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To Shepherd the Empire: The Catafalque of Charles V in Mexico City

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On September 21, 1558, Charles V, the grandson of both the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian and of Ferdinand and Isabella, died his *second death* at his villa on the grounds of the monastery of St. Jerome in Yuste, Extremadura, Spain. Preceding Charles' corporeal demise was his *first death*—a protracted political demise in Brussels from 1555 to 1556. Over the course of this period, he willingly banished himself from the imperial court and accepted his political death through the successive acts of resigning his sovereignty to the Order of the Golden Fleece, abdicating the throne of the Netherlands, and, finally, relinquishing the rule of Spain and his imperial title.

Exiling himself from the imperial court, Charles would never see his son Philip II again. His once vigorous mind and body were now sluggish, unsure, and pained after years of emotional turmoil and gout.¹ At the monastery of St. Jerome, nursed by his sisters, he lived quietly and obscurely. In effect, he had transformed himself into a political corpse. In the year following his physical death, the *Túmulo Imperial* (Imperial catafalque) of Charles V was constructed in the chapel of San José de los Naturales, inside the convent of San Francisco, Mexico City. The catafalque revealed nothing of Charles' political or mortal *deaths*; it revealed, instead, only his presence as undisputed Emperor of two worlds: Western Europe and the Hispanic Americas.

The Imperial catafalque imparted a univocal message that was preserved in the 1560 commemorative pamphlet by Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, *Túmulo Imperial*, and in the final page of the *Codex de Tlatelolco*, ca. 1562 (Valle 13) (Figs. 1 and 2).



Fig. 1. *Túmulo Imperial*. From Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, 1633.

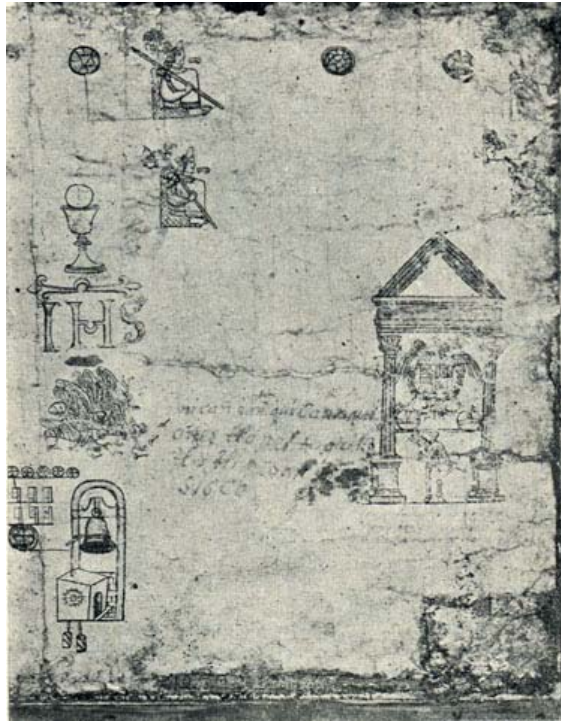


Fig. 2. *Codex de Tlatelolco*. Final page, ca. 1562 (from Valle 13).

Roughly coeval with the three-dimensional structure, and perhaps based on eyewitness accounts, the pamphlet and codex depict an iconography that is strikingly similar. The images in both sources accentuate the structure's Tuscan order, its height, and the omnipresent double-headed eagle of the Holy Roman Emperor. This essay explores the meaning of the structure beyond its visual representation, by focusing on the manner in which Charles V's catafalque functioned as a coherent monovalent sign that declared Charles and the Habsburgs the unequivocal rulers of a great Empire. In turn, these codes re-activated the heroic myth of the House of Habsburg, and, by extension, that of the nascent viceroyalty of New Spain.² In this analysis of meaning, it is important to note that the Imperial catafalque communicated to a diverse Novohispanic audience in Mexico City during the mid-sixteenth century. As an ephemeral structure, the catafalque shared traits with permanent architecture, but it also relied on a visual tradition more akin to public ritual. The melding of Habsburg and Greco-Roman styles, along with references to the divine rights of kings

overlayed by the immediacy of exequial performance, created a structure that was read by audiences as monovalent. At the same time, the multicultural environment of mid-sixteenth century Mexico City required that the catafalque communicate meaning with codes that spoke to both indigenous and criollo viewers. Despite the architecturally bilingual aspects of the structure, the message of the structure was univocal: it trumpeted the vitality and enduring power of the Empire.

