

**Identification**

<i>Nomination</i>	The earliest 16th century monasteries on the slopes of Popocatepetl
<i>Location</i>	States of Morelos (Atlatlahucan, Cuernavaca, Hueyapan, Tetela del Volcan, Yautepec, Ocuituco, Tepoztlan, Tlayacapan, Totolapan, Yecapixtla, and Zacualpan de Amilpas Municipalities) and Puebla (Calpan, Huejotzingo, and Tochimilco Municipalities)
<i>State Party</i>	Mexico
<i>Date</i>	1 October 1993

**Justification by State Party**

The considerable influence exercised by the architectural model of these early monasteries, which spread over a very wide area, is incontestable, because it operated not only in the second half of the 16th century in the centre and south-east of Mexico, but continued with the expansion of colonization and evangelization of the lands to the north in the 18th century, reaching the present-day USA from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts, in the form of a large number of smaller establishments known as "missions" rather than monasteries (criterion ii).

The group of monasteries selected as being representative of the large total, considered both as a family and as individual buildings, bears characteristic witness to a certain type of structure, architectural as well as urban, which served as the centre of new human establishments for the reorganization of an enormous territory and for the introduction of new social and cultural elements.

Independently of earlier monastery models in Spain, Europe, and the Mediterranean region, the distinctive characteristic of these monasteries of New Spain lies in the relationship between the built and open spaces and, above all, in the emphasis placed on the wide forecourt or *atrium* with its individual *posas* and open chapels which offered a variety of solutions (criterion iv).

These monasteries were conceived and built to be the main instrument for establishing new religious beliefs through the medium of a new architectural model which made it possible to christianize a very large population over a vast territory and in a short period of time (criterion vi).

**History and Description***History*

This region was intensively occupied from early times. At the time of the Spanish conquest it was divided into two provinces of the Aztec Empire. It was the scene of several bloody battles during the siege of Mexico-Tenochtitlan by Cortes in 1521.

The first twelve Franciscans arrive in Mexico in 1523, followed by the Dominicans in 1526 and by five Augustinians in 1533. From Veracruz they moved inland to Mexico City, where they set up their first communities, but they quickly moved outside the capital to spread the gospel to the Indians, establishing their first monasteries on the southern slopes of the mountain range dominated by Popocatepetl - the Franciscans at Cuernavaca in 1525, the Dominicans at Oaxtepec in 1528, and the Augustinians at Ocuituco in 1534.

The three Orders established their own spheres of influence in the region. Their relationships were generally harmonious and several common routes were created, such as that between Hueyapan and Tochimilco (which is now no longer in use and where substantial remains of the original surfaces have survived).

The monasteries were founded in areas of dense indigenous settlement, with the object of providing focal points for urban settlements, a role which has survived to the present day. At Cuernavaca, which was an important prehispanic centre and which became a colonial provincial capital, the monastery exceptionally became a cathedral.

- *Franciscans*

From their Cuernavaca house, designed and built by Francisco Becerra, the Franciscans moved towards the "hot lands" to the south, and to the west, away from the mountains. A new route was opened to the south-east, encircling the volcanic massif towards Puebla, to replace the difficult Paso de Cortes. Their first foundation on the eastern slopes of the volcano was at Huejotzingo (1529), followed quickly by Calpan (both built by Juan de la Alameda) and then Tochimilco on the southern slopes.

- *Dominicans*

Three years after the arrival of the Franciscans the Dominicans built their monastery and hospital at Oaxtepec, but their efforts to establish themselves in the Tepozteco valley at Tepoztlan were frustrated by the local tribes until 1560. In the meantime they opened up a westerly route to Oaxaca, founding monasteries at Tetela del Volcan and Hueyapan.

- *Augustinians*

The Augustinian houses occupied the area lying between the eastern route of the Franciscans and the western route of the Dominicans. The mother house was at Ocuituco, from which other establishments were created at Totolapan and Yecapixtla to the west and Atlatlahcan, Zacualpan, and Tlayacapan on the route towards the "hot lands" further south. The Augustinians built the largest number of monasteries in this region.

