An Interdisciplinary Journal

<http://www.netsoljournal.net/>

Volume 2, Issue 2, pp.31-35, Fall 2017

<https://doi.org/10.24819/netsol2017.08>

Book Review

Górny, Grzegorz, Janusz Rosikoń, and Stan Kacsprzak, *Guadalupe Mysteries: Deciphering the Code*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2016.

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Author-photographer duo Grzegorz Górny and Rosikoń Janusz in *Guadalupe Mysteries: Deciphering the Code*, thoroughly examine the Guadalupe *tilma* (cloak) in terms of its chronology, and political relevance in national identity, and religion. The book also examines the complex iconographies present in image and name, recently discovered scientific and mathematical phenomena relating to the *tilma* and the cultural fashion aspect of *tilmas* in general. The book is an amalgamation of interdisciplinary mediums in the cultural arts; showcasing past and present through photography and painting, featuring narrative commentaries on the pre-Columbian past, the Spanish Conquest, and the seed of Mexican Revolution. The authors also discuss the political impact of Guadalupe in times of rebellion and political transition placing particular emphasis on the scientific examination of the Guadalupe image. The book is loaded with numerous primary resources and research from other Guadalupe scholars, but given its overall tone and its publisher, the Ignatius Press, the work unsurprisingly emerges as a highly erudite pro-religious coffee table book anchored in essentialist data proclamations.

This compendium is divided into eight chapters. For convenience, the authors present a graphic timeline from the years 1474 to 2003, heavily embedded with imagery in mediums of painting, photography, artifacts (statues, coins, codices) and graphics. The chronology chronicles the birth of important figures in Mexican history, the Spanish Conquest, and the Marian apparition, such as the births of St. Juan Diego and Hernán Cortés, moving through the emergence of important codices and research from artisans based on the apparitions, global and domestic political events, such as the numerous pilgrimages of Pope John Paul II, and finally the establishment of the Higher Institute for Guadalupan Studies.

A Singular Apparition: The first chapter outlines an introductory history of Christian conversion in Mexico and of the Marian apparition, starting with the birth of Cuauhtlatoa (Talking Eagle), who belonged to one of the first Nahuatl-speaking indigenous group evangelized by the Franciscans around 1524. Talking Eagle later became famously known as the visionary Juan Diego. Cuauhtlatoa witnessed the consecration of the Great Temple in Tenochtitlan, involving a massive human sacrifice by the thousands under Aztec rule. He would later learn that it was his calling to destroy the Great Temple and consecrate the cathedral to the Virgin Mary built from the rubble. In this chapter, the authors analyze the influence of the Franciscan order in evangelization. Unlike the conquistadors, who pushed for ruthless physical conduct and aroused great animosity and

ambivalence from the indigenous population, the Franciscans fostered a relaxed and welcoming protocol towards conversion. The Franciscan order respected the indigenous, unlike the Conquistadors, who treated them as wretches. Because the Franciscans believed that indigenous people were the future for the continuum of religion in the Americas, a resurgence in cultural hybridity emerged through arts and culture. This is evident in the creation of atrial crosses, which combined totem-like pre-Columbian motifs with the crucified Christ, along with painted frescos and maps with indigenous iconographies and flat two-dimensionality and stylistic rendering. This, along with the appropriation of landscape worship, seen through open-air sanctuaries that acted as theatres and facilitated an efficient transition towards Christian evangelization. The first sanctuary was built by Franciscan missionary Br. Pedro de Gante, of Flemish ancestry and relative to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.

The Marian apparition on December 9, 1531 is then discussed along with primary sources from the *Nican Mophua* (*Here it Is Told*) and the *Heui Tlamahuicolitica* (*The Great Happening*, the oldest printed book on the Marian apparition of Guadalupe). In the *Nican Mophua*, a written account by Antonio Valeriano (a personal acquaintance of Juan Diego), the reader learns of the Virgin's message to Juan Diego and the miracle of the Castilian roses presented with the image to the bishop. Images of popular paintings of Juan Diego and the Virgin, along with architectural models and photographs of the constructed basilica on the apparition site are showcased.

