

GUADALUPE AND SOME PERSPECTIVES OF THE SACRED IMAGE: AN ESSAY

Paulo Nuno MARTINS,

International Center for Transdisciplinary Research, CIRET, Paris, France;
Transdisciplinary Center for Studies of Consciousness, CTEC, Fernando Pessoa University of Oporto, Portugal; Interuniversity Center of History of Science and Technology, CIUHCT, NOVA School of Science and Technology,
PORTUGAL
Email: paulonunom@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to address some scientific perspectives of the sacred image of the Virgin of Guadalupe that appeared in the tilma of the “seer” Juan Diego. The content of the “Message of Guadalupe” received by Juan Diego is also addressed. The importance of the several “signs” of this Marian apparition is also discussed in this essay.

Keywords: history of Guadalupe; perspectives of the sacred image; spiritual “signs”;

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Virgin of Guadalupe is connected to the conquest of Aztec civilization by the Spanish army commanded by Hernando Cortes, in Mexico in 1519 [1]. Then, the Spanish performed the difficult task of converting the Aztec culture to Christianity, the European culture. This made the Spanish Emperor, Charles V to appoint Prior Juan Zumárraga as the first Bishop of Mexico City, although he had some difficulty in introducing the European Christian rituals into the Aztec pagan culture. Thus, Bishop Juan Zumárraga prayed to Our Lady¹ in order to help him to overcome this cultural gap. Among the first Mexicans to receive the Christian sacraments was Juan Diego whose native name was Cuauhtlatouac or “Speaking Eagle”. The name of Juan Diego’s wife became Maria Lucia and his uncle became Juan Bernardino after they received the Christian sacraments.

At the beginning of December 1531, during the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, Juan Diego was close to the Aztec pagan temple of Tonantzin, in Tepeyac Hill, where he listened to a beautiful sound from a woman’s voice [2]. Suddenly, he came face to face with a beautiful and bright Lady who introduced herself as the Virgin of Guadalupe². She asked him to build a *teocalli*³ in that place where there was a pagan temple. Juan Diego went to Tenochtitlán (now Mexico City) to inform Bishop Juan Zumárraga of the intention of Our Lady of Guadalupe. At first, when Bishop Zumárraga heard the request of

¹ The history, of Gil Cordero, in Spain and Juan Diego, in Mexico are connected because both are “seers” of the Virgin of Guadalupe. To study this topic, see Caso-Rosendi, Carlos. “The Parable of two Men”, In: *Guadalupe: A River of Light*, 5: 61-68. Front Royal, VA: First Light Press. 2017.

² The name Guadalupe cannot be spelled in the Aztec language, since the letters D and G do not exist in it. Thus, a name phonetically similar to Guadalupe might have been said by the Virgin of Guadalupe. To study this topic, see León-Portilla, Miguel. *Tonantzin Guadalupe*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica. 2006.

³ *Teocalli* means “God-house” and it was a temple of the Aztec people, where they performed their rituals.

Juan Diego, he did not give particular attention to him, having demanded him to show a “sign” from Our Lady of Guadalupe. This made Juan Diego to give up on the Virgin’s request. Meanwhile, in Tolpetlac, Juan Diego took care of his uncle, Juan Bernardino who was suffering from an incurable disease. When he noticed his uncle’s health was getting worse, Juan Diego went to Tlaltelolco to find a priest that would perform the last Sacramental Rites for his uncle. So, he crossed Tepeyac Hill, where the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to him once again. She said to Juan Diego «...*It is you that I have chosen for this mission...you must go back to the bishop and express once again my great desire to have a temple in this place....Your uncle will not die because his health is being taken care ...*»⁴.

Then, the Virgin of Guadalupe told him to go pick up roses on the top of Tepeyac Hill, and show them to Bishop Juan Zumárraga as a proof of the veracity of the “Message” received from her. Juan Diego met again with Bishop Zumárraga and showed him the roses in his tilma as the “sign” which he requested for at first. Bishop Zumárraga became amazed with the appearance of roses in the middle of Winter [3]. The translator Juan Gonzales and Bishop Ramirez y Fuenleal were also present at Zumárraga’s house, they were also stunned by the appearance of the sacred image of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Juan Diego’s tilma, where she was pregnant with her Divine Son. Currently, the sacred image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is located in the basilica built on Tepeyac Hill, at the outskirts of Mexico City, where there is a spring where water with medicinal properties gushes [4].

1. GUADALUPE AND SOME PERSPECTIVES OF THE SACRED IMAGE

The shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe is visited by millions of pilgrims from all over the world. This made Pope Pius X to declare the Virgin of Guadalupe as the Patroness of Latin America [5]. This essay is a compilation of the several investigations [6] performed specifically on the sacred image of the Virgin of Guadalupe [7] that was printed on Juan Diego’s tilma and connected to the four apparitions on the Tepeyac Hill, the last one took place on December 12, 1531 [8]. The first descriptions of these Marian apparitions are found in the “Nican Mopohua”⁵ [9], and were originally written by Don Antonio Valeriano, in 1545, where some historical events are referred to people.

