

Typological Analysis as an Architectural Historiographic Tool. Corpus Christi: an Atypical Temple for Indigenous Chieftesses Wives of Christ in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

In New Spain, the temples found in female convents often shared the same set of architectural and urban characteristics and were therefore quite similar. This means that it may be possible to conduct a historiographical analysis of such buildings by applying a typological methodology focused not only on buildings displaying traditional features but also on those exhibiting deviations, as potential drivers of change in the direction of architecture. This case study will analyze one atypical example—the temple of Corpus Christi in Mexico City—designed and built by master builder Pedro de Arrieta as a nunnery for indigenous women; given his professional experience, any departure from traditional features was not likely a random occurrence, but rather an intentional diversion from conventional typologies. Findings will be interpreted based on architectural notions, not using a history of mentalities, nor an approach in the history of art, but drawing from typological analysis, which has been successfully used in Mexico and Latin America for decades. The purpose of this research will be to explore why the author adopted such an exceptional approach for this project.

KEYWORDS

colonial temples, female convents, architectural typology, Corpus Christi, Pedro de Arrieta

After having worked and proved herself in the lower positions of the monastery, Mother Petra was made abbess, which she was twice, fulfilling the nuns' expectations, of whom she took care of spiritually and physically with a true mother's affection and dedication. anonymous, XVIII century, Life of the venerable Sister Petra de San Francisco. First foundress and abbess of Corpus Christi convent for religious indigenous chieftesses under the first regimen of St. Clara.

The three centuries of Spanish presence in America bequeathed remarkable projects, among which the female convents in New Spain stand out, architectural complexes reserved for the wives of Christ, maidens, or widows, Spanish or Creole and, exceptionally, mixed-race women. Even three hundred years apart, it's possible to clearly identify, mainly in the temples, their main architectural characteristics that derive from the medieval conventual structural tradition in Spain and Portugal: they usually had a single nave, an axis parallel to the street, two lateral doorways as main entrances and a single bell tower, solutions which, repeated over centuries, became architectural typologies. To deviate from this compositional tradition in an age in which adherence to the canon prevailed was something exceptional; however, in the Novo-Hispanic capital, the edified evidence shows singular cases built in the XVIII century, such as the temple of Corpus Christi convent, which ended up housing exclusively indigenous nobles and chieftesses. This fact sparked opposition in ecclesiastical sectors since they believed that, although indigenous women had to be educated¹, their racial² condition was not suitable for the religious profession. Nevertheless, the temple and its cloister were designed and built, before royal authorization was granted, by master builder Pedro de Arrieta, whose composition failed to replicate the traditional typological characteristics: he equipped it with a single portal with three large openings, oriented the main axis of the nave

¹ Ever since the 16th century, they were being evangelized and educated in a Christian way, as Josefina Muriel has explained in several works, especially in: Muriel, J. (1946). *Conventos de monjas en la Nueva España (Nunneries in New Spain)*, Editorial Santiago, and in Muriel, J. (2004). *La sociedad novohispana y sus colegios de niñas (The Society of New Spain and its Girls' Schools)*, t. I y II. UNAM, México.

² It should be remembered that at that time the Spanish mainlanders only recognized three "natural" races: Spanish, indigenous and black. The diverse combinations among them were considered castes, which were usually given names that socially stereotyped them, as it can be seen in the numerous colonial paintings and folding screens that portray social segregation.

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FIGURE 1. Corpus Christi convent main facade, Mexico City (Photograph: Ivan San Martín, December 2006).



METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

In architecture, typological³ analysis has been used for two main purposes: as a projectual foundation—this was the case for the nineteen seventies postmodern architects—and as a historiographic tool, to explain the authors' compositional decisions that led them to stick to certain traditional solutions, or, for reasons which historiography could unravel, to consciously move away from typological constraints. The latter perspective will be the methodological line followed in this text: first, the existence of typological solutions in this architectural subgenre will be confirmed; then, a case study that deviated from this repetitive inertia will be presented; and, finally, we will inquire and speculate, in a heuristic manner,

³ For whom we write this, we understand *typology* as an architectural solution—spatial, constructive, structural, or ornamental—which, due to its high efficiency level, is repeated innumerable times by other authors in each time and place.

in order to propose a possible explanation of this singular case. Much has been written, for over a century, by prominent historians⁴ on the history of life on New Spain's female convents; however, few Latin American scholars—such as Argentinian Marina Waisman⁵—have opted for a projectual analysis with a typological perspective allowing speculation regarding the reasons which led their authors to replicate some of the design solutions. This is, therefore, the path we shall follow to propose Arrieta's motives in designing a structure so far removed from inherited typologies.

STATE OF THE ART AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Most available texts that address Corpus Christi's architectural design describe its historical, stylistic⁶ and spatial characteristics without speculating on the possible causes behind its atypicality. For example, it's striking that Josefina Muriel, in her monumental research on *Las Indias Caciques de Corpus Christi (Corpus Christi's Indigenous Chieftesses, 1963)*, even though describing the sober facade's measurements and its iconographic elements, the pictorial trousseaus and interior tribunes as well as the rest of the adjacent conventual area, only mentions the original ceiling regarding the peculiarity of the temple: "It should be noted that master Pedro de Arrieta did not exactly fulfill the construction contract, since he made numerous innovations, among them the building of a wooden vault [...]" (Muriel, 1963, p. 52)⁷, without clarifying whether these innovations included the exceptional entrance at the foot of the temple or the absence of paired doorways for a monastic temple. On the other hand, Concepción Amerlinck and Manuel Ramos, in their thorough study on nun convents (*Los conventos de monjas [The Nunneries]*, 1995), dedicate a chapter to Corpus Christi convent and provide invaluable data on the eventful creation process, management, foundation and construction (Amerlinck & Ramos, 1995, pp. 122-123) as well as about the fact that,

⁴ Such as Antonio García Cubas, Manuel Rivera Cambas, Josefina Muriel, Concepción Amerlinck de Corsi, Guillermo Tovar de Teresa and Arturo Rocha Cortés, with books and articles that have shed light on that period's conventual life.

⁵ The historiographic advantages of a typological interpretation were presented mainly in two of her books: *La estructura histórica del entorno (The Historical Structure of the Environment, 1972)* and *El interior de la Historia (Inside of History, 1993)*.

⁶ Such as Francisco de la Maza (1983) and Martha Fernández (1992, 2003), who have unraveled nun choirs' characteristics—in the first case—and the stylistic features of the buildings made by the major masters in the viceregal Baroque. Or, from architectural history, with Carlos Chanfón Olmos (2001), Xavier Cortés Rocha (2011) or Mónica Cejudo Collera (2011).

⁷ Editorial translation. All quotes and descriptions of terms where the original text is in Spanish are also editorial translations.

after two decades, the space available for the parishioners on the first floor was already insufficient and the replacement of a second ceiling was necessary, but they don't underline the temple floor plan's atypical nature, nor do they venture a proposal to explain it, which is understandable given that the purpose of their study was historical and not architectural. Some years later, Muriel, in one of the chapters of a collective book celebrating the recovery and restoration of the temple and its re-designation as a cultural space and seat of the Archive of Notaries, in which he delves into its construction history, documents that in 1729 it was "enlarged" six *varas* forward (16.5 ft) (2006b, p. 102), a transformation that increased confusion on the matter, since the inherited building has always had its facade facing the street, as attested by several colonial paintings and 19th lithographs illustrating the straight edge facing south of the alameda. In that same collective publication, Carlos Martínez Ortigoza's chapter, on the restoration and safeguarding of that convent for indigenous people, exposes the monastic buildings' common characteristics and highlights both their atypicality and the fact that the Capuchin temples used to place the low choir to the side of the altar (Martínez, 2006, pp. 233-234), as indeed happened with Corpus Christi, and that would explain why the *sotocoro* (place under the high choir) was used to enter the temple, but not the lack of two twin portals or a bell tower.

In the absence of projectual explanations regarding its atypicality, one might ask: what was the reason for such a singular composition? Was it the gradual abandonment of typological solutions by the construction guilds in New Spain? Was Arrieta aware of his abandonment of typological traditions in the Corpus Christi temple, or did he do it under Franciscan indications, on whom the future foundation would depend? How was it possible for the authorities to consent to this peculiar design? And was it influenced by the unusual process of being built before receiving royal authorization? Should its exceptionality be interpreted as an indigenist vindication or, on the contrary, as a discriminatory gesture? In order to answer some of these questions, the following path will be taken: first, a historical introduction on the convents built in the capital of the New Spain Viceroyalty will be presented; then we shall proceed to the typological analysis, examining what extent the 17 convent foundations before Corpus Christi temple complied with the identified variables, contrasting the facts with the latter's atypicality, in order to develop a projectual hypothesis; then, we'll review the convent's singularities, its ascription and foundational process, and finally, we'll evoke Arrieta's professional development,

the commissioning and the temple's characteristics, to propose a plausible explanation for the singularity that characterizes the process and the building.

