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# Franciscan Ensemble of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala (Mexico)

## No 702bis

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### Official name as proposed by the State Party

Franciscan Ensemble of the Monastery and Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala (as Extension of the “Earliest 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Monasteries on the Slopes of Popocatepetl”)

### Location

City of Tlaxcala  
State of Tlaxcala  
Mexico

### Brief description

The Franciscan Ensemble of the Monastery and Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption is part of the first construction programme launched after the arrival of the Franciscans in 1524 for the evangelisation and colonisation of the northern territories of Mexico.

This Ensemble is one of the first five monasteries established by Franciscan, Dominican and Augustinian friars, and one of three still standing; the other two are already included in the World Heritage property. As such, it provides an example of the architectural model and spatial solution developed in response to a new cultural context, which integrated local elements and knowledge to create new spaces such as wide atria, open chapels and *posa* chapels in order to receive a large congregation. In addition to these solutions, the Franciscan Ensemble of the Monastery and Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption presents two other particular features – a free-standing tower and a wooden *mudéjar* ceiling called *alfarje* – that are not found in the other monasteries already inscribed on the World Heritage List.

The particular location of the Ensemble on an acropolis led to a singular distribution of the different spaces of the monastery, but it also allowed the site to be seen from the city which developed around it. The monastery still functions as a place for religious manifestation and worship.

### Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a nomination for an extension of a serial property of one *monument*.

## 1 Basic data

### Included in the Tentative List

7 November 2018

### Background

This is a nomination of an extension of the World Heritage serial property of Earliest 16<sup>th</sup>- Century Monasteries on the Slopes of Popocatepetl (Mexico), which was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1994 on the basis of criteria (ii) and (iv).

### Consultations and Technical Evaluation Mission

Desk reviews have been provided by ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, members and independent experts.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 13 to 17 December 2020.

### Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 25 September 2020 requesting further information about the justification for inscription, the comparative analysis, the restoration works, the buffer zone, and the ownership and management of the proposed component.

An Interim Report was provided to the State Party on 25 January 2021 summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel. Further information was requested in the Interim Report including: the comparative analysis; the boundaries of the nominated property; the buffer zone; and management.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 12 November 2020, and on 26 February 2021, and has been incorporated into the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

### Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

18 March 2021

## 2 Description of the property

Note: The nomination dossier and additional information contain detailed descriptions of this property, its history and its state of conservation. Due to limitations on the length of evaluation reports, this report only provides a short summary of the most relevant aspects.

### Description and history

The inscribed serial property of Earliest 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Monasteries on the Slopes of Popocatepetl is composed of 14 monasteries located in the states of Morelos and Puebla in Mexico: *Atlatlahucan*, *Cuernavaca*, *Hueyapan*, *Oaxtepec*, *Ocuituco*, *Tepoztlán*, *Tetela del Volcán*, *Tlayacapan*, *Totolapan*, *Yecapixtla*, *Zacualpan de Amilpas*, *Calpan*, *Huejotzingo* and *Tochimilco*. These monasteries are outstanding examples of the architectural style and spatial solutions adopted by the first missionaries – Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians – that illustrate the interchange between Indigenous and European cultures. Many of the buildings that are part of these monasteries have an explicit military aspect and include compositional elements with Mudéjar and Renaissance origins. Influences of the indigenous

cultures are tangibly expressed in large open spaces used for worship as well as in the decorations and the wall paintings. The relationship between built and open spaces is a distinctive characteristic of these monasteries and, above all, the emphasis placed on the wide forecourt or atrium, with its individual *posa* and open chapels. They were founded in areas with large indigenous populations, and became focal points for new urban settlements, many still existing to the present day.

The nominated extension proposes to add the Franciscan Ensemble of the Monastery and Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala, which was built near earlier settlements and which became the cornerstone for the development of the city of Tlaxcala. Its central presence in the townscape of the city is still visible today. It also retains its liturgical function, being since 1959 the seat of the Bishopric of Tlaxcala.

The Monastery and Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala was the first ensemble built by the Franciscan friars, and is therefore one of the earliest examples of the new architectural typology, and which was later expanded throughout the Mexican territory and even beyond its borders.

The city of Tlaxcala was founded in 1521, after the conquest of Tenochtitlan, one of the most important pre-Hispanic cities in the Americas; this granted the new city special privileges. When the first 12 Franciscan friars arrived in 1524, they established one of their monasteries in Tlaxcala, which would later become a Diocese. The construction of the ensemble started soon after their arrival, and progressed in different phases until the 17<sup>th</sup> century in parallel with the development of the city of Tlaxcala.

The construction of the Cathedral is believed to have begun in 1527 and by around 1556, the upper atrium already had four chapels. When the liturgical and doctrinal space was moved to this upper atrium, the lower atrium lost its importance and later became a burial ground. Construction continued during the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the addition of the friar's house in 1629, a new altarpiece in 1633, and the Chapel of the Third Order in 1685, among other structures.