The sacred image of Our Lady of Guadalupe printed in Juan Diego’s *tilma* was made in ayate fibra and has been studied over time by several experts from different areas of knowledge, whose most relevant perspectives are described in this essay [10]. This sacred image shows the Virgin of Guadalupe’s head tilted to the right with black hair and a tender facial expression with well-defined eyes, nose and lips and hands clasped in front of the chest. She wears a gold robe and a ribbon tied above her womb indicating that she is pregnant. In fact, her body is covered by a blue mantle with stars and tassels reinforcing the pregnancy, while her feet on the moon are supported by an angel [11].

In 1756, Miguel Cabrera [12] declared that «*Juan Diego’s tilma, for more than two centuries, has resisted the natural force of gravity and the weight of the two pieces which it unites and which are themselves made of much heavier and coarser stuff*». In fact, the type of *tilma* used by Juan Diego consisted of two pieces of ayate fiber put together with a cotton thread and usually has a lifespan of twenty years.

⁴ English translation is my responsibility. See Connell, Janice. “Guadalupe, México: Juan Diego, 1531”, In: *Encontros com Maria*, 1:59-63. Lisboa: Planeta Editora. 2006.

⁵ In English “Nican Mopohua” means “Thus It Is told”. “Nican Motepana” means “Here we present in orderly fashion” and was written by Fernando de Alva, in 1590, who reported several miracles not referred to in “Nican Mopohua”.

In this regard, Fr. Lee [13] said that *«is a cause of legitimate admiration. And the climax of this wonder is the preservation of the delicate colors in all their rich freshness»*. This is because Juan Diego's *tilma*, where is printed the sacred image of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been existing for more than four hundred and fifty years; it does not have a sign of decay, despite having being exposed to the smoke of incense, candles and touch of millions of pilgrims over the centuries.

Furthermore, in 1936, Fritz Hahn [14] also took two fibres of Juan Diego's *tilma* for them to be examined for the Nobel Prize in chemistry, by Richard Kuhn who used a spectrophotometer to analyze them, although he did not match the colors to any kind of pigmentation of animal, vegetal or mineral origin. The painter Ibarra [14] also wrote *«no painter has ever been found capable of sketching or copying Our Lady of Guadalupe...Its singular uniqueness proves the picture to be the invention, not of a human artist, but of the Almighty»*. He defended the sacred characteristic of this portrait. Further investigations carried out in 1946 showed the non-existence of a preliminary drawing underneath and brush strokes on the sacred image while. In 1954 and 1966, Francisco Ribera [14] completed these studies supporting the view that this sacred image was not painted by any human being

In 1929, the photographer Alfonso González [14] discovered the face of a man in the eyes of the Virgin of Guadalupe, while, in 1951, Carlos Salinas [14] also supported this discovery. Furthermore, in 1962, Charles Wahlig and Isabelle [15] detected two more figures in the eyes of the sacred image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and so they argued that this sacred image is a kind of "celestial photograph" of the scene between Bishop Juan Zumárraga and the exhibition of the roses by Juan Diego, who was surrounded by the translator Juan Gonzales and Bishop Ramirez y Fuenleal⁶.

In fact, Wahlig [15] argues that *«Our Lady was actually present in the room, but chose to remain invisible. Instead, in order to give a visible, lasting indication of her presence, she chose to imprint upon Juan Diego's blanket an authentic picture of herself as she stood there watching the scene.... It seems from the posture of Juan Diego and the other two that they were not aware of Our Lady's presence. The two appear to be looking at Juan Diego and he, we may assume, is looking at the Bishop»*. This perspective is also supported by Carlos Chávez and Manuel de la Mora [16].

In 1979, this sacred image was also studied using infrared radiation by scientists Philip Callahan and Jody Smith [17] who said that *«no study of a work of art can be considered complete....until the techniques of infrared photography have been utilized. And certainly no valid scientific study is complete without such an analysis...as far as I am concerned, the original picture is miraculous»*, confirming the supernatural nature of this portrait, namely the inexplicable color and gloss preservation over the centuries.

CONCLUSIONS

The sacred image of Our Lady of Guadalupe engraved on Juan Diego's *tilma* is considered to be a treasure for Latin American culture [18] due to its "mysterious" characteristics for contemporary science [19]. In fact, the Gualupan cult of Tepeyac [20] has spread due to the protective action of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Mexican people in several occasions, such as, the cessation of plagues, in 1544 and 1736, and the minimization of the flood damage, in 1629, among others. Also, the occurrence of a spill of nitric acid, in 1791,

⁶Jose Tönsmann was able to define the images of a total of thirteen persons, including the four that had been found previously. To study this topic, see Tönsmann, Jose. *Los ojos de la Virgen de Guadalupe*. Mexico City: Editorial Diana. 1981.

and the explosion of a bomb, in 1921, in this sacred image with no damage on it also support the sacred nature of this portrait [21]. These show the singularity of this sacred image [22].

