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The Architectural Patrimony of the Male and Female Religious Orders in Mexico City

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This article documents and discusses the surviving architectural patrimony of the male and female religious orders in Mexico City, which was the seat of colonial power in Nueva España. After the defeat of the Culhua-Mexica in 1521, the Spanish initiated the conversion of the twin cities of Tenochtitlán-Tlatelolco into their own urban centers. Tlatelolco continued as a largely indigenous urban center, whereas Mexico-Tenochtitlan evolved as a Spanish political and administrative center with a continued indigenous presence. This pattern of evolution can be visualized in the Uppsala Map, which was one of the first cartographic representations of the post-conquest cities. The Franciscan doctrina complex, the Colegio de Santa Cruz, the market, and tecpán (seat of indigenous government) dominated the urban space of Tlatelolco (see Figure 1). The houses of the indigenous population occupy the rest of the urban space. The depiction of Mexico-Tenochtitlán documented a very different urban space (see Figure 2). Spanish civil-religious structures dominated the center of the city including the primitive cathedral and viceregal palace, but also the tecpán of the indigenous government. The Codex Osuna drafted in 1569 included a more detailed representation of the Mexico-Tenochtitlán tecpán (see Figure 3) that no longer exists.[1]

A recent study analyzed the development of the urban plan of the city in the formative period 1521-1535, based, in part, on *cabildo* (town council) records of grants of house lots. It was in these years that the spatial organization of the city evolved, and four of the missionary orders established a presence. The Franciscans arrived first, and initially established their convent adjoining the main square. They later relocated to a new site on the edge of the city with more room to build a larger complex. The Dominicans and Augustinians had arrived by 1535, and began the construction of complexes they would occupy for some four hundred years.[2] The Jesuits arrived in 1572, the reformed Carmelites in 1585, and Mercedarians (1595).[3]

The end of the male religious orders came in 1767 with the expulsion of the Jesuits from all Spanish territories, and in 1861, following the conclusion of the three-year civil war known as the "Guerra de las Reformas" (1858-1861). The reformist liberal regime of Benito Juarez confiscated the assets of the Catholic Church in Mexico, that had sided with the conservative faction during the recently concluded civil war. Among other assets the government confiscated the convent complexes of the male missionary orders the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and in the cases of the Franciscan and Dominican complexes proceeded to divide the convents into lots for sale and demolished most of the non-church buildings. A detailed book published in 1861 documented the history of the suppressed convents in the city that included both male and female institutions, and the initiation of the process of demolition.[4] The book also published lithographs showing the complexes and the process of demolition. The cloister of the former Jesuit *casa profesa* was also confiscated and demolished.

[1] For a detailed analysis of the Uppsala Map see Miguel León-Portilla and Carmen Aguilera, *Mapa de México-Tenochtitlán y sus contornos hacia 1550* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 2016).

[2] Lucia Mier y Terán Rocha, *La primera traza de la ciudad de México, 1521-1535,* 2 vols. (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005). The Mercedarians (Orden Real y Militar de Nuestra Señora de la Merced y la Redención de los Cautivos) was a Spanish religious order established in Barcelona in 1218, and was dedicated to rescuing Christians held by Muslims.

[3] Jessica Ramírez Méndez, *Los carmelitas descalzos en la Nueva España: Del activismo misional al apostolado urbano* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2015), 13. The order of Nuestra Señora del Monte Carmelo came into existence in the crusader states in the Holy Land in the twelfth century. The reformed discalced Carmelites came into existence in Spain in 1562.

[4] Manuel Ramírez Aparicio, *Los Conventos Suprimidos de Méjico: Estudios Biográficos, Históricos, y Arqueológicos* (México, D.F.: Imprenta y Librería de J.M. Aguilar y Compañía, 1861).

Figure 1: Tlatelolco in the Uppsala Map.

Figure 2: Mexico-Tenochtitlán in the Uppsala Map.

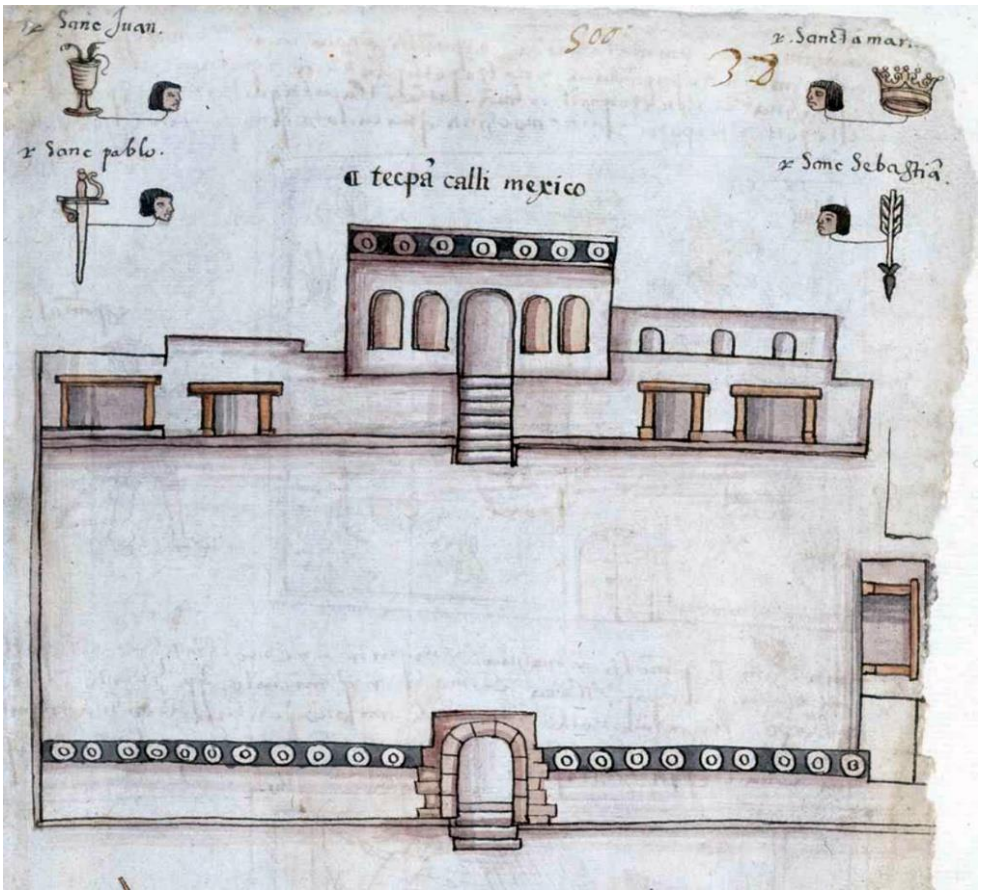


Figure 3: The tecpán of Mexico-Tenochtitlán from the 1569 Codex Osuna.

The Franciscans (1523/1524), Dominicans (1526), Augustinians (1533), and Jesuits (1572) were important participants in the attempted evangelization of the indigenous populations of Mexico. The Mercedarians (end of the sixteenth century) and reformed Carmelites (1585) were involved in an urban ministry. The Franciscans were the most important missionary order, and staffed missions in central Mexico and on the frontiers. The Dominicans also staffed missions in central Mexico, in the Sierra Gorda region, and after 1774 in Baja California. The Augustinians limited their missionary activity to central Mexico and the Sierra Gorda. The Jesuits rivaled the importance of the Franciscans in the staffing of frontier missions. The Mexico City complexes of all four orders were important as administrative centers.

What survives of the large colonial-era convent complexes in Mexico City? This chapter briefly summarizes details of the development of the convent complexes, and documents what remains. The complexes are the Franciscan convent of San Francisco and the apostolic college of San Fernando, the Dominican and Augustinian convents, and the Jesuit Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo and casa profesa. Where available, historic images are used to provide an idea of the size of the complexes, and what remains. The 1861 demolitions did not destroy all architectural elements of the Franciscan and Dominican complexes, and several examples of what remains are presented. This chapter first discusses the Franciscan complexes in Mexico City.

El Convento Grande de San Francisco

The first Franciscans arrived in Mexico in 1523, and in the following year the so-called “twelve apostles” came and initiated the evangelization of the indigenous populations. The Franciscans established the convent of San Francisco in Mexico City in 1524, and it was one of the first four *doctrinas* or missions. The others were in Tezcoco, Tlaxcala, and Huejotzingo.[5] The first site of the Franciscan complex was just off of the main square about where the national

[5] Lauro Rosell, *Iglesias y conventos coloniales de México,* 2nd edition (México, D.F.: Editorial Patria, 1961), 178.

palace is today, and later relocated to the current site on the edge of the city where there was more space. The church and convent were built in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. The church, for example, was dedicated in 1716, and the Capilla de Balvanera was one of the last additions and was constructed between 1763 And 1766. The convent covered an area of some 22,000 square meters.[6] Images from the 1850s show the church and convent before the demolition in 1861.

Figure 1: An 1875 diagram of the convent of San Francisco as it was before its demolition.

[6] Ibid, 178; Guillermo Tovar de Teresa, *Ciudad de Palacios: Crónica de un patrimonio perdido* (México, D.F.: Editorial Vuelta, 1990), vol. 2, 16.

Figure 2: Detail of the Uppsala map showing the Franciscan complex as it was around 1550.

Figure 3: The Franciscan complex on a seventeenth-century *biombo* or folding screen.

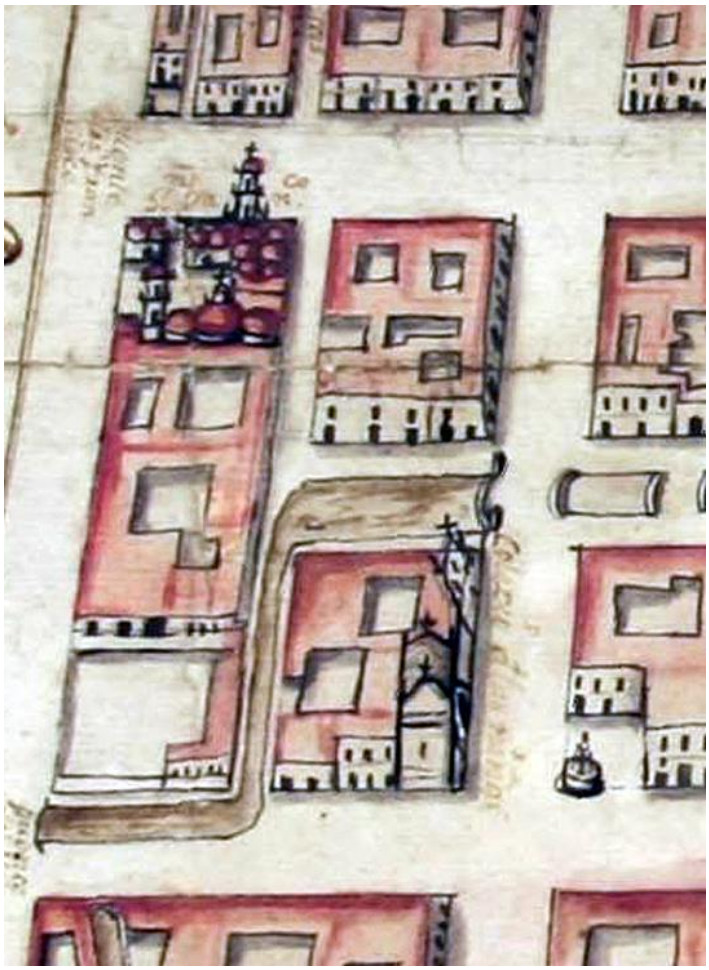


Figure 4: The complex from a 1720 map of the city.

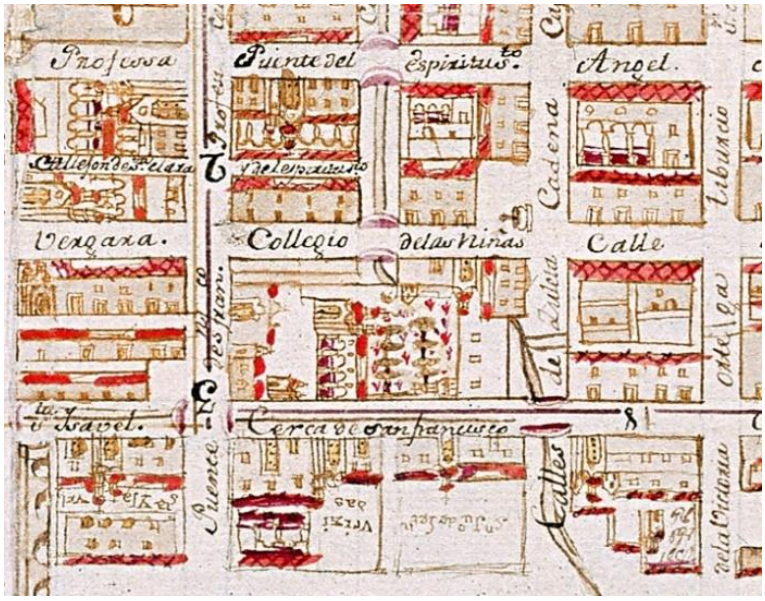


Figure 5: The Franciscan complex from the 1750 map.

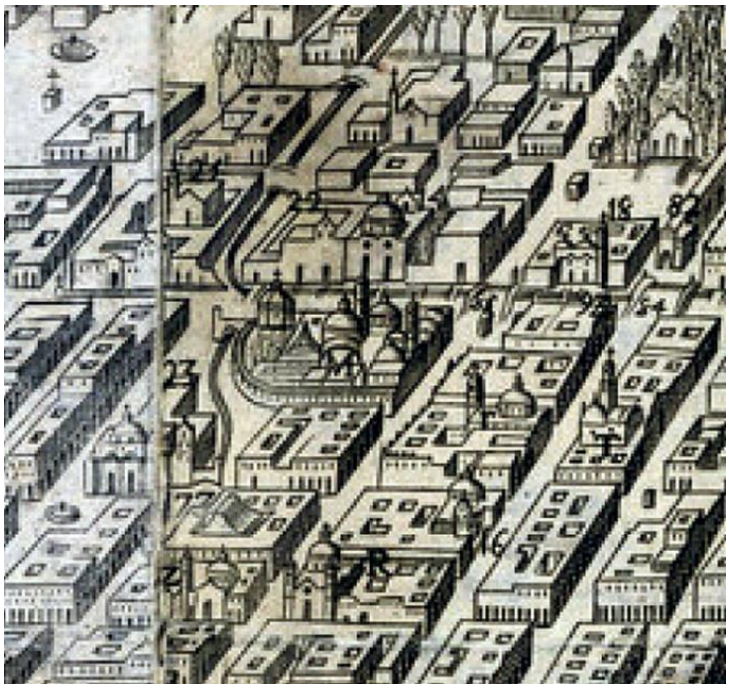


Figure 6: The Franciscan complex from the 1760 map marked as “M”.

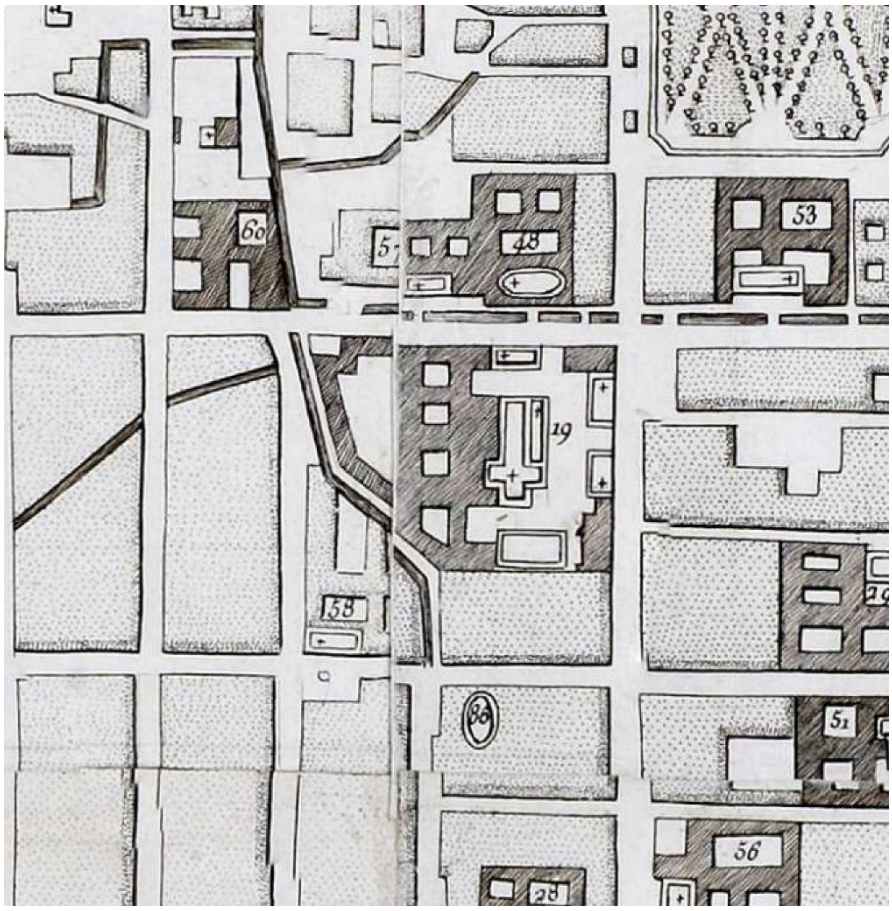


Figure 7: The Franciscan complex from the 1785 map.

Figure 8: A nineteenth-century lithograph of the San Francisco church.

Figure 9: An 1855 painting by Eugenio Landesio of the Franciscan convent.