In spite of the secularisation ordered in 1640 by Bishop Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, the Franciscan Ensemble of Tlaxcala remained a meaningful place for the Tlaxcalteca community, who continued funding improvements to the Ensemble.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the independence process, the Franciscan Ensemble lost some architectural elements and some areas, such as the orchard and part of the lower atrium (the latter is now occupied by a bullring). Between 1877 and 1881, the cloister of the monastery began to serve diverse uses, for example a jail, a hospital and a school.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a few works were carried out, especially on the tower to ensure its stability. In 1933, the cathedral and former monastery were declared

colonial monuments. Some conservation works were carried out in the following decades to address issues such as groundwater infiltration and the collapse of certain features. In 1978, the federal government divided the 'usufruct' of the property between the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) and the Diocese of Tlaxcala. Given that more than half of the built area was abandoned and in poor condition, INAH was made responsible for a large part of the Ensemble, the rest remaining under the control of the Diocese of Tlaxcala. Decades of conservation work followed. Today, most of the Ensemble is still under the administration of INAH who manage the regional museum installed in the monastery.

### **Boundaries**

The nominated extension is conceived as a new component of the inscribed serial property, having its own property area and its own buffer zone. It had initially an area of 1.9 ha and a buffer zone of 14.8 ha. In its Interim Report, ICOMOS noted that the boundaries for the nominated extension were defined according to the present extension of the Franciscan architectural ensemble only. Instead, ICOMOS considers it important that the proposed extension boundaries reflect the importance of other spaces with functional relevance that existed in the past, such as the Lower Atrium (as the foundation site of the early church) and the space of the *Calle De La Capilla Abierta* (a processional path with a remarkable viewpoint to the Open Chapel). By including these elements into the boundaries of the nominated extension, it will ensure their conservation and the integrity of the property.

In response to these recommendations, the State Party proposed new delineations, including part of the street *Capilla Abierta* but limited to the footprint of the street and without including the buildings that delimit it. However, most of the areas once occupied by the lower atrium and the orchard have not been included. ICOMOS considers that it is important that the archaeological evidence of those spaces is conserved and reiterates its request to the State Party to include them within the limits of the proposed extension.

The proposed buffer zone follows the original total extent of the monastery, including its now-disappeared areas such as the orchard. In its Interim Report, ICOMOS noted the importance of the location of the monastery on a hill and of its relationship with its surroundings, and considers it necessary to ensure the protection of the viewsheds from the Franciscan Ensemble. Therefore, it asked the State Party for more information on how the boundaries of the proposed buffer zone integrate the features presented as decisive in the choice of the location for the settlement of the Franciscans, such as the seven hills and the water source. It also asked for further details on the current legal and planning provisions to protect both the views to the monastery and from the monastery to its surroundings, in a broader landscape approach. Whilst the State Party provided further information regarding the legal and planning provisions, which are analysed in a different section of the evaluation, no concrete information

was provided on how the boundaries of the buffer zone take into account important features related to its geographical location.

ICOMOS acknowledges the State Party's efforts to revise the boundaries of the proposed extension but considers that further adjustments are needed to incorporate areas that provide evidence of the former lower atrium and the orchard. Likewise, the delimitation of the buffer zone should be revised in relation to important elements that determined its location, to better define its immediate setting and to consider important viewsheds.

#### **State of conservation**

After Mexico became an independent nation, and especially after the application of reform laws, namely the 'Law of Disentailment of ecclesiastical and civil property', the Franciscan Ensemble was used for other functions: it became a school in 1861 and later a hospital, a prison and a garrison. Repairs began after it was declared a colonial monument in 1933, especially between 1945 and 1949. Between 1970 and 2016, INAH carried out several programmes of conservation works. All the interventions were documented with inventories, plans, and research papers, most of them kept and available in the archives of the INAH local office.

The nomination dossier and additional information received detail three main phases of conservation works. During the first phase, between 1970 and 1990, works were aimed at stabilising and consolidating parts of the buildings that were damaged and adapting its use to its current functions. These works included the consolidation and water-proofing of walls and vaults, the replacement of damaged wood pieces, substitution works on the floor of the Cathedral, and repairs to the electrical installation. The second phase, between 1991 and 2011, concentrated on the reinforcement of a wall that had collapsed due to a landslide and on general maintenance and cleaning works, especially of organic matter, in the different parts of the Ensemble. It also included the removal of the concrete floor in the Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the restoration of vandalized paintings in the Chapel of the Rosary, in 2005. Finally, between 2012 and 2016, interventions were made to ensure waterproofness of the external deck of the main nave of the Cathedral, and to preserve wall paintings all over the monastery; cleaning works continued during this period. In 2018-2019, INAH led interventions to strengthen architectural elements, such as the foundations of the free-standing tower. Maintenance and cleaning works in the Ensemble continue on a regular basis.