NUN CONVENTS IN NEW SPAIN

Since the first viceregal century, Christian education of indigenous women was considered indispensable for religious consolidation and perpetuation of social stability. Gradually, schools for indigenous girls and young women were founded—in addition to those for Spaniards, creoles and mixed-race people—, an area studied by specialists such as Josefina Muriel (1946, 1963, 2006b) and Concepción Amerlinck/Manuel Ramos (1995). However, during the first two colonial centuries, there was no institutional option regarding religious life for indigenous women, unlike Spanish and creole women, who, rich or poor, could choose the novitiate and eventually profess as veiled and choral nuns in the numerous convents established⁸. During the Novo-Hispanic Viceroyalty, 21 convents were founded in the capital⁹, belonging to various female orders¹⁰, most of them with temples using the same architectural party¹¹ solution: a single double-height nave, its hierarchical axis parallel to the access street, absence of an atrium at the foot of the temple, two main entrances located laterally to the nave—which allowed placing a low choir at the foot of the temple—and a single bell tower; management processes and conventual conformation were also similar: A sponsor was proposed, permission was requested and, once obtained, work began on the adaptation of donated houses, to later select the founding nuns—sometimes from Spain and sometimes Creole or Spanish settlers—. If the construction was not yet finished, they were housed—for months or even years—in convents with analogous rules. Upon construction completion, the convent was dedicated to nuns and novices who had paid their dowry and

⁸ Women's foundations in mining and harbor towns were excluded, as they were considered potential risk sites for them, due to possible harassment by miners or pirates.

⁹ We exclude the Capuchin convent of La Villa because at that time it was considered a different town.

¹⁰ Quality of life in the convent depended on the novices' and nuns' social status, as the members of noble and wealthy families usually lived in private cells within the complex, with fine fixtures and furniture. Some cells were remarkable: Pedro de Arrieta designed one for Jesús María, which included quarters for the nun and the four wenches, as well as a kitchen, pantry, stairs, bathrooms with bathtubs, corrals and laundry rooms. See the detailed list of works presented in Amerlinck, 2011.

¹¹ For the authors architectural parti is defined as a particular three-dimensional organization that satisfies certain habitability demands from a group of users, not to be confused with the term floor plan, which only reflects a graphic expression in two dimensions.

thus occupied it to begin their cloistered life together (this was the usual process, and it is worth emphasizing for when we discuss Corpus Christi's unusual management and construction). When, in 1720, Pedro de Arrieta built Corpus Christi, there were seventeen formally established convents (García, p. 25) which we will take as typological antecedents¹²; eight were Conceptionist: La Concepción¹³—the first of all, built at the initiative of Juan de Zumárraga—, La Natividad de Nuestra Señora y Regina Coeli,¹⁴ Nuestra Señora de Balvanera,¹⁵ Real Convento de Jesús María,¹⁶ La Encarnación,¹⁷ Santa Inés Virgen y Mártir,¹⁸ San José de Gracia¹⁹ and El Dulce Nombre de María y Padre San Bernardo²⁰; Dominicans had one: Santa Catalina de Siena;²¹ The Discalced Carmelites, two: San José²²—known as Santa Teresa “the Ancient”, the name that we'll use from now on—, and Santa Teresa “the New”, built by Pedro de Arrieta in 1704;²³ Hieronymites had two: Nuestra Señora de la Ex-

¹² The full names of each convent are noted, but hereinafter they will be mentioned in a shortened form.

¹³ Built northwest of Plaza Mayor, on the border of then San Juan de Letran Street. Its temple still exists, in the current Belisario Domínguez street (García, p. 26).

¹⁴ It was built southwest of Plaza Mayor. Its temple still exists, in the current Regina street (García, p. 27).

¹⁵ It was first called Recogimiento de Jesús de la Penitencia, when it sheltered Spanish women repentant of their licentious life. Later it became the Nuestra Señora de Balvanera convent. It was built southeast of Plaza Mayor, and its temple still exists, in the present República de Uruguay street (García, p. 28).

¹⁶ It was built southeast of the main square. Its temple still exists in the current Jesús María street (García, pp. 27 y 28).

¹⁷ Erected north of Plaza Mayor. Its temple still exists, in the current Luis González Obregón street (García, pp. 28 y 29).

¹⁸ It was built east of Plaza Mayor, on what is now Moneda street (García, p. 29).

¹⁹ It was also known as Santa María de Gracia, when it was a beatario. It was built south of Plaza Mayor. Its temple dates from 1653-1661 and is still preserved on Mesones street (García, pp. 29 y 30).

²⁰ It was originally requested as a foundation for Benedictine nuns, but the benefactor died. Then the idea was taken up again and a new benefactor came along, who paid for the temple and cloister, which were given to the Conceptionist nuns, who kept devotion to St. Bernard. It had two successive temples: the first, from 1635, and the second, from 1685-1691, which still exists, and in which Pedro de Arrieta collaborated. It was built south of Plaza Mayor. Its temple, on Venustiano Carranza street, still partially exists, because it was partially cut down in the 20th century when 20 de Noviembre Avenue was inaugurated (García, p. 31).

²¹ It was founded by Dominican nuns from the Oaxacan convent of Santa Catalina and built north of Plaza Mayor between 1619 and 1623 by Juan Márquez de Orozco and still partially exists, in the current República de Argentina street. During the Porfiriato period, the temple's choirs and cloister were used to house the National School of Jurisprudence (García, pp. 39-41).

²² It was built east of Plaza Mayor with two successive temples: the 1613-1616 one and the 1678-1684 one, built by Cristóbal de Medina Vargas. Its temple still exists, on Licenciado Primo Verdad street (García, pp. 42-43).

²³ It was built northeast of Plaza Mayor. The temple still exists, in the current Loreto street (García, p. 43).

pectación—better known as San Jerónimo²⁴—and San Lorenzo,²⁵ plus four more, ascribed to the Franciscan order, of which three were of Urbanist Poor Clares:²⁶ San Juan de la Penitencia,²⁷ Santa Clara²⁸ and La Visitación de Nuestra Señora a Santa Isabel,²⁹ and one, of the Capuchin nuns,³⁰ consecrated to the then Blessed Felipe de Jesús.³¹

THE TYPOLOGICAL TOOL

Francisco de la Maza was one of the specialists who analyzed the temples and their monastic choirs to identify recurring morphological characteristics:

The temple had to be public [...] that is, open to the people so they could attend all the ceremonies that were there celebrated, but the enclosure of the convent, which secluded the nuns in a private world, demanded the temple be built in such a way that, allowing free access to the people, could also serve the nuns without them being disturbed in their confinement. The solution is perfect: a single-nave temple is built occupying less space and its main axis is laid out parallel to the public road [...] [De la Maza, 1983, p. 9].

²⁴ It was built southwest of Plaza Mayor. Its temple, which still exists, on the current San Jerónimo street, is used as a school by the Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana (García, pp. 38-39).

²⁵ It was built northwest of Plaza Mayor. Its temple was built by Juan Gómez de Trasmonte between 1643 and 1650. Towards the late Viceroyalty it received a second facade, designed by José Joaquín García de Torres. Its temple still exists, in the current Belisario Domínguez street (García, p. 39).

²⁶ Originally, the Franciscan and feminine version of the Poor Clares did not allow them to own any goods; however, they requested a reform that would allow them to do so, which was authorized in 1263 by Pope Urban VI, which is why they were known as *Urbanist Poor Clares*.

²⁷ It was built southwest of Plaza Mayor, outside the Spanish city, in the indigenous neighborhood of Moyotlán/San Juan. The temple and the cloisters were destroyed at the beginning of the 20th century. Years later, the temple of Guadalupe was built on the same site, with the work of the engineer Miguel Ángel de Quevedo, with funds provided by the tobacco company El Buen Tono (García, p. 34).

²⁸ It was built west of Plaza Mayor. Its first foundation was as a place of recollection, then a religious house and, finally, an Urbanist Poor Clares convent. The construction of the temple is owed to Pedro Ramírez. It still exists, in the current Tacuba street, but not the cloisters, which were destroyed (García, pp. 32-33).

²⁹ It was erected west of Plaza Mayor. Temple and cloisters were destroyed in 1903, during the Porfiriato, to build the Teatro Nacional, currently the Palacio de Bellas Artes (García, p. 34).

³⁰ It was built west of Plaza Mayor. Its first temple was built between 1666 and 1673, but it had to be rebuilt between 1754 and 1756 (García, pp. 35-37). Temple and cloister were totally destroyed to open the extension of La Palma street (today called Palma Norte and Palma Sur).

³¹ Felipe de Jesús was born in New Spain and died martyred in Japan in 1597, because of his evangelizing work. He was beatified in 1627, for which reason the Capuchin nuns dedicated their convent to him; in 1862 he was canonized as a saint (García, p. 35).

These dispositions were compiled within most conventual temples, although there were exceptions, generally due to the random expansion of the complexes. Precisely, the present analysis will answer to what extent the seventeen convents built prior to Corpus Christi³² complied or not, and to do so we will employ five typological architectural variables.