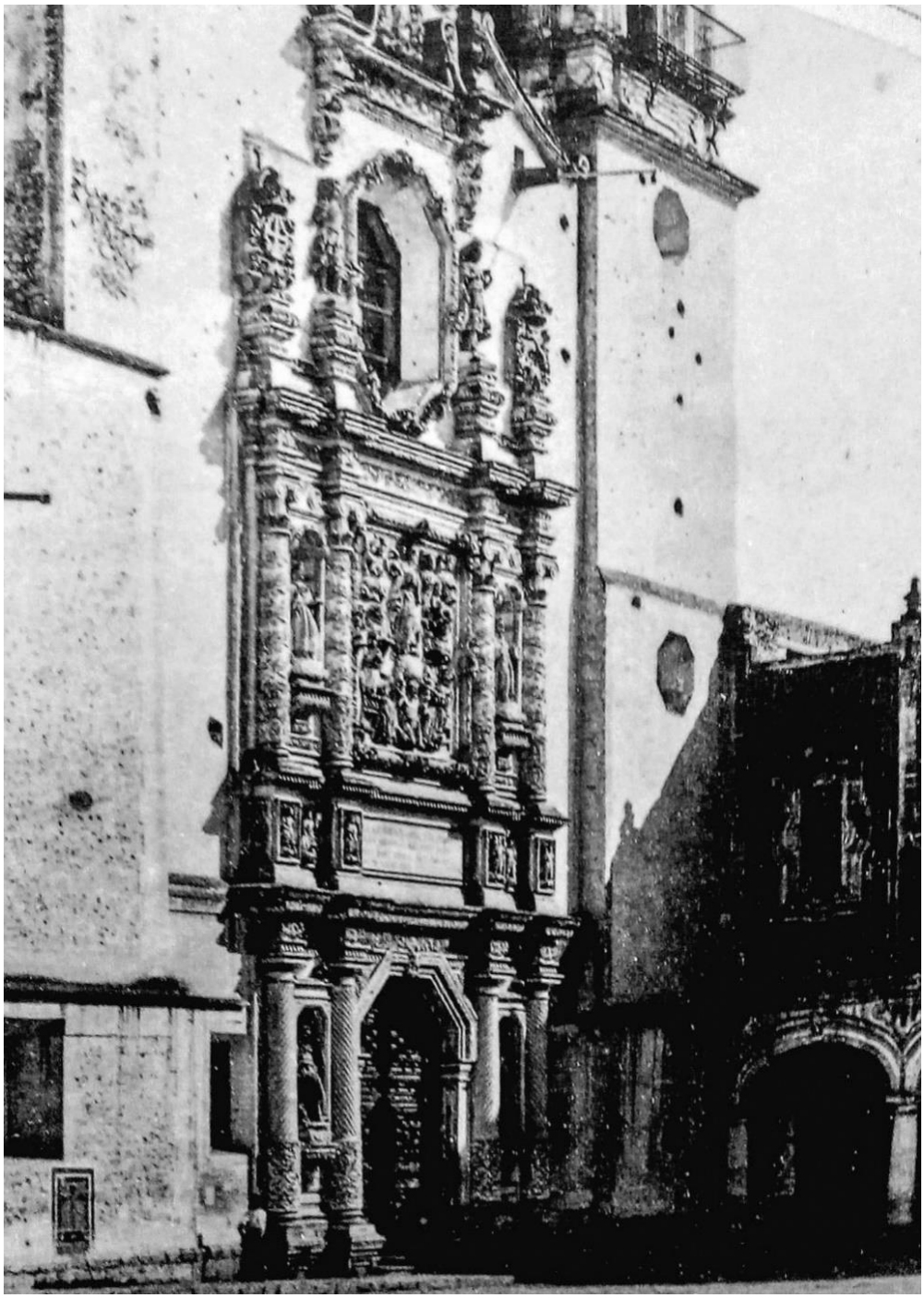


Figure 10: A historic photograph of the church façade.

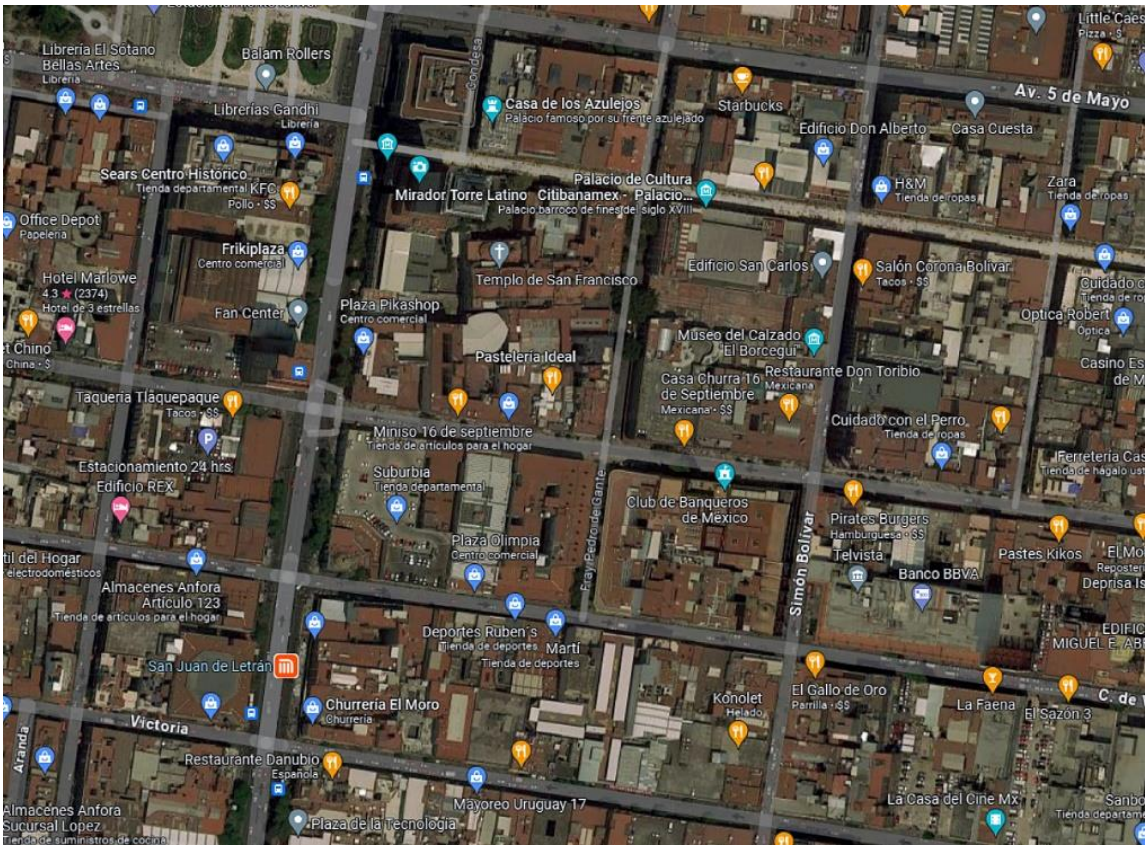


Figure 11: A Google Map showing the area of the ex-Franciscan complex.

What remains of the Franciscan complex today? Following the implementation of the reform laws and the 1868 sale of the complex, the church no longer served as a place of worship. For a period the cloister housed a circus, and in 1866 another part became a hotel. The capilla Balvanera served as the residence of the hotel manager. In the early twentieth century the Jesuits occupied the church, but returned it to the Franciscans in 1949. The church still exists, although the tower and design elements of the façade were removed. The main altar screen is a replica of the colonial-era one. The façade of the Capilla Balvanera survived intact, but the current altar is from the Dominican convent of nuns Santa Catalina de Siena. In the 1930s, the government assigned Santa Catalina church to the Presbyterians, and the altar was removed and installed in thee Capilla de Balvanera. Fragments of the convent also still exist, and of several chapels. Elements of the main cloister have also survived, but in a rather strange way. The cloister arches were incorporated into the Holy Trinity Methodist church. There are also remains of the cloister in the Panadería Ideal.

Figure 12: La Capilla de Balvanera. Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 13: The Church façade and interior.
Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 14: The remains of a chapel in the main atrium.
Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 15: The remains of chapels now occupied by a book-store.
Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 16: Remains of the cloister in the atrium.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

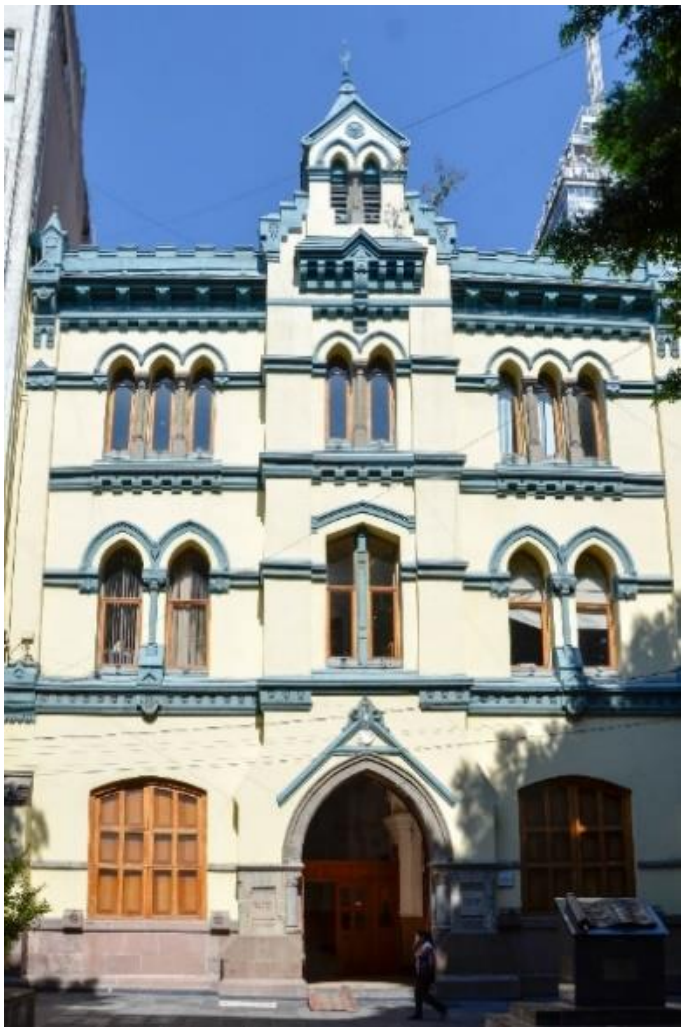


Figure 17: Remains of the cloister in the Holy Trinity Methodist church. Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 18: The remains of the cloister in the Panadería Ideal. Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 19: Remains of the cloister in the Panadería Ideal.

Photographs in the collection of the author.

The Convent of Santo Domingo

The Dominicans arrived in Mexico in 1526, and occupied the current site of Santo Domingo church in 1539. Construction of the first complex took more than thirty years, and the first church was dedicated in 1576. Construction of the cloister continued in the seventeenth century, and it was dedicated in 1692. The Dominicans promoted the cult of the Virgin of the Rosary, and in 1690 dedicated a chapel of the Rosary. Mexico City experienced periodic flooding, and in 1720 the Dominicans initiated the construction of the current church to replace the sixteenth

century structure damaged by flooding. Construction took 16 years, and the Dominicans dedicated the new church in 1736. [7]

The government ordered the demolition of the Santo Domingo cloister in 1861. Ramírez Aparicio published a lithograph showing the demolition in progress.[8] However, sections of the cloister still survive today. Several are *residencias*, or a block of low-cost small apartments or single rooms that have housed many city residents from the colonial period to the present. A cultural center occupies another section of the cloister. The church façade did not suffer modification as did that of San Francisco. However, the main baroque wooden altar was replaced in the nineteenth century by one in neoclassical style. The church still preserves its baroque wooden side altars.

Figure 20: The Dominican Complex in the Uppsala Map.

[7] Rosell, *Iglesias y conventos,* 186-189.
[8] Ramírez Aparicio, *Los Conventos Suprimidos,* 11.

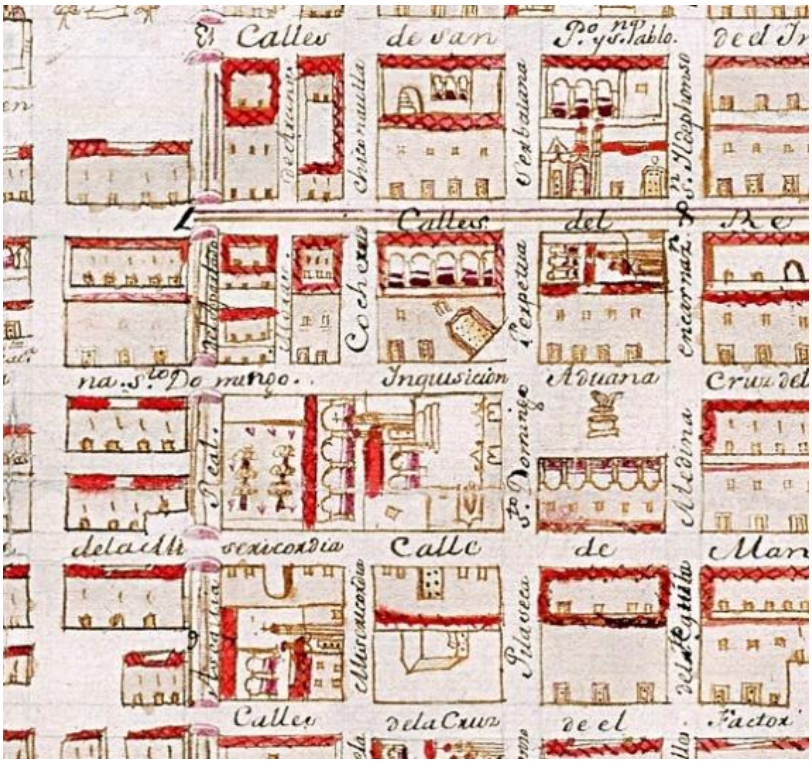


Figure 21: The Dominican complex from the 1750 map.

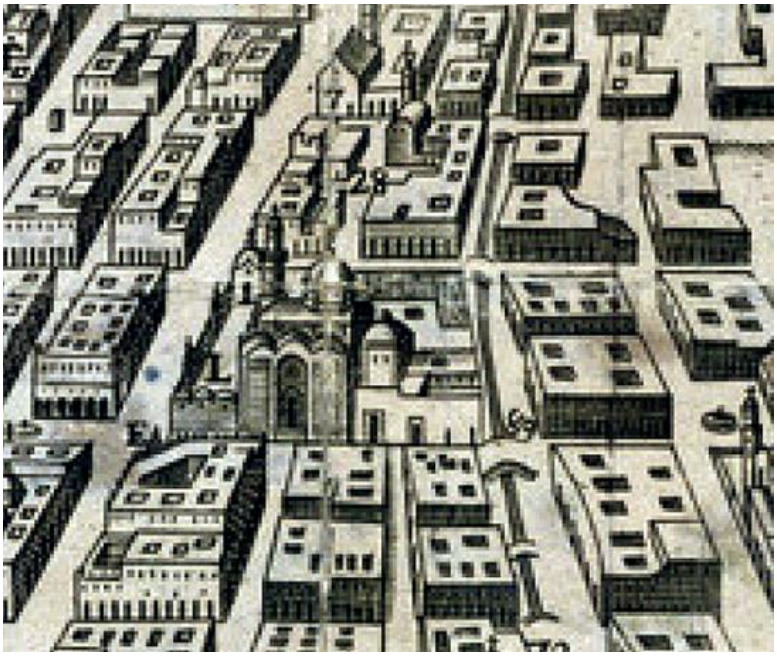


Figure 22: The Dominican complex from the 1760 map.

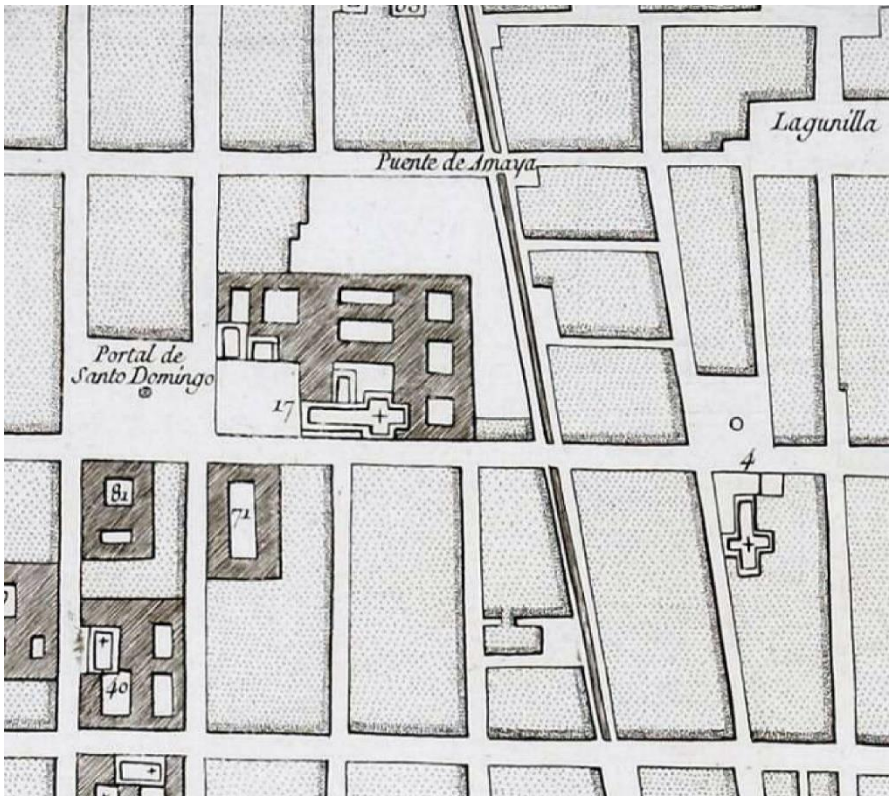
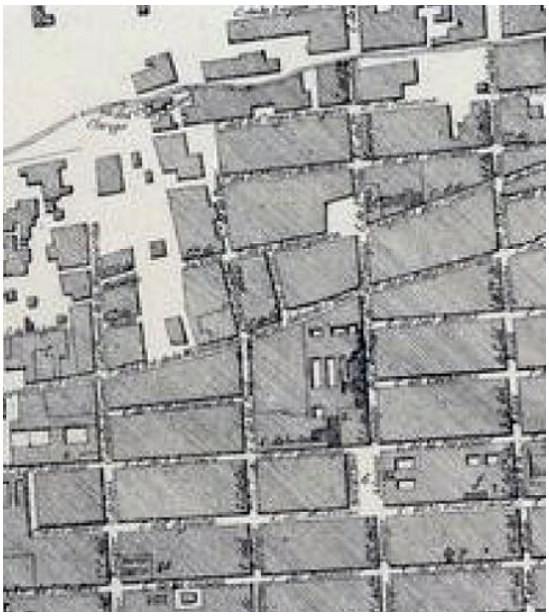


Figure 23: The Dominican complex from the 1785 map.



