and New Jerusalem on earth. For them, New Spain was to be the site of these utopian communities.

Mendieta's utopian vision, however, was not realized due to epidemic diseases among the natives, the encroaching powers of the secular clergy, and the persistence of idolatry, among other factors. The idea of New Spain's eminence in Christendom, however, was not abandoned as later Creole scholars and authors sought other signs

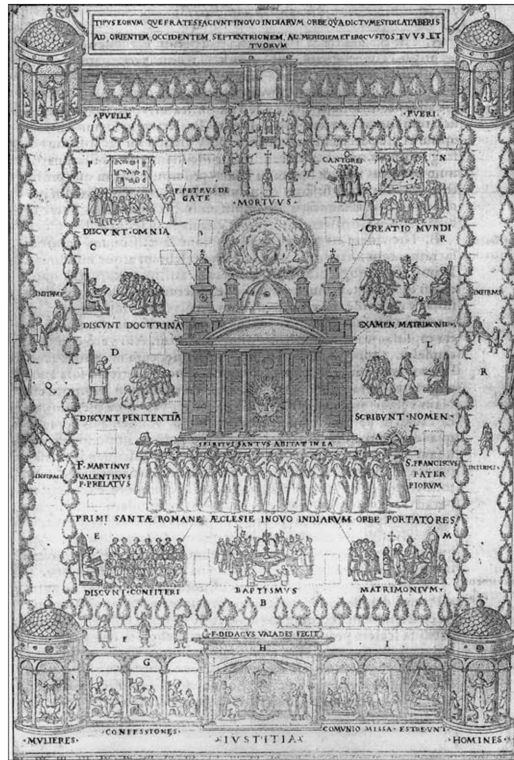

Figure 15 *Ideal Monastery.* In Diego de Valadés's *Rhetórica Christiana.* 1579. Engraving. Reproduced with the permission of the Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

that distinguished New Spain and its inhabitants in the Christian world. Consequently, Saint Thomas/Quetzalcoatl, the Virgin of Guadalupe, Saint Rose of Lima, and New Spain's nuns became those signs that demonstrated God's favor for the land and its inhabitants.[24] For example, in the dedication of *Paraíso occidental*, Sigüenza y Góngora (1995 [1683], 33) situates the convent of Jesús María in Mexico City on a higher, more virtuous level than the original Earthly Paradise: '[I]f in that [paradise] the first sin triumphed over original purity, in this one divine grace peacefully resides; if in that paradise driven by disobedience, vices took possession of human nature, in this paradise all virtues reduce human nature to its original state; and if from that paradise an angel banished the only woman who inhabited it, in this one innumerable virgins burning in the love of their spouse live like seraphim.'[25] The nuns of Jesús María (representative of New Spain's brand of female monasticism), then, through their virtuousness and fidelity to God, are deemed spiritually superior to the first woman, Eve, who resided in the original Earthly Paradise.[26]

For Sigüenza y Góngora, the site of the New Earthly Paradise was located specifically inside Jesús María—a convent patently Creole, since it was designated

originally for the daughters and granddaughters of conquistadors—and, more generally, in Mexico City. The very title he gave the book in which he articulates these ideas utilizes floral imagery to convey the spiritual worth of the nuns that populate this paradise: *Paraíso Occidental, PLANTED AND CULTIVATED by the liberal and beneficent hand of the most Catholic and powerful Kings of Spain, Our Lords, in their magnificent Real Convento of JESUS MARIA of Mexico City: OF WHOSE FOUNDATION AND PROGRESS, and prodigious marvels and virtues, with which the Venerable Madre MARINA DE LA CRUZ and other exemplary religious women, giving off sweet smells of perfection, flowered in its cloister, don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, Mexican Presbyter, GIVES NOTICE IN THIS VOLUME.*[27]