1. Temple nave layout

There were two design prescriptions that influenced the female convent temple layout: a single nave parallel to the main street and the altar preferably facing east, a symbolic relationship that dates back many centuries in religious architecture. In the 17 convents analyzed, the naves were indeed arranged parallel to the main street, which allows us to confirm that the application of this compositional model constituted a tradition. The ritual orientation could not always be fulfilled, due to the donated properties and houses, since only five of the seventeen temples had an east-facing altar,³³ while twelve were oriented to other points: six to the west,³⁴ four to the north³⁵ and two facing south.³⁶

2. Position of the temple's main entrances

Unlike male convent parishes or temples, female cloistered temples usually have two main features: they're accessed through two lateral doors, both of which face the epistle—on the right side of the nave from the perspective of the parishioners—(Chanfón, 2001). In this regard, the specialist Martha Fernández reminds us that there has been much speculation about the reasons for placing two iden-

³² Only three female convents were built in the capital after Corpus Christi: Nuestra Señora de las Nieves, of the order of San Salvador, with its temple dedicated to Santa Brígida (García, pp. 45-46), exceptional for having an unprecedented elliptical floor plan, built in 1744, attributed to the military engineer Luis Diez Navarro: It was completely destroyed when the Lázaro Cárdenas Avenue—currently Eje Central—was widened, in spite of exploring, unsuccessfully, several alternatives to preserve it, and two convents, founded by the Company of Mary, that of Nuestra Señora del Pilar or “Enseñanza Antigua” (García, p. 44), whose temple of atypical floor plan still exists, as well as its cloisters, with new fates, and that of the “Enseñanza Nueva” (García, p. 44), east of the Jesuit school of San Gregorio, of which only an allusive plaque remains in the corner of its old site, in front of the east side of Loreto temple.

³³ Those of the Conceptionists of Balvanera, La Concepción, Santa Inés and San José de Gracia as well as the Hieronymite of San Lorenzo.

³⁴ Those of the Conceptionists of Regina Coeli, San Bernardo and Encarnación; the Hieronymite of Nuestra Señora de la Expectación; the Poor Clares of Santa Clara, and the Capuchins of Felipe de Jesús.

³⁵ Those of the Conceptionists of Jesús María, the Dominican of Santa Catalina de Siena and those of the Poor Clares of San Juan de la Penitencia and Santa Isabel.

³⁶ Those of the Discalced Carmelite nuns of Santa Teresa, the Ancient and the New.

tical doorways that communicated laterally to the same nave, even hagiographic legends have been assumed or that they served as exit and entrance for the processions, although she attributes it to a symbolic sense:

When describing the Temple that King Solomon had erected, in a passage of the first book of Kings, it is said that “he made at the entrance of the Temple quadrangular posts of olive wood, and two fir-wood doors, one on each side; and both doors were made with two panels that opened without disjoining.” [...] If my interpretation is correct, it means that over time the image of a female temple that ideally reproduced the Temple of Jerusalem was completed [Fernández, 2003, pp. 100-101].

We would suggest an architectural semantic perspective: that the presence of two doorways would obey a legibility criterion for the user, since, given the impossibility of having a main doorway at the foot of the temple—a space reserved for the lower choir, two twin doorways would indicate its main access hierarchy: one could be interpreted as a parish or male conventual temple secondary doorway. Sixteen of the seventeen convents mentioned did have two doorways (eleven of them, twins,³⁷ one with small variations³⁸ and four more with different doorways),³⁹ while only one, the Hieronymite convent of San Lorenzo, had a single doorway. The other prescription was to place them on the epistle side and opposite the gospel side, located on the left side of the nave; however, evidence shows that of the seventeen temples analyzed, twelve did have the doorways on the epistle side⁴⁰, while five were on the gospel side⁴¹.

³⁷ We are referring to the Conceptionists of Jesús María, La Concepción, Balvanera, Santa Inés, San Bernardo, San José de Gracia and La Encarnación, the Carmelite of Santa Teresa la Antigua, and the Poor Clares of Santa Clara and San Juan de la Penitencia, and the Visitation de Nuestra Señora a Santa Isabel.

³⁸ The Carmelite monastery of Santa Teresa la Nueva was designed and built by Arrieta.

³⁹ Those of the Dominicans of Santa Catalina de Siena, the Capuchin of Blessed Felipe de Jesús, the Conceptionist of Regina Coeli and, finally, the temple of the Hieronymite nuns of Nuestra Señora de la Expectación (with a second doorway that doesn't face the nave, but the transept, although the reason for this singular solution, which would merit a separate study, is unknown).

⁴⁰ Those of the Conceptionists of Regina Coeli, Jesús María, Nuestra Señora de Balvanera, Santa Inés, Santa Isabel and San Bernardo, the Hieronymites of Nuestra Señora de la Expectación, that of San Lorenzo, the Discalced Carmelites of Santa Teresa la Antigua and Santa Teresa la Nueva—built by Arrieta—, that of the Poor Clares of San Juan de la Penitencia and that of Santa Clara.

⁴¹ Those of the Conceptionists of San José de Gracia, La Concepción and La Encarnación, that of the Dominicans of Santa Catalina de Siena and the Capuchin temple of Blessed Felipe de Jesús.

3. High and low choir layout

The choral spaces were the most sacred places within the cloistered life, so their location in the temple had to comply with several characteristics: to be located at the foot of the nave and to separate the upper and lower choirs to accommodate greater capacity (the lower choir was where the cloistered women could receive the communion sacrament). The effectiveness of this solution led it to be repeated for centuries until it became a model since only Capuchin nuns' constitutions indicated a variant for the lower choir: that it should be placed, instead of at the foot of the temple, on one side of the presbytery, which allowed the *sotocoro* to be used as an extension of the nave, without eliminating the double lateral access. It is also noted that in the 17 convents analyzed, the presence and disposition of these choral spaces was complied with, even in the Capuchin convent of Felipe de Jesús, which had a high choir at the foot of the temple and a low choir next to the presbytery.

4. Absence of atrium

Atriums had several public functions during the viceregal centuries, but since nuns and novices never went out to perform activities there, there was no point in having them. Instead, in order to provide a small vestibule for the parishioners attending services, the monastic temples had small set-back on their facades to accentuate the side entrances—Amerlinck/Ramos (1995) calls them walkways—, elongated public spaces that were used to place buttresses that received the structural thrusts of the vaults of the roofs. Of the seventeen convents analyzed, twelve did have a recess in the form of an urban vestibule of their temples⁴², while the remaining five convent temples⁴³ did not.

5. Bell tower layout

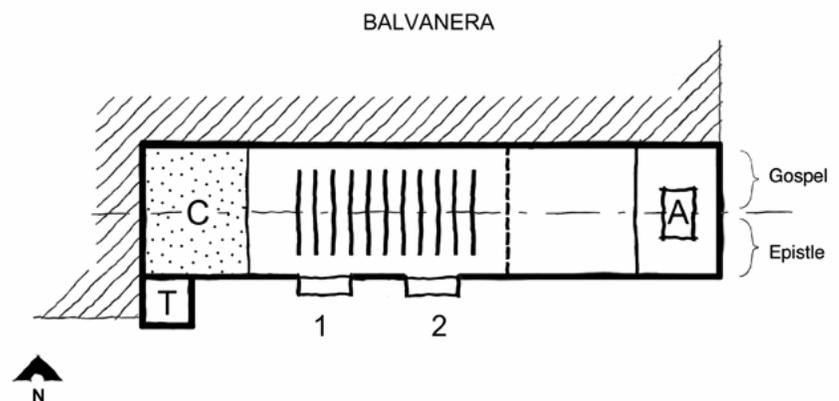
Another essential presence in Catholic temples were the bells, as their sound was used to call the parishioners⁴⁴ both in parishes and

⁴² Those of the Conceptionists of Jesús María, Balvanera, La Concepción, Santa Inés, San Bernardo, La Encarnación, with the Hieronymite nuns of San Lorenzo, the two Discalced Carmelites of Santa Teresa la Antigua and la Nueva, with the Poor Clares of Santa Clara and Santa Isabel, and with the Capuchin nuns of Blessed Felipe de Jesús.

⁴³ Those of the Conceptionists of Regina Coeli and San José de Gracia, of the Dominicans of Santa Catalina de Siena, of the Hieronymite nuns of Nuestra Señora de la Expectación and of the Poor Clares of San Juan de la Penitencia.

⁴⁴ Different religions use various means of acoustic diffusion, such as minarets in mosques.

FIGURES 2 and
3. Typological
diagrams of the
temple's floor plans
for the convents of
Balvanera and Santa
Inés (Drawing: Rafael
Mancilla Walles,
2021).



⁴⁵ The large convents of San Francisco, San Agustín and Santo Domingo had only one bell tower, the first two on the right side of the doorway—the one of San Agustín has now been lost—and the one of Santo Domingo on the left side. The same was true of the Franciscan convent of Propaganda Fide de San Fernando, with a single tower on the left side of the doorway. In contrast, the Profesa, designed by Arrieta, had two towers, indicating the Jesuits' political and religious power.

⁴⁶ Those of the Conceptionists of Regina Coeli, La Concepción, Balvanera, Santa Inés, La Encarnación and San Bernardo, two of the Discalced Carmelites of Santa Teresa la Antigua and La Nueva, that of the Hieronymite nuns of Nuestra Señora de la Expectación and that of San Lorenzo—collapsed due to an earthquake—and those of the Urbanist Poor Clares of San Juan de la Penitencia.