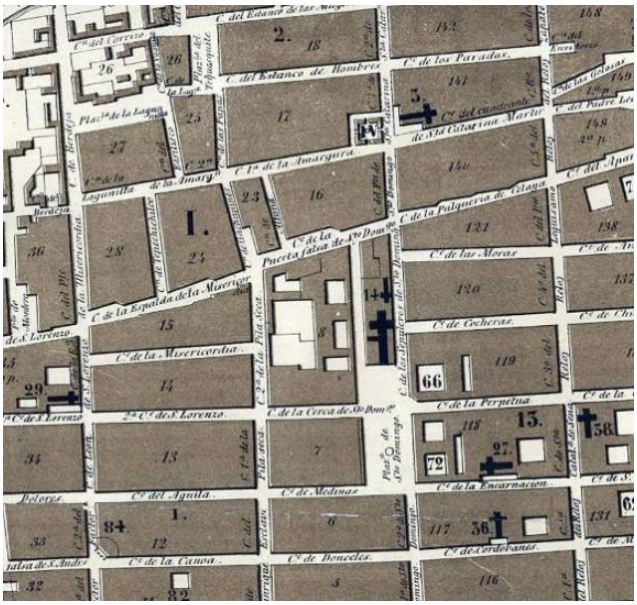


Figure 24: Details of 1858 and 1866 maps of Mexico City showing the Dominican complex before and after its partial demolition. The 1866 map shows the sections of the cloister that were still standing and that had been converted into vecindades.

Figure 25: Detail of an 1875 map of Mexico City showing the ex-Dominican complex and the remaining sections of the cloister.

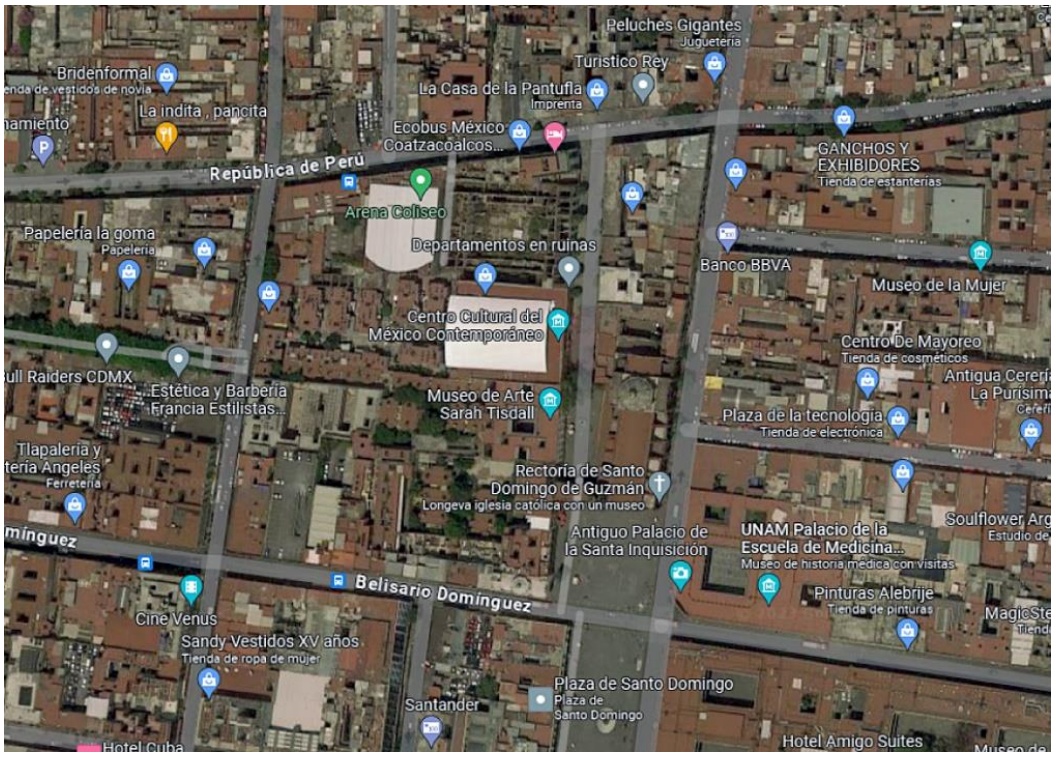


Figure 26: A Google Map showing the area of the ex-Dominican complex.

Figure 27: The partial demolition of the Santo Domingo cloister.

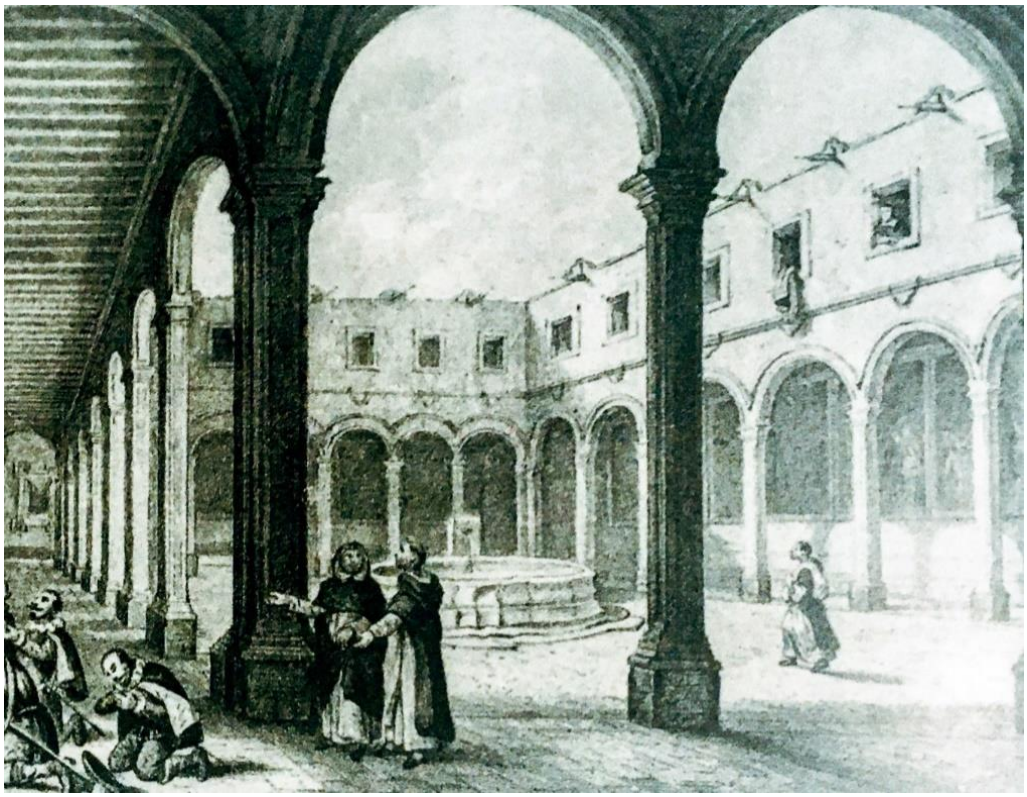


Figure 28: A 19th century lithograph of the main cloister.

Figure 29: The Santo Domingo church today. Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 30: The church interior. The noted architect Manuel Tolsa designed the neoclassical-style main altar. Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 31: Baroque-style side altars. Photographs in the collection of the author.

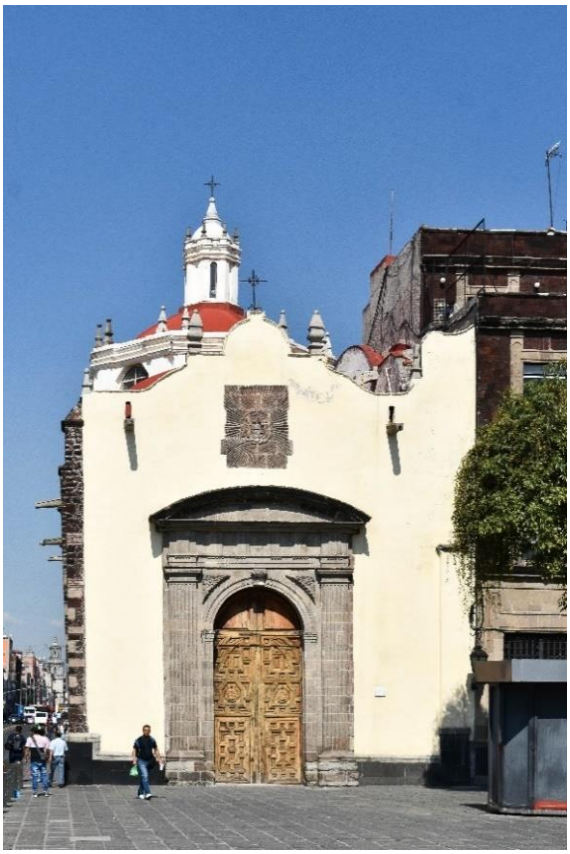


Figure 32: Capilla de la Expiación. Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 33: A section of the cloister that is now a cultural center.
Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 34: A section of the cloister that is now a vecindad. It was housing for novices. Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 35. Ruins of the cloister in what today are vecindades.
Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 36: A colonial-era house that was a rental property that belonged to the Dominicans. Photograph in the collection of the author.

The Convent of San Agustín

The Augustinians arrived in Mexico in 1533, and between 1541 and 1591 directed the construction of the first church and convent complex. A fire badly damaged the church in 1676, and the Augustinians started the construction of the current structure in the following year. The Augustinians dedicated the new church on its completion in 1692. Historic images show the Augustinian complex as it was at the time of the reform laws, and following the transformation of the church in 1884 into the Biblioteca Nacional and the demolition of the tower that had adorned the church.[9] The Augustinian complex occupied two city blocks, and a novitiate operated in the block located behind

[9] Rosell, *Iglesias y conventos,* 193-195.

the convent. During the colonial period a large arch connected the convent to the novitiate, and is shown in a 1720 map of the city. Much of the novitiate structure exists today, and is occupied by businesses including a pharmacy.

Figure 37: San Agustín church before and after its conversion into the Biblioteca Nacional in 1884. It no longer functions as the National Library,
and is undergoing restoration.

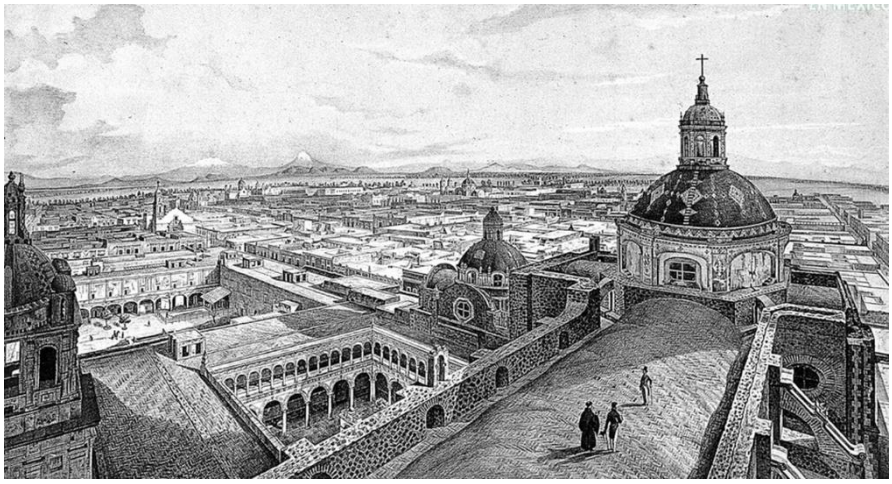


Figure 38: A lithograph showing the cloister of the Augustinian convent.
Parts of the cloister exist today incorporated into other buildings.

Figure 39: Detail of a 1720 map of Mexico City showing the Augustinian arch.

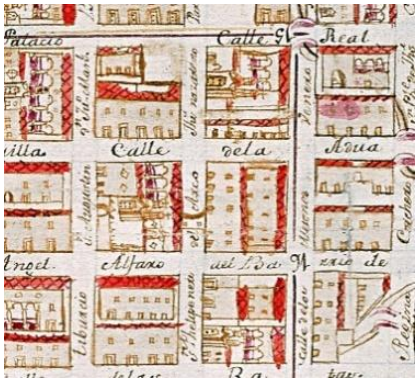


Figure 40: The Augustinian complex from the 1750 map.

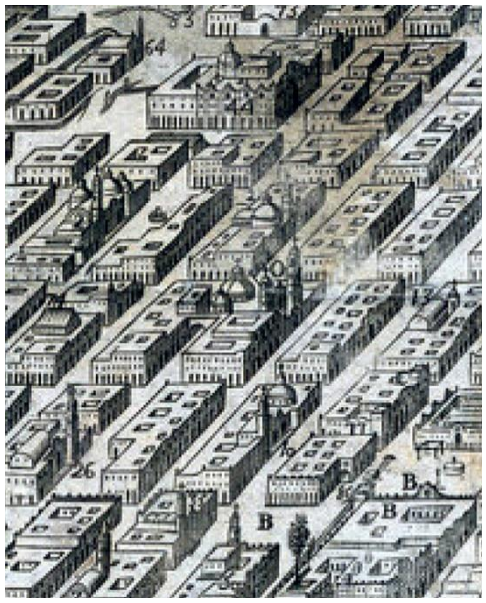


Figure 41: The Augustinian complex from the 1760 map.

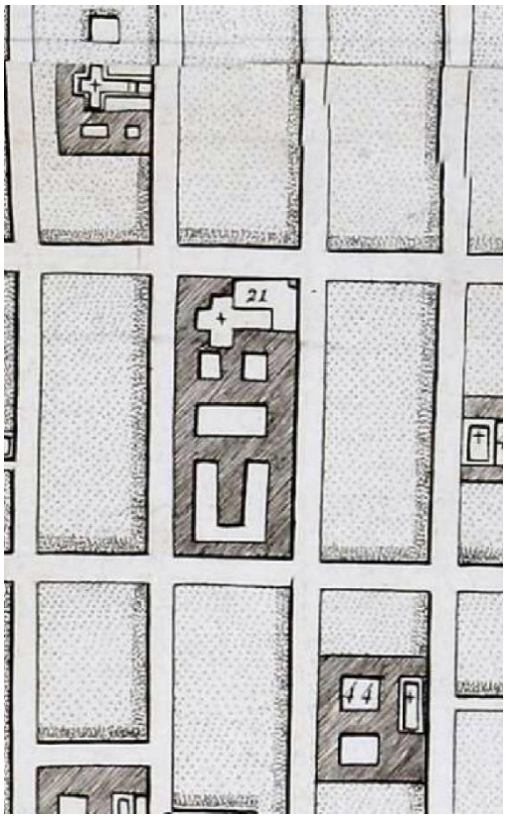


Figure 42: The Augustinian complex from the 1785 map.

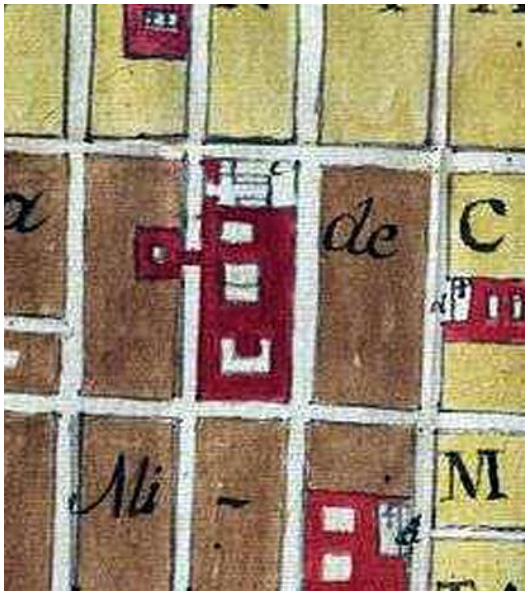


Figure 43: The Augustinian complex from the 1792 map. It also shows the arch.

Figure 44: The ex-church undergoing restoration.
Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 45: A section of the former Augustinian novitiate now occupied by a pharmacy. Photograph in the collection of the author.