Between 1525 and 1570 more than a hundred monasteries were built in this region, a fact that is difficult to reconcile with the records of the number of monks who arrived in New Spain in this period. By the end of the century over three hundred had been established.

Following the Council of Trent, which ended in 1567, the role of the missionary Orders was greatly diminished and many of the monasteries were taken over by the regular clergy, being converted into parish churches.

### *Description*

The fourteen monasteries that form this nomination have been selected for their representative character from the large number that survive intact. The group selected is also limited to the earlier establishments, which were built on the slopes of Popocatepetl to the south-east of Mexico City and the Sierra de Tepozteco to the south and south-west. They all conform with an architectural model which spread rapidly over the region which contains certain basic elements common to this new type of monastic house.

They were built in a regular chronological sequence. This began with the walls of the atrium, the open chapel, and the *posas* chapels. Then followed the nave of the church and the ancillary buildings; during this phase the atrium played a fundamental role in the process of converting the natives, who were accustomed to religious ceremonies taking place in the open air. Finally, other elements were added, such as towers, side chapels, and sometimes a second open courtyard or upper storeys for the monastic buildings.

The three principal elements of these monasteries were the atrium, the church, and the monastic buildings:

*The atrium* was an open space, usually rectangular (80-120 m by 50-80 m), but sometimes trapezoid (Zacualpan) or square (Hueyapan). It could be at ground level (Cuernavaca, Atlatlahcan, Tlayacapan), sunken

(Tepoztlan, Calpan, Tochimilco), or on a raised platform (Ocuituco, Oaxtepec, Huejotzingo, Tetela); in some of the last-named cases there is evidence that they were built on prehispanic structures (eg Hueyapan, Oaxtepec).

- *The atrium walls*, in stone and 2-5 m high, were sometimes crenellated (Tepoztlan, Tochimilco), and were entered through two or three gateways (important examples at Huejotzingo and Zacualpan).
- *The "posas" (chapels)* These are small vaulted chapels at each corner of the atrium for depositing the sacraments. They vary in size from 4.5 to 6 m and are open on two sides to the atrium, with various types of roof (ribbed, domed, or pyramidal). Some are plastered and painted (Yecapixtla, Atlatlahcan) and others are more elaborately finished with sculpted decoration (Huejotzingo, Calpan). In some cases the *posas* are incorporated into the main monastery structures (Atlatlahcan, Totolapan, Tepoztlan). Some of the atria do not have *posas* and in some cases they have been replaced at a later date by larger chapels.
- *The processional way* A pathway up to 10 m wide leads round the interior perimeter of the atrium, connecting the *posas*; used for religious ceremonies, this is known as the processional way. Few of these have survived intact; those at Atlatlahcan, Totolapan, and Tepoztlan are marked by low stone walls, and elsewhere they are defined by pavements or by trees or bushes (Huejotzingo, Yecapixtla, Calpan).
- *Open chapels* Open chapels were basic elements of open-air religious activities and were usually built to one side of the eventual church. In some rare cases, as at Cuernavaca, the open chapel was orientated not in parallel with but perpendicular to the church. At Tochimilco and Yecapixtla the open chapel was incorporated into the main facade of the monastery in the form of a balcony on the upper storey.
- *Atrium cross* There is usually a stone cross in the centre of the atrium, on the line of access to the monastery. Some are simple (Tepoztlan, Hueyapan) and others are very elaborate (Huejotzingo).
- *Via crucis or calvary* At some of the monasteries (Tochimilco, Huejotzingo) there are niches symbolizing the Stations of the Cross in the walls of the atrium. At Atlatlahcan the Stations are exceptionally represented by chapels outside the monastery along the axis of the village, but only four have survived.
- *Water channels, fountains, and cisterns* were important elements in the monasteries, and include aqueducts (Tochimilco, Huejotzingo), fountains (Ocuituco), and other water-management features (Oaxtepec, Tepoztlan, Tlayacapan, Ocuituco, Totolapan, Calpan).

*The church* was the central, dominant feature of the monastery complex. It was usually simple in plan but of imposing size, with a single nave. The roof was generally barrel- or rib-vaulted, without a dome or transepts but sometimes having a tower above the main facade.