The Guadalupe Code: The second chapter primarily focuses on the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe as visual codex in uniting both the Spaniards and the Aztec nation. Both authors refer to primary sources, such as codices and statues of Tonantzin (Virgin Earth Goddess whose temple was once on the apparition site of Guadalupe), along with a contemporary work by Fr. Eduardo Chávez in *The Truth about Guadalupe*. Here the image embodies European iconographies: the mandorla (an almond-shaped aureole of light surrounding the entire figure of a holy person); the color blue ("Star of the Sea," taken from "The Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary"); a sash (virginity, purity, and everlasting devotion to God); a cloud (symbol of invisibility and the inexpressible/omnipotent/omniscient God); the color pink (recollection of the color red as self-sacrificing love, at the time of Christ's death the sky was pink); the leaves (paradise); the moon (the woman of the Apocalypse); ermine fur lining at neck collar and cuffs (allusion to royalty and purity); a gold brooch with cross (crucifixion of Christ); angel (servant of the Virgin); hands folded in prayer (to show honor, praise, and worship to God); Mary's inward eyes (contemplation and spiritual unity with God—Renaissance look of *sprezzatura*, a certain nonchalance, so as to conceal all artifice); Mary's bent knee (humility before God the Father); and the smile of Mary (elation within the presence of the Creator). The Aztec iconography presents itself as the mask less face of Mary (symbolizes humanity as the center part style of loose hair is a symbol of virginity); the blue mantle (allusion to heaven, sanctuary of the supreme gods); the mantle's covering (means Lady that rules the stars); Mary obscuring the sun (for her power is greater than the sun, the greatest force to life on a terrestrial plane); the arrangement of the stars (constellations correspond to the location and date of December 12, 1531 as seen from outer space); the pink tunic (color of the rising sun and symbol of the renewal of life); the moon (dethronement of moon gods); folded hands (prayer to someone of greater power); the blue mantle (heavenly care of the earth, as it covers the flora); an angel (the humanity of Mary and her superiority over other beings); the knee bent (dance, a form of prayer and homage to the gods); flowers rooted in the sky (heaven is life source for people); the magnolia (human hearts sacrificed to the gods); under the neck brooch with cross (Aztec image of a god); the bow (sign of pregnancy for Aztec women); and the quincunx flower (an arrangement of five things in a square or rectangle with one at each corner and one in the middle, Aztec symbol of transcendence, perfection, the principle of order in the universe).

This is to say, the image bridges both cultures as the name is derivative of another dark-skinned Madonna in Spain (*Guadalupe de Extremadura*); so the apparition site is same as the temple of earth goddess Tonantzin, who was also once human and a virgin pregnant by Immaculate Conception.

A Blood-Soaked Empire: The third chapter examines the pre-Columbian past in terms of the cultural and political dispositions fostered by the regime of Montezuma in the Aztec empire. The success of the Aztec empire in migration appeared by the vision of myth of the eagle eating the snake on the cactus ordered by the god Huitzilopochtli, the Promised Land (Aztlán/ “Place of Herons”) of the Valley of Mexico situated near a water reservoir and two volcanoes. Thus, with the capital city Tenochtitlan established and with its major temple consecrated in 1487, the stairs of the temple ran with human blood for four days, from morning to night. This floating city, constructed through a vast network of canals, appeared to the Western eye as the Venice of the new world, inspiring awe in the Spaniards with its vast tropical splendor. Montezuma, a superstitious king, welcomed the Spaniards with gifts of gold, cocoa, exotic species of parrots, animal skins, and flowers. Prophecy had foretold the coming of the white God, and thus Montezuma assumed this was fulfilled with the coming of the Spaniards, whose eyes bulged in hunger for the riches presented at hand. Of course, the Spaniards also harbored disgust and horror at the sight of animal headed deities, serpent worship, and the idols with offered human blood and hearts in their mouths. Alas, with the animosity harbored against the Aztecs by the Tlaxcalans, the fate of the Aztec was sealed.

Twilight of the Gods: The unequivocal lust for gold that was apparent in the eyes and facial expressions of the Spanish made conquest inevitable. On August 13, 1521, the gold mask of Huitzilopochtli topping the major temple in Tenochtitlan was removed. Conquest ensued, Cortés was at a complete advantage due to the Spaniards’ extensive knowledge and collection of advanced armaments, guns, cannons, and powder. Biological weaponry was also in play because the indigenous people lacked any resistance to European diseases like small pox and influenza. Conquest was also expedited with the aid of opposing tribes who despised the Aztec. Communication with these disgruntled groups was facilitated by Cortés’s concubine Malinche, who became known as the traitor and mother of the first Mexican. Drunk with power and authority, Cortés and his legion of men dehumanized the captured Aztecs. Brute force was applied in stark contrast to the efforts of the Catholic Church. The Franciscan and the Jesuits orders sought to convert the Indians and save their souls; Fr. Antonio de Montesinos was the first to defend the rights of the Indians as Juan de Zumárraga the first bishop to defend the natives.

Patron of Mexico: The fifth chapter of book focuses on the political significance of Guadalupe. With church officials expressing rights for the natives and creoles, it was perhaps inevitable that the Virgin of Guadalupe would bolster a new world identity bound to further inflame nationalistic sentiment. Father Miguel Hidalgo, for one, later bore the rebel banner with the Virgin of Guadalupe against the Spaniards even as Fr. José Mariá Morelos (another devotee) led the independence uprising. The first president of Mexico would even later take the name Guadalupe Victoria. History repeated itself once again, as Emiliano Zapata’s rebels rose up against President Porfiro Díaz, the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe ever present. Again, during the Cristero rebellion, when the government became anti-Catholic, the Virgin of Guadalupe banner took on new importance. Agreement between the state and the church was formalized in 1938, but relations remained shaky. Paradoxically, while Mexican authorities remained openly anti-Catholic, ninety percent of Mexicans identified as Catholic. This did not stop the 2016 papal visit; the authorities beheld a staggering 20 million participants gathered for the pope.