Jesuit Urban Complexes in Mexico City

There are three ex-Jesuit complexes in Mexico City. One is the ex- Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo founded in 1574 and related colegios that occupied two complete urban blocks behind the metropolitan cathedral and close to the main square. A published 1785 map of Mexico City shows the ex-Jesuit complex. The Colegio Máximo and the colegio of San Gregorio occupied a single large urban block, and the complex included two churches. One was the church of San Pedro y San Pablo of the Colegio Máximo that still exists, and the second was the church of San Gregorio that was replaced by a new church dedicated to the Virgin of Loreto following the Jesuit expulsion. The Colegio de San Ildefonso occupied an adjoining but smaller urban block, and had a small chapel. The church of San Pedro y San Pablo is a single nave structure built between 1576 and 1603. In 1822, it served as the meeting place of the Constituent Congress of newly independent Mexico, and now is a museum open to the public. Construction of the Colegio Máximo concluded in 1643. Following the Jesuit expulsion royal officials assigned the complex to Pedro Romero de Terreros, the Conde de Regla, for the Sacro y Real Monte de Piedad de Ánimas, a type of pawn shop, he founded in 1775. The Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes now occupies the complex, and it is closed to the public.

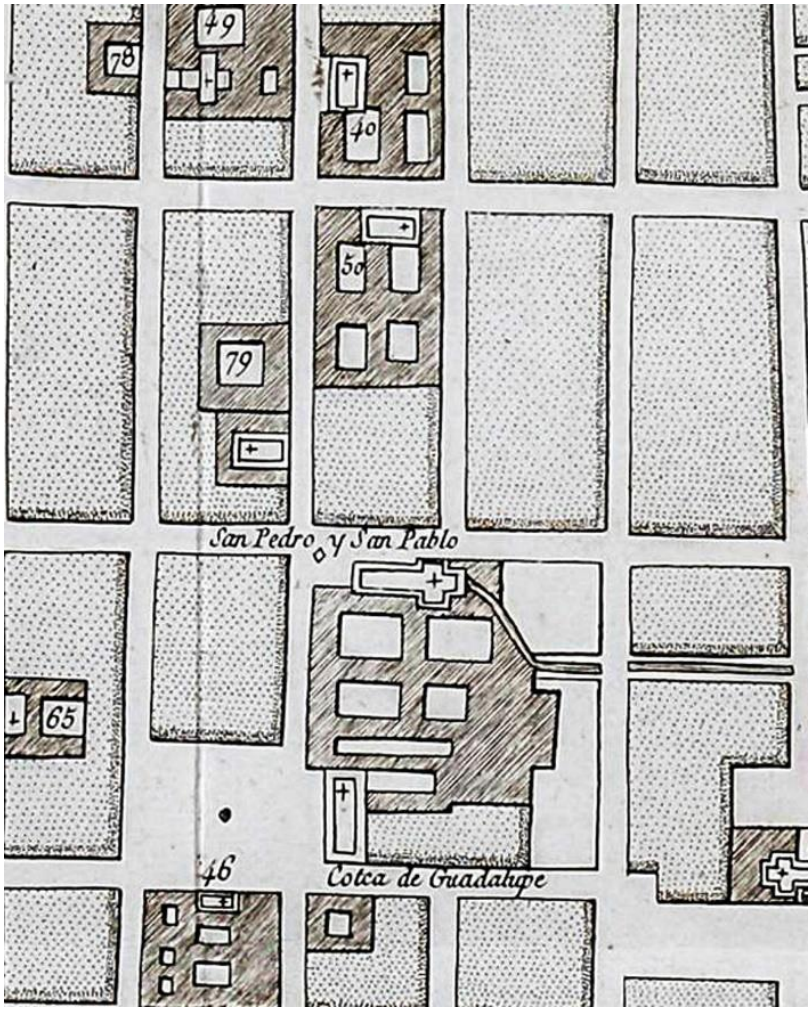


Figure 46: Detail of a 1785 map of Mexico City showing the ex-Jesuit complex. San Ildefonso is marked as number 79.

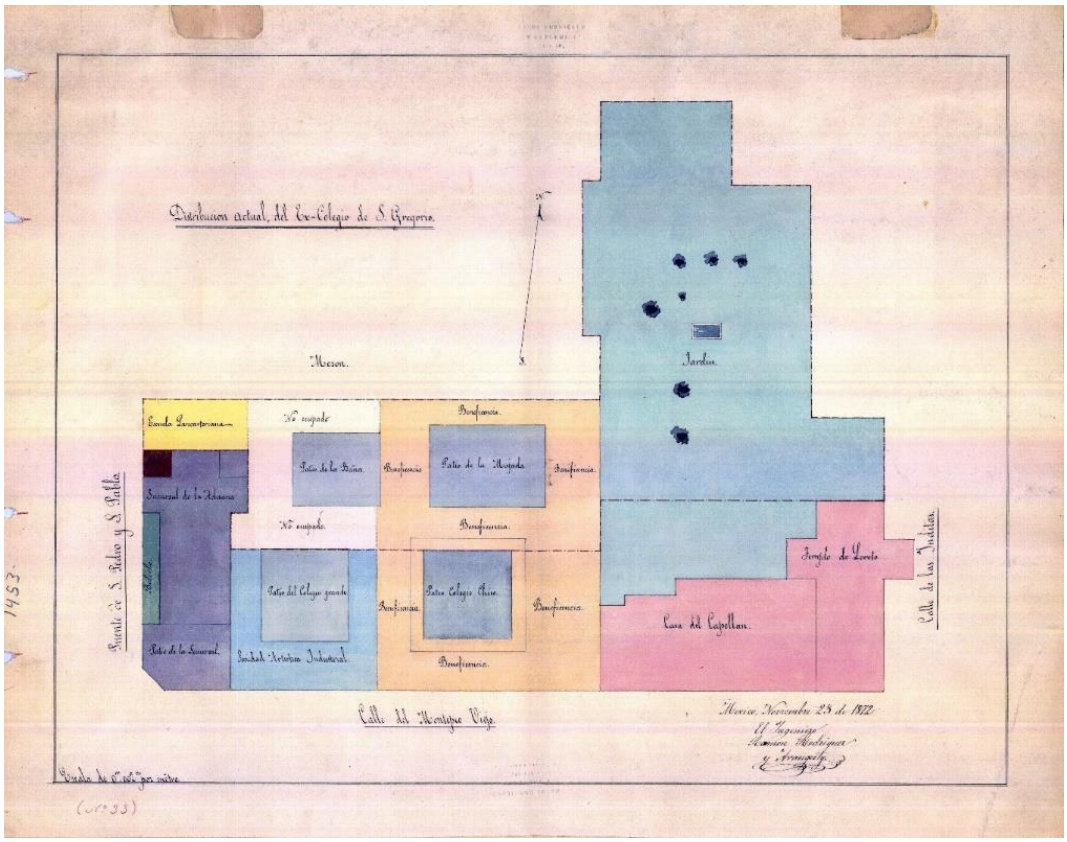


Figure 47: An 1872 diagram of the ex-Colegio Maximo.

Figure 48: A Google Map showing the complexes today.

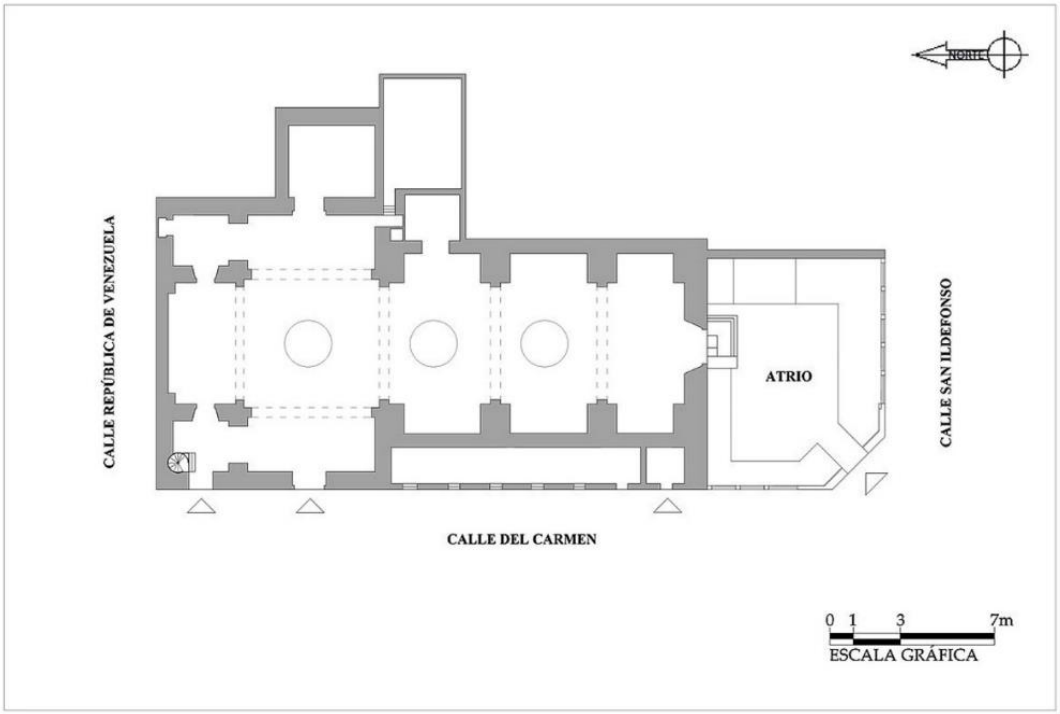


Figure 49: A diagram of the church of San Pedro y San Pablo.

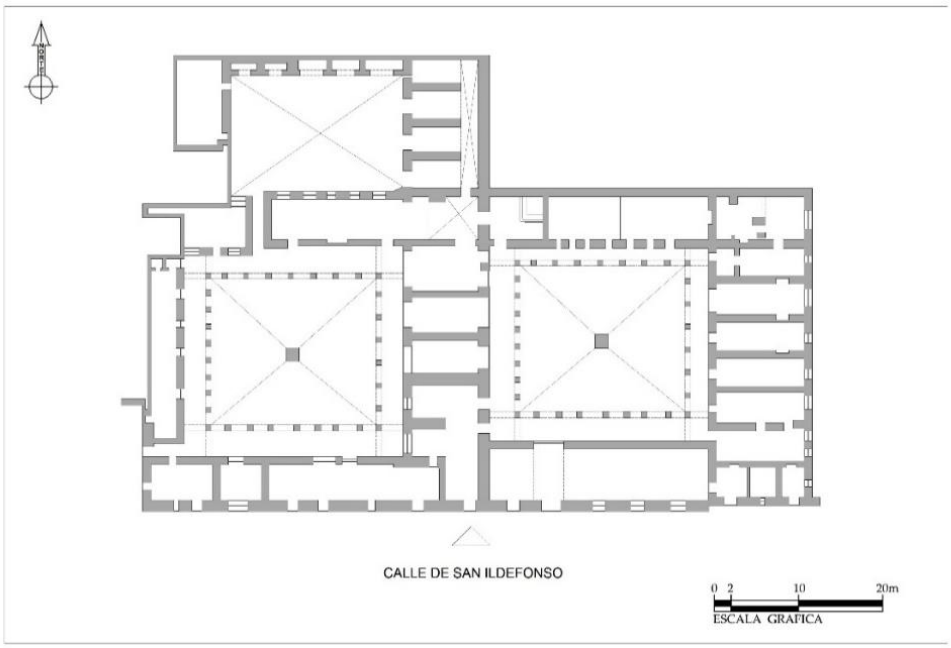


Figure 50: A diagram of the Colegio Máximo.

Figure 51: An eighteenth-century painting of the church of San Pedro y San Pablo by Jesuit missionary Ignacio Tirsch. Tirsch was assigned to the Baja California missions at the time of the Jesuit expulsion.

Figure 52: The church today is a public museum.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 53: The first patio of the Colegio Máximo.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 54: The second patio of the Colegio Máximo.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

In the 1930s, the street that dead-ended at the ex-Jesuit complex was extended, and cut the complex in two. What remains of the rear sections are now occupied by a small library and theater, and the large Abelardo Rodríguez public market. The market incorporates architectural elements of the ex-Jesuit complex. Another section of the former Jesuit complex that adjoins the Colegio Máximo is the campus of the Universidad Obrera de Mexico “Vicente Lombardo Toledano” founded in 1936. All of these sections of the complex are open to the public, and muralists painted murals in some sections. San Ildefonso occupies a different urban block. In the period following the 1910-1920 Mexican Revolution the complex served as the first state administered public high school. It is now divided in two uses. One section of the complex is a small museum, and the other larger section is a cultural center and museum administered by the UNAM (National Autonomous University). Muralists such as Siqueros decorated the complex in the 1920s and 1930s.

Figure 55: A historic photograph showing the demolition of a part of the Jesuit complex to extend a street in the 1930s.

Figure 56: A courtyard in the rear section of the ex-Jesuit complex that adjoins the Rodríguez market. Photograph in the collection of the author.

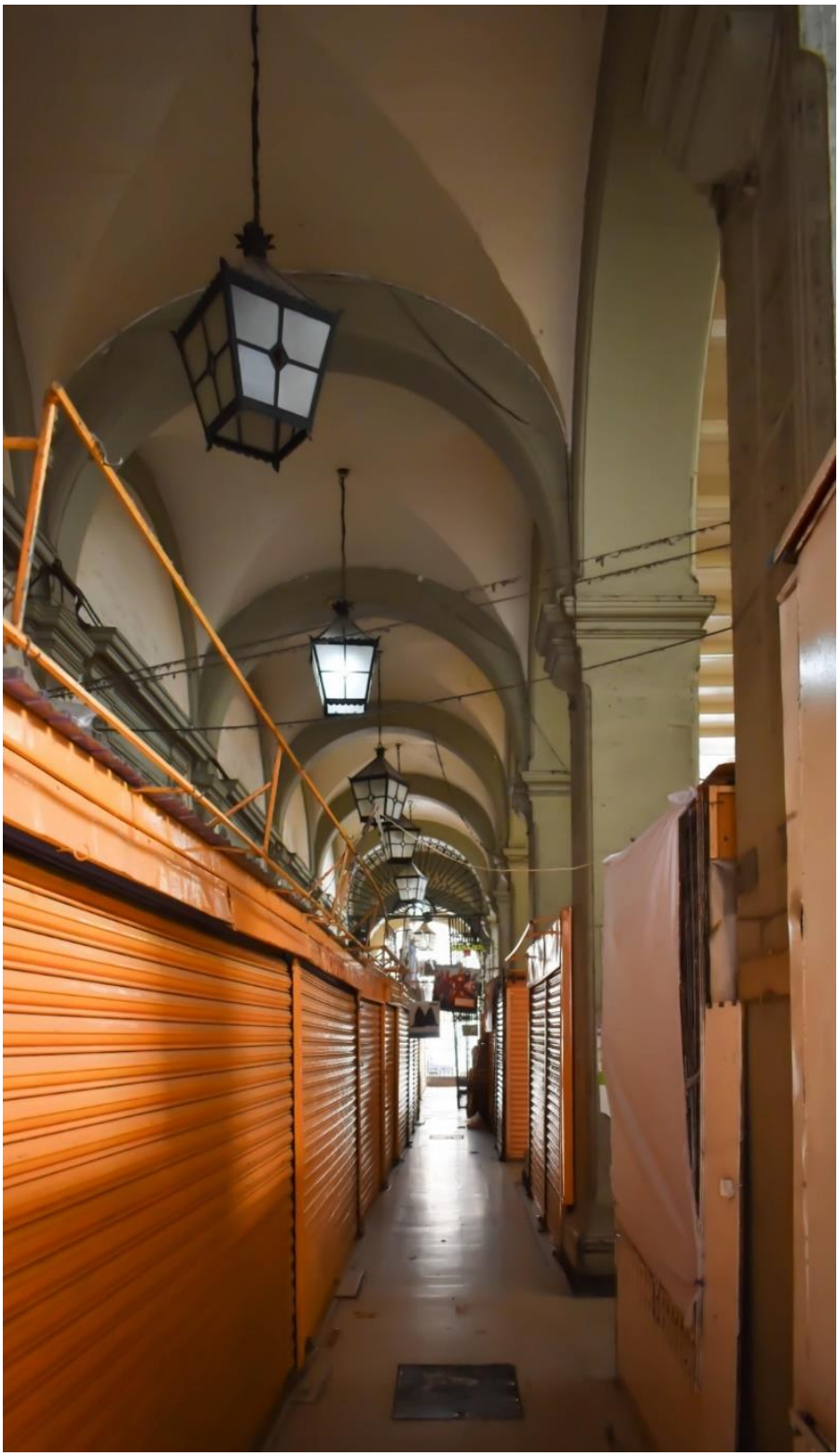


Figure 57: Architectural elements in the Rodríguez market.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 58: Architectural elements in the Rodríguez market.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 59: The part of the complex occupied by the Universidad Obrero de Mexico. Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 60: The main courtyard of the ex-Colegio de San Ildefonso. Photograph in the collection of the author.

The other Jesuit complex in Mexico City that still exists is the ex-casa profesa, where priests lived before having taken their final oath of obedience to the Pope. The Jesuits established the casa profesa in 1585, and received a license from royal officials in 1592.[10] What remains of the complex is the church built in baroque style between 1714 and 1720. The interior and main altar, however, are neoclassical in style. Manuel Tolsa designed the revamped interior in 1805. The cloister, however, no longer exists. Following the reform laws of 1857-1858, a number of religious complexes in Mexico City were partially or completely demolished. The ex-Jesuit cloister was demolished

[10] Rossell, *Iglesias y conventos de México*, 225.

in 1861, and the Calle 5 de Mayo extended through a part of the complex.[11] A historic photograph taken before its demolition shows that it was similar in style to the Colegio Máximo. Following the Jesuit expulsion royal officials assigned the complex to the Congregation of the Oratory of San Felipe Neri, although it is popularly known today as “La Profesa”. It still functions as an active parish church, and is open to the public. The church also houses an important collection of religious art.