- *Nave* Yecapixtla and Tepoztlan have barrel vaults on the nave and ribbed vaulting on the chancel, whereas Oaxtepec, Tochimilco, and Huejotzingo have ribbed vaulting over the whole nave. At Tochimilco, Ocuituco, and Yecapixtla there is a "triumphal" arch at the opening of the chancel.

There are always large buttresses on the outside side walls and sometimes also at the angles of the chancel and the main facade. The average overall length is 50 m, with Tetela and Totolapan shorter (36 m) and Cuernavaca (70 m) and Huejotzingo and Tepoztlan (60 m) longer. They are all over 10 m wide, the largest in the group being Tepoztlan (14 m).

Only at Oaxtepec and Cuernavaca are there clearly defined transepts, although the latter is part of a 17th century enlargement of the edifice.

- *Chancel* The chancels are usually raised 1 m above the level of the naves. Most terminate in semi-hexagonal apses, emphasized in some cases by buttresses ((Tlayacapan, Yecapixtla, Atlatlahcan, Huejotzingo).

- *Ancillary structures* In some cases there are structures ancillary to the naves used as baptisteries (Zacualpan, Ocuituco) or side chapels, often elaborately decorated in subsequent phases of the structures (eg the Baroque chapel at Zacualpan). Large fonts carved from single pieces of stone and still retaining their original paint are important features at Tetela and Tepoztlan. Only at Huejotzingo has the original 16th century retablo survived, but there are fine Baroque retablos at Hueyapan and Zacualpan.

*The monastery* is usually located to the south of the church, mainly for climatic reasons, so as to utilize the high nave as protection from the north. The monastic buildings are disposed around a courtyard or *patio* designated as the cloister; this is usually square and has corridors on all four sides and at both levels. The open space is generally small compared with the ground area of the monasteries (14-15 m square).

The Augustinian monasteries usually, and the others sometimes, have an internal corridor parallel to that of the cloister (Ocuituco, Huejotzingo, Yecapixtla, Tepoztlan). These are roofed, with barrel vaulting in the earlier structures. There are confessionals, often in the thickness of the wall separating the monastery from the church. They are S-shaped, allowing the monks access from the interior of the monastery and the penitents from the church (Huejotzingo, Tochimilco, Atlatlahcan, Tepoztlan).

The customary rooms on the ground floor are the *de profundis* hall for prayer and meetings, refectory, kitchen, and larder in addition to the sacristy, which connects with the church, and the lodge opening on to the atrium. Cells and other lodgings and sometimes a library are to be found on the upper storey. Most of the interior walls of the monasteries are usually covered with mural paintings. This wide use of mural painting and the variety of the subjects is one of the most important features of this group of monasteries. Of particular interest are the paintings at Tetela, Atlatlahcan, the nave of the church at Cuernavaca, and Huejotzingo.

## **Management and protection**

### *Legal status*

All these buildings belong to the Federal Government, in accordance with the reform laws of 1856 and 1859 and the 1857 Constitution, by virtue of their classification as former monasteries, church property, and religious cult buildings within the category "Churches and their ancillaries". They have also been declared historical monuments between 1932 and 1950 under successive Federal legislation relating to the cultural heritage, the most recent being the 1972 Law on archaeological, artistic, and historic monuments and zones.

### *Management*

Because of their statutory designation these monasteries are the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL) through the General Directorate for the Federal Monumental Heritage, and are under the guardianship of the Ministry of Public Education (SEP) through the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH).

No work of any kind may be carried out on them except by or with the authorization of SEDESOL, and with the technical approval of SEP and INAH.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

These monasteries have been for centuries the centres of the villages that grew up round them and continue to play a vital role in the life of these communities. For this reason they have been kept in a good state of repair. Since this is an earthquake zone, major consolidation work has been carried out on several of the buildings. The churches at Tetela and Ocuituco have been reroofed, in the 19th and early 20th century respectively, and major changes were made to Cuernavaca when it became a cathedral.

All the monasteries are under the supervision of the SEDESOL and INAH regional offices for the States of Morelos and Puebla, who work closely with the respective communities in ensuring their proper maintenance.