A Challenge for Science: In the sixth chapter, the original *tilma* is examined academically from a multidisciplinary perspective by mathematicians, physicists, geographers, and medical

doctors. Here the image is dissected by academics, including Eddie Gamboa and Daniel Gutierrez, who researched the positioning of the stars on the mantle and flora on the vestment, and matched the physical location of the volcanoes and star constellations of the apparition site to the stars on the *tilma*. Fernando Llalnes discovers the mathematical perfections in the proportions of the Guadalupe *tilma*, the arrangement simulating the Fibonacci sequence, Kepler's triangle, and the Pythagorean Theorem.

Mystery of the Eyes: The seventh chapter focuses on the ophthalmology of the Virgin of Guadalupe's eyes. The compendium of research derives from a team of ophthalmologists: Javier Toroella Bueno, Ismael Ugalde Nieto, Jaime Palacios, Guillermo Silva Rivera, Ernestina Zavaleta, Charles and Isabelle Wahalig, Enrique Graue, and José Aste Tönsmann. These specialists use diagrams, charts, and photographs to illustrate one notion: the Virgin's eyes echo that of human eye structure, unmatched by any artist's rendition of eyes; not Rafael or Murrilo could replicate such naturalistic complexity.

Indestructible Material: The last chapter covers the examination of the materiality of the Guadalupe *tilma*. Laura Irene Castillo, a laboratory specialist on art history canvases, examines the image with all her expertise and technologies and concludes that "[i]n this matter science is helpless. It is not possible to explain it, even by invoking the laws of nature and all the knowledge that is available to man. It simply had no right to occur." (254) Furthermore, the reader is presented with primary accounts from famed colonial artist Miguel Cabrera, who could not decipher the technique in creating such an image. Other scientists like Issac Ochotorena and Noble Prize winner Richard Kuhn examined the image and its grain of material; each in their own way found that science cannot match Guadalupe.

In addition, the reader is apprised of background information on the construction of the *tilma*, particularly with respect to its weaving and the agave materials making up its base. Primary sources on Aztec codices are used to demonstrate the attire and decorum of the *tilma*, and a photograph of a contemporary Indian is used with vector diagrams to show how the *tilma* should worn.

This work by Grzegorz Górny and Rosikoń Janusz contains considerable historical information and many images. The *mese en page* in graphic design along with the plethora of photographs (both contemporary and of primary sources and artifacts) demonstrates the mastery of the photographers. As an authored piece, the work reads easily, fluidly and clearly, avoiding the more conventional convoluted verbosity of older academic works. The reader acquires a sizeable sweep of Mexican history from its pre-Columbian roots in the Aztec and Mayan cultures, the Spanish Conquest, and the process of evangelization, to Guadalupe's role in fortifying nationalism in later centuries. The work supplies visual analyses on the iconography of Guadalupe, and makes available scientific researches and discoveries on the materiality and construction of Guadalupe's *tilma*.

The sources appear credible, including accounts of contemporary academics in disciplines of the arts, sciences, and mathematics with primary sources like codices, diaries, and printed books. There is a caveat, however, and this lies in the plethora of unnamed didactic historical paintings and codices about whose dates and creators the reader is left to wonder. Only an audience adept in Mexican colonial art history could have the ability to delineate and decipher such artworks. It is also the case that the team of, ophthalmologists, physicians, chemists, and mathematicians, whose work is coupled with high quality research, fails to take into account important academic figures in the field of art history. Art history specialists in Latin colonial art such as Tom Cummins, Clara Baragellini, or Jeanette Favot Peterson, who wrote *Visualizing Guadalupe: from Black Madonna to Queen of the Americas*, are not mentioned or referred to. In particular Peterson's book should

have been referenced because it has a comprehensive analysis on multiple European models that inspired the Guadalupe and the replicas that followed suit, and it supplies a methodology on blackness and its sacredness. Grzegorz Górny and Rosikoń Janusz seem to have utilized only one European reference, that of the Guadalupe de Extremadura, to the detriment of the subject.

The overall tone of the work evokes patronage and adoration of Guadalupe, as evidenced by the many religious forms of reference included, something not altogether unexpected from a work published by the religiously focused Ignatius Press. But the essentialist evidences, academic references, and use of primary resources credit this work as academic, albeit with a hint of Catholic bias. Nevertheless, the reader is left with a comprehensive and readable documentary containing innumerable images that track the Guadalupe's historical, political, and supernatural qualities across time.