Figure 61: The church known today as “La Profesa.”
Photograph in the collection of the author.

[11] Ibid, 229.

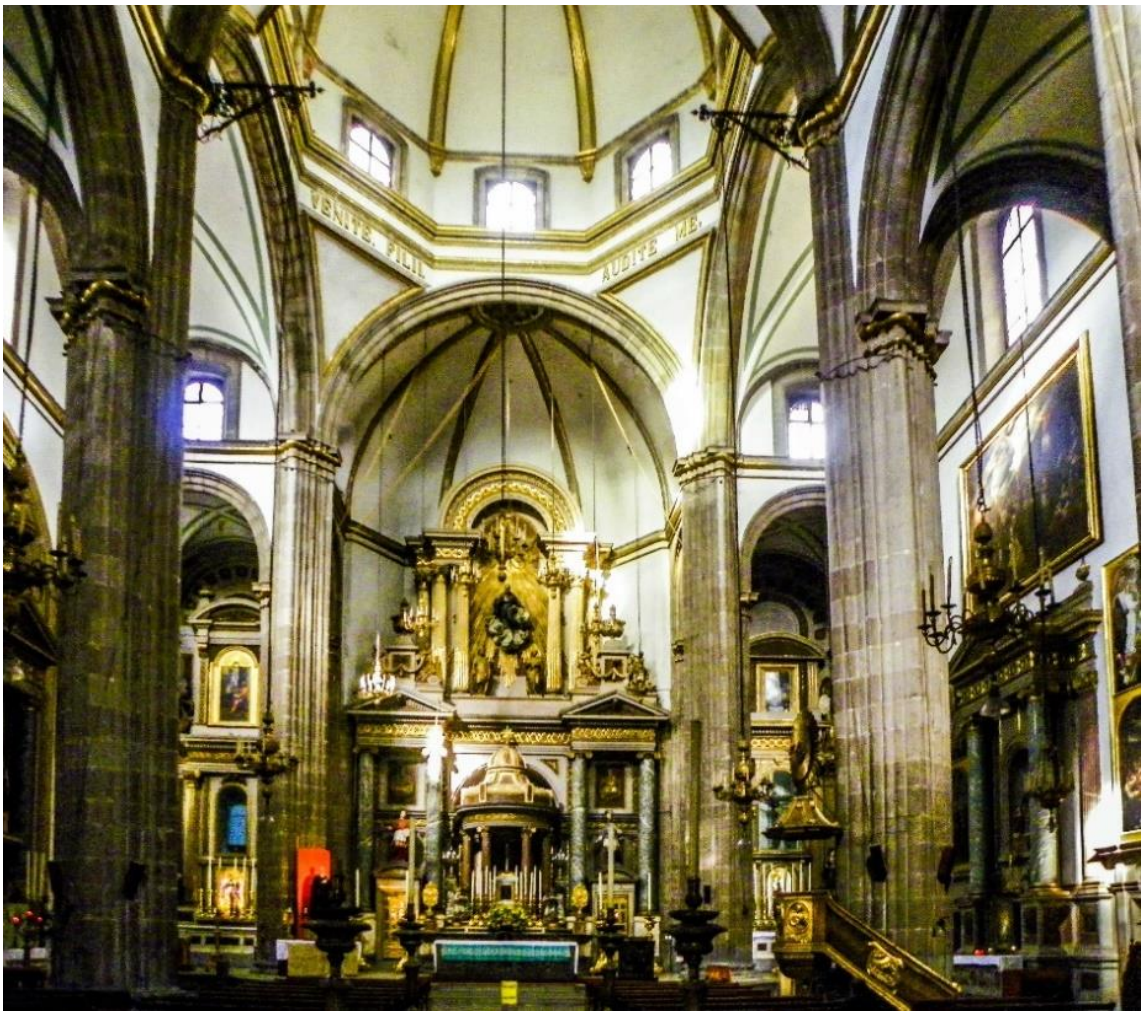


Figure 62: The church interior. Photograph in the collection of the author.

The Jesuits also administered another colegio named San Andrés located close to the Franciscan convent and not far from the edge of Mexico City and the Alameda. The complex has completely disappeared. It initially was named Santa Ana, but the name had changed by 1676 when the church was completed. In 1750, the Jesuits dedicated a *casa de ejercicios* built on one side of the colegio. The *casa* was a center where lay people could come and practice the Ignatian Exercises, and was an important part of the Jesuit urban mission. Following the Jesuit expulsion, the colegio served as a hospital, and in 1784 the Panteón de Santa Paula was added to the hospital. In a notorious act of public theater, the military leader and 11-time president of Mexico José Antonio Santa Anna had his leg buried in Santa Paula. Santa Anna lost the leg to a cannon ball during the 1838 French bombardment of Veracruz in the so-called "Pastry War" (1838-1839). The *casa de ejercicios* became a vecindad, or a low-cost housing complex. In 1867, the emperor Maximillian lay in state in the church of San Andrés, but in the same year the government had it demolished. The rest of the former Jesuit complex was demolished in the late nineteenth century.[12]

[12] Tovar de Teresa, *Ciudad de Palacios,* 155.

Figure 63: An 1861 photograph of the cloister of the *casa profesa* before its demolition.

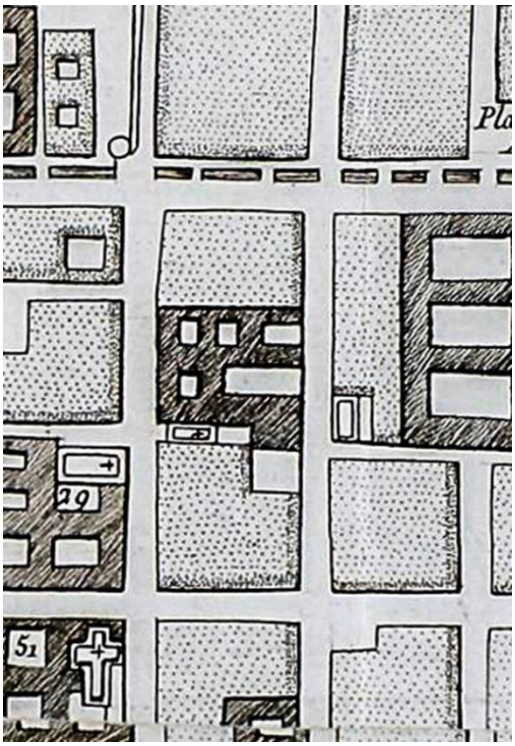


Figure 64: Detail of the 1785 Mexico City map showing the colegio de San Andrés.

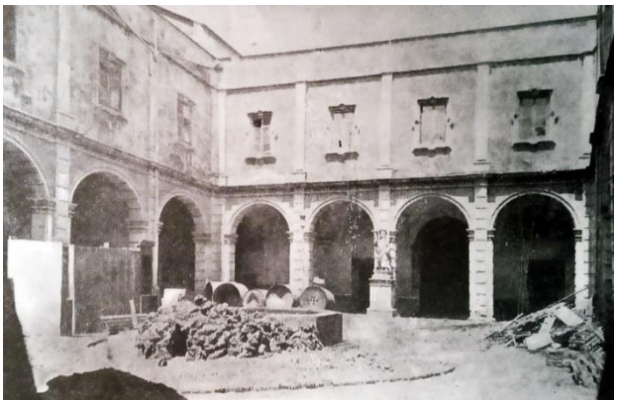


Figure 65: The main patio of the colegio de San Andrés, and the façade of the colegio and *casa de ejercicios*.

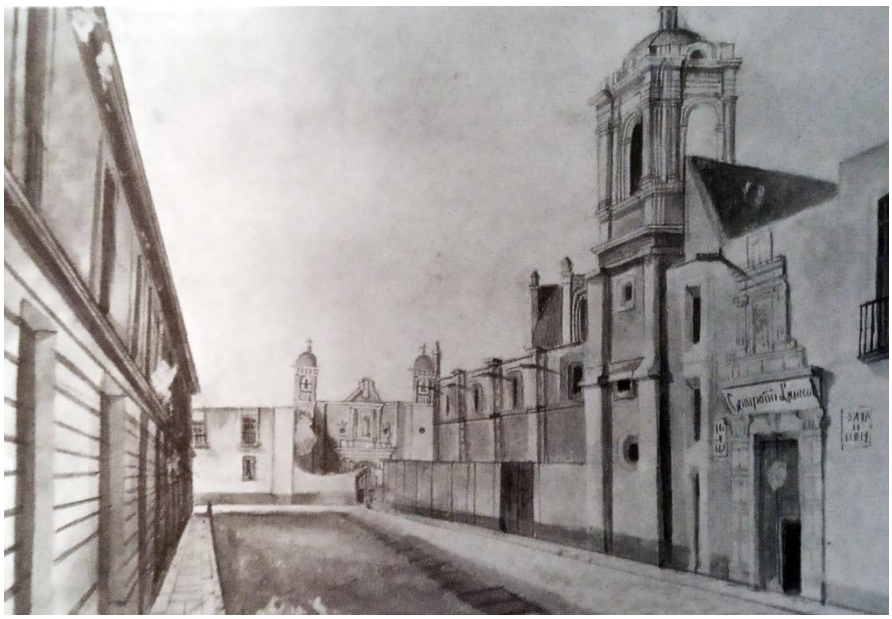


Figure 66: A mid-nineteenth century painting showing the church and Hospital de Betlemitas and San Andrés church in the background.

The Jesuits established a colegio in 1586 in Tepotzotlán north of Mexico City for the indigenous population, and later established a novitiate that became the single most important Jesuit training ground in New Spain. Many of the missionaries who staffed missions on the northern frontier trained or resided there. The church of San Pedro begun in 1609 was the first Jesuit temple, and still functions today as an active parish. The rest of the Jesuit complex is now the Museo Nacional del Virreinato, including the church of San Francisco Xavier built between 1670 and 1682. Following the Jesuit expulsion in 1767 royal officials assigned the complex to the Archbishopric of Mexico for use as a seminary. The government returned the complex to the Jesuits in 1871, and they occupied it until expelled in 1914 during the Mexican Revolution. In 1961, the government started restoration work on the complex, and in 1964 opened the Museo Nacional del Virreinato.

The restored San Francisco Xavier church contains a group of baroque wooden altars, including the main altar designed in the early 1760s by the well-known religious artist Miguel Maldonado y Cabrera (1695-1768). Within the church is also the chapel or camarín dedicated to the Virgin of Loreto, which was a favorite of the Jesuits. The chapel consists of a replica of the house of the Virgin Mary reportedly transported to Loreto n Italy, and an ornately decorated chapel and altar. A third element is the domestic chapel for the use of the priests and novices decorated with an ornate baroque altar. The museum houses a large collection of religious art, and other artifacts that interpret the 300 years of Spanish rule in Mexico.

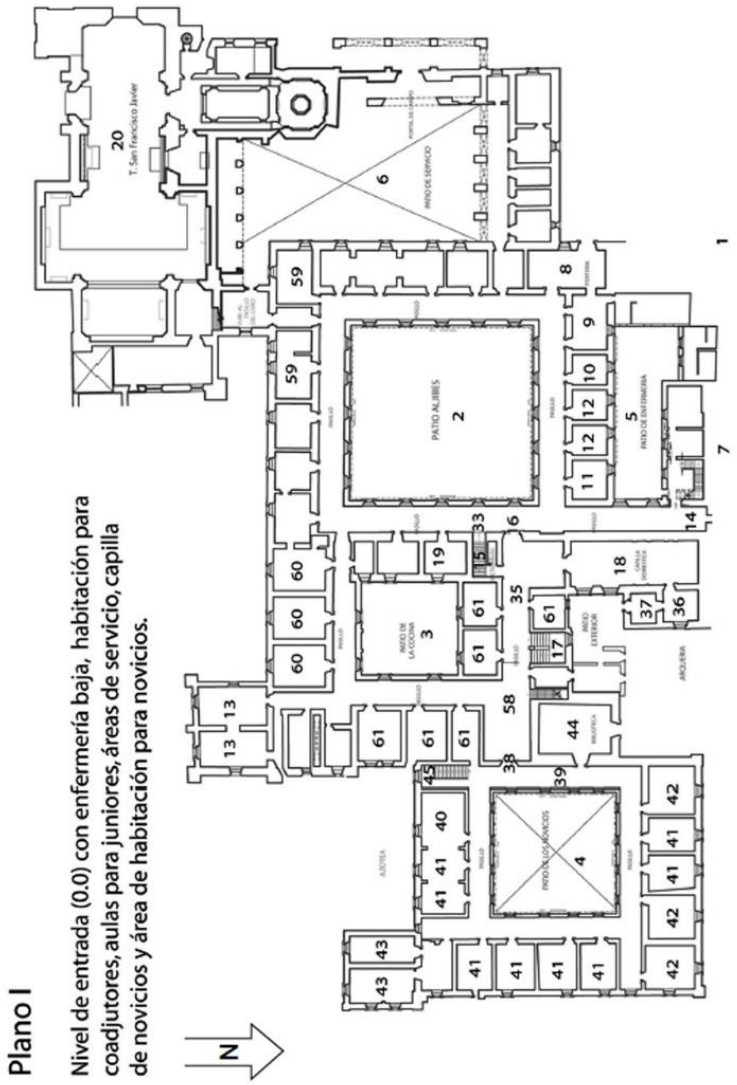


Figure 67: A diagram of the ex-Jesuit complex in Tepotzotlán.

Figure 68: The façade of San Francisco Xavier church.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 69: The church interior and main altar.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 70: The church interior seen from the choir loft.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

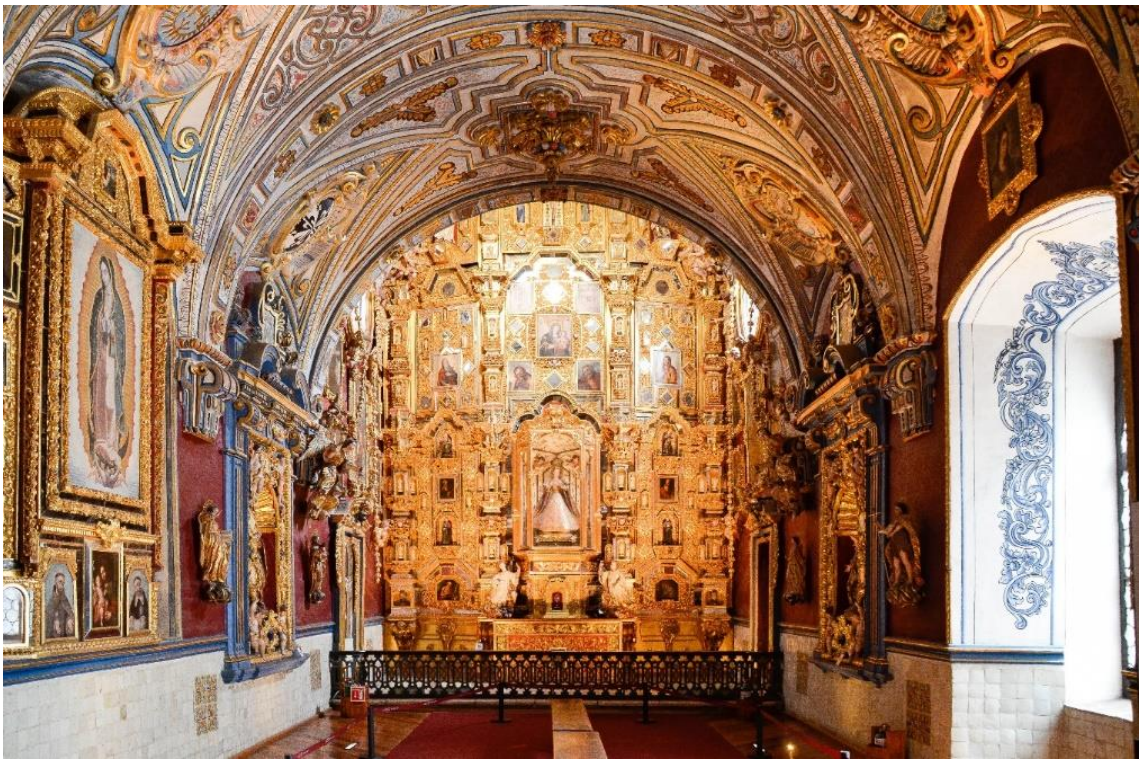


Figure 71: The domestic chapel. Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 72: The chapel of the Virgin of Loreto.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 73: The patio of the novitiates. Photograph in the collection of the author.

La Merced

There were other non-missionary male religious orders in Mexico City during the colonial period. Some of the complexes of these orders still exist, as is the case of the Mercedarians or the Orden Real y Militar de Nuestra Señora de la Merced y la Redención de los Cautivos. The order had its origins in Iberia during the period of the reconquest, and engaged in charitable works including the ransom of Christian captives held by Muslims. The Mercedarians arrived in Mexico in 1582, and eventually established convents in Mexico City, Puebla de los Ángeles, Guadalajara, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Valladolid (Morelia), San Luis Potosi, Zacatecas, Colima, Aguascalientes, Toluca, Querétaro, Teocaltiche, Guanajuato, Celaya, and Villa de Santiago. Following the Jesuit expulsion King Carlos III initiated a reform of the regular orders including the Mercedarians, and the reform process provides insights into the structure of the order in Mexico. At the time there were 20 Mercedarian convents in Mexico staffed by a total of 295 friars including the installation in Veracruz. Guatemala counted 58 convents and 161 friars. There were seven convents in the Caribbean that included Caracas in Venezuela and 134 friars. The order earned income to support its activities primarily from urban rental properties, rural properties, lending, and church fees.[13] The main convent was in Mexico City, and, although the exact date is not known, the Mercedarians were in Veracruz at least by the 1620s.[14] The Mercedarians had only an urban presence in colonial Mexico.