#### *Authenticity*

The level of authenticity in design and materials at the monasteries is high. After the Council of Trent many of the monastic buildings were converted to other uses and in the course of the 19th century new public buildings, such as schools and clinics, were built in the monastery precincts. However, the churches have all retained their original function and as a result have preserved the greater part of their original form and furnishings.

#### **Evaluation**

##### *Action by ICOMOS*

An evaluation of the cultural significance of this group of monasteries was provided by Arq. Jorge O. Gazaneo (Argentina). An ICOMOS expert mission visited them in May 1994. The mission confirmed Mr Gazaneo's estimation of the cultural importance of the group (with the exception of Hueyapan, which is considered to be of lesser architectural significance than the others), but expressed grave concern about the inadequate control exercised by the competent authorities over interventions on the individual monasteries and the complete absence of any protection of their settings by means of planning regulations. In several cases (eg Tlayacapan, Atlathauhcan, Calpan) recently built intrusive structures should be removed; in the case of Cuernavaca, this church should be removed from the nomination unless buildings of this kind are removed.

##### *Qualities*

The selection of monasteries (with the exception of Hueyapan) represents an excellent cross-section of the first period (16th century) of the Spanish conversion of the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

##### *Comparative analysis*

This group of monasteries is unique, as representing the initial phase of Christianization. The Committee should bear in mind that there are substantial remains of monasteries from two later periods in Mexico - the Spanish "Herrerismo" or Classical period (eg the Cathedral in Mexico City) and the "Mestizo" period (eg El Pocito), which illustrates the fusion of the Spanish and Mexican cultures.

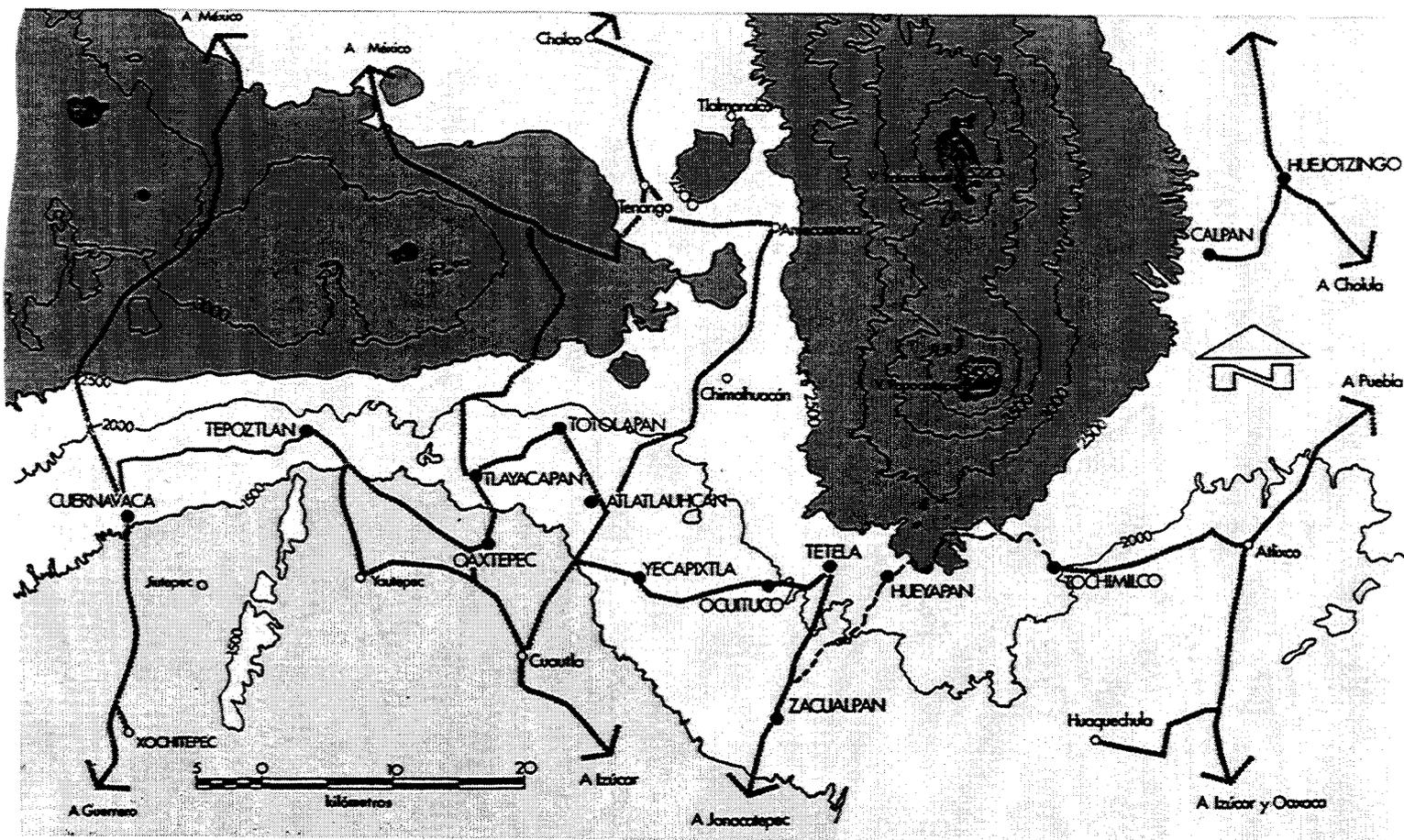
##### *ICOMOS recommendations for future action*