The Catafalque Tradition and the House of Habsburg

A catafalque is a temporary structure for displaying a casket or effigy of the deceased during funerary rites. Its architectonic form is rooted in Classical mortuary monuments and other theatrical ephemera. Specific precursors can be seen in Roman funerary structures and the perishable, triumphal arch. The temporary structure of a catafalque combines the honorific function of a funerary monument with the sculptural narrative of a *retablo* (retrotabulum), aspects that coalesce in a lavish display of propaganda. Catafalque use and design reached its highest point during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in southern Europe (Arbury 5). Religio-political concerns contributed to the intensification of these funerary structures. Decrees issued by the Council of Trent (1545–1563) encouraged exequial ritual and prayers for the deceased, leading to a veritable industry of events and expressions honoring the elite dead (Kostoff 517).

In the sixteenth century, the production of these structures was enhanced by the Habsburg dynasty's inherent political insecurity. An occasion or event could be imbued with added significance if it could be exploited as a linkage of the sacred Empire of Rome to the Habsburg's Holy Roman Empire (Strong 76). At the forefront of these opportunities, the royal house used the event of death as a spectacular demonstration of royal authority in the face of political vicissitudes. As a result, the catafalque tradition spread throughout the territories of the Spanish realm. Spanish catafalques were made primarily for members of the royal family. Charles V was no exception; at least eight catafalques were constructed in his honor (Charbrowe 14; Arbury 53).³ Interestingly, site specificity is often revealed in the design of the structures. These site-specific differences might have reflected the needs and desires of the crown responding to local conditions in each city.

Before Charles' political and corporeal deaths, the Habsburg dynasty extended its reach across a vast empire that included Germanic, Slavic, Italian, and New World peoples. Though powerful, the dynastic hold was perennially threatened by local politics (Chabrowe 386). Charles inherited his Spanish kingdom from his grandparents; his rights of inheritance

included the right of conquest over the Hispanic Americas. Nonetheless, as in Europe, there were no guarantees of New Spain's allegiance to the Emperor. Under the strain of centrifugal political and cultural forces, the Habsburg empire started to break apart, albeit quietly, with the first writings of Martin Luther in 1517 (Raudzens 56). By the 1550's, the empire was in chaos. The Reformation, beginning earlier in the century, challenged the very core of divine rule and its corrosive effects eroded the dynasty's power. Charles' political demise preceded the Spanish crown's declaration of bankruptcy in 1557, which, in turn, was followed by Charles' mortal death. By the early sixteenth century, the tradition of bestowing bureaucratic offices as lifetime gifts to loyal subjects had given way to the practice of office holders treating their positions as property to be bought and sold. After 1558, in the wake of the Spanish crown's bankruptcy, the marketing of offices became the sole purview of the crown (Burkholder 82). This development contributed to the instability of royal power in New Spain by frustrating the political and economic ambitions of the peninsulares. Charles' unprecedented, self-sacrificial feats of abdication in 1555 and 1556, split the realm in two: his brother, Ferdinand I of the Netherlands, became the new Holy Roman Emperor and his son became Philip II of Spain. The Habsburgs would never regain their earlier power.

In a world as prone to conflict as Charles', his catafalques functioned as unambiguous statements of imperial nationalism and unity. In New Spain and other environs of the Empire, the exequies of a royal figure were completed within a year or two of his or her death. It was expected that the Viceroy and other leaders of a municipality would bear the cost of the funerary rites, including the costs of a catafalque (Ramos 185). Francis Ramos has observed that "early modern public ceremonies fundamentally served to create a sense of harmony, the script not only had to soothe the displeasure of popular groups, but also to reaffirm the hierarchy of power of the contentious elite" (211). It should not be surprising, then, that the iconographies of his catafalques were designed to evoke communal participation in a cohesive message of divine rule. The Hispanic Americas, with its vast natural and human resources, and its central position in trade, was a jewel in the Habsburg's tarnished empire. Charles' mortal death served as a powerful occasion for promoting the divine right of the Habsburgs in the Americas and the unity of the realm.