In the seventeenth century the Mercedarians directed the construction of a large complex on the western edge of Mexico City. The church, that no longer exists, was constructed between 1634 and 1654. The government ordered its demolition in 1861. The current cloister with its strongly baroque design elements and the church tower date to 1693-1703.[15] The cloister still exists, and adjoins the La Merced public market. There are published lithographs of the church just prior to its demolition that show the appearance of the façade and the interior design with its neoclassical-style main altar that most likely replaced a wooden baroque altar.

[13] Jaime Antonio Peire. “Estudio social y económico de los mercedarios de México y el Caribe, 1773-1790,” *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas* 26:1 (1989), 113-136

[14] David Carbajal López, “Pública utilidad o causa pública: la utilidad de los conventos de la provincia de Veracruz, 1786-1834,” *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 65:2 (2008), 151-175.

[15] Rosell, *Iglesias y conventos,*211; Tovar de Teresa, *Ciudad de Palacios,* 73.

Figure 74: Apainting of La Merced church.

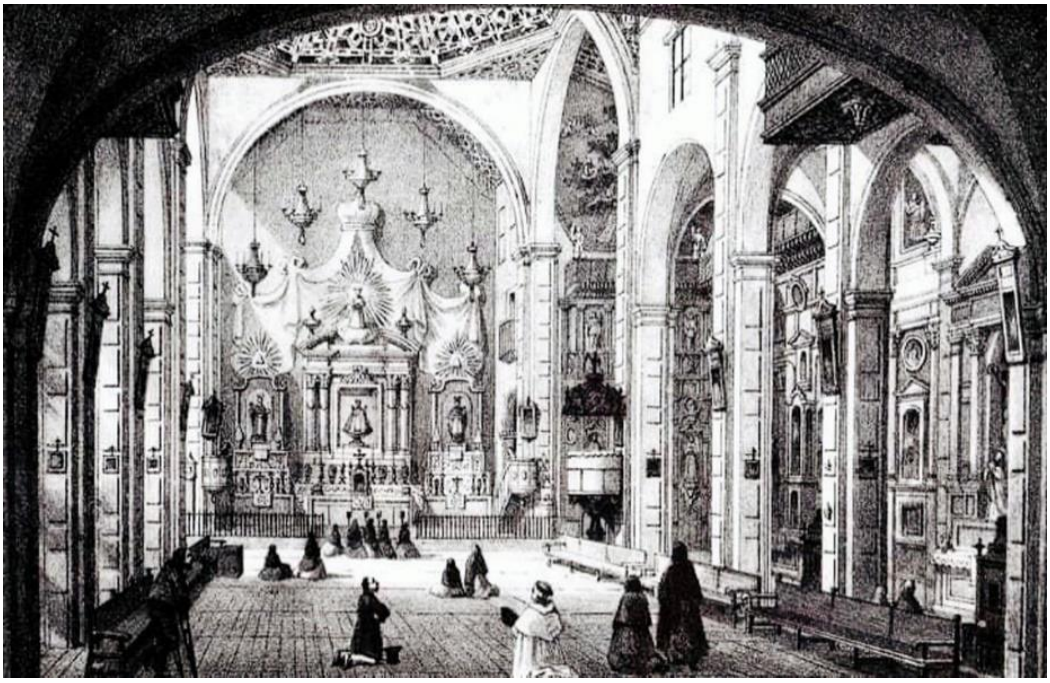


Figure 75: A lithograph showing the church interior.

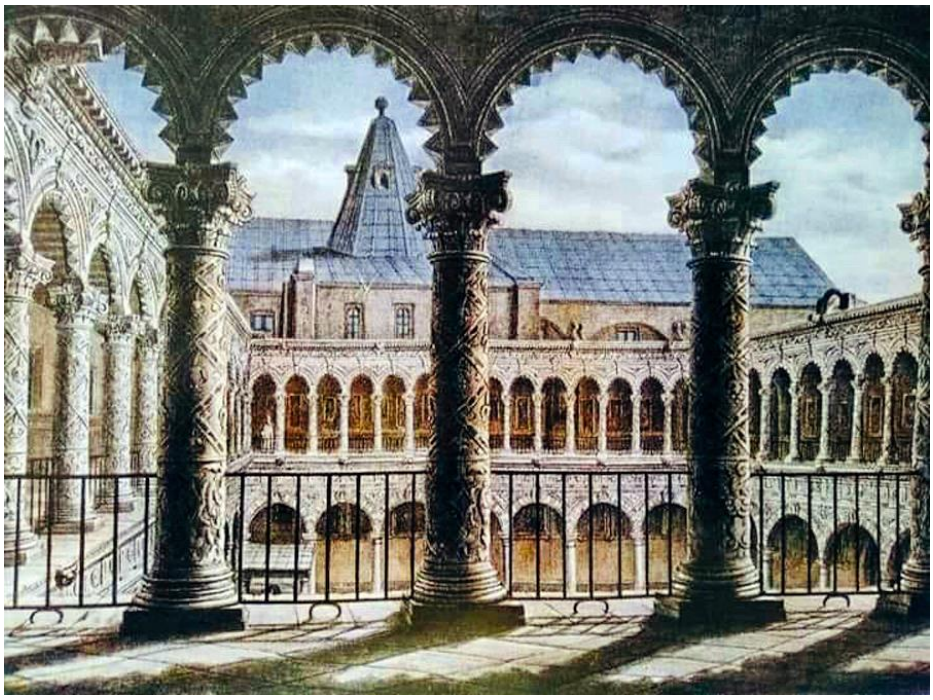


Figure 76: A lithograph of the La Merced cloister.

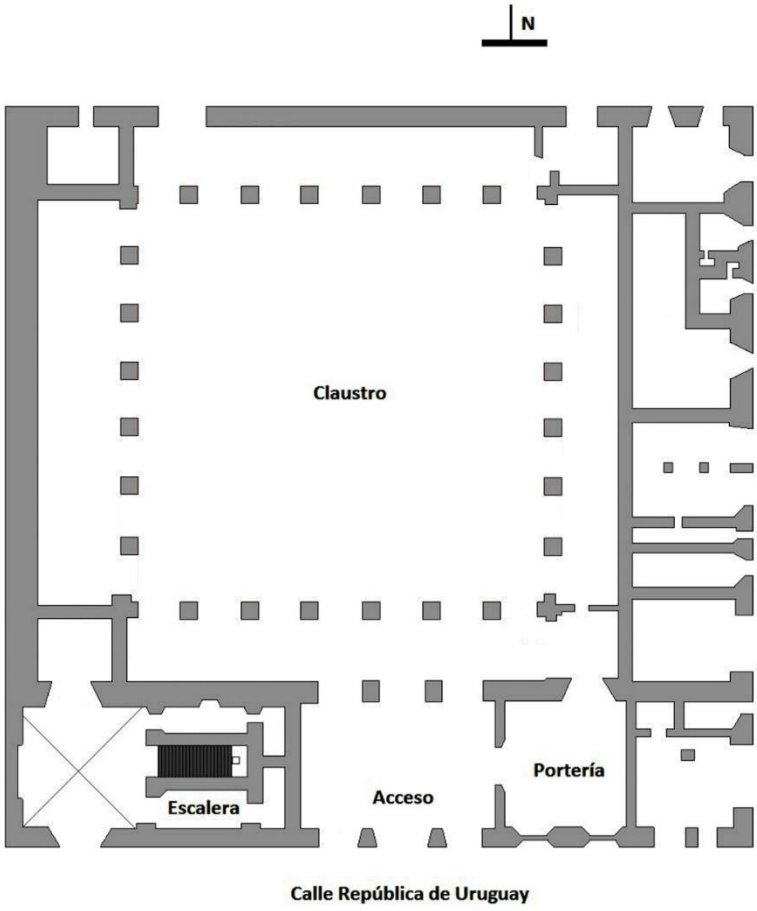
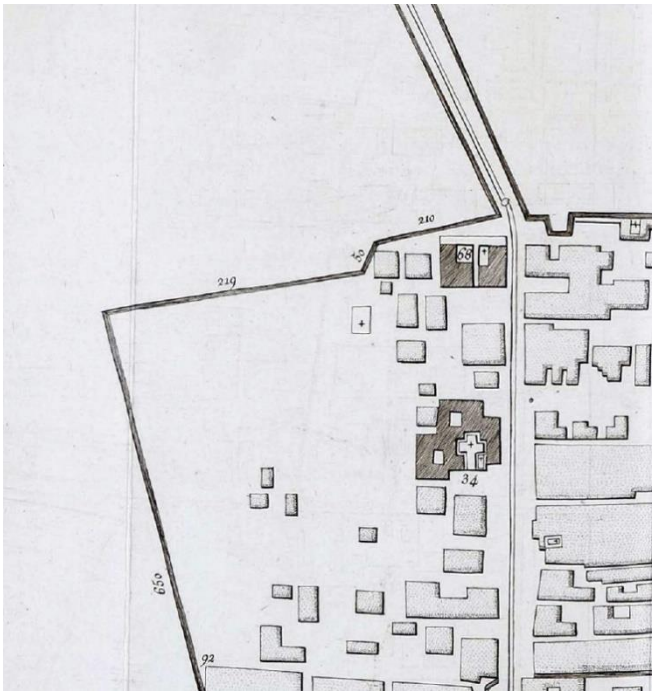


Figure 77: A diagram of the cloister.

Figure 78: The cloister. Photograph in the collection of the author.

The Mercedarians had two other complexes in the Mexico City area. One was Nuestra Señora del Belén de los Mercedarios, located on what was the outskirts of the city in an indigenous barrio. There was a small complex in 1626, and a larger one completed in 1686. The church was rebuilt in 1735.[16] The 1785 map shows the church, a chapel, and a large complex with two patios (see Figure 79). What remains today is the church (Figures 80-81). The second was a chapel and small convent known as Nuestra Señora de la Merced de las Huertas built on a property the Mercedarians purchased in 1607 in the indigenous pueblo of Popotla as a place of rest. The present chapel was part of a complex built between 1668 and 1680 (see Figures 82-83). The convent was demolished in the twentieth century.



[16] Rosell, *Iglesias y conventos,* 213-216.

Figure 79: Belén de los Mercedarios in the 1785 map marked as 34.

Figure 80: The church. Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 81: The church interior. Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 82: The chapel of la Merced de las Huertas.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 83: The chapel interior. Photograph in the collection of the author.

Carmen

The Carmelites arrived in Mexico City in 1585, and between that year and 1607 occupied and administered San Sebastian church in an indigenous barrio on the edge of the city. The Franciscans administered the church until the arrival of the Carmelites, and the Augustinians took over in 1607.[17] The 1785 map shows San Sebastian, as well as the large complex the Carmelites occupied after 1607 (see Figure 84). San Sebastian and its curial complex still exist today, and is an active parish (see Figure 85). Little remains of the Carmelite complex. A new church completed in 1809 was demolished in 1862, along with the convent. The surviving structure is the former Chapel of the Third Order completed in 1742, and that was rebuilt between 1900 and 1903 (see Figure 86).[18]

[17] Ibid, 67.

[18] Ibid, 232.

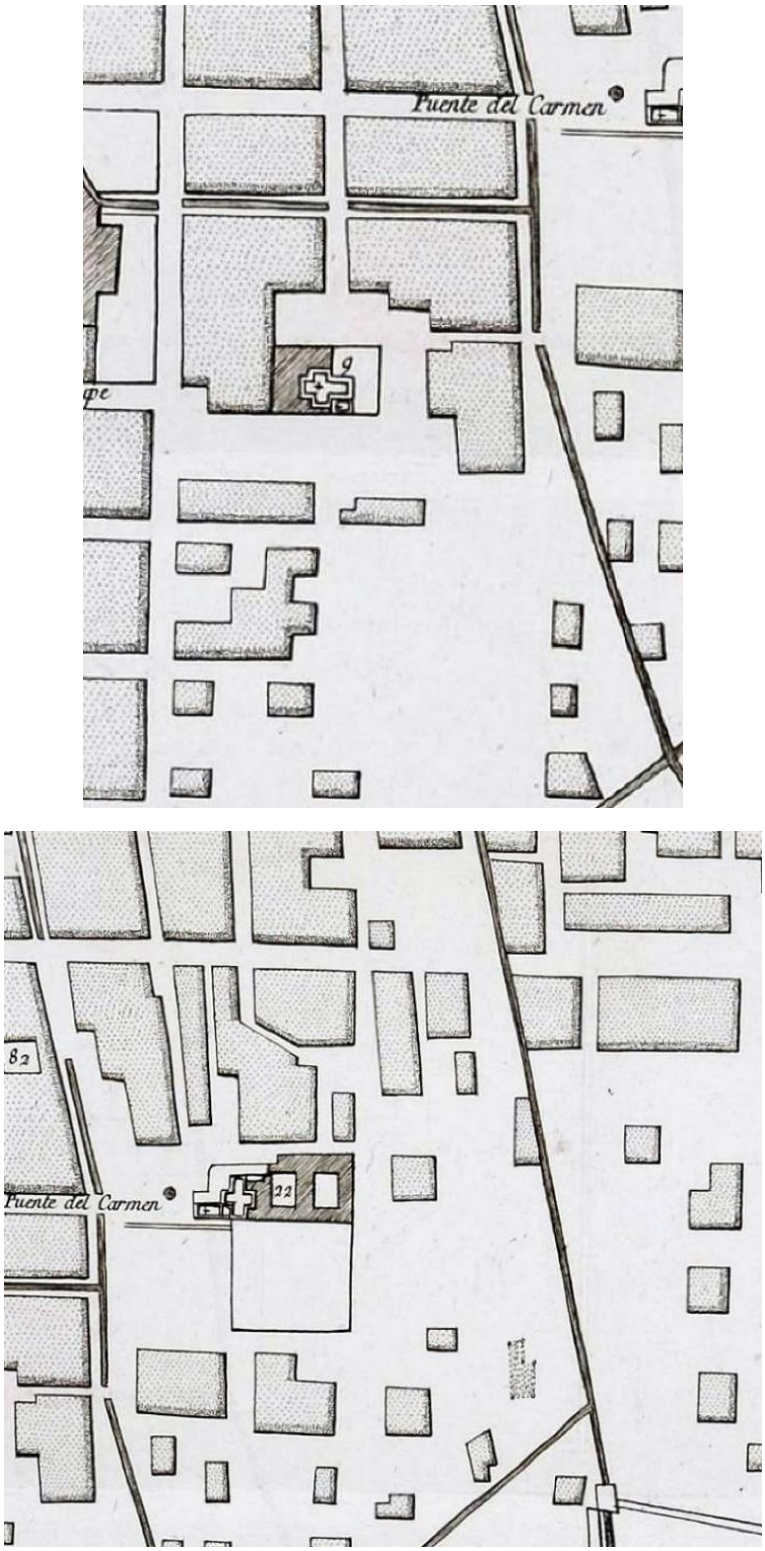


Figure 84: Detail from the 1785 map of Mexico City showing San Sebastian (9) and Nuestra Señora de Carmen (22).

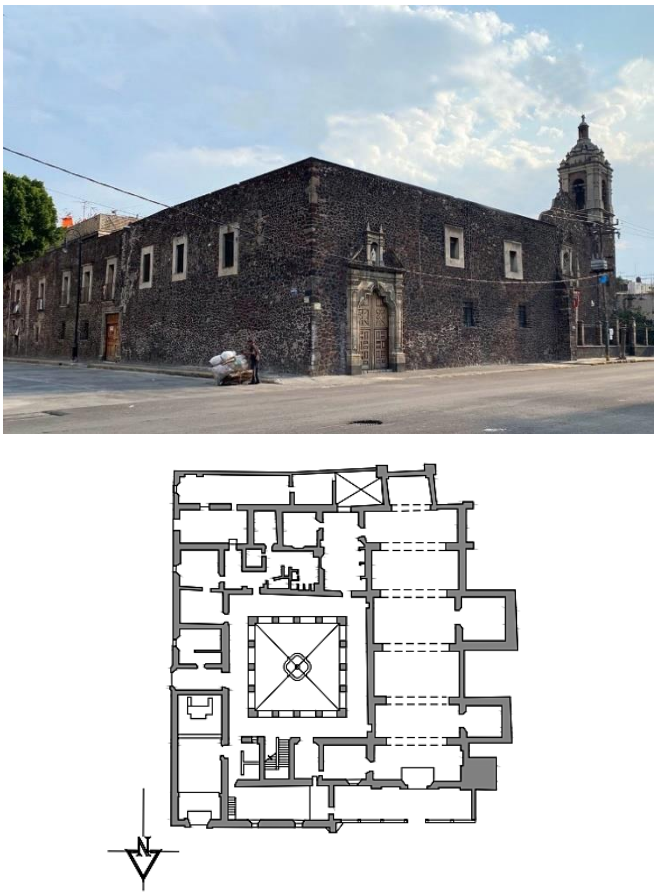


Figure 85: San Sebastian and a diagram of the complex.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

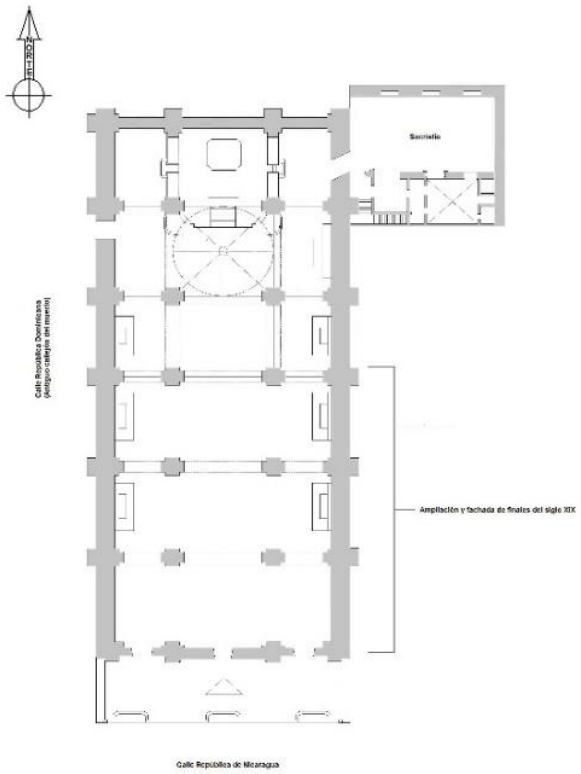


Figure 86: The Temple of Carmen and a diagram of the church.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

The Franciscan Complexes located outside of Mexico City

There were three colonial-era Franciscan complexes located just north of the city on the axis of the Calzada Mexico-Tacuba. The first is the convent of San Diego established by the discalced Franciscans at the northern end of the Alameda. The Descalzos med Franciscan group founded in Spain in 1495, dedicated to living a more austere life that characterized the origins of the order. The construction of San Diego dates to the years 1594-1621, and the church was rebuilt in 1778. The 1785 map of Mexico City shows the sprawling complex (see Figure 87). The liberal Juarez regime ordered the closing of the complex as a part of its campaign to de-cloister the religious orders.[19] The church and a part of the cloister still exist, and are now a part of a public museum (see Figures 88-90).