No information is given in the nomination dossier about the existence of buffer zones around any of the monasteries proposed. This information must be provided by the State Party.

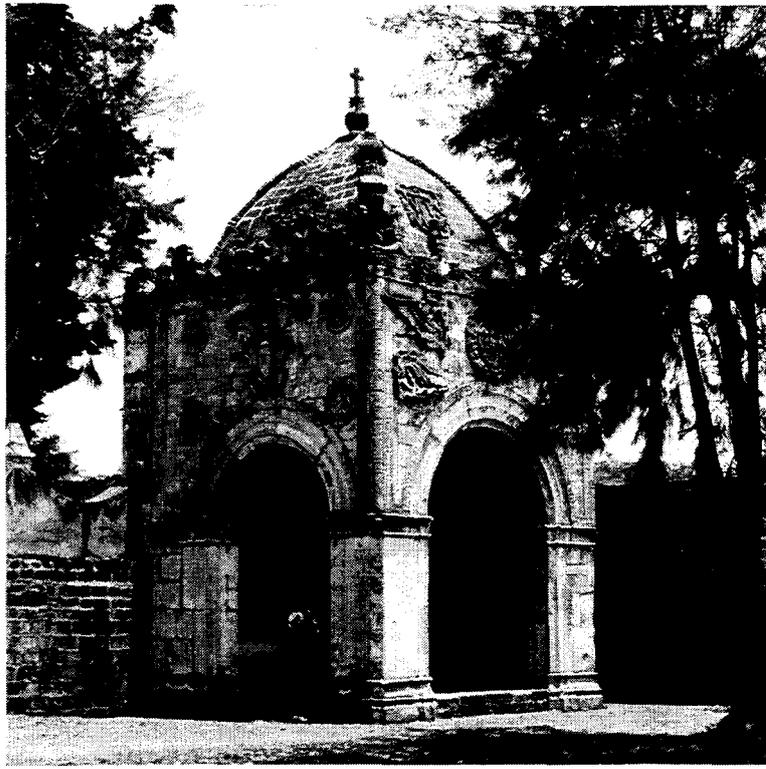
#### **Recommendation**

That this nomination be deferred, the State Party being requested to provide information about buffer zones in respect of the monasteries proposed for inclusion on the World Heritage List, and invited to consider the omission of Hueyapan (and also Cuernavaca, if assurances cannot be given that recent constructions will be removed).

ICOMOS, October 1994



Monastères sur les versants du Popocatepetl : plan de localisation /  
 Monasteries on the slopes of Popocatepetl : location map



Monastères sur les versants du Popocatepetl :  
"posas" de Calpan /  
Monasteries on the slopes of Popocatepetl :  
"posas" of Calpan



Monastères sur les versants du Popocatepetl :  
chapelle ouverte de Cuernavaca /  
Monasteries on the slopes of Popocatepetl :  
opened chapel of Cuernavaca