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation is good in general. However, the effects of seismic activity, heavy rains and the location of the Ensemble on a hill containing a water source, require constant attention to avoid recurrent problems of water infiltration, rising damp and moisture, which can lead to the deterioration of structural elements as well as decorative ones.

#### **Factors affecting the property**

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the main factors affecting the proposed extension are related to natural disasters, namely earthquakes, torrential rains and landslides. Since the Franciscan Ensemble is located on the slopes of Popocatepetl volcano, and also near the La Malinche volcano, there are constant effects from volcanic activity. The last big earthquake, in 2016, had a significant impact on the nominated extension as well as on the monasteries already inscribed; this led to the provision of an emergency international assistance in January 2018, under the World Heritage Fund, for the already inscribed property.

The management plan evokes those risks, and suggests the need for a dedicated plan of civil protection but does not present concrete measures in this regard. Based on the information of the technical evaluation mission, in its Interim Report, ICOMOS also noted the potential fire risk from an outdated electrical system. Therefore, it asked the State Party to submit further information on concrete measures to deal with the risk of fire (particularly given the importance of the wooden *alfarje*) as well as on other existing measures or risk management plans to address other risks. Additional information submitted by the State Party explains that the responsible authorities have already taken measures to start replacing the electrics (works are expected to start in 2021) and planning the installation of a fire detection system. The State Party also submitted plans to develop a General Risk Management Program for the whole property.

Urban development pressures have generated in some cases high-rise buildings, the construction of buildings with little or no planning, and also traffic congestion and pollution, which are other important factors. The fact that the Franciscan Ensemble in Tlaxcala is included inside the monumental zone declared in 1986 helps in addressing these pressures; however, ICOMOS has already expressed its concerns about the need to protect the viewsheds to and from the Ensemble. To help with this issue, the local government recently adopted a new plan to control and monitor urban development in the city centre.

Rising damp, humidity and micro-organisms (and organisms such as moths) also pose problems to the structural and decorative elements of the Ensemble.

### **3 Proposed justification for inscription**

#### **Proposed justification**

The nominated extension is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- The Earliest 16th-Century Monasteries on the Slopes of Popocatepetl are considered to represent good examples of the architectural style adopted by the first missionaries – Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians, with spatial solutions and the architectural expressions that

materialised the fusion and synthesis of heterogeneous elements. A considerable number of these buildings have an explicit military aspect, and compositional elements with definite Mudejar and Renaissance origins. The expression of the native culture is also present, from the open spaces used for worship to the work in the decorations and the wall paintings.

- They all conform to an architectural model which spread rapidly over the region and contains certain basic elements common to this new type of monastic house; the monasteries were also founded in areas of dense indigenous settlements, with the objective of providing focal points of new human establishments.
- The Franciscan Ensemble of the Monastery and Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala follows the same architectural model and its foundation precedes most of the other monasteries already included in the inscribed property. In addition, it presents particular features that cannot be found in the other monasteries, such as the free-standing tower and the wooden Mudejar ceiling called *alfarje* (all other monasteries have vaulted ceilings), as well as a unique distribution of the spaces and buildings due to its location.

#### Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis presented in the nomination dossier details extensively the uniqueness of the history of the Franciscan Ensemble and stresses the particular context, both cultural and geographical, of the foundation and development of the monastery. It also presents a list of monastic foundations in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Latin America, but no comparison of their features is presented. Therefore, in its request for supplementary information sent in September 2020, ICOMOS enquired about the reasons why this particular component has been selected as a proposed extension and what was the rationale that was followed to reach this selection.

The additional information submitted by the State Party in November 2020, clarified that the Franciscan Ensemble in Tlaxcala was not included in the original nomination because of the lack of reliable information and research. The information provided also explained that the Franciscan Ensemble is one of the first monasteries founded, and emphasises its unique features, such as the free-standing tower, and the *alfarje* ceiling. Nevertheless, there was still only limited comparison with the monasteries already inscribed.

Therefore, ICOMOS in its Interim Report asked for additional information on how this ensemble compares with, and complements, the other 14 monasteries and how it contributes to a better understanding of the Outstanding Universal Value of the inscribed property. In the additional information provided by the State Party in February 2021, a closer comparison with the monasteries highlights the specificity of the proposed Franciscan Ensemble and its unique features. The State Party also addressed ICOMOS's concerns about the completeness

of the series by confirming that no further future extensions are envisaged.

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ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of the proposed extension for the World Heritage List.

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#### Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The Earliest 16th-Century Monasteries on the Slopes of Popocatepetl were inscribed on the basis of cultural criteria (ii) and (iv) The proposed extension therefore is nominated under the same criteria.

Criterion (ii): *exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the Franciscan Ensemble of the Monastery and Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala is an example of how the exchange of human values led to the creation of urban spaces by becoming the cornerstone for the construction of the city of Tlaxcala, by the third decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A large proportion of its visible walling is made up of spoil materials from pre-Hispanic constructions. There are also non-Hispanic reminiscences and traces of the indigenous technology in the walls, in the *posa* chapels of the upper atrium, and in the support rig of the free-standing tower.

