

Abstract

In my dissertation, I inquire into the phenomenon of monastic architecture and its plastic decoration in 16th century New Spain. The aim of this work is to present Mexican monasteries and their artistic significance. In my analysis, I build on the interpretation of monastic architecture from the perspective of early colonial society, I also reflect on the individual level, assessing its impact on the conquest and colonization of America. The methodology of this research project combines analysis of historical (e.g. study of historical sources) and art historical processes (*iconological analysis* of E. Panofsky) with analysis of anthropological concepts (e.g. *rituals of transition* of A. van Gennep, *thick description* of Cl. Geertz, concepts of *liminality*, *structure* and *communitas* of V. Turner). During my PhD studies, I conducted a field trip in Central Mexico (2013), supported by a grant from the Government of Mexico. I visited and documented one hundred and sixteen monasteries and the photographic documentation is the main empirical source of my analysis which further draws from the study of historical sources and academic literature. My research primarily focuses on three aspects: 1. the monastic architecture and art; 2. the role of the monastery in the process of European conquest and colonization of New Spain (e.g. monastery as an instrument of conquering and moving ahead with the frontier line); 3. the role of monastery in the process of transition from the pre-Hispanic society to the early colonial society.

Key words: monastery; New Spain; 16th century; conquest; colonization; evangelization; mendicant orders; mission; iconography, iconology, rituals of transition; thick description, structure, communitas, liminality.