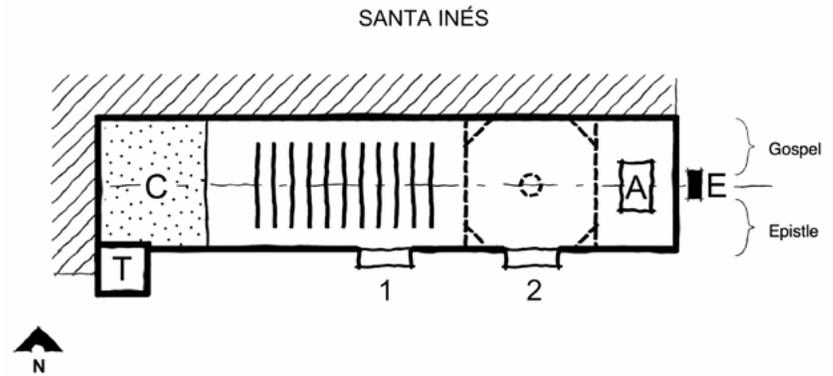
⁴⁷ Those of the Conceptionists of Jesús María and San José de Gracia, as well as that of the Dominicans of Santa Catalina de Siena—now demolished—over the choirs, still visible in photographs from the beginning of the 20th century, revealing its tower in the distance (Tovar, 1990).

⁴⁸ Santa Clara, with its unique tower and bell-gable, unfortunately, lost.

⁴⁹ That of the Urbanist Poor Clares of Santa Isabel and that of the Capuchin nuns of Blessed Felipe de Jesus.

⁵⁰ They're the only two that have a nave parallel to the main street, an altar facing east, two twin doorways on the epistle side, low and high choirs at the foot of the temple, a small setback on the facade due to the absence of an atrium and a bell tower on the main facade.

FIGURE 3.



CORPUS CHRISTI'S TEMPLE ATYPICALITY

The repetition of these variables in the convents previously analyzed highlights the atypical nature of Corpus Christi temple, because, despite covering a similar architectural program, it did not reproduce the same solutions, which is even more remarkable if we remember that the same author designed the whole structure. Thus, of the five variables we find that, in the layout of this temple's nave, the altar was placed southwards—despite the fact that it has a good front facing the alameda—and its only parallel nave was not placed on the most important street; the temple's main entrance had a single doorway at its foot, that is, covering the Epistle and the Gospel, and, exceptionally, this doorway included a portal with three open bays on the first floor⁵¹ (Figure 4).

Regarding the high and low choirs' layout, the architect placed only one choral space above the entrance—as it would happen in a parish or a male convent temple—, while he placed the low choir next to the altar, a solution similar to the one used in Capuchin temples⁵²; the atrium also had no setback, something unnecessary given the proximity of the alameda and Calvario Street, which was lined with the Way of the Cross (Robin, 2014), and as for the bell tower, Arrieta did not include one either: instead—as attested by the construction contract—(Rocha, 2006, pp. 147-152), he placed a small belfry above the choir window, at the top of the main pediment, which years later was transformed into a niche.

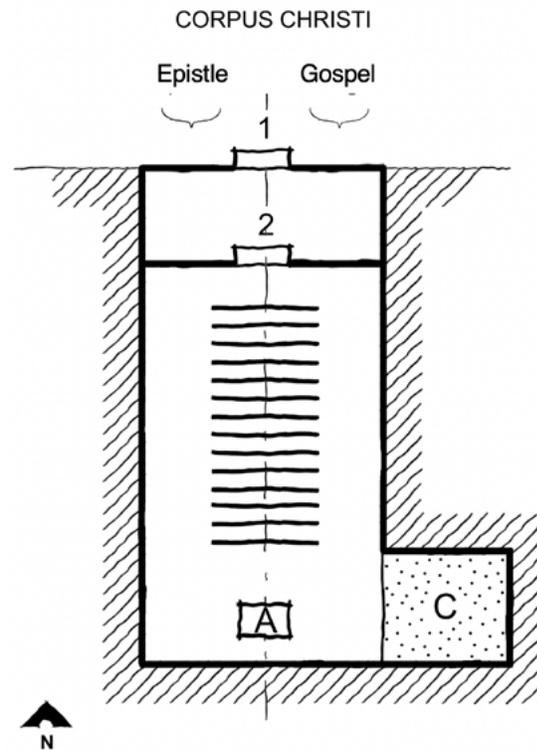
⁵¹ A similar solution to some Jesuit temples—such as De La Compañía in Puebla—or the Carmelite temples designed by the architect Fray Andrés de San Miguel in several viceregal towns.

⁵² In addition to the Capuchin temple, another conventual temple that repeated this solution of a low choir next to the presbytery and a high choir above the sotocoro was that of Nuestra Señora del Pilar or "Enseñanza Antigua", of the Compañía de María, although it should be noted that it was built after the Corpus Christi temple, so it could not have served as a model for Arrieta, but, in any case, it would have been the other way around.

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FIGURE 4.
Typological scheme
of the temple's
floor plan of Corpus
Christi (Drawing:
Rafael Mancilla
Walles, 2021).



In view of this discrepancy accumulation, one might wonder about the reasons that led Arrieta to a proposal so far removed from tradition. One possibility is that the remoteness of the convent, practically in the western indigenous neighborhoods, allowed him greater design freedom; however, this hypothesis would be invalidated by the fact that the Urbanist Poor Clares of San Juan de la Penitencia's temple, in the same indigenous neighborhood, did comply with the typology. A secondary explanation could be that it was due to the alameda's urban hierarchy, that is, that Arrieta had designed a different facade, given the location of the site; however, this hypothesis would be nullified by the fact that the Poor Clares of Santa Isabel's temple closed the alameda to the east and its main facade—toward San Juan de Letran—turned its back to the tree-lined space. A third assumption would involve showing that the exceptionality of the temple derives from the indigenous singularity of its population, something that could be interpreted in two ways: as a vindication of native peoples⁵³ value or, on the contrary, as a disparagement towards them⁵⁴, since they “did not deserve” a fa-

⁵³ Although a possible indigenous valuation would be suggestive from our historical moment, it seems unlikely given the ecclesial opposition that it faced since its foundation.

⁵⁴ Something that coincides with the racism and classism of the time cannot be verified with the analysis of previous works for indigenous people—because the first attempts to found indigenous convents did not prosper (Hernández, 2014)—nor by

cade equal to that of the convents for the Creoles and Spaniards.⁵⁵ Finally, a fourth possibility could be ventured that arose when considering the professional dynamics of New Spain architects, whose workshops and guilds were forced to the ups and downs of the decisions of powerful clients, changes in budgets, ecclesial struggles, and political transformations, as we proposed below.

A FLEXIBLE PROJECT HYPOTHESIS

These atypical characteristics cannot be considered a fortuitous or thoughtless fact, mainly because they came from an experienced master builder like Arrieta, who had already built the temple and cloister of Santa Teresa la Nueva for the Discalced Carmelites, which complied with most of the typological variables, except for its altar, facing south, and its two doorways with very small variations. So, what could have happened? In response, we here propose a hypothesis that, although cannot be proven based on the available documents, would eventually shed light on a different interpretation of a unique construction: the uncertainty of royal authorization for a convent for indigenous people led the Marquis of Valero and Arrieta himself to conceive of a flexible temple so that, in case of authorization was refused, it could be used by the Franciscans.

RELIGIOUS ASCRIPTION AND UNUSUAL FOUNDATION

The new convent for indigenous women was ascribed to the first rule of Santa Clara, a branch that at that time did not yet exist in the Novo-Hispanic capital (Rocha, 2004). It should be recalled that, in addition to the ascription and obedience to an ecclesiastical pow-

comparing it with later works. In addition to the fact that it would seem contradictory that an underestimation caused the incorporation of such an elaborate and sophisticated cover, where, in addition, an inscription was displayed that proudly declared the indigenous origin of its inhabitants.

⁵⁵ After this convent, similar foundations were replicated, since there were noble and Christian indigenous women in all the regions, with rich caciques with the ability to allow their daughters to enter. The Jesuit convent for Indians of Enseñanza Nueva was built next to the San Gregorio school and in other towns the convents for indigenous people were replicated, such as the Poor Clares of Our Lady of Cosamaloapan, in Valladolid—the current Morelia—, founded with royal authorization from 1734—with a temple that also departed from the typology—, without twin and lateral portals, for which a separate study would be worthwhile. Other attempts did not have the same luck, such as the failed requests, in 1779, to found a convent for indigenous people in Tlatelolco and another in Puebla, both requests rejected by the king in 1785 (Hernández, 2014). Better luck ran with the request of the convent of Poor Clares of the first rule of Our Lady of the Angels, in 1782, in the old Antequera, today Oaxaca, with nuns from Corpus Christi, which occupied a previous construction of the secular clergy—the temple of the Seven Princes—whose eventual compliance with the traditional typology cannot be confronted.

er—regular or diocesan—, women’s convents⁵⁶ were subject to a specific⁵⁷ rule (Muriel, 1946)—a normative instrument that regulated the community’s life, traditionally instituted by the founder or foundress. These ascriptions become relevant to specify the normative niche of the Corpus Christi convent, since there are authors who have erroneously identified it (García, 1908) as Capuchin, perhaps because it had a low choir near the altar: normatively, they did have differences in their way of life, such as fasting, as well as their own constitutions (Hernández, 2017). It should be noted that the mendicant order of Assisi had several subsequent reforms, each with modifications to the rule, which integrated a panorama of Franciscan communities,⁵⁸ some of which reached New Spain and some of which did not. The original feminine branch arose with the sisters Clara and Inés Sciffo, aristocrats from Urbino, who were captivated by Francis’ preaching. At first, they were welcomed in a Benedictine convent, until they were assigned the convent of San Damiano—that is why they were first known as Damianists—and founded, in 1212—the papal confirmation of Innocent IV would not arrive until 1253—, the order of Poor Clares of the first rule, with a requirement of absolute poverty and proscription of possessing goods (mendicant Poor Clares).