Charles V's Catafalque in New Spain

Charles' catafalque was constructed only thirty-eight years after the conquest of Mexico, when memories of the conquest and the realities of governing an indigenous population, combined with the often combative

energies of the religious orders, the entrepreneurial peninsulares, and the Viceroyal bureaucracy, made governance a complex and daunting endeavor (Schreffler 9, 10). Writing to Charles from Mexico City in 1552, Fray Pedro de Gante eloquently describes the demands of this extreme environment. De Gante details changes that signal material progress, such as new building campaigns, and the diversification and growth of the Church; however he tempers these successes with blunt descriptions of religious infighting and the atrocious conditions of indigenous laborers (Mills and Taylor 82–89).

Our understanding of Charles' catafalque comes from the only extant image of the complete structure, an anonymous woodcut from Cervantes de Salazar's *Túmulo Imperial* (Fig. 1). From this design, it is clear that the construction was as grand as any permanent ceremonial architecture. Though made of stucco and wood, the whole structure can be considered a *trompe l'oeil* of permanent architecture. The emotional impact on viewers cannot be overstated. Art historian Francisco de la Maza characterized the Imperial catafalque, or pyre (*la pira*), "as the most reverential of the sixteenth century" (29).⁴ The structure was placed in the chapel of San José de los Naturales because it was deemed too grand for Mexico City's old municipal cathedral (29). There were other catafalques in Mexico, but, as De la Maza observes, none had the presence of Charles' *Túmulo*.

Claudio de Arciniega, a *Maestro Mayor* or Architect of the Crown, designed both Charles' Imperial catafalque and the new Municipal Cathedral (Bargellini 70).⁵ After accepting a commission from the Viceroy Don Luis de Velasco, he arrived in Mexico City in 1558 to begin work on both structures (Toussaint 110). Beyond the catafalque's overall design, the structure's construction techniques also mirror those of permanent civic buildings. It is not surprising, therefore, that the creator of the work had a background in architecture. Arciniega employed a Classically-inspired "Renaissance Purism" style in the design of both the catafalque and the municipal cathedral's façade. The *Túmulo Imperial* was the first structure in New Spain to be completed in this "Purist" style (Toussaint 115).

Charles' *Túmulo* in Mexico City was a Greco-Roman style structure constructed and painted by "Indian painters from all regions of Mexico" (de la Maza 29). These artisans likely were under the tutelage of Fray Pedro de Gante, who had established a school of arts and crafts in the chapel of San José de los Naturales where the catafalque was built. Thus, Arciniega was supplied with an ample number of artisans who were familiar with the classicizing styles of the Renaissance. Following the architect's direction, the indigenes lavishly adorned his work with gold and silver leaf, sculptures, and paintings.

Arciniega translated the geometry of antiquity into a physically imposing structure composed of two stories rising to a height of over fifty feet (de la Maza 29). Based on its two-tiered construction and smaller top level, Aubry has classified the form of the catafalque as a pyre-type (52).

The design echoes the Roman architectural trope of a hemispherical vault over a square room. The combination of these ideal forms—circle and square—in the design of the Imperial catafalque supply powerful visual references, enhancing the notion of the deceased royal figure as a European Caesar.

The plan of the catafalque is akin to a Greek cross with four arms that project outward from a central square. The first story consists of a domed, cella-like chamber framed by four, radiating, colonnaded porticos, accessed by four short staircases of nine steps (de la Maza 29). The second story is more like a small classical temple with a classical pediment. The diminutive temple is centered on the platform of the first story. It is difficult to determine from the 1560 woodcut whether there are four open bays that correspond to the porches below; such a design, however, would have been consistent with the entire structure. The second level also is reminiscent of a cupola or lantern, which was a popular design motif in Renaissance architecture.

Several architectural features are common to both levels of the catafalque. These repeated elements contribute to the “readability” of the structure. Twelve Tuscan order columns, characterized by plain shafts and identical capitals and bases, support the four lower level porticos and upper level “lantern.” Highlighting the verticality of the lower columns are eight obelisks (two are hidden from view) topped by an orb that extends upward from the corners of the portico roofs. These help to visually extend the vertical line from the Tuscan columns below. Four classical pediments from the lower level porticos provide a horizontal counterpoint; these are duplicated in the upper storey. A frieze decorates the cornice of each pediment.

