

THE MYTH OF LA VIRGIN DE GUADALUPE

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Although the Virgin of Guadalupe is best known as the patroness of the Americas, the story of her “miraculous” appearance at Tepeyakak, Mexico has its roots in the province of Extremadura, Spain. It was here that a Spaniard named Gil Cordero discovered a small Islamic image which resembled the Virgin Mary on the bank of the Guadalupe river, sometime in the middle of the 13th century. The wooden image had dark brown skin and stood atop a crescent moon, the symbol of Islam. In fact, the very name of the river “Guadalupe” had an Islamic influence, as it stems from the Arabic word *guadale*, which means “river,” and *Lupo*, which is Latin for Lobo. Both the image and the river’s name were remnants of the Moorish occupation of Spain.

The discovery of the carved image was viewed as a great sign from God, and in 1338, King Alfonso XI ordered that a temple be built on the site where it was found. The image became known as “Our lady of Guadalupe,” and the temple was constructed in her honor. In order to help spread the veneration of “our lady,” artists began to paint replications of the carving and earned their money by selling prints of it.

In February of 1495, Christopher Columbus began the trans-atlantic slave trade by shipping 550 Taino Natives from the newly “discovered” American continents off to Spain. And since these strange and “savage” people were of the same complexion as the image of our Lady, the King and queen of Spain declared the Virgin to be “protector of the Indians.” In 1496, Native slaves were taken to the temple and baptised in honor of the virgin of the lobo river. The discovery of the Virgin was seen as proof that the expulsion of the Moors had been God’s will, and her temple quickly developed a faithful following. Among her devotees was a soldier named Hernan Cortes. Cortes was fanatically devoted to the worship of Our Lady, and he carried an image of her on his banner, taking it with him wherever he went.

In 1519, Cortes invaded Anawak, bringing the image of La Virgin with him to the New World. Italian Historian Lorenzo Boturini described the banner as follows: “A beautiful image of the Virgin Mary was painted on it. She was wearing a gold crown and was surrounded by 12 gold stars. She has her hands together in prayer, asking her son to protect and give strength to the Spaniards so they might conquer the heathens and christianize them.” It was Cortes’ banner which served as the “official” flag of the Spaniards until the first Spanish officials began to arrive.

As Cortes and his men carried out the cultural and spiritual rape of Mexico, they made it a point to destroy Indigenous places of study and erect Catholic churches over their ruin. In 1520, the Spaniards tore down the temple of Tonantzin at Tepeyakak and in its place raised yet another temple glorifying the Virgin of Guadalupe - a reproduction of Cortes’ banner was created and hung inside. The Spaniards figured that they could easily replace our symbol for the earth (Tonantzin Coatlikwe) with the mother of their Christian “God.”

On August 13, 1521 Mexico-Tenochtitlan fell to the invading white forces. The genocide which followed was carried out under the pretext of religious conversion. Our ancestors were given two choices, they could either accept the white man’s new religion or face a gruesome death. Not surprisingly, most of our people chose life, with the intention of preserving our traditions while faking conversion to Christianity.

In order to further facilitate the “conversion” of our ancestors, a priest named Juan de Zumarraga arrived in Anawak on December 6, 1528. A proud student of the inquisition, Zumarraga wasted no time in launching a

fanatical assault on the ways of our people. He ordered that our libraries be burned, our temples destroyed, and had our teachers rounded up and killed. Thousands of our people were put to death by Zumarraga for refusing to accept the white man's religion. And despite such humanitarian attempts at missionizing our ancestors, priests complained that the Mexikans were still holding onto their traditions while only pretending to accept the Catholic faith.

As proof of Mexikan resistance to Christianity, the priests pointed to the temple of Guadalupe at Tepeyakak, where Mexikans still gathered to venerate the energy of Tonantzin. The Spaniards had a Tlaxkalteka artist named Markos Zipaktli paint a new image to be hung in the temple at Tepeyakak. They hoped that a Virgin painted by one of their own would inspire the Mexikans to begin mixing Catholic practices with their own. Zipaktli based his painting on the original image of Cortez' banner, but removed the 12 stars from around her head, leaving only the crown. It was during this time, right in the middle of his personal inquisition against Native people, that Zumarraga was called back to Europe by the King of Spain in the middle of 1531 (where he remained until 1534).