ICOMOS considers that the close relationship between the monastery and the development of the city of Tlaxcala is still visible today. As one of the first five monasteries constructed and one of three still standing, the proposed extension has special relevance in the development of the new architectural model illustrated by the serial property and its influence, both on the urban development around the monasteries and the spread of this model up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Criterion (iv): *be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the Franciscan Ensemble of the Monastery and Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala shares some characteristics with the monasteries settled on the slopes of Popocatepetl. Beyond the architectural features found in the other monasteries, the proposed extension has some singularities that grant it an outstanding character, namely its location on an acropolis from which it dominates the valley of the city of Tlaxcala, its double atria, its free-standing tower reinforced by a sentry passage that recalls the military buildings of the Spanish Reconquest period, and its wooden *alfarje* ceiling.

ICOMOS considers that the Franciscan Ensemble of the Monastery and Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala contributes to a better understanding of the architectural model developed in the monasteries. It also exemplifies one of the first attempts in developing new constructive spaces based on the synthesis of different stylistic influences and techniques.

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ICOMOS considers that the nominated extension meets criteria (ii) and (iv) and will enhance the justification of the Earliest 16th- Century Monasteries on the Slopes of Popocatepetl World Heritage property.

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### **Integrity and authenticity**

#### **Integrity**

According to the State Party, the extension of the Earliest 16th- Century Monasteries on the Slopes of Popocatepetl through the addition of the Franciscan Ensemble of the Monastery and Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala forms a coherent and complete picture, each of the components having its specificities.

When the Franciscan, Dominican and Augustinian orders reached the American continent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they faced new realities, which forced them to reconsider and rethink their models and architectural typologies, adapting them to an American context and a new population. The new models incorporated a series of units and spaces, characteristically American, such as the wide well-defined atria, the *posa* chapels and the open chapels. The extreme simplicity of the constructions, and in some cases their defensive character, helps define a distinct American architectural typology.

ICOMOS considers that the Franciscan Ensemble of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala has and maintains all the elements of the described typology. Its two atria, the *posa* chapels and the open chapels, as well as the buildings of the monastery, are all typical of this new model. ICOMOS already noted that, despite the revisions to the boundaries proposed by the State Party as part of the supplementary information sent in February 2021, some areas corresponding to the lost spaces of the lower atrium and the former orchard are not yet included within the boundaries of the proposed extension but should be part of it.

ICOMOS concurs with the State Party that the proposal of extending the inscribed property with the Franciscan Ensemble of Tlaxcala will increase the level of integrity of the property by adding an essential element participating in the historic development of the monasteries in this region, and being the only still-standing monastery out of the first five built at the time of arrival of the Europeans.

While the loss of some of these spaces in the past was mainly due to the development of the Ensemble, ICOMOS considers that their archaeological evidence needs to be conserved. At present, adverse effects from development

do not significantly affect the integrity of the remaining elements but need to be carefully controlled.

#### **Authenticity**

ICOMOS considers that the physical attributes of the proposed extension reflect credibly the proposed justification for inscription through their form and design, their materials and use.

The forms and design of the Franciscan Ensemble of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala have been maintained, practically since its origin in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Modifications or changes over the centuries did not significantly affect the overall architectural model.

The materials used since the 16<sup>th</sup> century (stone, wood, lime, sand) are those still visible today in the whole complex; the different interventions carried out over the centuries have made use of these same materials. Minimal contemporary functional adaptations, such as modern toilets for visitors, among others, have been discreetly and adequately located, without affecting the historical monumental complex or any of its components. Although parts of the Ensemble served other functions for some periods of time, its cathedral has maintained its original religious use for almost five hundred years.

The location of the Ensemble in an acropolis and its prominent position within the urban settlement is still preserved but the relationship with the setting is fragile.

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ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the proposed extension have been met, but are vulnerable. They should be enhanced through minor boundary modifications to the nominated area and buffer zone.

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### **Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription**

ICOMOS considers that the proposed justification for inscription of the nominated extension is coherent with the justification and the Outstanding Universal Value of the Earliest 16th-Century Monasteries on the Slopes of Popocatepetl World Heritage property, and reinforces the justification of criteria (ii) and (iv).

The conditions of integrity of the proposed extension are vulnerable because there are elements related to the spatial layout of the Ensemble that are fundamental to the understanding of the contribution it makes to the Outstanding Universal Value of the already inscribed property (in particular the lower atrium) that are not yet included within the boundaries of the nominated extension.

ICOMOS also considers that the relationship with the setting and the viewsheds from and to the monastery needs to be better defined and protected.