Although the Imperial catafalque shares characteristics with permanent architecture, a clear distinction can be seen in the treatment of space. Catafalques, in general, are open structures, almost transparent, like a stage set “in-the-round.” This radial construction, often consisting of a series of platforms, provides an ideal means for displaying royal icons and accouterments. In the case of Charles’ *Túmulo* in Mexico City, the iconographic program of the whole promotes both empire and imperial family: the first storey contains icons of Charles the warrior, statesman, and Emperor, while the second story displays the Habsburg dynasty as a universal and semi-divine entity.

Judging from the woodcut in Cervantes de Salazar’s *Túmulo Imperial*, the royal accoutrements displayed in the catafalque were imperial and would have revealed nothing of Charles’ abdications or the political turmoil of the Habsburgs. A pall would have been placed inside the first storey of the catafalque, which was centrally located beneath the dome. This funerary textile would have been emblazoned with the Imperial double-headed eagle and overlain by the Spanish coats-of-arms; instead of the body of the

deceased, a sword topped by an Imperial crown would have lain on the pall. The Imperial helmet, flanked by two flags, would have stood behind the pall. Banners would have been draped over the first level portico and would have been embroidered with the Habsburg eagle that served as a final reminder of the Emperor's presence. The second storey, likewise, would have provided a suitable venue for objects related to imperial power and royalty. This structure would have contained a monumental image of the Imperial, double-headed eagle standing on two orbs that represented the earthly realm and the two worlds: America and Europe.

Two-dimensional art (e.g., paintings) would have also decorated the Imperial catafalque and would have carried narrative accounts of the life and times of the Emperor. By depicting subjects unique to the Novohispanic social and political environment, the imagery would have "localized" the catafalque for the colonial Spanish, mestizo, and indigenous audience. Although these images are lost to us today and are not illustrated in the Cervantes de Salazar woodcut print, nor in the *Codex de Tlatelolco*, they are discussed in the 1560 *Túmulo Imperial* text (Cervantes 188–206; de la Maza 34–35). They are worth discussing here because a number of the images would have been particularly resonant for a Mexico City audience. The paintings were allegorical and historical, and fell into four categories: (1) images of the popular topic "Dance of Death," (2) stories glorifying the Emperor's life, (3) allusions linking Charles to classical heroes, particularly Caesar, and (4) images from the Conquest of both New Spain and Peru. Of particular interest for this essay are images that focus on narrative imagery, relating the triumph of the Crown over the indigenous past, as the visual referents within these paintings are particularly Novohispanic in nature.

According to Cervantes de Salazar, of the twenty two painted scenes, nine images had direct references to the Conquest. Of these nine paintings, seven are markedly powerful representations of the Imperial Habsburg dynasty. Cervantes de Salazar and de la Maza have described these vignettes in such a way that they fall in two general categories: political and religious. Images that adhere to the first theme include a painting of the conqueror Cortés, presenting himself to the Emperor with his sword unsheathed, a painting of a shield of Castile and Leon crowned by a rooster, an image of Charles V on his throne (venerated by pre-Hispanic Emperors), and, lastly, a painting of the final indigenous ruler of the Mexica, Cuauhtémoc, in prison. Works that recount the dominance of the Church and the church's sanction of Habsburg power include Cortés toppling an idol of the Aztec god of fire and war, Huitzilopochtli, a painting of Tenochtitlan in shambles with temples and sculpture burning and destroyed, and an image of Pope Alexander VI, presenting the New World to the Emperor Charles V.

The Architectural and Political Context of Charles V Exequies
The chapel of San José de los Naturales, a school and religious sanctuary for the Indians, and the Church of San Francisco, a convent and place of

worship for peninsulares and criollos, served as centers of faith and culture for their respective mid-sixteenth century audiences (Chauvet 13). Cervantes de Salazar describes the chapel as an enormous structure with a high ceiling of carved wooden arches and seven naves (Cervantes 169). The chapel conveniently accommodated large indigenous converts who came to listen to the words and teachings of Fray de Gante. The ample space of the chapel, as well as its proximity to the church, permitted large numbers of Indians and Spaniards to view the Imperial catafalque and participate in the exequial ceremonies. However, the placement of the catafalque in the chapel of San José was driven not only by these utilitarian considerations, but also by personal and symbolic affiliations. According to Kenneth Mills and William Taylor, Pedro de Gante (Peter of Ghent), was either the bastard son of Frederick III, or of Maximilian, Charles' great grandfather and grandfather respectively (81). The mendicant was, therefore, a kinsman of the Emperor. In addition, de Gante's mission, the Church of San Francisco, and its chapel, had been constructed on the site of Moctezuma's aviary on the former ruler's estate. By staging the Imperial catafalque at a location well known for its Pre-Columbian associations, the mortuary structure physically replaced the conquered Aztec order and celebrated the supremacy of the new Spanish imperial order over the indigenous one. Although temporary, the catafalque, and its associated exequies, solidified the centrality of the San José and San Francisco complexes in the minds of *ex convento*'s indigenous neophytes and other Novohispanic residents. Such grand political statements have been commented upon by Edward Said, who notes that the definition (or redefinition) of physical space is "a method for using collective memory selectively by manipulating certain bits of the national past, suppressing others, elevating still others in an entirely functional way" (245).