[19] Ibid, 199-201.

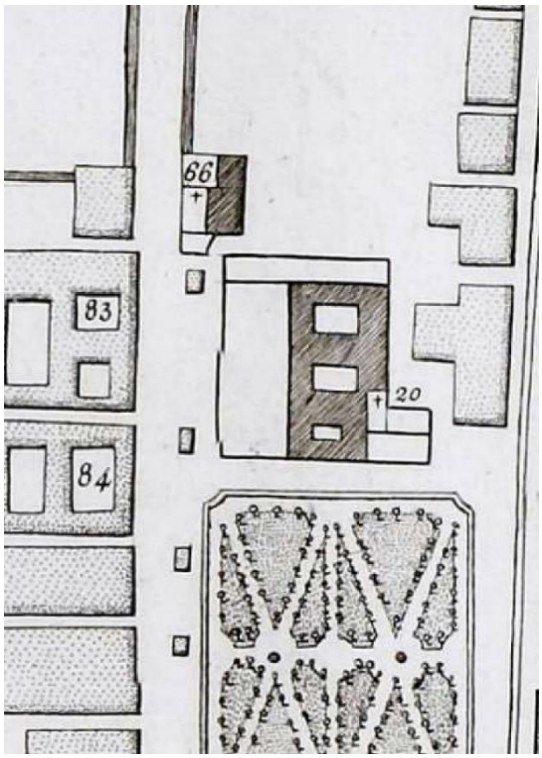


Figure 87: The San Diego convent complex in the 1785 map of Mexico City marked as 20.

Figure 88: San Diego church. Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 89: The remains of the cloister. Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 90: The remains of the cloister. Photograph in the collection of the author.

The second complex is the ex-Hospital of Santos Cosme y Damian founded and administered to attend to the medical needs of *indios forasteros*, or indigenous peoples not native to the area. The Franciscan chronicler Antonio Ciudad Real mentioned the Hospital in the early 1580s, and it may have been founded earlier by Juan de Zumárraga, the first Bishop of Mexico. The complex consists of the church dedicated in 1675, and the cloister (see Figures 91-93). The wooden baroque altar was originally in the church of the Carmelite San Joaquin complex, located in the Legaria district north of the city, and was moved to the Santos Cosme y Damian church in 1937 (see Figure 94).[20] The church is an active parish, and the cloister houses the parish offices.

Figure 91: A nineteenth-century lithograph of the complex.

[20] Ibid, 205.

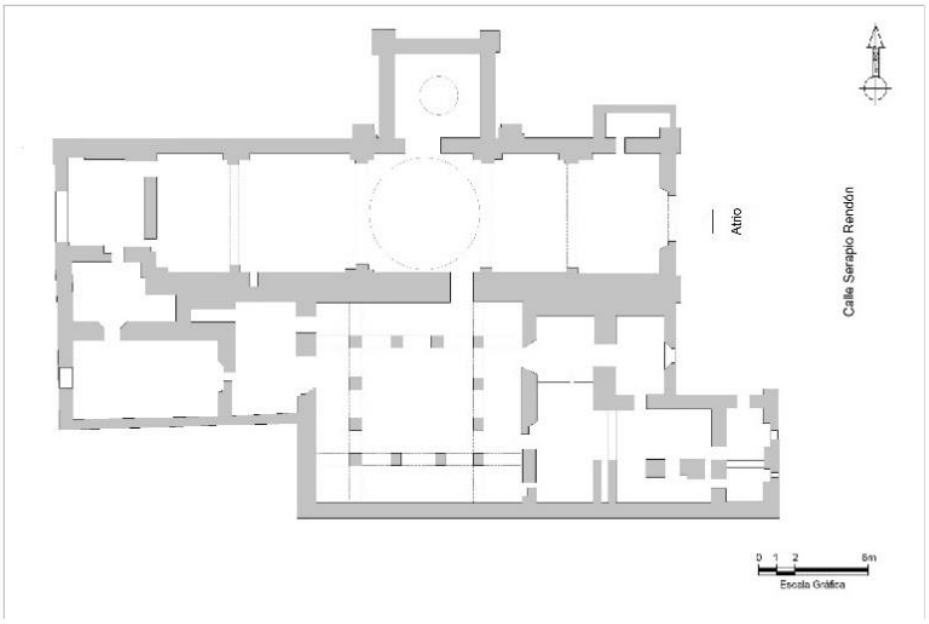


Figure 92: The church and a diagram of the complex.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 93: The cloister. Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 94: The church interior and main altar that is currently undergoing restoration. Photograph in the collection of the author.

The third complex is the apostolic college of San Fernando, located just north of the Alameda and adjoining the Hospital de San Hipolito. Towards the end of the seventeenth century a new initiative came from the *propaganda fide* in Rome to revitalize and reorganize the Franciscan evangelization of non-Christians through the new apostolic colleges. This initiative was particularly important as Franciscans assumed a greater role in evangelization on the frontiers of Spanish America including in northern Mexico, and replaced Jesuit missionaries following the expulsion of the Society of Jesus. The Franciscans were perhaps the most numerous of the missionary orders in Spain and Spanish America. In 1700, there were some 15,000 in Spain and 5,000 in Spanish America.[21] The idea was to recruit and train missionaries which was something that had not occurred during the initial evangelization campaign in the sixteenth century, and the colleges were also to administer missions. In the case of Mexico, the Colleges trained and assigned missionaries to missions on the near northern and northern frontiers, and lay administrators received the stipends paid by the Crown, and purchased and shipped supplies to the missionaries.[22] The Franciscans also directed the economic development of the different groups of missions. In California, for example, Franciscans from the Apostolic College of San Fernando (Mexico City) responded to the imperative of the Bourbon Reforms and organized large scale farming and ranching operations, and used the mission economies to subsidize the cost of the colonization of California by providing food and other supplies to the military.[23] The Apostolic Colleges also existed alongside the earlier administrative structure of the Provinces. In Zacatecas City, for example, an Apostolic College founded in 1707 coexisted with a sixteenth century doctrina.

[21] David Rex Galindo, *To Sin No More: Franciscans and Conversion in the Hispanic World, 1683-1830* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 4.
[22] Robert H. Jackson, "Eighteenth-Century Supply System in Texas and California: The Development of Mission Economics," in John F. Schwaller, ed., *Francis in America: Essays on the Franciscan Family in North and South America* (Berkeley: Academy of American Franciscan History, 2005), 277-293.
[23] Robert H. Jackson, "Population and the Economic Dimension of Colonization in Alta California: Four Mission Communities," *Journal of the Southwest* 33 (1991), 387-439; Robert H. Jackson, "The Changing Economic Structure of the Alta California Missions: A Reinterpretation," *Pacific Historical Review* 61:3 (1992), 387-415.

The first apostolic college established in Spanish America was Santa Cruz de Querétaro, founded in 1683 by Antonio Llinás, O.F.M. (1635-1693).[24] Altogether, the Franciscans established six apostolic colleges in what today is Mexico, and four directly participated in evangelization and the administration of frontier missions. The Franciscans from the apostolic colleges also participated in what was called a "popular mission," or, in other words, missions to populations that were ostensibly already Catholic to correct doctrinal errors.[25] The missionaries from Santa Cruz de Querétaro staffed missions on the north Mexican frontier, primarily in Coahuila and Texas, and following the Jesuit expulsion a group of missions in northern Sonora. In 1773, they transferred jurisdiction over their Texas missions to the Zacatecan Franciscans so as to be able to concentrate their efforts on northern Sonora. They were responsible, for example, for directing the construction of monumental churches in the Pimeria Alta region of northern Sonora and southern Arizona at places such as Bac, Caborca, and Tubutama. The second was Guadalupe founded in 1707 outside of Zacatecas. It also staffed missions in Coahuila-Texas, and later in the early 1830s sent a group of missionaries to California.

Two other apostolic colleges established during the first decades of the eighteenth-century staffed frontier missions. The first was the apostolic college at Pachuca (Hidalgo), founded by the Province of San Diego de México in 1727. These were the so-called discalced ("descalzos") Franciscans who established the province in 1599. The apostolic college remained a dependency of the province until 1772. Franciscans from this apostolic college staffed missions in the Sierra Gorda region. The second was the apostolic college of San Fernando formally founded in 1735 the same year the first stone was laid for the construction of San Fernando church. Before participating in the post-1769 colonization of California, the Franciscans from San Fernando staffed missions first in the Sierra Gorda after 1744 and later replaced the Jesuits in [Baja] California.

Unlike the other convents already discussed in this article, the San Fernando complex was located outside of the precinct of colonial Mexico City, and adjoined San Hipolito hospital that, as in the case of most colonial-era hospitals, was also located outside of the city. A detail from the 1793 Mexico City map shows that the San Fernando complex was semi-rural (see Figure 95). The College had a large orchard, as well as pasture identified as a *potrero* or pasture for horses. The church is all that remains of the Apostolic College. It was built between 1735 and about 1751 (see Figure 96). The main altar is a replica of the late colonial-era wooden baroque altar that was replaced in the nineteenth century by a neoclassical style altar (see Figure 97). One of the interesting pieces of art in the church is a large painting that represents the "Tree of Life" theme that shows the Franciscan genealogy and prominent martyrs, as well as the theme of the "Final Judgment" (see Figure 98). The September 19, 2017 earthquake damaged the church (see Figure 99), and restoration has been incomplete. The cloister was demolished in the 1930s to open a new street named Calle Guerrero (see Figure 100).

In 1860 at the time of the implementation of the laws of reform, the lands and complex of the apostolic college were divided into three lots to be sold. The cemetery attached to the College had already been converted for public use as the Panteón de San Fernando, and many prominent politicians and residents of Mexico City were buried there from the 1850s to 1870s. When he died in 1872, Benito Juárez was laid to rest in the Panteón. The widow of Miguel Miramón, the conservative general who sided with the French during the intervention (1862-1867) and who Juárez had executed with the erstwhile Emperor Maximillian, had her husband´s body disinterred and reburied in the Puebla cathedral after Juárez¨s death. She did not want her husband in the same cemetery as the man who had ordered his execution. The cloister existed until the 1930s when it was demolished for street development.

[24] Rex Galindo, *To Sin No More,* 2.
[25] On the popular missions see Ibid, Chapter 4.

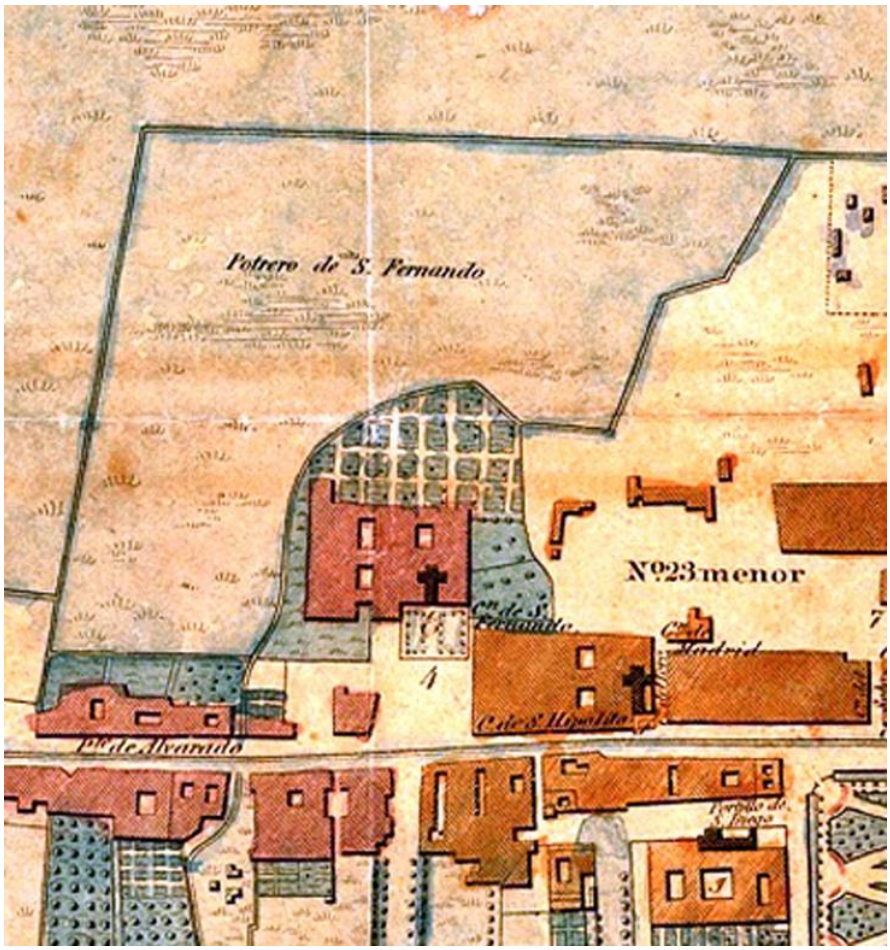


Figure 95: Detail of the 1793 map of Mexico City showing the Apostolic College of San Fernando.

Figure 96: The church façade. Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 97: The church interior. The main altar is a replica of the colonial-era one replaced in the nineteenth century by a neoclassical style altar.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

Figure 98: A late colonial “Tree of Life” and Final Judgment painting.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

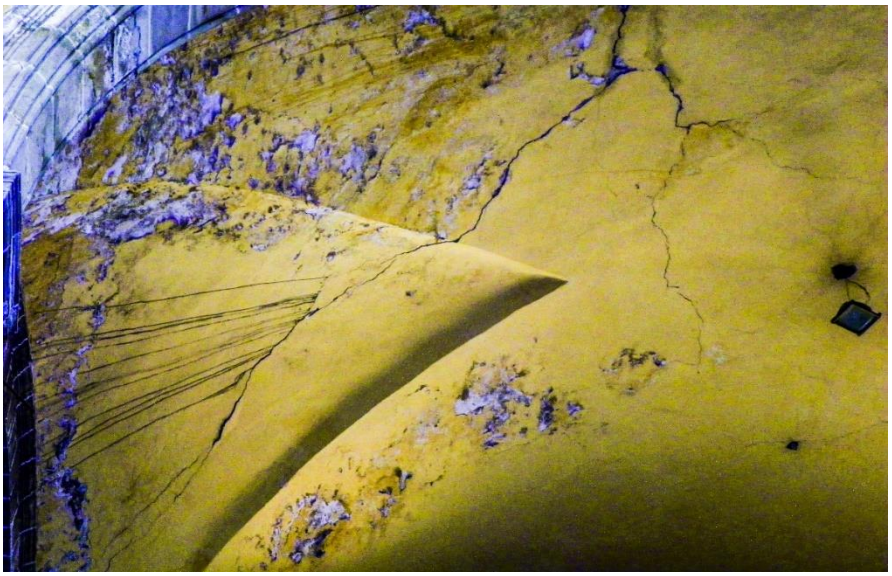


Figure 99: Detail of damage from the September 19, 2017 earthquake.
Photograph in the collection of the author.