### Attributes

As in the other monasteries already inscribed, the distinctive relationship between built and open spaces of the Franciscan Ensemble of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala constitutes one of its main attributes. The same can be said of the individual *posa* and open chapels that offered a variety of architectural solutions. All the monasteries conform to an architectural model which spread rapidly over the region and contains certain basic elements common to this new type of monastic house: atrium (usually rectangular), church (usually simple in plan but of imposing size, with a single nave), and monastic buildings, usually located to the south of the church and disposed around a small courtyard or patio, designated as the cloister. They often had a defensive aspect and were of simple construction. Being one of the first built monasteries with these features, the nominated extension presents also an early example of a mixed architecture including various stylistic influences and techniques, and includes unique features like its free-standing tower and the wooden ceiling of the cathedral.

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ICOMOS considers that the nominated extension with its attributes will complement and enhance the Outstanding Universal Value of the Earliest 16th-Century Monasteries on the Slopes of Popocatepetl inscribed property.

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## 4 Conservation measures and monitoring

### Conservation measures

The property has a preventive conservation plan and there is a permanent follow up of the state of conservation by the INAH team on site. The conservation measures are considered appropriate to ensure the proper conservation of the property's Outstanding Universal Value, authenticity and integrity. The funding of these measures is ensured jointly by the INAH, the Diocese of Tlaxcala and the Municipality of Tlaxcala.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission identified potential risks related to the obsolescence of the electrical system. The additional information provided by the State Party in response to ICOMOS's Interim Report presents the details of a project to change the electrical system, set to begin in 2021.

ICOMOS also notes the factors affecting the state of conservation of the property, such as the rising damp, humidity and development of micro-organisms, especially to its structural and decorative elements, and considers the need to implement conservation measures to mitigate these effects.

### Monitoring

The Franciscan Ensemble of Tlaxcala hosts a museum and offices of the regional delegation of the INAH, and the daily uses and intervention for maintenance in the buildings allow a close monitoring of the property. In addition, yearly inspections are conducted by the management unit of municipal cultural heritage through photographic reporting,

and videos from an airborne drone. Every three years, the division of public works of the city of Tlaxcala conducts an architectural mapping and inspection of the Ensemble aimed at monitoring material decay and possible changes in the structural integrity of the buildings. ICOMOS considers that changes in the surroundings of the Ensemble should also be closely monitored in order to ensure that development does not compromise the relationship of the Ensemble with its setting.

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ICOMOS considers that the proposed extension benefits from adequate conservation measures.

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## 5 Protection and management

### Documentation

The proposed extension has been widely documented over the past decades. Conservation works have been documented and most of the documentation is kept in the library of the INAH centre in Tlaxcala.

A full inventory of the movable properties in the cathedral was carried out in 2002. There is an extensive bibliography of studies on the development of the city of Tlaxcala and the role the Franciscan Ensemble played in it. However, ICOMOS noted a number of discrepancies related to the history and development of the proposed extension that should be carefully reassessed and revised based on historical records.

### Legal protection

The Franciscan Ensemble of the Monastery and Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala is a declared historic monument, under the Federal Law on Historic, Archaeological and Artistic Monuments and Zones, published in the Official Gazette of the Federation in May 1972. The Ensemble and Cathedral is located inside the Area of Historic Monuments of the City of Tlaxcala de Xicohténcatl, published in the Official Gazette of the Federation on April 11 1986. This area is subject to specific legal conditions requiring that any type of construction, restoration or conservation work within it need to be approved by INAH with the support of the competent State and Municipal authorities.

At the State and Municipal levels, the legal protection of the proposed extension has recently been updated and adjusted by the Urban Development Partial Program of the Franciscan monastery and cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala and its area of influence, approved by the Municipal Council of Tlaxcala on 3 June 2020. This program covers the entire buffer zone, including parts outside the historic area.

Other laws and regulations such as the Law of Construction of the State of Tlaxcala, the Law of Public Works for the State of Tlaxcala and its Municipalities, and the Law of Territorial Ordering for the State of Tlaxcala, allow the Municipal authorities to actively control development around the Ensemble.

### **Management system**

The nomination dossier includes a document called Management Plan for the Franciscan ensemble and cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala. Although this document contains useful information, it provides little information on the important aspects of the management system in place, including staffing, expertise and resources available and it does not clarify the relationships between the many actors involved in the site management. This document is also limited to the Franciscan Ensemble and does not adequately explain how its management will be integrated with that of the monasteries already inscribed.

Additional information provided by the State Party in response to ICOMOS's first request for supplementary information, confirms the creation in October 2020 of a Cultural Heritage Management Unit but without detailed information on staff or financial resources necessary to render it operational; there is also no evidence of a mechanism of coordination between the three levels of government. By Law, the Franciscan Ensemble is considered a federal property and its administration falls to the INAH but the enforcement of the regulations and the management unit are under the municipality's responsibility.

In the additional information provided in response to ICOMOS's Interim Report, the State Party proposes a structure for a Management Unit for the whole property, involving the federal authorities as well as state authorities from the three States where the monasteries are located. This Unit will be in charge of coordinating and monitoring an Integral Management and Conservation Plan for all the monasteries. It also proposes that a General Risk Management Program be developed.