Additionally, Charles' Imperial catafalque offered an alternative liturgical and meditative focal point within the large chapel. In contrast to *retablos* or altarpieces, the catafalque was fully independent of the enveloping architecture. A viewer could see through and around the structure. The east-west directionality found in Christian architecture was momentarily suspended in favor of a new axis or center. The overwhelming presence of the catafalque and its temporary nature altered a previously defined space. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the *túmulo*'s new textures and spaces against the comprehensible interior of the chapel created a visual tension that may have invited a more complete appraisal by a viewer.

Univocal Messages and Univocal Codes

Charbrowe has noted that "temporary structures are valuable not despite but because of their fleeting and popular character" (391). The ephemeral nature

of the catafalque imparted both an immediacy of current events, while lending a sense of urgency of meaning. Embedded in the Imperial structure were two sets of popular codes, which were read differently by the diverse audiences that participated in Charles' exequies. In essence, the catafalque communicated in several languages, but imparted one message—the continuing vitality and permanence of the royal house. The Emperor's corporal death presented the crown with an ideal opportunity to rectify the confusing lapses in Spanish imperial politics that were precipitated by the Crown's financial bankruptcy and Charles' political and mortal deaths. The immediate presence of the "Emperor" was made real in the spectacle of the catafalque. Like a shepherd's crook, the spectacle of the catafalque gathered and unified the Emperor's Novohispanic subjects together, under one message of enduring state power.

The codes of the Imperial catafalque condensed pageantry and narrative into a highly orchestrated experience. According to Roy Strong, a prevailing attitude in the sixteenth century that regarded symbols or "hieroglyphics" as representations of *truth*, contributed towards reading signs uncritically (22). Catafalques, their and associated ceremonies, were embraced within this milieu. Renaissance public ritual solidified the process of transforming experience and memory into truth by integrating narrative with elaborate imagery. As Strong notes, "sight was the primary sense. . . . [G]reat store was laid upon the cult of hieroglyphs and emblems, which . . . visually symbolized an abstract idea" (Strong 23). The power and mystery behind these signs arose from a Neo-platonic view that wedded the idea of a prince to an ideal of "greatness" or "magnificence" (Strong 22). The catafalque's message of Imperial apotheosis and unwavering authority resonated within this milieu.

After considering how the Imperial catafalque projected a univocal message, and why this targeted system of signs could have worked as one voice, it is helpful to explore the most salient features of the *Túmulo Imperial's* iconography. The Cervantes de Salazar woodcut and the image from the last page of the Codex Tlatelolco both depict a classically styled structure, but with some differences. The woodcut's image is a more developed representation of the catafalque in its totality, while the representation of the catafalque from the codex focuses only on aspects of the upper level, or the lantern, of the structure. Although the authors of these works differ—the woodcut created by a Spaniard and the Codex manufactured by an indigenous scribe—each work emphasizes the structure's classically styled façade, Tuscan columns, and airiness of the lantern's platform. The catafalque's design (or syntax) harks back to Classical ideals. By referencing the ancients, Arciniega revitalized the familiar sacred empire of the eternal past and linked it to Charles V and his dynasty. These classical ideals were also a cornerstone of the educational practices of Pedro de Gante and his College of Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco

(Donahue-Wallace 6). Many of de Gante's students (members of the Aztec elite) were taught to read and write in Latin and Castilian, although there also were a number of humble, indigenous students who were trained in European styles of architecture, painting, and sculpture. Thus, these two sets of students, who most likely viewed the Imperial catafalque (and those who built it), were familiar with the classical iconography of the structure and its clear references to Charles V as the new Caesar (Cervantes de Salazar 188–98).⁶ It is clear, by the time of Charles V's death, that European traditions regarding royalty had supplanted, in part, indigenous iconography, and that the semantic load imparted by such imagery was more fully understood.