It is unclear whether the nuns of Jesús María—*Paraíso*'s intended local audience—and their families were the first to incorporate Sigüenza y Góngora's ideas into portraits of living crowned nuns. However, when it was published in 1683 *Paraíso* consolidated an already developed sense of Creole identity with carefully chosen elements of the pre-Hispanic past and longstanding ideas of female Christian virtue. In so doing, it provided a vehicle for nuns, their families, and artists to produce images that were informed by these issues. In particular, the themes of paradise, flowers, and virginal women, so prominently featured in *Paraíso*, are the same ones present in portraits of living crowned nuns. These themes are also conveyed forcefully in an anonymous eighteenth-century painting from New Spain that pictures the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception surrounded by Capuchin nuns who emerge from the center of colossal flowers (Figure 16). Rather than bearing flowering crowns and palm fronds, the nuns are pictured as actual flowers. They supplicate the Virgin (Christ's most precious flower) in gestures of prayer and awe while the Virgin observes tenderly this veritable garden of virtues. Above, the figures of the Most Blessed Trinity, though partially cut off, reign over the scene unfolding below. The association of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception—a representation of Mary conceived without sin—with nuns as flowers in this painting implies the elevated state of grace of these nearly perfect, but mortal, brides of Christ who look to the Virgin as the ideal bride. In one passage, Sigüenza y Góngora actually identifies the nuns of Jesús María as 'flowers which will be immortalized for their rationality;' a quality that the first woman lacked in the original Earthly Paradise (Ross 1993, 61).

For colonial Mexican Creoles like Sigüenza y Góngora who perceived New Spain's greatness in religious terms, the Aztec past was incorporated into this vision. Just as Europeans regarded ancient Greece and Rome as the flagships of their classical antiquity, the foundations for modern Europe, and a fertile seedbed for the fruition of Christianity, colonial Mexican Creoles came to perceive the pre-Hispanic past in a similar light. In fact, Sigüenza y Góngora was the first among them to systematically study this past so that he could incorporate it into New Spain's history, which he and subsequent scholars were eager to write.[28] When he acquired the papers of don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl that contained the account of the Aztec 'vestal virgin' ceremony, he very likely saw another opportunity to link the Aztec past with the colonial present; to associate the vestal virgins of New Spain's classical antiquity with

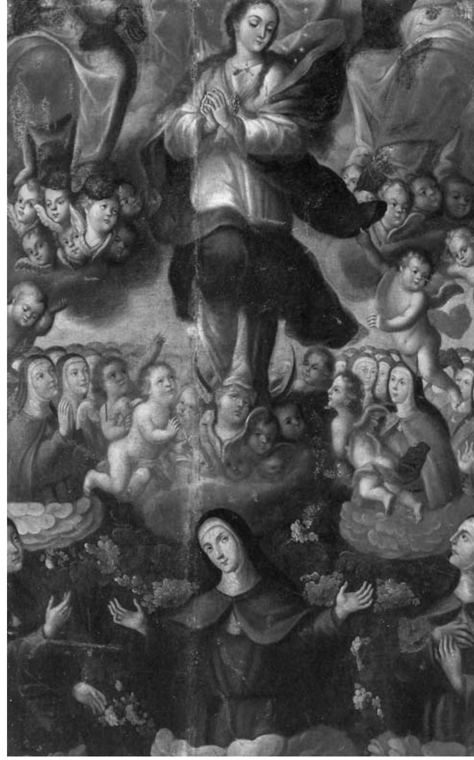

Figure 16 *The Patronage of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception over the Capuchin Order of Nuns*. Anonymous artist. Eighteenth century. Oil on canvas. Reproduced with the permission of the Nuevo Museo Universitario, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico.

its modern-day vestal virgins in one of the convents of its greatest city.[29] For him the *cihuatlamacazque*, however misguided in their heresy, are specifically identified as the original female virgins of the land to dedicate themselves to the service of a higher power. Furthermore, just as New Spain's nuns entered the religious life wearing floral accoutrements to symbolize their virtuousness, the *cihuatlamacazque*, who were equally virtuous, entered the temple in a similar manner and professed similar vows.

For a modern audience such a comparison might seem incongruous, since it pairs elements of a pagan religion with Christian ones. However, for Sigüenza y Góngora (1995 [1683], 51) it demonstrates that there was a historical precedent of religious excellence and virginal women in Mexico even before the Spanish arrival; he makes a similar argument in his identification of Quetzalcoatl as Saint Thomas the Apostle. Just as Quetzalcoatl prepared the natives for the coming of Christianity, so did the *cihuatlamacazque* ready the way for New Spain's brand of female religious excellence, embodied in is nuns. Sigüenza y Góngora (1995 [1683], 56) further justifies his comparison of the *cihuatlamacazque* with New Spain's nuns by relating it to Europe's

association with its vestal virgins of the classical past: 'If until now the oft-referred-to example of ancient Rome's vestal virgins has inspired the pious souls of Christian maidens, I do not know why what I have presented here would be less effective if it is given the credit that it is owed.'[30] For Sigüenza y Góngora, then, the nuns of New Spain could look to Aztec vestal virgins as a kind of spiritual predecessor and a source of inspiration.