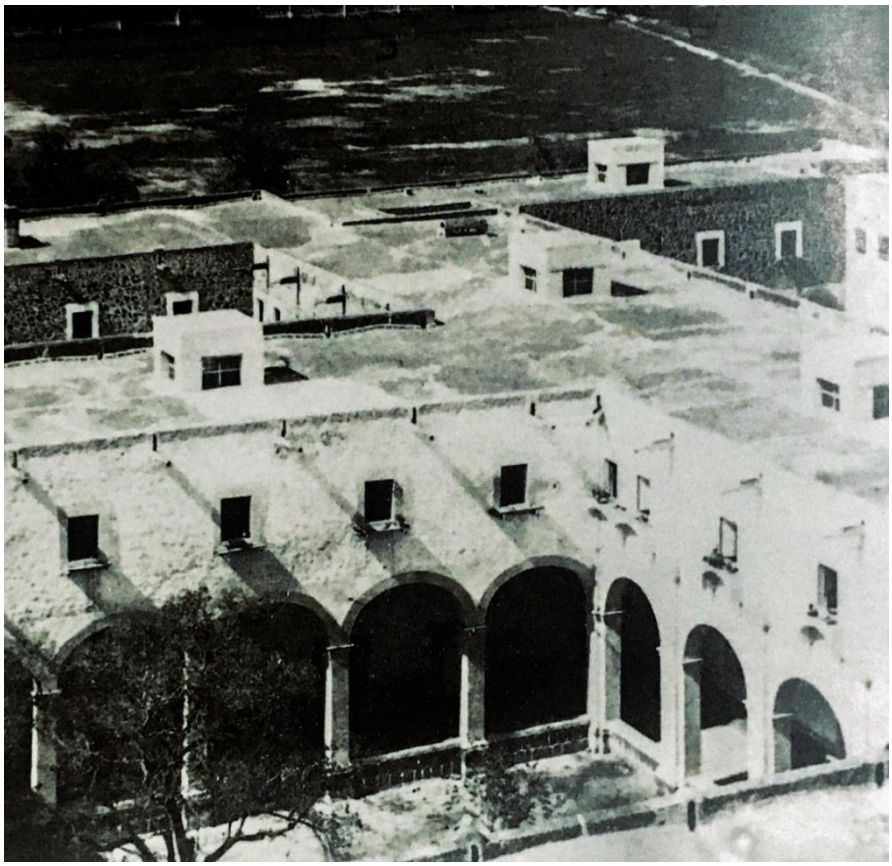


Figure 100: A historic photograph of the cloister demolished in the 1930s.

The Complexes of the Female Religious Orders

The churches and complexes of the female religious orders established in Mexico City exist in different stages of conservation, and four complexes were demolished in the past. They were San Juan la Penitencia, Santa Isabel, Nuestra Señora de las Nieves (Santa Brígida), and the Franciscan Capuchan convent (see Table 1). However, historic images exist from before their demolition (see Figures 101-104). The Conceptionist nuns established the largest number of convents in the city with a total of eight. The first was La Concepción established around 1530. Several nuns left the convent to establish that of Regina Coeli in 1573, and this was the process in the establishment of new convents. The nuns enjoyed their cloistered life until the implementation of the liberal reform laws, when they were forced leave and to fend for themselves in society. The Franciscan, Dominican, Carmelite, and San Jeronymite nuns also established convents in the city. The convent of Corpus Christi located just north of the city on the Alameda was unique in that it catered solely to indigenous women.

Figure 101: The Church of San Juan la Penitencia before its demolition.

Figure 102: The Capuchan church before its demolition.

Figure 103: The church of Santa Isabel before its demotion.

Figure 104: The church of Nuestra Señora de las Nieves (Santa Brigida) before its demolition.

The Conceptionist Convents

La Concepción was the first convent established in Mexico City. The church built in the seventeenth-century still exists and is an active parish. However, the cloister has disappeared. The church interior was converted to neo-classical style in the nineteenth-century.

Figure 105: Concepción church. Photographs in the collection of the author.

Regina Coeli was the second Conceptionist convent established in the city. The church still serves an active parish. It is one of a handful of churches in the city that retains wooden baroque altars. The main cloister still exists, and serves as an asylum for the elderly and is not open to the public.

Figure 106: Regina Coeli church. Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 107: The main cloister. Photograph in the collection of the author.

The convent of Jesús María still exists. The church still serves an active parish. It was damaged in the earthquake of September 19, 2017, but has been restored. However, the cloister is in a poor state of conservation, and is closed. There are historic photographs of the cloister..

Figure 108: The Jesús María church. Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 109: A historic photograph of the cloister, and the cloister today.

The Secretaria de Educación Publica now occupies the ex-church and cloisters of La Encarnación convent. The church is an auditorium, and the cloisters offices. Although the cloisters still retain their form, they have been modified. The muralist Diego Rivera painted a mural series in the main cloister, and this part of the complex is open to the public.

Figure 110: The church and main cloister of La Encarnación. Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 111: A section of the complex that has not been architecturally modified. Photograph in the collection of the author.

The Santa Inés complex still preserves its church and main cloister, although the church tower was demolished in the nineteenth-century. The eighteenth-century religious artist Miguel Maldonado y Cabrera was buried in the church. The church still serves an active parish, and the main cloister is a museum open to the public.

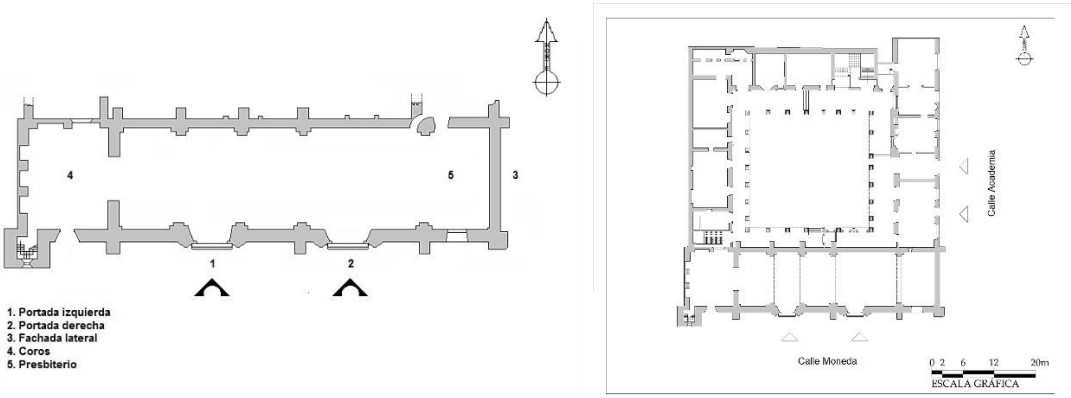


Figure 112: Architectural diagrams of the church and main cloister.

Figure 113: The church. Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 114: The main cloister. Photograph in the collection of the author.

The cloisters of the San José de Gracia, Balvanera, and San Bernardo convents no longer exist, and all that remain are the churches. The San José de Gracia Church is now an Anglican cathedral. That of Balvanera serves a Marionite congregation. San Bernardo serves an active parish.

Figure 115: The churches of San José de Gracia (left) and Balvanera (right). Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 116: San Bernardo church. Photographs in the collection of the author.

Franciscan Complexes

Most of the Santa Clara complex was demolished in the nineteenth-century. What remains is a former chapel that now houses the Library of Congress. The Corpus Christi convent was also demolished, and the church is now occupied by offices. Two historic eighteenth-century paintings show the Corpus Christi complex before its demolition, and the church interior.

Figure 117: The chapel that is all that remains of the Santa Clara convent complex (left), and the ex-Corpus Christi church (right). Photographs in the collection of the author.

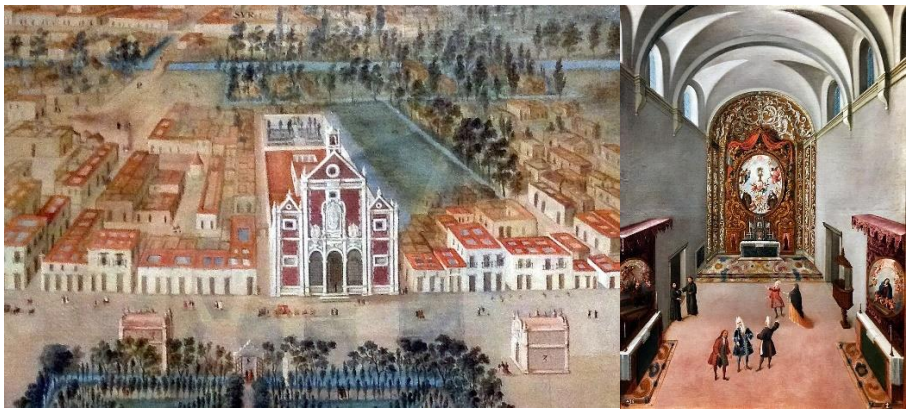


Figure 118: The Corpus Christi complex from two eighteenth-century paintings.

Dominican Convent

The Dominican nuns established Santa Catalina de Siena in 1593. The Church still exists, but serves a presbyterian congregation. What remains of the cloister is now occupied by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico. One section of the cloister is the former law school.

Figure 119: The ex-Santa Catalina de Siena complex. Photographs in the collection of the author.

Carmelite Convents

Discalced Carmelite nuns established two convents in Mexico City. The first is known today as Santa Teresa la Antigua, since it was the first convent established. The church is now a museum, and little remains of the cloister. The second is known as Santa Teresa la Nueva, and it serves an active parish. What was the cloister is now occupied by small shops, and has been greatly modified.

Figure 120: Santa Teresa la Antigua (left), and Santa Teresa la Nueva (right). Photographs in the collection of the autor.

Jeronymite Convents

Jeronymite nuns established two convents in Mexico City. The first was San Jerónimo established in 1585 on the western edge of the city. It is best known as the residence of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Juana Inés de Asbaje y Ramírez de Santillana Gonzales y España, 1648-1695), known today as the Décima Musa because of her writings. The Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana now occupies the convent complex, and the ex-church is a theater (see Figure 121). The second was San Lorenzo established in 1598. The church still serves an active parish, but the cloister was demolished in the late nineteenth-century. Historic photographs show the cloister before its demolition (see Figure 122).

Figure 121: The complex of the ex-convent of San Jerónimo. Photographs in the collection of the author.

Figure 122: The San Lorenzo church and a historic photograph of the cloister before its demolition.

The colonial-era complexes of the male and female religious orders that survive today are a patrimony in danger, in danger from neglect and urban development. A number were da in the earthquake of September 19, 2017, and the restoration process has not been completed. The complexes dominated the city during the colonial period, as can be seen in historic maps from the eighteenth-century. The most complete map is that published in Spain in 1785 by the cartographer Tomás López. The map provides a clear visual point of reference of the number of and the amount of urban space occupied by the complexes. Much of the patrimony has been lost.

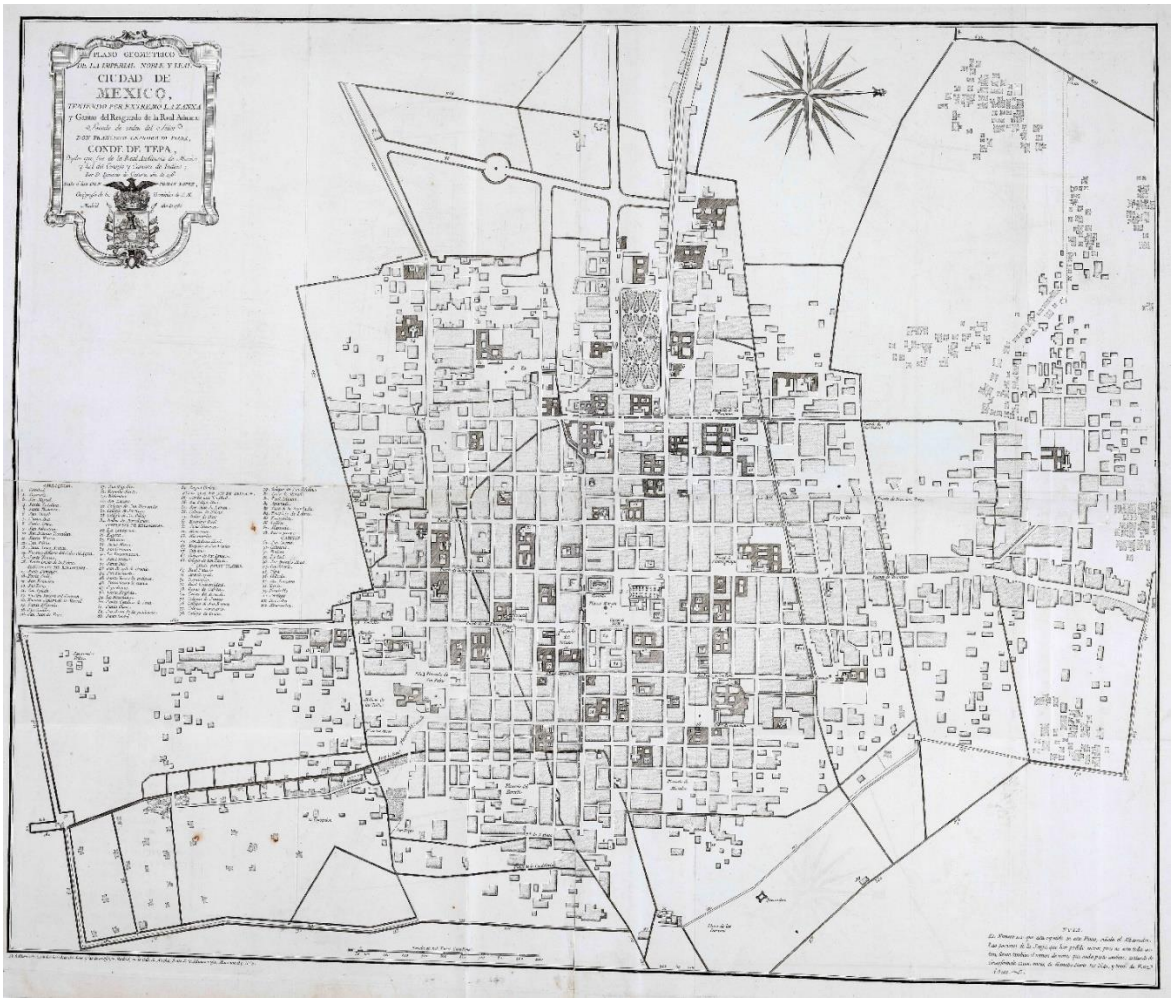


Figure 123: The 1785 Tomás López map of Mexico City.

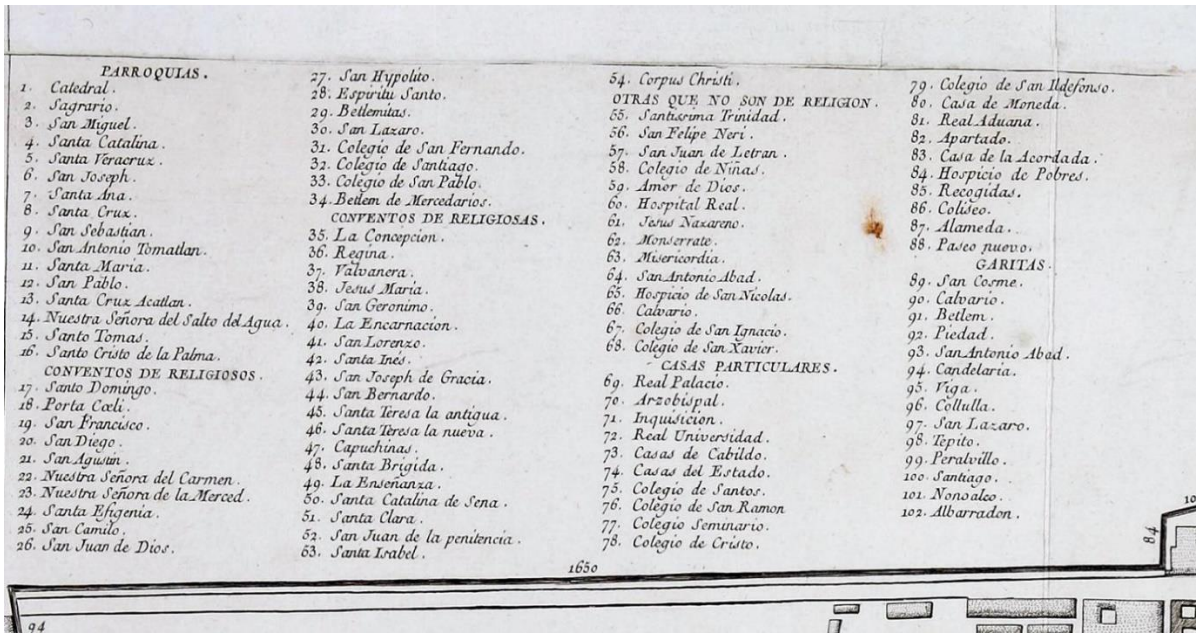


Figure 124: Detail of the map.

Table 1: Convents of the Female orders in Mexico City

Convent	Year Founded	Church Begun	Church Completed
Conceptionist Nuns			
Concepción	1530	1645	1655
Regina Coeli	1573	1586 (work suspended until 1655)	1656
Jesús María	1580	1596	1621
La Encarnación	1594	1639	1648
Santa Inés	1600	1785	1790
San José de Gracia	1611	1653	1659
Balvanera	1619	1667	1671
San Bernardo	1636	1685	1687
Franciscan			
Santa Clara	1579	1601	1661
San Juan la Penitencia	1598	1695 (complex demolished)	1711
Santa Isabel	1600	1676 (complex demolished)	1681
Capuchinas	1666	1666	1673
Corpus Christi	1718	1720	1724
Dominican			
Santa Catalina de Siena	1593	1619	1623
Order of San Jerónimo			
San Jerónimo	1585	1598 (church and complex)	1623
San Lorenzo	1598	1643	1650
Discalced Carmelites			
Santa Teresa la Antigua	1616	1678	1684
Santa Teresa la Nueva	c. 1700	c. 1700	1715
Santísima Salvador de Santa Brígida			
Nra. Sra. de las Nieves	1740	1740 (complex demolished)	1745

Source: Lauro E. Rosell, *Iglesias i conventos coloniales de Mexico: Historia de cada uno de los que existen en la Ciudad de Mexico* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Patria, 1961); Guillermo Tovar de Teresa, *La ciudad de los palacios: crónica del patrimonio perdido*, 2 vols. (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Vuelta, 1990).