ICOMOS welcomes the suggestion to create a management unit for the overall management of the property, as well as the creation of an integral management and conservation plan for the monasteries.

### **Visitor management**

The city of Tlaxcala has experienced an increase in tourism in the last decade. For the time being, the State Party considers that visitors and tourists do not represent a risk for the conservation of the Ensemble; the actions mentioned in the management plan and the nomination dossier regarding visitor management relate mainly to the promotion of Tlaxcala as a tourism destination.

ICOMOS also notes that there is no information about a common interpretation and presentation strategy for the whole property. According to the information gathered, no cultural routes or circuits have been developed or implemented to help visitors and tourists gain a comprehensive understanding of the inscribed property as a whole and encourage them to visit different monasteries that are part of the series.

### **Community involvement**

The population of Tlaxcala possesses a very high sense of belonging and social appropriation of the Franciscan Ensemble, which supports its protection. The history of the monastery as one of the first of its kind is largely known within the local community. However, ICOMOS notes that there is a lack of mechanisms to promote the involvement of the population in the management of the Ensemble. The nomination dossier mentions a Citizen Advisory Council but it remains unclear if the local communities are represented, and what would be the relationship between the community and the management unit.

### **Evaluation of the effectiveness of the protection and management of nominated property**

ICOMOS considers that the protection and management mechanisms in place are sufficient to ensure proper conservation of the Ensemble, but certain elements should be reinforced. The legal protection and enforcement mechanisms are considered adequate to maintain the authenticity, integrity and Outstanding Universal Value of the proposed extension. Rules and regulations are also in place to protect the buffer zone. However, ICOMOS considers that the protection of viewsheds from and to the monastery should be further studied and strengthened.

Governance arrangements should also be strengthened to include practical mechanisms to coordinate the actions between the many actors with management responsibilities over the Ensemble, its buffer zone and its wider context.

The integration of the proposed extension into an overall management framework for the whole property remains a challenge. Such a framework should also address a common interpretation and communication strategy for the serial inscribed property.

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ICOMOS considers that the protection measures and management arrangements are adequate. Some aspects could be reinforced to strengthen their efficiency. ICOMOS recommends as well that the efforts towards developing an overall management framework for the whole property, which should include a common risk management plan, a monitoring system and interpretation, communication and tourism strategies, should be pursued.

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## **6 Conclusion**

The Franciscan Ensemble of the Monastery and Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala was one of the first monasteries built as part of the evangelisation and colonisation processes of the northern territories of Mexico. The Ensemble became the cornerstone for the development of the city of Tlaxcala and nowadays still has a unique position above the city centre. Like the other monasteries, it conforms to a new architectural model, characterised by the relationship between the built and

open spaces, its open atria with *posa* chapels, the church (usually of simple plan but imposing size) and the monastic buildings disposed around a patio. The Ensemble also presents other features that are not found in the other monasteries already inscribed, namely the atria on different levels, a free-standing tower and a wooden Mudejar ceiling called *alfarje*. For these reasons, ICOMOS considers that the proposed extension reinforces criteria (ii) and (iv). ICOMOS welcomes the State Party's assurances that no other extensions are envisaged and that the series is considered complete.

The Ensemble is in a good state of conservation, and even if it requires regular maintenance, the problems are consistent with the age, building materials and regular use of this type of property. Some spaces that were originally part of the monastery, such as the lower atrium, which is a distinctive feature of the proposed extension, and the orchard, were lost due to subsequent construction phases throughout the centuries. Nevertheless, ICOMOS considers that the archaeological evidence of those spaces needs to be maintained and that the footprint of their layout must be fully included within the boundaries of the proposed extension, regardless of whether these spaces are now occupied by modern constructions. While ICOMOS welcomes the efforts that the State Party has already made in this regard, it considers that the boundaries of the proposed extension need to be further revised. For instance, ICOMOS notes that the revised boundaries proposed in the supplementary information, sent in February 2021 only include the space defined by the *Calle De La Capilla Abierta* but do not include the buildings that delimit it.

In light of the revisions needed for the boundaries of the proposed extension, ICOMOS also considers that the State Party must study the implications of these modifications on the delimitation of the buffer zone. ICOMOS notes that due to the specific location of the Ensemble on a hill, maintaining the prominent role of the monastery in the townscape of the historic centre, the relationship with its setting is critical. Therefore, the delimitation of the buffer zone should be revised in relation to important elements that determined its location, to better define its immediate setting and to consider important viewsheds from and to the monastery. Maintaining these viewsheds may require mechanisms other than what is feasible to include in the buffer zone. ICOMOS acknowledges the provisions already included in the Partial Urban Development Program but recommends that the State Party gives further consideration to this issue. ICOMOS recalls that the integrity section of the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for the property already inscribed refers to important challenges regarding the physical setting of these monasteries, particularly in terms of controlling urban sprawl. This is even more important in the case of the proposed extension because of its location on a hill.