Within the catafalque, each element was carefully chosen according to its historic and iconographic reference. The Tuscan columns, previously identified as Doric by Cervantes de Salazar and de la Maza, create direct references to Rome, the birthplace of the Sacred Empire and seat of the Caesars, as well as the Church. In ancient Rome, the Tuscan order was often used as a celebratory column (such as the Column of Trajan [C.E. 113]) to proclaim military victories. During the sixteenth century, it was incorporated into the design of the Court of the Belvedere in the Vatican, thus linking the political past with the sacred present (Ackerman 24, 33). The powerful dialogue between Classical architecture and its revival in the Renaissance was not lost on the Novohispanic viewer, who associated the order with ancient heroes and Christianity. The royal accoutrements of Charles V displayed in the catafalque, explicitly linked the ruler to the ideological semantics of the Caesars and the Church.

The lantern, often seen crowning the top of Renaissance and Baroque church domes, had practical uses, as well as symbolic meaning. Placed at the top of a Renaissance building, the lantern allowed light and air to circulate below, but, as it was partially enclosed, it also kept debris out. As depicted in the Cervantes de Salazar woodcut and Codex Tlatelolco image, the lantern serves the additional function of housing the emblem of the Holy Roman Emperor, the double-headed eagle adorned by the shield of Castile and Leon. The eagle is depicted standing on orbs that signified heavenly bodies. This emblem functions as a proxy for the Emperor and the two worlds that he ruled, the Old and New Worlds. The lantern and its double-headed eagle are elevated, as though apotheosized. The lantern, figuratively, shines down upon the audience or "flock" like a unifying beacon, enveloping all in its "light." The references were deliberate and added a sense of sanctification (or sacredness) to the space.

Like the European catafalques constructed in honor of Charles, features of the Mexico City catafalque embodied Neo-platonic intellectual sensibilities and aspects specifically tailored to its audience. Relative to viewers of the Continental catafalques, however, Novohispanic viewers of the Mexico City catafalque, including peninsulares, criollos, and select members of the indigenous or mestizo communities, were extraordinarily

diverse. In recognition of this diversity, de la Maza observed that the Imperial catafalque was distinct from the other *túmulos* in Spain and Europe. Although he does not offer any detailed analysis of the differences, he regarded the Mexican structure as “distinct and original” and the European catafalques as relatively homogenous (13).

The Imperial catafalque’s paintings are not shown in the Cervantes de Salazar woodcut or Codex Tlatelolco image, but Cervantes de Salazar describes them in detail in his narrative. As noted earlier, the narrative scenes most likely were created in Mexico and painted by students from de Gante’s school. Most of the paintings depict the providential and divine nature of the Conquest. Many of the paintings exhibit “dual codes” that would have been seen by diverse audiences similarly, but “read” differently. The painting of Emperor Charles with the Pre-Columbian Emperors (Moctezuma of the Mexica and Atahualpa who ruled the Incas), depicts the European leader’s widespread authority outside the Continent. By depicting Moctezuma and Atahualpa bowing to Charles, a clear hierarchy is presented, one that emphasizes Charles’ superior power. Since the divine right of kings also was a tradition in pre-Hispanic America, the image would have been powerful for a non-European audience. The painting is an explicit, or transparent, example of an aggrandizing propaganda.

A feature not seen in the Cervantes de Salazar woodcut, but included in the image from Tlatelolco, is the drawing of a skeleton standing beneath the double-headed eagle emblem of the Holy Roman Emperor. This figure was a common character in several paintings from the catafalque and was likely used as an allusion to Death guiding the Emperor to paradise and the afterlife (de la Mata 34). What is striking is its inclusion in the Codex, a document commonly associated with indigenous artists and indigenous audiences (Valle 10). It seems likely that the personification of death may represent another example of a dual code. Pre-Columbian peoples from Mesoamerica depicted the “animate skeleton” in a variety of mediums, including painting, bas-relief, and sculpture, and actual skeletons were incorporated into the architectural foundations of many pyramidal constructions. The European reading of the “Dance of Death” parody is, therefore, but one interpretation of this image. Another could be the skeleton’s tie to imagery before the Conquest and pre-contact indigenous practice. For a viewer familiar with a Pre-Columbian visual tradition, the Codex skeleton could signify an ancient Pre-Columbian figure that accompanies a dead king to the Underworld.