With the order’s rapid growth, Poor Clares who were unhappy with not possessing any goods arose, which led to a request for reform, which was authorized in 1263 by Pope Urban VI, and from then on, they became known as Urban Poor Clares. Almost three centuries later, in 1538, the Italian noblewoman Maria Laurencia Longo—or Longia—proposed in Naples to return to the original rule of St. Clare, which gave rise to the Discalced Capuchin nuns. These variants settled in Spain during the 16th century and undertook the foundation

⁵⁶ From the urban point of view, the convents were always located, both in Spain and in the overseas colonies, in towns or villages. In contrast, monasteries were rural, and in that country, there were monasteries for men and women, unlike in New Spain, where there were only monasteries for men—such as the Carmelite monastery of Santo Desierto, in Cuajimalpa—, because it was considered risky for its members’ honor to establish a female monastery in an unpopulated place. These conditions have caused regional divergences in the use of the terms, as it is considered that convents were only for women and monasteries for men. In New Spain it is customary to name them indistinctly when referring to female religious establishments.

⁵⁷ For example, the Augustinian nuns adhered to the rule of St. Augustine, but there were also those who did not have a rule instituted by the founder, but adhered to another existing rule, assigned by the papal power, as happened with the Dominican nuns, affiliated to that of St. Augustine, or those of the Order of the Conception, who, when they were founded in 1498, were assigned the rule of the Cistercian Order, which was later changed to that of St. Clare, and finally, in 1511, they were given their own rule.

⁵⁸ For example, Conventual Franciscans, Observants, Reformed, Discalced, Recollects and Capuchins.

of female Franciscan convents (Muriel, 1946) in the conquered territories: the Urbanist Poor Clares, following the reformed rule; the Capuchins, reinstated, and the Poor Clares, adhering to the first rule.

When Corpus Christi was founded, at the beginning of the 18th century, there were already three convents for Urbanist Poor Clares⁵⁹ and one, dedicated to Blessed Felipe de Jesus, for Capuchin nuns reinstated to the original rule, but there was no foundation for Poor Clares of the first rule. It was proposed that this would then become the ascription of the future convent for indigenous nuns,⁶⁰ although they would share the same original rule with Capuchin nuns. History recognizes the viceroy Baltasar de Zúñiga y Guzmán Sotomayor y Mendoza marquis of Valero (1658-1727)⁶¹ as the main promoter of its foundation, but recent research (such as Rocha, 2014, pp. 209, 214-215 and 220) has shown that the idea, not in terms of its indigenous composition, but in the ascription to the Poor Clares of the first rule, had begun germinating years earlier.⁶² It was taken up by the Marquis of Valero, who added the indigenous composition and decided to act as benefactor and manager to obtain royal authorization. In 1720 he wrote to Philip V, King of Spain,⁶³ followed by letters of support (Muriel, 2006b, p. 44) from the Mexican archbishop and the Franciscan provisor of the Holy Evangelic Province, the ecclesiastical sector on which the future foundation would depend: the Marquis seemed to be sure the innovative foundation would be granted (García, 1908), as he proposed it to be self-sufficient⁶⁴, so,

⁵⁹ The convents of San Juan de la Penitencia, Santa Clara and Santa Isabel.

⁶⁰ Without the possibility of owning any property, a disadvantageous situation compared to the dozens of farms owned by the three convents of the Poor Clares.

⁶¹ By then the Marquis had served Charles II, the last Habsburg king, as viceroy and captain general of the kingdom of Navarre from 1792 to 1797. After the War of Succession, he served Philip V, the first Bourbon monarch, who appointed him viceroy and captain general of the kingdom of Sardinia in 1704-1707, and then, in 1715, viceroy, governor and captain general of the kingdom of New Spain, positions he held from 1716 to 1722.

⁶² Rocha illustrates that since 1704, some nuns of San Juan de la Penitencia were interested in founding a new convent of Poor Clares of the first rule near the hermitage of the Holy Calvary, at the end of the Way of the Cross, erected by the Franciscans behind San Diego convent. The promoters of this proposal were two Poor Clares from that convent, located in the indigenous neighborhood of San Juan, but the idea did not prosper as they wished; it bore fruit, however, sometime later, since it was precisely one of them who would be the founder and for 17 years abbess of Corpus Christi convent.

⁶³ Philip V of Spain was born in France (1683) and went on to reign in Spain in 1700, in the absence of a Habsburg heir; with him began the House of Bourbon in Spain, which still reigns in that country. His period, only interrupted for a few months (from January to August 1724), when his son Louis I reigned, who died prematurely, ended with his death in 1746.

⁶⁴ One of the arguments in favor of the foundation is that it would not imply any cost to the Crown, since it was intended to be a mendicant, that is, to live off charity and food donations from the local population. In fact, it was so, for when the indigenous Poor Clares went through economic hardship, they would send a sister to go out at midnight and ring a bell, which made the neighbors recognize the call for help and send provisions for the following days.

still without royal authorization, he decided to reverse the usual process: first he bought, for 40,000 pesos, a plot of land on Calvario Street and immediately entrusted the project and construction to Arrieta. The acquired plot was located, as noted above, outside the city layout, in the old indigenous neighborhoods (Guerrero, 2014). The Marquis appointed Juan Gutiérrez Rubín de Celis to represent him in the land purchase and in construction management through the building contract signed in 1720 with Pedro de Arrieta. In fact, the architectural project of the convent of the nuns of the Discalced Saint Francis would share similar solutions with Capuchin temples:

The mentioned Pedro de Arrieta must install a small grille in the lower choir and another in the upper choir, in the same measurements and size as those of the Capuchin Mothers of this city. And likewise, the temple is to be roofed with beams and the choir loft in the same manner. And the floor of said choir that falls to the portal will be of an extended groin vault for greater security [Rocha, 2006, p. 142].

Once the project was approved and the resources were available, the temple and cloister were finished in only eight construction months: from February to September 1720;⁶⁵ however, it couldn't be occupied, because the royal authorization process had been stopped, largely due to the fierce Jesuit opposition. Finally, the Marquis left the viceregal post in 1722, as Philip V had appointed him president of the Royal Council of the Indies and returned to Spain without giving the building to the future indigenous Poor Clares (Rocha, 2004). Two years later, on January 14, 1724, that monarch abdicated in favor of his son Luis I—who would have a very brief reign—, a circumstance that the Marquis took advantage of politically to convince the ephemeral king about the goodness of the indigenous foundation, a grace that he granted on March 5, 1724 to the cheerful delight of those who supported the cause and, surely, of Arrieta himself, since, after four years of having designed and finished the building, it was still unoccupied. The successor of the Marquis of Valero, the new viceroy Juan de Acuña y Manrique Marquis of Casa Fuerte, complied with the royal wish and issued a decree the following June 25 (Rocha, 2006, p. 137). The temple was dedicated on that year's Corpus Thursday,⁶⁶ so that it could be

⁶⁵ Surely for Arrieta's own peace of mind, who had had to mortgage two of his houses at the signing of the contract, as collateral.

⁶⁶ In the Catholic tradition, the celebration of Corpus Christi Thursday, established by Pope Urban IV in 1264, is 60 days after Christ's Resurrection Sunday.

occupied in July by the first four Spanish founding nuns⁶⁷ (Rocha, 2004)—the indigenous ones were still novices—: two from San Juan de la Penitencia convent,⁶⁸ one from Santa Isabel and another from Santa Clara (Rocha, 2014). After the dedication ceremony, the first noble maidens, daughters of chiefs or chiefesses, descendants of the ancient pipiltin, jubilantly entered the convent; they were part of an estate that, within the viceregal structure, still held governmental, judicial and fiscal functions, even if they were women, as proven by Josefina Muriel (Muriel, 2006, p. 31). Shortly after, in December of that same year, with great sorrow among the grateful Poor Clares of the First Rule, the benefactor died in Spain. His heart was sent to New Spain the following year, at the express request of the Marquis himself, to rest near the presbytery⁶⁹, below the craticle⁷⁰, in a lead reliquary (Guerrero, 2014). To summarize, buying the land and erecting the construction before having royal approval shows how unusual the process of founding Corpus Christi was, and would explain, especially if one considers that its protagonist was not a dilettante when he was commissioned—he had carried out many religious works, including a convent for nuns—, some of its atypical characteristics since they could not be attributed to improvisation.

ARRIETA'S EXPERIENCE

Martha Fernández (1992, p. 29 ff.) provides information about Pedro de Arrieta's life and professional career: he was native to Real de Minas de Pachuca, capital of the modern state of Hidalgo, and married Melchora de Robles but had no descendants; during his productive years he had a comfortable economic position, as he owned several houses. His life as an independent professional began on June 12, 1691, with his guild examination (Cortés, 2011). In 1695 he was appointed senior master of the Holy Tribunal of the Holy Office (Fernández, 1992, p. 42) and in 1720 he was appointed

⁶⁷ Rocha reports that "The nuns who were finally chosen to be foundresses were from San Juan de la Penitencia convent: Sister Petra de San Francisco (who was to be the first abbess) and Sister Theresa de San José; from Santa Isabel convent: Sister Michaela de Jesús Nazareno, and from Santa Clara convent: Sister Michaela de San José [...]" (Rocha, 2004, p. 21).