The similarities between Aztec and Christian ceremonies, as well as the manner in which Aztec maidens and Mexican nuns were dressed—that is, sumptuously and crowned with flowers—constitute a harmonious correspondence between the Aztec past and the colonial present; a correspondence to which Sigüenza y Góngora was sensitive. For him, comparing New Spain's Aztec past to Europe's classical antiquity established a foundation for the equality of New Spain to Europe in a manner that linked parallel elements of the heathen past to the Christian present in a seemingly unbroken continuum.

Sigüenza y Góngora died in 1700 but his efforts were not without fruit, for eighteenth-century New Spain experienced the consolidation of a Mexican-Creole identity that incorporated elements of the Aztec past and articulated New Spain's most significant role in Christian terms.[31] Portraits of living crowned nuns constitute a portion of this large-scale campaign to forge a Mexican-Creole identity in their utilization of traditional Christian symbols to establish something that is effectively new and exclusive to New Spain.[32] This newness, however, is based pictorially on the older Hispanic tradition of picturing deceased nuns in flowery regalia and on the image of Saint Rose of Lima, which was a powerful symbol of Creole spiritual distinction.

Unlike the death portraits, those that picture nuns recently professed convey a message—articulated by Sigüenza y Góngora in *Paraíso occidental*—about the eminent position of New Spain in Christendom: namely, the foundations for the New Earthly Paradise were to be found among the *living* nuns of New Spain's convents. The sanctity and virtuousness of these nuns not only gained them eternal salvation but also benefited the land and its inhabitants, elevating New Spain above other nations (which were populated by the heirs of the original, failed Earthly Paradise). And unlike portraits of deceased nuns whose subjects' spiritual worth, finally realized in death, was intended to inspire living nuns, the spiritual worth of those pictured in portraits of living crowned nuns was realized in their lifetime and directed to a lay, mostly Creole audience. As such, the portraits shared not only their pictorial resemblance, but also their role as expressions of Creole religious excellence, with images of Saint Rose of Lima. The importance of this expression in the late colonial period is highlighted in art-historical terms by the proliferation of crowned-nun portraits in the mid to late eighteenth century—nowhere else were portraits of nuns commissioned and collected in such large numbers by the laity.

Yet strikingly absent in the portraits is a pre-Hispanic message or quality that refers to the *cihuatlamacazque*. To visually portray elements that conjure Aztec religion in colonial portraits would be, from the Christian standpoint, a dangerous conflation of

the pagan past with the Christian present, and a consequential diminution of the sitters' spiritual eminence. Images of, or from, the pre-Hispanic past were, in colonial times, relegated largely to history paintings or scholarly manuscripts about Aztec history, just as Sigüenza y Góngora's account of the *cihuatlamacazque* appears in a historical account. For Mexican Creoles, New Spain's nuns were not a reincarnation of their Aztec predecessors; they were their heirs, advanced, and therefore distinct, in historical and religious terms. Unlike their Aztec predecessors, crowned nuns were literally Christ's brides who, at the time of their profession, and in their portraits, resembled the first and greatest Spanish American saint, Rose of Lima, spiritually and visually.

Furthermore, for Sigüenza y Góngora, nuns linked the pre-Hispanic past with the colonial present in historical terms that were exclusive to New Spain's glorious and newly written history. As part of the larger Mexican-Creole discourse on New Spain's exceptionality, crowned-nun portraits are informed by, and project, the concepts of divine election and spiritual preeminence. Furthermore, they do so in a manner that, from the Creole perspective, is based historically on the 'vestal virgins' of Aztec Mexico, and pictorially on portraits of deceased crowned nuns. At the same time, however, they distinguish themselves from these groups as something new and distinct, just as the phenomenon of Saint Rose of Lima was new in, and distinct to, the Americas. As a late colonial manifestation of New Spain's sense of divine election, portraits of crowned nuns represent the most important aspect of Sigüenza y Góngora's western paradise: the sacred brides of Christ, upon whom New Spain's providential destiny was partially founded.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. For example, in 1680, Sigüenza y Góngora designed and wrote about a triumphal arch that featured images of Aztec gods and kings rather than the customary figures of Europe's classical antiquity (Leonard 1959, 226; Kügelgen 1994). The term 'Creole' here refers to those of Spanish stock though born in the Americas.
2. In the late Mesoamerican postclassic era, Texcoco was a powerful polity near the banks of Lake Texcoco and a member of the Aztec Triple Alliance. Ixtlilxochitl, who was from Texcoco, is the author of a number of native regional histories from the basin of Mexico.