Another reference to pre-contact iconography can be found in the surface treatment of the catafalque. Although the structure was classical in style it was not painted to look like marble. Instead, it was painted to resemble the uniquely Mexican *tezontle* stone (de la Maza 33). *Tezontle* is volcanic, dark gray in color, rough, and porous in texture. It was the preferred building material of the Mexica’s capital, Tenochtitlan. After the

conquest and the razing of the city, the Spaniards reused the stone to transform the old site into Colonial Mexico City. Painting *trompe l'oeil* *tezontle* stone on a Greco-Roman styled structure is another example of the incorporation of dual European and indigenous codes within the Imperial catafalque. Interestingly, like the Mexica, the Habsburgs had an Imperial stone: porphyry.⁷ In Mexico, while the choice of simulated *tezontle* over porphyry was natural, it was also very significant. Tailored to a Mexican audience, the painted *tezontle* stone created a dialogue between the Crown and the Novohispanic viewer: *tezontle* stone was intimately familiar to the indigenous viewer, but, simultaneously, its simulation on the Imperial catafalque was a direct reminder both of the Conquest, which had occurred only two generations previously, as well as the creation of a new imperial center.

A subtler feature of the Imperial catafalque's construction presents another additional visual reference to both the Pre-Columbian past, and the new, post-Conquest order. Hence, it is another example of the catafalque's dual codes. De la Maza notes that there were nine steps leading to the elevated platform of the first storey (29). In ancient Mexico and among the Maya, numbers had significant meaning and, within Mesoamerican numerology, nine was associated with death. There were nine levels of the underworld and thirteen levels of heaven. Because of this, many sacred Mesoamerican temple-pyramids were oriented to be the pivot between the four cardinal directions and the central vertical axis of the nine levels (Miller and Taube 31). These ancient temples were often made of stacked cut-stone platforms or tiers. Mortuary structures were almost always designed as nine-stepped, platform structures. It seems highly likely, therefore, that the incorporation of nine steps on the Imperial catafalque was deliberate. In effect, the inclusion of this Pre-Columbian architectural trope may have remade the *Túmulo Imperial* into the center of a Pre-Columbian cosmos, which, ultimately, may have rendered it intelligible to a local audience and suggested the integration of cultures under the aegis of Habsburg rule.

At the same time, Christian numerology is commonly integrated in religious architecture (Hisock 95). The nine steps of the catafalque would have also been significant for a Europeanized viewer. In Christianity, nine refers both to the sacred multiplication of the triadic shape, and to the Trinity. Multiplying the triangle and the union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had both architectonic and spiritual potency. In another example, the Celestial Hierarchy was organized around the numbers nine and three. The hierarchy was composed of three levels, each containing three types of angels (Hisock 48). The angels of the ninth order were the messengers, and an allusion to their role seen in the nine steps might have been known to educated peninsulares and criollos.

An image of Charles V's authority and longevity was created through the use of a potent architecture style, which was augmented by an

iconography of combined Imperial and Pre-Columbian markers of divine power. Normal daily experiences were suspended for a viewer in the presence of the catafalque and its attendant exequies. The variety of textures, colors, spaces, and lighting created an abstracted narrative of the Emperor. In this light anthropologist Edward Muir has observed that “images of political rituals are ambiguous in their meaning but direct in their emotional appeal. They present simple absolute truths” (231). Presenting an overwhelming univocal message required manipulating and repeating powerful codes to transform a politically traumatic event (e.g., a weakened emperor’s death) into a single, integrative voice in the insecure periphery of the Spanish Empire, through the *impression* of truth embodied in the transitory structure of the catafalque.

The iconography of Charles’ catafalque was a demonstration of the living and robust Spanish Empire. The style of the *Túmulo Imperial* referenced the classical past, a period that was idealized as the foundation of sixteenth-century, European civilization. Colonial Mexico City was constructed upon an ancient Pre-Columbian reality and an emerging Novohispanic identity. The mid-sixteenth century city was a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and cosmopolitan assemblage of people. By incorporating dual codes of the Pre-Conquest indigenous people and the Habsburg Empire into the decoration and structure of the Imperial catafalque, Charles’ funerary monument guided these diverse viewers toward an experience of enduring state power.