⁶⁸ In Sister Petra's case, Rocha states, her first baptismal certificate recorded that she was of mixed race, but she was later corrected and noted as Spanish, which allowed her to be named first rector (she was the nun of San Juan de la Penitencia who years earlier had proposed the foundation of a Poor Clares of the first rule convent); she was one of the four chosen by the Marquis before returning to Spain.

⁶⁹ This is evidenced by the recent discovery of the lead reliquary, not silver, as the chronicles claimed.

⁷⁰ Small window through which communion is given to the nuns, whose flared section allows the reception of the sacred body from the outside without the need for the priest's fingers to touch the lips of the novices and nuns.

senior master of the Palace of Viceroys and the Cathedral of Mexico, which reflects professional recognition of the viceroyal power and the diocesan clergy. By 1720⁷¹, when he undertook the project and construction of the future convent for indigenous nobles, Arrieta had solid experience in conventual works for the Conceptionists and the Carmelites⁷² as well as with the Dominicans,⁷³ as he had made a lateral altarpiece for the Holy Office in the Audience Hall (1718) and other hospital structures⁷⁴ (Figures 5, 6 and 7).

He had built the Casa Profesa temple for the Jesuits (1714-1720), located in one of the city's most centric streets, whereas for the diocesan clergy, he had contributed to the Seminario de la Catedral Novohispana School, located to the east and now gone, in addition to the famous Collegiate Temple of Guadalupe (1695-1709) with a basilical floor plan⁷⁵ in the then town of La Villa, while between 1720 and 1721 he undertook the Chapel of Las Ánimas, a discreet structure attached to the back of the Cathedral (Fernández, 1992). He also had undertaken public projects⁷⁶ and private houses⁷⁷ (Berlin, 1945/1967, p. 376), and after Corpus Christi he would go on to complete other large commissions falling outside the scope of this paper⁷⁸, but which attest to his mastery of a vast

⁷¹ Martha Fernández quotes a document by Arrieta himself in which he gives a detailed account of all these projects, and which comes from an article by Heinrich Berlin originally published in 1945, later reappeared in 1967: *Three Master Architects in New Spain*.

⁷² For the Conceptionists he had collaborated with Juan de Cepeda in San Bernardo temple—the second temple—and for the Discalced Carmelites he had carried out two works: the cloister of the convent of Santa Teresa “la Antigua”—the temple was by Cristóbal de Medina Vargas—and the whole of the Santa Teresa “la Nueva” convent (1695-1709).

⁷³ For this powerful order of preachers, he had built the sacristy and antesacristy of the Santo Domingo temple, although abundant historiographical material tends to attribute the entirety of this temple to him.

⁷⁴ He designed the temple of the Hospital del Amor de Dios, of which remains only the cloister, which half a century later was adapted to house the Academia de San Carlos.

⁷⁵ Martha Fernández clarifies that the Profesa and Basilica floor plans probably come from other authors, based on which Pedro de Arrieta designed the elevations, a common collaboration if we consider that constructions took a long time and incorporated architects from several generations.

⁷⁶ In the public construction field, he had built two bridges: the San Juan del Río and La Mariscal bridges, as well as the Plaza Mayor basin, and had made revisions and repairs to the capital's sewage system and the Santa Fe aqueduct (Cejudo, 2011).

⁷⁷ We know of one on Montealegre Street—with Diego Rodríguez—commissioned by the Conceptionist nuns, for whom he had carried out some repairs inside their extensive convent.

⁷⁸ We mean the Real Tribunal de la Inquisición, built between 1733 and 1737, an excellent building that shows, through the corner arches of the lower cloister solution, not only his mastery of the structural and constructive elements but also his innovative capacity in his relationship with the urban space by strengthening the urban hierarchy of the dreaded building towards the square. In 1731 he presented a project for a luxurious “cell” for the Jesús María convent. The following year, together with other architects of the guild: Miguel José de Rivera, José Eduardo de Herrera, Miguel Custodio Durán, Manuel M. Juárez and Francisco Valdés, they elaborated, to be presented before the city council, the new regulations that would

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FIGURES 5, 6 and 7. Temple of the Professed House of the Jesuits, Santa Teresa "la Nueva" convent and Ánimas del Purgatorio chapel, three works by Pedro de Arrieta made before and during the commissioning of Corpus Christi convent (Photographs: Ivan San Martín, January 2005, December 2004, and September 2020 respectively).

body of work, a fact which contrasts with his economically straitened death (Fernandez, 1992, pp. 148-150).

CORPUS CHRISTI'S TEMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The documents between Arrieta and the Marquis' representative (the 1720 contract and the two reports dated September 1727)⁷⁹ provide many details regarding the physical and functional features found in Corpus Christi (Rocha, 2006). The temple had a single nave, with the altar facing south, measuring 12 *varas* wide by 24 in length (33 x 66 ft), with a sloping wooden gabled roof—its parallel on the facade was the upper pediment silhouette—, which in its lower part incorporated a false vault, also, as narrated in the same contractual document, made of wood; both were later replaced by a brick vault (Figure 8).

It was accessed through a three-arched portal protected by iron bars, the one in the center with a bolt—currently with wooden doors—, as a vestibule for the parlor door on one side, the access to the porter's lodge at the other end, while the entrance to the nave was located in the center: “the door to the temple must be three *varas* wide and six *varas* high (8.25 x 16.5 ft.). And the ornamentation of said door must be Doric with architraves, frieze and cornice, and its frontispiece below the vault” (Rocha, 2006, p. 144). The second section of the doorway housed the central relief for the Body of Christ's custody, to which the convent was dedicated, and on the sides, “two coats of arms of His Excellency the Marquis of Valero, crowned with the bell tower” (Rocha, 2006, p. 150), while an inscription placed in 1729 protested its indigenous racial composition⁸⁰ (Martínez, 2006a, p. 236) (Figure 9).

replace those of 1599 still in force. This same group was in charge, a few years later, of the oil painting on a screen of a map of Mexico City. During the last stretch of his life, Fernández states that he suffered from illnesses that sometimes prevented him from attending work assignments and he was even imprisoned when he failed to comply with the repair of a house. He died on December 15, 1738, in financial straits, as his widow had to ask for financial support from the Holy Office to shroud and bury him, and then face debts and mortgages that wiped out the little wealth he had left.

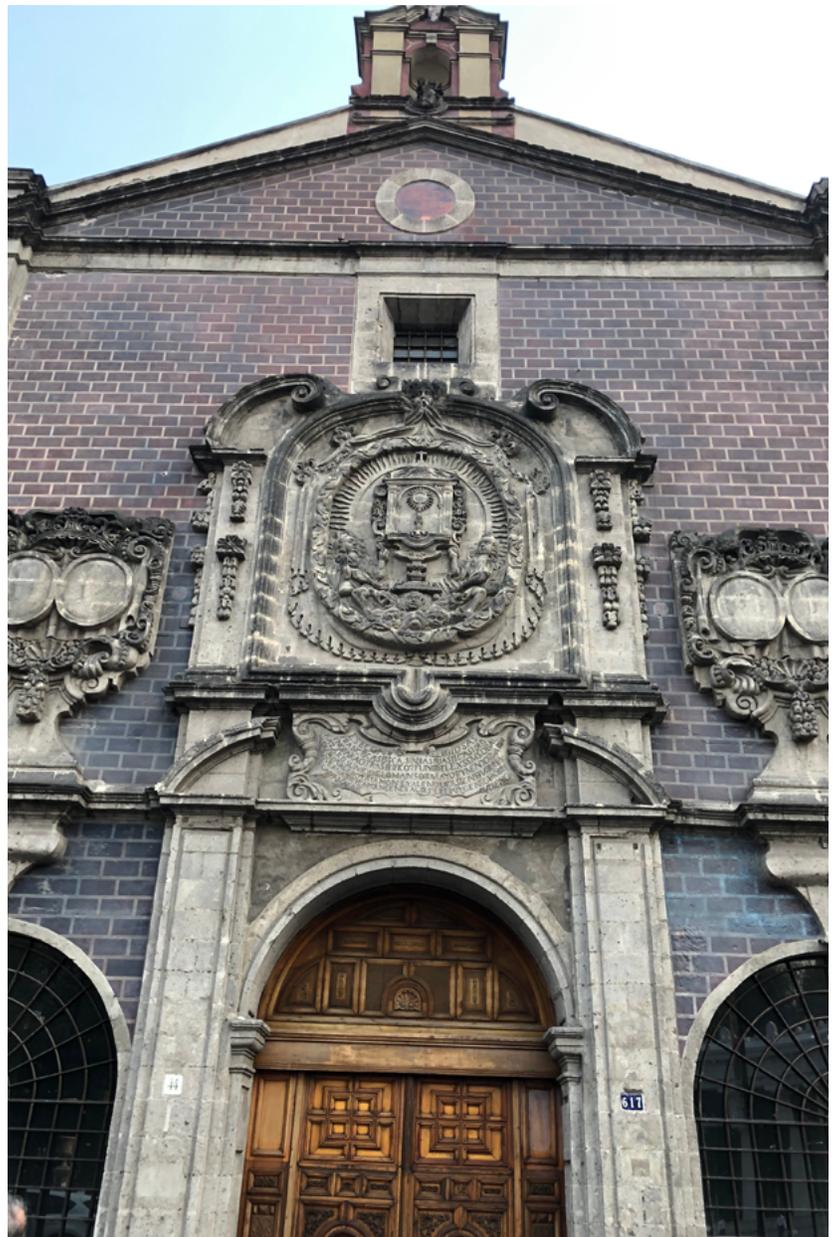
⁷⁹ These reports were site visits made by a designated third party who wasn't involved in the project and construction and were part of a legal process of claims by the owners or users, in this case, the nuns against Arrieta. The first was done on September 29, 1727, by master architect Joseph Manuel de la Mata y Hortigosa, and the second, the following day, on September 30, by master architect Antonio Alvarez. Both were done seven years after the work was completed, that is, three years after they were occupied. Both, published in full by Rocha Cortés (2006: , pp. 147-152), come from *Títulos y escrituras de fundación de este convento y aumento de sitios* (Titles and Foundation Deeds of this Convent and Increase of Sites), s. n. f., in the *Archivo del Convento de Corpus Christi de México* (ACCXPI).