But not everyone was pleased with the attempts at blending the Native religions with Catholicism. On September 8, 1556, a Franciscan priest named Francisco Bustamante denounced the cult of Guadalupe, declaring "If we are trying to wean Indians away from idolatry, why force them to worship the Virgin of Guadalupe, whose image was only recently painted by the Indian Markos?"

On Sept. 25, 1575, the fourth Viceroy of Mexiko, Martin Enriquez de Alamanza, sent a letter to King Phillip II, who wanted to know why there was a temple in Tepeyakak in honor of our Lady of Guadalupe. In his letter, Alamanza stated that the Mexikans worshipped a special image at that temple - "an image of our lady, which they call our lady of Guadalupe since she looks like the Spanish Virgin de Guadalupe." To help further clarify where the inspiration for the image had come from, Juan de Torquemada wrote in his 1612 book "Indian Monarchy" that "Our first Priests at Tepeyak built a church dedicated to the mother of God, as she appeared in Spain: The virgin of Christopher Colomubus and Hernan Cortes, our Lady of Guadalupe" (Chapter X)

In 1648, father Miguel Sanchez decided to capitalize on the image by writing a book titled "The image of the Virgin Mary." It was in this book that the modern myth of "la Virgin" was born. The story, designed to attract more followers to the dwindling temple at Tepeyakak, went as follows: On December 9, 1531 a recently christianized Mexika by the name of "Juan Diego" was visited by the virgin Mary on the hill of Tepeyakak. "Juan" reported his encounter to the Catholic Archbishop Zumarraga, who at first did not believe him. Once again, Mary appeared to "Juan" and once again Archbishop Zumarraga did not believe him. A few days later on December 12, 1531, Mary appeared once more and caused flowers to grow on the barren hill. She then told "Juan" to gather the flowers up in his Tilma and show them to the bishop as proof of her appearance. When "Juan" unfolded his Tilma in front of the bishop to let the flowers fall out, it was revealed that "Mary" had left an image of herself on the Tilma. This "miracle" tilma, made of simple maguey fiber and bearing the image of La Virgin, is the same tilma which hangs in the temple at Tepeyakak. Or so the story goes....

The only problem with father Sanchez' story is that Zumarraga wasn't even in Mexiko during the time of the alleged appearances! As we already know, he was called away to Spain earlier that year and did not return until 1534. Not only that, but Zumarraga wasn't even declared Archbishop until 1532. Why did Father Sanchez make up the story? Because the temple at Tepeyakak was losing money. All the priests wanted to be sent to the church of San Juan de Los lagos, where the sale of prints, indulgences, alms, and the massive number of pilgrims made the church very wealthy. These profits made the priests of Mexiko City jealous. They needed

something that would attract more people to their church, they needed something that would attract the Mexikans - a DARK virgin. The small church at Tepeyakak had gone unnoticed for nearly a century, but when father Sanchez' book came out, the story of the "miracle" quickly spread and became imbedded in the Mexican consciousness. The Church at Tepeyakak would never be poor again.

As years passed, Markos Zipaktli's painting became badly deteriorated from mold and exposure to the elements. In 1751, Archbishop Rubio commissioned famed painter Miguel Cabrera, himself a Catholic fanatic, to retouch the painting. In order to cement the idea that the image was a miracle, Cabrera published a book in 1756 titled "American Marvel." But not everyone was convinced by Cabrerar's lofty claims, and in 1787, Jose Ignacio Bartolache took it upon himself to examine the "miracle" image. Aided by a group of skilled painters, Bartolache discovered that the image had been "heavily retouched and was covered with patches and that in places is falling apart due to the effect of fungus and moisture." In addition to this, the group concluded that the divine image was:

- 1. the work of more than one artist.**
- 2. not made on maguey cloth but on fine palm shawl**
- 3. stuck to a wooden frame**
- 4. badly deteriorated**

Bartolache was not the only one who doubted the heavenly origin of the image. In 1883, Joaquin Garcia Icazbalceta was directed by Archbishop Labastida to investigate the matter. After an intensive and thorough examination of the tilma, Icazbalceta conceded that the image was in fact a fraud. In his report back to the Archbishop, Icazbalceta stated "With all my heart, I had hoped this miracle which would prove to be such a great honor for my country would prove to be true, But I do not find it to be. If we are obliged to believe in and proclaim miracles which have occurred, we are also prohibited from publicizing false ones." Incidentally, after Icazbalceta died, the Catholic Church had a Jesuit historian write a book to refute what Icazbalceta had written. The result was the "Historical album of the Virgin of Guadalupe" which had 25 worthless, unprovable and long since debunked "proofs" of the Virgin's appearance. Among the "proofs" presented in the Album were varying stories describing the event, and dates which did not match for the events described.