Given that this is an extension, ICOMOS considers that the Franciscan Ensemble meets the necessary conditions of authenticity and integrity but that these are vulnerable because of the issues with the boundaries and protection

of the setting, and with potential adverse effects from development and neglect. ICOMOS noted that an outdated electrical system poses considerable risks of fire, particularly given the importance of the wooden *alfarje*, a unique feature of this Franciscan Ensemble. Therefore, ICOMOS welcomes the State Party's assurances that it has already allocated funds to start a programme to replace the electrical system. It also notes that a subsequent phase is already planned to install a smoke and fire detection system but that no funds are allocated to it yet. ICOMOS considers that this should be given high priority.

Since the Ensemble is located in an earthquake-prone area, ICOMOS also welcomes the State Party's plans to develop a General Risk Management Program for the whole inscribed property.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection is appropriate and encompasses both the proposed extension and the buffer zone. ICOMOS considers that the management system could be improved to strengthen governance arrangements and promote collaboration between the many actors involved, including the local communities.

ICOMOS also welcomes the State Party's willingness to develop an overall management framework for the whole property, called Comprehensive Management and Conservation Plan, as well as the creation of a Management Unit to oversee the implementation of this plan. The General Risk Management Program will be a part of this plan. ICOMOS also recommends that a common monitoring system and interpretation, communication and visitor management strategies are included as part of (or complementary to) this overall management framework. Overall, these foreseen protection and management mechanisms seem adequate but are yet to be implemented.

## 7 Recommendations

### Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the extension of Earliest 16th-Century Monasteries on the Slopes of Popocatepetl to include the Franciscan Ensemble of the Monastery and Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Tlaxcala, Mexico, be approved on the basis of **criteria (ii) and (iv)**.

### Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

#### Brief synthesis

The Earliest 16th-Century Monasteries on the Slopes of Popocatepetl is a serial property with 15 component parts located in the states of Morelos, Puebla and Tlaxcala in Mexico, built as part of the evangelisation and colonisation of the northern territories of Mexico. The monasteries are: Atlalahucan, Cuernavaca, Tetela del Volcan, Yautepec, Ocuilco, Tepoztlan, Tlayacapan, Totolapan, Yecapixtla, Hueyapan and Zacualpan de Amilpas in Morelos; Calpan, Huetotzingo and Tochimilco in Puebla; and San Francisco

in Tlaxcala. These monasteries are considered to represent good examples of the architectural style adopted by the first missionaries – Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians – with spatial solutions and the architectural expressions that materialised the fusion and synthesis of heterogeneous elements. A considerable number of these buildings have an explicit military aspect, and compositional elements with definite Mudejar and Renaissance origins. The expression of the native culture is also present, from the open spaces used for worship to the work expressed in the decorations and the wall paintings.

The monasteries also represent an example of a new architectural concept in which open spaces are of renewed importance. The influence of this style is felt throughout the Mexican territory and even beyond its borders. The distinctive characteristic of these monasteries resides in the relationship between built and open spaces and, above all, in the emphasis placed on the wide forecourt or atrium with its individual *posa* and open chapels that offered a variety of solutions. 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.

The 15 monasteries all conform to an architectural model which spread rapidly over the region and contains certain basic elements common to this new type of monastic house: atrium (usually rectangular), church (usually simple in plan but of imposing size, with a single nave), and monastic buildings, usually located to the south of the church and disposed around a small courtyard or patio, designated as the cloister.

The great atria, which are open spaces, surround the entire perimeter of the church (in some cases most of it). They are delimited by Resting Chapels in the atrium's internal perimeter, called the processional path, and the walls have small niches for the *Viacrucis*. Another important element is the Open chapel. The hydraulic structures also are elements of the exterior composition that conducted water from the upper part of the mountain for community use.

**Criterion (ii):** The considerable influence exercised by the architectural model of the Earliest 16th-Century Monasteries on the Slopes of Popocatepetl, which spread over a very wide area, is incontestable. They 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 colonisation and evangelisation of the lands to the north in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, reaching the present-day United States of America from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts, in the form of a large number of smaller establishments known as "missions" rather than monasteries.

**Criterion (iv):** The Earliest 16th-Century Monasteries on the Slopes of Popocatepetl is a group of monasteries selected as being representative of a large total. They bear 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.

#### Integrity

Since each of the monasteries has preserved all of the original elements of its architectural complex, they are a complete representation of an actual 16<sup>th</sup> century Monastery. In general, they are in a good state of conservation and physical integrity has been maintained. Decay processes have been controlled by the yearly implementation of conservation projects. There are important challenges to be addressed regarding the physical setting of these monasteries, particularly in terms of controlling urban sprawl at diverse locations.

#### 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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. The conditions of authenticity might be threatened by unpredictable natural phenomena, such as earthquakes and/or eruption of the Popocatepetl volcano, because of its proximity. In the case of the latter, there could be total or partial loss of the monasteries.