⁸⁰ “THIS CONVENT IS FOR FRANCISCAN NUNS, DAUGHTERS OF INDIGENOUS CHIEFS AND NOT FOR OTHERS. IT WAS BUILT AND FOUNDED BY THE MOST EXCELLENT LORD DON BALTAZAR DE ZÚÑIGA Y GUZMÁN SOTOMAYOR Y MENDOZA, MARQUIS OF VALERO AND ALENQUER, BEING VICEROY, GOVERNOR AND

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FIGURE 8. Temple portal at Corpus Christi convent (Photograph: Ivan San Martín, April 2019).



At the foot of the nave, above the wide portal, the high choir and two tribunes at its ends were placed: boxes for the physically disabled nuns, while the low choir was on the first floor, but at the opposite end, on one side of the presbytery, protected with a tin railing and counter-railing, just above the crypt and the ossuary⁸¹. There were also the craticle, two confessionals drilled into the wall

CAPTAIN GENERAL OF THIS KINGDOM, GENTLEMAN OF THE CHAMBER OF MAJESTY AND AUDITOR OF HIS ROYAL AUDIENCE.”

⁸¹ It should be remembered that once a novice was professed and became a nun of veil and choir, she never went out again, for when she died, her remains rested under the choirs, first individually, in the crypts, and then mixed with the other remains, in the lower ossuaries.

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FIGURE 9. Temple portal at Corpus Christi convent and detail of the inscription indicating indigenous exclusivity (Photograph: Ivan San Martín, April 2019).



which separated it from the cloister and a regular door, used to allow the new members⁸² to enter the cloister located to the east.⁸³

It should be noted that, once the building was handed over, there were complaints from the nuns to the architect, which motivated the two acknowledgments that finally ended in the architect's favor⁸⁴. In fact, in June 1729, while Arrieta was still alive, there was an "enlargement of six *varas* (16.5 ft) to the temple", a transformation that has raised some doubts, since the facade that exists

⁸² In addition to this entrance, there were three turnstiles: one in the parlor, for meetings between the residents and their families; another in the porter's lodge, for the transfer of provisions and belongings, and the third in the sacristy, to provide liturgical supplies to the priest, ingenious solutions for communication with the world.

⁸³ The cloister was developed on two levels, around a courtyard with 20 archways, in the center of which was a fountain, the only element that remains in the atrium of the convent of El Carmen, in San Angel (Rocha, 2006). On the first floor were located the office, the refectory, the kitchen, the laundry, the washing rooms, the farm and a small vegetable garden; on the upper floor, the cells for novices and professed—they did not have individual residences like other convents—, as well as a labor room, infirmary and corridors that communicated with the counter-choir, high choir and tribunes. Some sources indicate that the convent had a *temazcalli* (De la Maza, 1983, p. 47), the traditional Mesoamerican sauna made with water steamed over hot stones and medicinal herbs, a peculiarity not enjoyed in other convents, and understandable, given the noble maidens' hygienic habits.

⁸⁴ As the first stated, made by master Joseph Manuel de la Mata y Hortigosa in 1727; "I feel not only did he comply with what was agreed, but that he exceeded all the work that was referred to, improving it in every respect, and for my conscience's sake I declare it so". In September 1727 Arrieta was summoned on two occasions by the convent's vicar to answer a complaint from the nuns, apparently due to discrepancies between the building constructed and the building recorded in the deed, a complaint that was finally ruled in favor of the architect. "Acknowledgements of the construction excesses of the architect Pedro de Arrieta in Corpus Christi monastery temple... September 29 and 30, 1727". Both documents have been published in full (Rocha, 2006, pp. 147-153).

today is indeed Arrieta's original, as can be seen in the paintings of the time. The nave was indeed enlarged, and this is confirmed because the exact measurements of the original temple prior to the enlargement are known; they are indicated in the September 30, 1727, report written by the master architect Don Antonio Álvarez: "The temple is 12 *varas* wide and 24 in length [...]" (Rocha, 2006, p. 150). In fact, the present temple is, in its equivalence in meters, 30 *varas*⁸⁵, that is, precisely six more, due to the enlargement in 1729. Thus, at least four hypotheses are possible: the first is that it would have been enlarged to the north, but this would have implied the facade's demolition and a new body would protrude from the wall by 6 *varas*, which is improbable given that the current volume is always depicted in the paintings and urban plans of the eighteenth century. The second, that it would have had a narrow atrium in front, towards which the temple would have been enlarged, with the consequent assembly and disassembly of the facade, as occurred within other viceroval instances⁸⁶, although this would imply that the original temple would have been recessed, a situation that is not described in the 1720 contract, nor does it appear in any urban plan or old engraving. A third hypothesis, presented by specialists Enrique Tovar and Itzel Landa (2007, p. 19), is that the enlargement would have been made to the south, extending the presbytery by 6 *varas* over the burial chamber. The fourth hypothesis is the one we now present, based on the description in the *Gacetas de México* of that enlargement in 1729:

Give six more *varas* of length to this polished temple, and although great care has been taken by the masters, in the midpoint that the choir is to receive, it is still feared that once the wall that serves as formwork is removed, the vault will have a notable impression, but it is certain that once these tasks are happily achieved, it will have sufficient capacity, beauty and splendor [Sahagún, quoted by Tovar & Landa, 2007, p. 19].

⁸⁵ One *vara* is equivalent to the current 83.59 cm (33 inches or 2.75 ft.); the length of the current temple is 25.50 m (83 ft.) between the north and south axes, that is, a little more than 30 *varas*.

⁸⁶ In this regard, the master's thesis of one of this text's authors analyzed San Felipe Neri's temple (La Concordia) in Puebla, based on a book found in the archives of that city's Cathedral. Carlos García Durango's original work in the seventeenth century had respected the four bays of the nave and had left a small atrium at the front of the temple (with a finished portal), to allow access to two chapels (of "Indians and dark-skinned people") that couldn't be included in the project. In the 18th century, the chapels were joined to the original temple and the facade was dismantled (let's remember that they were assembled), which was moved towards the street, extending the plan towards the *sotocoro*; the result was a much longer plan than normal. The old facade wall remained for many years as a support for the enlargement and was removed upon completion.

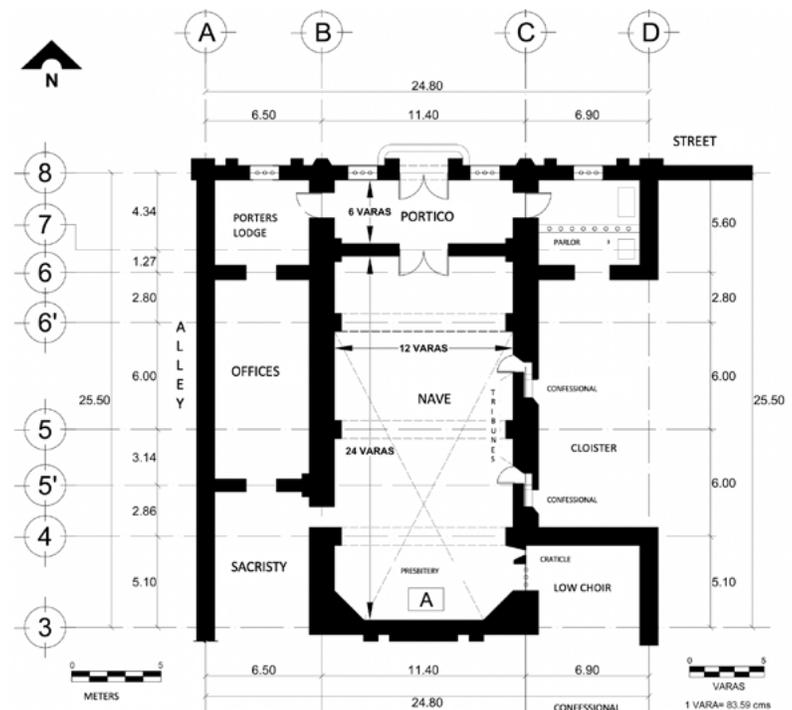
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FIGURE 10. Plan reconstruction of the original temple based on the hypothesis based on the enlargement of the interior space of the nave without altering the exterior measurements. The portal and the dividing wall for the entrance to the nave are notorious when the nave was 24 *varas* (66 ft.) long in its interior and 6 *varas* (16.5 ft.) longer than the portal (Drawing: Ivan San Martín and Verónica Orozco, September 2020, based on the drawing by Rafael Mancilla Walles, 2020).