Conclusion

Permanent mortuary architecture, although physically stable and apparently immutable, is a vulnerable medium. Buildings made of stone and mortar can become relics of the past, as their messages are reinterpreted, or become diluted, or are forgotten. Temporary monuments, like the Imperial catafalque, create an impression of immutability that defies the monument’s physical impermanence. Ephemeral architecture suspends notions of “place,” “space,” and time. These structures, instead, are grounded in immediate events, experiences, and senses (Stefanovic 212). Both permanent and temporary mortuary monuments honor the dead, and yet the fate of their messages is decisively influenced by the differing life spans of their construction.

Catafalques use their temporality and pageantry to create meaning. Like the intensity and memory of a rare ceremony or celebration, the potency of a catafalque’s messages is rooted in the catafalque’s impermanence. Ephemeral structures (like Charles’ catafalque) were designed to be torn down after their original function had ended—like the body of Charles

himself, this catafalque had a birth, a celebrated life, and a death. As such, this *túmulo* was highly valued and alluring, but more importantly, because of its rarity and short life, its political and cultural messages were conveyed as truths.

The catafalque of Charles V and its exequies stressed messages not seen in other transformative ceremonies, such as royal succession and the triumphal entrance of a Viceroy. These rituals were accompanied by temporary structures and great pomp, but, as Francis Ramos has shown, these public events also needed to contain multi-vocal and ambiguous symbol systems, allowing local leaders flexibility and some improvisation in delivering the messages of the crown (187, 188). These rites spoke to a community's future, whereas the Imperial catafalque reconstructed (and projected) a defunct past. The value of the catafalque, and its associated ceremony, lay in its ability to corral collective memory, through dual codes, and steer this integrative sensibility toward promoting the needs of the Crown.

The irony of the Imperial catafalque is that it presented a portrait of a political entity, "The Healthy Empire," through the metaphor of a dead man. By examining the visual codes embedded into the design and decoration of the catafalque, a visual language is revealed, one whose salient features are preserved in the text and woodcut of Cervantes de Salazar's *Túmulo Imperial*, and in the painted image from the *Codex de Tlatelolco*. In both images, the dead "Emperor" embodied a message of absolute authority, permanence, and divine rule.

Notes

1. A number of factors, public and private, contributed to Charles' abdication, including the tumultuous politics of the time, loneliness, and poor health. The Reformation and the emerging culture of Humanism bewildered Charles, and war, economic failure, and the physical demands of governing an empire of great geographic scope proved to be debilitating. His two friends and great rivals, Francis I and Henry VIII, were dead, and after their deaths, Charles' ambition declined (Kleinschmidt 204).
2. The Habsburgian founding myth held that God favored the Habsburgs with the divine right to rule in 1271, after Rudolph I of Germany gave his horse to a priest who was carrying the host and journeying to give last rites to a dying man (Ramos 203). The Habsburgs rulers often reenacted this event.
3. According to Arbury, the earliest Spanish royal catafalque was erected for Phillip I in 1507; the ceremonies were sponsored by the young Archduke Charles of Austria, Phillip's son and the future Charles V (43). Charles V sponsored the catafalque for his grandfather, Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor in Barcelona, as well (Arbury 46). This catafalque is notable for the inclusion of an effigy of the royal person on the bier. With the many catafalques for Isabel of Portugal, wife of Charles V, Arbury states that the catafalque tradition became solidified (47). The catafalques

for Charles' queen, dating from the 1530's, started the tradition of the *túmulo* style, which is characterized by classicizing elements, reinterpreted by a Renaissance sensibility (47). Pedro Machua, the architect for Charles' Granadan palace, also designed Isabel's catafalque from the same Andalusian city (47).

4. "Pyre" is another word for catafalque. The term refers, more specifically, to a temporary funerary structure composed of a series of receding platforms. Charles' Imperial catafalque in Mexico City may be classified as a pyre-type because it contains two levels of differing sizes.
5. Arciniega also was responsible for renovating the Ayuntamiento building (Municipal building) of Mexico City. He used the same Renaissance Purism style seen in the cathedral and the catafalque (Donahue-Wallace 82).
6. Cervantes de Salazar describes the entire set of twenty-two paintings that adorned the catafalque. Many of the works linked Charles V to classical heroes, including Caesar.
7. Chabrowe notes that *trompe l'oeil* of porphyry was used in the imperial catafalque for Josef I (387).

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