[3] Ana García Sanz and Leticia Sánchez Hernández (1997, 137) have noted that Mexican portraits of newly professed crowned nuns inspired artists in Spain to add floral crowns to extant paintings of living nuns. The Spanish paintings, however, picture convent superiors (rather than newly professed nuns), and were displayed in convents.

[4] The origins of this discourse—today called millennialism—began among the earliest friars to arrive in New Spain shortly after the conquest. See Phelan (1956, 39–74) for the roots of millennialism and its impact on the earliest Franciscan friars in New Spain.

[5] Notable studies on the high religious roles of Aztec women include Kellogg (1995), Alberti Manzanares (1994), and Rodríguez-Shadow (2000). For the roles of women in New Spain's convents see especially Muriel (1946), Montero (2002), Lavrin (1976; 1983; 1986; 2008), López (2000), and Chowning (2006).

[6] In his *Book of the Gods and Rites*, Diego Durán (1971 [1579], 85) notes that girls destined for the temple could only come from six particular wards of Tenochtitlan; however, Alberti Manzanares (1994, 175) believes that, in actuality, they came from all of Tenochtitlan's wards.

[7] Because the informants who were consulted by Sahagún's *gramáticos*, or native assistants who wrote and illustrated *Primeros memoriales*, were from Tepepulco, it is assumed here that the scenes relate to Tepepulco's history. However, they may also refer to events that very likely took place in other Nahua cities of the Valley of Mexico (such as Texcoco, with which Tepepulco was closely aligned).

[8] Susan Kellogg (1995, 586) has speculated that 'women priestesses may be depicted in the *Primeros memoriales* as sacrificing a female victim during the month of *Ochpaniztli*.'

[9] Colonial authors disagree about the exact age that girls entered the temple: Acosta (2002 [1590], 283) and Durán (1971 [1579], 83) list their age as 12 or 13 years old, while Sigüenza y Góngora (1995 [1683], 53) lists it as eight. Francisco Clavijero (2003 [1780], 237), on the other hand, writes that maidens left the temple at around 17 or 18 years of age, after having served one or two years.

[10] Durán (1971 [1579], 81) locates the living quarters of the *cihuatlamacazque* inside a wall surrounding the temple while Motolinía (1951 [1858], 127) locates them in a hall behind the principal temple.

[11] See Motolinía (1951 [1858], 128), Acosta (2002 [1590], 283), Durán (1971 [1579], 83–89), and Clavijero (2003 [1780], 236–37) for description of the various duties *cihuatlamacazque* performed.

[12] Acosta (2002 [1590], 284) and Sigüenza y Góngora (1995 [1683], 52, 56) explicitly compare the *cihuatlamacazque* to Rome's vestal virgins.

[13] This symbol is based on the parable of the wedding attendants (Matthew 24), which admonishes those who do not have the resources to keep their lamps alight long enough to wait for the bridegroom (Christ), who arrives unannounced.

[14] Recent studies by Chowning (2006) and Burns (1999), however, have challenged the popular notion that nuns in colonial Spanish America strictly maintained their vow of enclosure. Their research has revealed that some convents in New Spain and Peru maintained stronger economic and social ties to the secular realm than previously thought. These ties often brought nuns in direct (and sometimes unsupervised [Chowning 2006, 126]) contact with laymen and -women inside convent walls.

[15] For studies on the Peruvian and Colombian portraits see Jaramillo de Zuleta (1992) and Montero (1999, 14–17; 2002, 624–71). See García Sanz and Sánchez Hernández (1997) and Montero (2002, 672–84) for studies of Spanish portraits of deceased nuns.

[16] 'Para su centro Camina, la que fuera de él se vió, en el su descanso halló, y siempre para él se inclina. Que el Claustro Carmelo aúna, como a su objecto mi amor, y si en él todo mi ardor en vida comuniqué, de muerta, se infiere, que he de estar allá mejor.' My thanks to Laura Bass and Ari Zighelboim for assisting with this translation.