By 1895 the tilma had deteriorated beyond repair and Father Antonio Plancarte ordered that it be switched with a new one. Plancarte's statement can be read in the Dec. 3rd, 1895 issue of El Universal. However, when the new image was put into place, the priests made a stunning discovery - the artists had completely left out the crown which rested on "La Virgin's" head! In an attempt to cover up this mistake, the church declared that the crown had miraculously disappeared, and those faithful to the image actually believed it. This entire sordid event was recorded in great detail in the book "Echoes of Olvido" which was published in 1900 by Bishop Sanchez Camacho.

In 1928 the new, crownless version of the image was examined by the great painter and Mexicanista Dr. Atl. Dr. Atl concluded that the image was definitely not on maguey fiber as claimed, and he went on to add that "The painting of Guadalupe is a parody of her image which is in Fuenterrabla Spain, which is in turn a parody of Byzantine images of decadence. The Virgin of Guadalupe is a purely decorative work, executed by someone with mediocre imagery. "

Despite all of the historical documentation (not to mention common sense) which clearly illustrates how the Guadalupe hoax was pulled off, millions of devout Mexikans still pray to her image and dedicate themselves to

her worship. But what possible proof do they have that the image of La Virgin is authentic? Well, the most often cited “evidence” of La Virgin’s appearance is the so-called “Valeriano Relation,” or the Nikan Mopohua as it is often called. This document, allegedly written in Nahuatl by Antonio Valeriano in the mid 1500’s, is supposed to serve as official confirmation of the miracle at Tepeyakak. But let’s take a closer look at the claims made by this piece of “evidence.”

First of all, the Nikan Mopohua begins by stating that Juan Diego was on his way to the Parish at Tlatelolko to receive the sacraments and find a priest to hear his sick uncle’s confession before he died. It should be noted that the sacraments, such as confession and communion, were not granted to Native people until 1540 - as it was thought that Mexikans were not human and could not possibly have souls. Not only that, but Tlatelolko did not have a parish until 1572! In fact, not even father Sahagun’s “General history of the things of New Spain,” which was written from Tlatelolko makes any mention of the Virgins appearance! Not a single written document available from 1531 to 1648 has a single record of Juan Diego or the supposed miracle! Spaniards such as Bernal Diaz del Castillo, Diego de Duran, Bernadino de Sahagun, Bartolome de las Casas, Hernan Cortez, and even Zumarraga himself NEVER mention the appearance at Tepeyakak. This sounds unusual considering how important the appearance would have been to the catholic invaders.

Another error in the Nikan Mopohua which is worth mentioning is that the document reports events which occurred long after Antonio Valeriano died in 1605. This makes it impossible for Valeriano to have ever written these things which he has been credited with. And if this were not bad enough, the original Nikan Mopohua document has never even been proven to have existed at all. The only “proof” of the original document’s existence is an alleged copy of the manuscript published in 1649 by Luis Lasso de la Vega. But this copy, the “Huey Tlanahuikoltika,” is nothing less than a Nawatl translation of the book written by Father Miguel Sanchez in 1648 - another bonafide fraud!

But despite the painfully obvious truth, “La Virgin de Guadalupe” remains one of Mexiko’s most recognizable and revered symbols. Literally millions of our people converge on the Basilica at Tepeyakak to waste their time, energy, money and resources in hopes that “La Virgin” will grant them eternal peace. But not all Mexicanos are so quick to bow down before the false image, and even some high ranking Catholic officials are questioning the divine origin of the tilma. In 1996, Guillermo Schulenberg was ousted by the Vatican after serving as Abott of the Basilica for 33 years. Schulenberg believed that creating the myth of La Virgin was justified because it won an entire nation for the Catholic religion. His real crime, however, was doubting the existence of Juan Diego, and knowing the truth behind “La Virgin.”

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