#### Management and protection requirements

The legal protection of the Earliest 16th-Century Monasteries on the Slopes of Popocatepetl involves three different levels of the government: federal, state and local. The legal instruments that ensure the protection of the property include the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States; the General Law of Human Settlements and the 1972 Federal Law on Historic, Archaeological and Artistic Monuments and Zones.

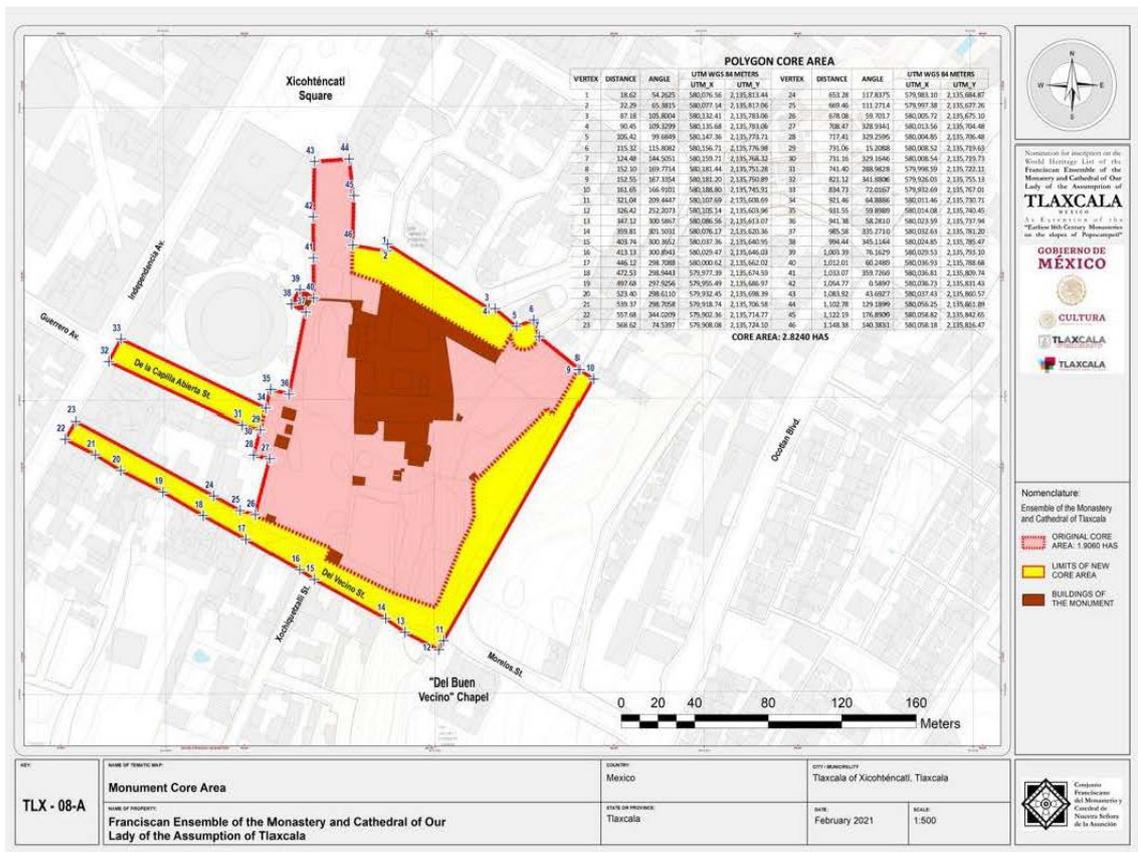
The management of the property is the co-responsibility of heritage authorities at the federal and state level and associated representatives from civil groups. Management and conservation centres aim at ensuring the stability of the monasteries and their elements through the implementation of conservation, maintenance and awareness-raising activities.

The efforts towards developing an overall management framework for the whole property, which should include a common risk management plan, a monitoring system, and interpretation, communication and tourism strategies, should be pursued and a dedicated management unit to coordinate its implementation should be set up.

### **Additional recommendations**

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- a) Submitting a minor boundary modification reflecting the below mentioned adjustments to the boundaries of the component part and its buffer zone, within a two-year period of the approval of the extension:
  - Adjusting the boundary of the component part area to include the areas occupied by the former lower atrium and at least parts of the orchard, to protect the archaeological evidence of those spaces, even if this requires including areas now occupied by more recent constructions as the bullring space,
  - If necessary, adjusting the delimitation of the buffer zone based on the modifications to be made to the boundaries of the component part, but also to better maintain the prominent role that the monastery has in the townscape of the historic centre,
- b) Strengthening the urban planning regulations that allow protection of the viewsheds from and to the monastery,
- c) Strengthening the governance arrangements for the Franciscan Ensemble to facilitate collaboration between different actors involved in its management,
- d) Continuing its efforts towards developing an overall management framework for the whole property (which should include a common risk management plan, a monitoring system and interpretation, communication and tourism strategies) and setting up a dedicated management unit to coordinate its implementation;



Revised map showing the boundaries of the nominated extension (February 2021)