Some sacred images have appeared throughout the history of religion, such as, the impression of the face of Our Lord during His Passion, in the well-known Shroud of Turin, which has also enigmatic characteristics to which science has not a definitive answer. These two sacred images seek to express in a tangible way the content of the “Message” to the “seers” through its own symbols [23], as a process that creates and assigns a meaningful meaning to the “transcendental occurrence” through which different people and languages are linked together [24]. In fact, some signs of the sacred image of the Virgin of Guadalupe are also presented in the “Woman of the Apocalypse” of St. John: «*a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, ...*»⁷. This shows the timeless symbology of the sacred.

REFERENCES:

- [1] de Gómara, Francisco L. *Historia de la Conquista de México*. Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho. 1979.
- [2] Poole, Stafford. *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531-1797*. Arizona, AZ: University of Arizona Press. 1995.
- [3] Monter, Luis F. “Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Miracle of the Roses”. Boston: Lectures at Saint Francis Chapel. 2013. [It could be complemented with Various Authors. *A Handbook on Guadalupe*. New Bedford, MS: Collection of Essays by the Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate. 1996.].
- [4] Bonnet-Eymard, Bruno. “La Vierge Marie au Mexique”. *La Contre-Réforme Catholique au XX^e siècle*. Supplément de Septembre en 1980. 1981.
- [5] Taylor, Coley. *Our Lady of Guadalupe*. Dayton, OH: Marian Library. 1961.
- [6] No Author. *La Virgen del Tepeyac: Compendio Histórico-Crítico*. San Nicolás de los Garza: Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León. 1884. <http://cdigital.dgb.uanl.mx/la/1080015042/1080015042.html>.
- [7] Smith, Jody. *The Image of Guadalupe*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press. 1994.
- [8] Elizondo, Virgil. *Guadalupe, Mother of a New Creation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 1997.
- [9] Valeriano, Antonio. *Nican Mopohua* (Text in English). 1560. https://springfieldop.org/wp-content/uploads/nican_mopohua_english.pdf. [It could be complemented with Burrus, S. and Ernest, J. “The Oldest Copy of the Nican Mopohua”. *Cara Studies in Popular Devotion*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Guadalupan Studies, 4. 1981].
- [10] Caso-Rosendi, Carlos. *Guadalupe: A River of Light*. Front Royal, VA: First Light Press. 2017.
- [11] Brading, David. *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe- Image and Tradition across Five Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001.
- [12] y Cabrera, Miguel. *Maravilla Americana y conjunto de varias maravillas observadas com la dirección de las reglas del arte de la pintura en la prodigiosa*

⁷ See Christian Art Publishers. Holy Bible. 2020. Fr. Miguel Sánchez was the first to identify the Virgin of Guadalupe with the “Woman of the Apocalypse” in his work entitled “Imagen de la Virgen Maria”. Alicante: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes. 2010.

imagen de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. Facsimile Edition. Mexico City: Editorial Jus. 1756.

[13] Lee, Fr. George. *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Patroness of the Americas*. Rockford, IL: Catholic Book Publishing. 1947.

[14] Johnston, Francis. *The Wonder of Guadalupe*. Charlotte, NC: TAN Books. 2011.

[15] Wahlig, Charles. *A Handbook on Guadalupe*. Libertyville, IL: Franciscan Marytown Press. 1974.

[16] Chávez, Carlos and De La Mora, Manuel. *Descubrimiento de un Busto Humano en los Ojos de la Virgen de Guadalupe*. Mexico City: Editorial Tradición. 1980.

[17] Callahan, Philip. "The Tilma under Infrared Radiation". *CARA Studies in Popular Devotion*, Vol. II. Guadalupan Studies, 3.

[18] Behrens, Helen. *America's Treasure: The Virgin of Guadalupe*. Mexico, DF: Editorial Progreso. 1964.

[19] Gorny, Grzegorz and Rosikon, Janusz. *Guadalupe Mysteries: Deciphering the Code*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press. 2016.

[20] Chauvet, Fr. Fidel de Jesus. *El Culto Guadalupano del Tepeyac*. Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Bernardino de Sahagún. 1978.

[21] Sousa, Lisa and Poole, Stafford and Lockhart, James. *The Story of Guadalupe*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1998.

[22] Pena, Fr. Angel. *Las Maravillas de la Virgen de Guadalupe*. Lima: OAR, Libros Católicos. 2017.

[23] Tanco, Fr. Luis. *Nuestra Señora De Guadalupe Y Origen De Su Milagrosa Imagem*. Mexico City: Imprenta y Litografía Española de Mexico. 1883.

[24] Martins, Paulo. "Fatima and the values of contemporary society: An essay". *Icon of Faith. International Journal Interdisciplinary Scientific Research*, 11(6): 37-40. 2020.