The above fragment expresses concern about the removal of a wall that “served as a formwork” for a vault, a circumstance we interpret as a dividing wall that originally separated the portal from the nave’s interior, as described in the 1720 contract, and which would explain why it was believed to help support it. Our project hypothesis would propose that the nave was indeed “enlarged” within the physical limits of the interior of the nave, but without modifying its exterior. By redrawing the floor plan with this wall, we found that, in accordance with what was noted in the September 30, 1727 report, the nave’s interior was 24 *varas* (66 ft.), plus 6 *varas* (16.5 ft.) from the former portal, i.e., that added together would result in the current 30 *varas* (82.5 ft.), as can be observed in our reconstruction (Figures 10 and 11).

By 1740, after Arrieta had passed away, the wooden roof of the temple was replaced with vaults—a terrible decision for the building’s stability—by Fray Juan de Dios de Rivera, the convent’s vicar and the man responsible for the construction, who apparently had limited knowledge regarding structural behavior. The original double wooden roof was undoubtedly lighter, and its load shifted vertically along the walls, while the brick vault implied greater weight and incorporated lateral thrusts that required more mass to contain them. On the east side, there was no problem, since the cloister helped the efforts, but on the west side, several buttresses had to be inserted: two upper buttresses, flanking the nave, and some



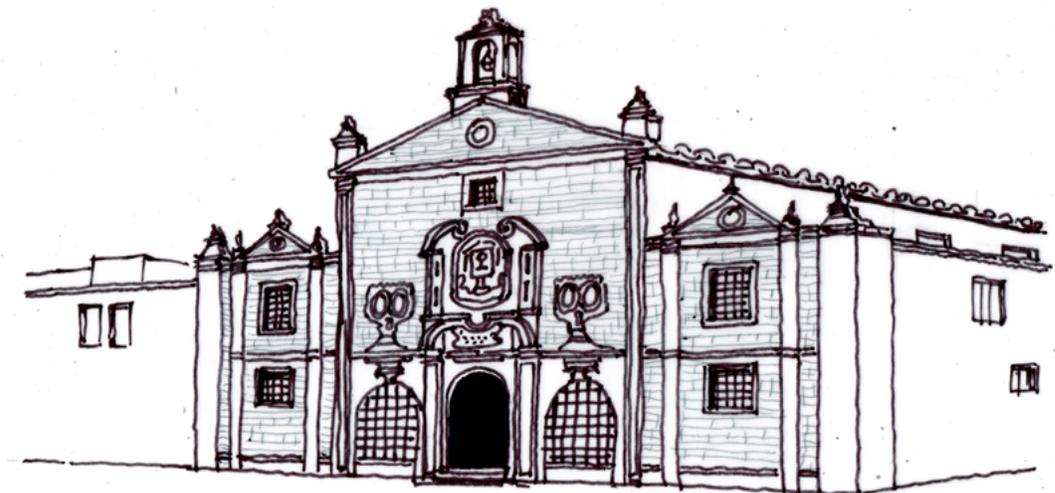


FIGURE 11. Hypothetical reconstruction of the original temple facade upon Arrieta's completion. Note the slenderness of the front of the volume of the single nave, which was lost when a parapet was inserted over the lower bodies (Drawing: Ivan San Martín and Verónica Orozco, 2021).

still existent buttress arches, to counteract the thrusts, which evidences the poor intervention even at that time. The vault insertion also gave the facade a slightly higher profile than the existing front, so to make up for the difference, a triangular wall had to be built, to this day visible, which ends at the upper bell tower, thus tarnishing Arrieta's pristine composition (Figure 12).

A FLEXIBLE PROJECT ARGUMENT

From the actions he undertook, it's evident that the Marquis was convinced of the relevance of the indigenous foundation since he had sent the request in 1720; however, King Philip V showed no signs of a prompt solution, and the matter became distended. He knew that his position as viceroy wouldn't last many years, so he had to hurry to get the future building ready, even without royal authorization. Therefore, he decided to commission Arrieta to build a temple with a flexible solution that would serve for the future indigenous nuns, if authorized, but also for a convent for men, probably Franciscan, given the proximity of several institutions of that order,⁸⁷ in case the longed-for authorization wasn't granted.

⁸⁷ Robin (2014) has called it the Franciscanization of public space, since in the vicinity of Corpus Christi were the Convento Grande de San Francisco and the Way of the Cross under its ascription; in addition, there were two convents of Urbanist Poor Clares—the Santa Isabel and San Juan de la Penitencia—and two male convents—the San Diego and the Propaganda Fide de San Fernando—, apart from the Hospital de Terceros—where today stands Palacio de Correos—for the Franciscans of the third order.

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FIGURE 12. Buttresses on the west wall of the vault inserted in 1740, a bad decision made by Fray Juan de Dios de Rivera shortly after Pedro de Arrieta's death (Photograph: Ivan San Martín, April 2019).



Thus, Don Pedro, a master builder with ample experience and an innovative spirit, accepted the challenge: a single-nave temple with its cloister facing east—a beneficial orientation for a residential area—could serve both men and women. First, he decided not to arrange the nave parallel to the street, nor to install twin doorways, as this would necessarily have restricted it to a women's temple, so he decided to place it perpendicular to the alameda, directing the altar to the south, as he had already done in Santa Teresa la Nueva, and to place the entrance at the foot of the temple, as would be the case in a Franciscan or Carmelite temple. The immediate consequence would have been to enter through the foot of the temple, which would have been an impediment if Arrieta, on the grounds that the future foundation was to be ascribed to the first rule of St. Clare—like the Capuchin nuns—had not foreseen

placing the low choir next to the presbytery⁸⁸ and leaving a large high choir above the entrance portal, also functional for the temple of a regular men's convent. Finally, the front doorway's compositional problem required that the same entrance be used both for the parishioners of the world and for service access, in the parlor and the porter's lodge, which would have detracted from the front doorway's design. The solution was masterful: a portal imbued in the facade wall would serve as a vestibule for these three entrances: the lateral ones for the service and the main one to enter the nave, with its door tucked under the upper choir. Lastly, given the future assignment's vagueness, Arrieta decided not to include a bell tower, but rather install a small upper belfry in its place (in any case, if two towers were required flanking the facade, they could be placed over the parlor and the porter's lodge).⁸⁹ As has been pointed out, the Marquis left the Viceroyalty in 1722 without yet handing over the already completed building, but with the hope of successfully completing the negotiations from the Peninsula, so, as the benefactor of the project, he decided to delay its delivery. Thus, once the foundation was authorized in 1724, the founding nuns and the future novices moved into their building four years after its completion, a sufficiently flexible project thanks to a Marquis' foresight and an architect's genius.

FINAL REMARKS

The establishment of a typology has highlighted the exceptional nature of a conventual work carried out by an experienced author, who would not have made improvised design decisions, so it's plausible that he conceived a design that, in accordance with an uncertain fate, was extremely flexible, as was the case with the usual processes of clients, authors and viceregal guilds, when houses and palaces changed their use, regular convents passed into diocesan hands or religious houses and retreat houses ended up being future female convents' seed. Unfortunately, there are no more professional documents available from Arrieta to confirm this hypothesis' validity, but such an interpretation would explain the temple's atypical characteristics.

Typological studies should serve not only to verify compliance with the model but also to identify those works that deviate from it

⁸⁸ And in this case, if the foundation were not authorized, it would be enough to close the window and the craticle and adapt the space to receive an altarpiece.

⁸⁹ Such as those designed for the Profesa and the Colegiata in the Villa de Guadalupe (Cejudo, 2011).

and, mainly, to explore the possible causes of this exceptional condition heuristically. Identifying the atypical nature of the temple in question and speculating about its possible causes would have also allowed authorities in 2002-2003 to face the intervention of the viceregal heritage that threatened ruin⁹⁰ in a different way, since they could have left the imbued portal designed by Arrieta prior to the “interior enlargement”, which would have caused a shading on the first floor and a greater lightness to the beautiful upper doorway. In the same way, since the temple is part of the Plaza Juárez urban project,⁹¹ the spatial environment could have been designed differently, for example, in its eastern zone, with architectural elements that evoke the old cloister structure and only freeing the western area to commemorate the old alley, interventions that would have been plausible if a typological analysis had been applied to this great viceregal construction, in front of which centuries later, perhaps as a macabre joke of destiny, the hemicycle to Benito Juárez was built, that Zapotec who promoted the exclaustation of the first indigenous wives that Christ had in Hispanic America (Figure 9).

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⁹⁰ Its cloister was destroyed, and the temple went through many misfortunes. Even in 1985 it was severely damaged by the September 19 earthquake.

⁹¹ Once the structural consolidation, restoration and maintenance works were completed, the building was given to the General Archive of Notaries, a judicial destination that remains.

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