[17] Ruíz Gomar (1978, 100) notes that colonial convent records do not list payments to artists for portraits of their nuns. He deduces that the portraits were commissioned by nuns' families, and hung in family living rooms. Unfortunately, there is no information about the families who commissioned crowned-nun portraits that points to their association with portraitists.

[18] Graziano (2004, 70) notes that in Hansen's hagiography of Rose of Lima the author describes the circumstances in which Rose, once dead, was crowned with a garland taken from a statue of Saint Catherine of Siena.

[19] Saint Rose of Lima never professed as a nun; rather, she belonged to the third order of the Dominicans, which was made up entirely of laypersons who lived pious lives though they never took the full vows of the religious life.

[20] At the end of her life, Rose of Lima was widely regarded as another Saint Catherine of Siena—a saint whom she generally imitated in life (Graziano 2004, 44).

[21] *Escudos de monjas* are shields or badges worn primarily by nuns of the Conceptionist and Jeronymite religious orders, though some of the less austere Dominican and Augustinian nuns adopted them as well (Perry 1999, 11). Just as with portraits of living crowned nuns, *escudos de monjas* are a visual phenomenon exclusive to New Spain, though they originated about 100 hundred years before the portraits.

[22] In the sixteenth century, José de Acosta, Juan de Tovar, and Diego Durán discuss the belief that Saint Thomas the Apostle arrived in ancient Mexico to spread the gospel before the arrival of the Spaniards. See Lafaye (1976, 64).

[23] Subsequent authors of influence, most notably Mario Veytia and Lorenzo Boturini Bonaducci, supported the Quetazalcoatl/Saint Thomas theory (Brading 1985, 12–13).

[24] Perry (2007, 322) regards the visual culture from New Spain's convents as a contributor to eighteenth-century Creole identity and the related notion of a divinely elected people.

[25] '[S]i en aquél triunfó de la original pureza la primera culpa, en éste tiene pacífica habitación la divina gracia; si en aquél conducidos de la inobediencia se enseñorearon de la humana naturaleza todos los vicios, en éste la reducen a su ser primitivo las virtudes todas; y si de aquél desterró un querubín a una sola mujer que los habitaba, por delicuente, en éste viven como serafines abrasadas en el amor de su esposo innumerables vírgenes' (Sigüenza y Góngora 1995 [1683], 33).

[26] As Perry (1999, 80) has noted regarding the nuns of Jesús María in *Paraíso occidental*: 'The fall of mankind in the east was now redeemed by the "angelic virgins" of Mexico's western paradise.'

[27] *Paraíso Occidental, PLANTEADO, Y CULTIVADO por la liberal benefica mano de los muy Catholicos, y poderosos Reyes de España Nuestros Señores en su magnifico Real Convento de JESUS MARIA de Mexico: DE CUYA FUNDACION, Y PROGRESSOS, y de las prodigiosas maravillas, y virtudes, con que exhalando olor suave de perfeccion, florecieron en su clausura la V.M. MARINA DE LA CRUZ, y otras exemplarissimas Religiosas DA NOTICIA EN ESTE VOLUMEN D. Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora Presbytero Mexicano.* Translated by Ross (1993, 79).

[28] Notable authors working in the vein of Sigüenza y Góngora were Lorenzo Boturini Bonaducci, Mario Veytia, and Francisco Clavijero, all of whom published comprehensive histories of Mexico in the eighteenth century.

[29] Further consolidating the link between past and present, Sigüenza y Góngora (1995 [1683], 101) alleges that Jesús María was founded on the site of the residence of Hernán Cortés's interpreter and mistress during the conquest, doña Marina (Malinche), who, after the fall of Tenochtitlan, helped convert the natives of the Aztec capital to Christianity.

[30] 'Y si hasta ahora al repetido ejemplo de las vestales romanas se conmovían los ánimos piadosos de las cristianas doncellas, no sé por qué no ha de ser más eficaz y activo el que aquí he propuesto, si ya no es que también se mide el crédito que se le debe' (Sigüenza y Góngora 1995 [1683], 56).

[31] For example, see the Aztec serpent head used as the cornerstone for the eighteenth-century palace of the counts of Calimaya in Mexico City. Also consider the pioneering studies of archaeological remnants of Aztec Tenochtitlan such as the Stone of the Five Suns and the Coatlique statue, both discovered in the late eighteenth century.

[32] For a detailed study on the political and cultural connotations of this pictorial strategy in portraits of crowned nuns see Córdova (2006).

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