

The Origins of the Guadalupe Tradition in Mexico

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Historical writings on Our Lady of Guadalupe, the most revered sacred figure indigenous to the Western Hemisphere, focus largely on her cult's origins. Scholars disagree on whether reports of Guadalupe's 1531 appearances to the indigenous neophyte Juan Diego initiated devotion to her or whether the apparition tradition is a later invention that provided a mythical origin for an already existing image and devotion. This essay critiques the standard argument against a foundational apparition tradition as exemplified in the work of Stafford Poole. The reevaluation sheds light on the scope of early indigenous devotion and the genesis of belief in the apparitions.

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Devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe has evolved for nearly five centuries into a deeply rooted, multifaceted tradition. The Guadalupe basilica in Mexico City is the most visited pilgrimage site on the American continent. After Jesus of Nazareth, her image is the most reproduced sacred icon in the Western Hemisphere. Today Guadalupe appears among an increasingly diverse array of peoples, places, and religious groups. The growing Protestant engagement of Guadalupe encompasses a number of congregations that celebrate her December 12 feast, as well as theological investigations that span various denominational perspectives.¹ Catholic basilicas and shrines dedicated to Guadalupe are as far south as Santa Fe in Argentina and as far north as Johnstown on Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia.

Historically the rising prominence of Guadalupe prompted debates about the origins of such a significant religious phenomenon. These dis-

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1. Maxwell Johnson, *The Virgin of Guadalupe: Theological Reflections of an Anglo-Lutheran Liturgist* (Lanham, MD, 2002); Johnson, ed., *American Magnificat: Protestants on Mary of Guadalupe* (Collegeville, MN, 2010).

putes have recurred for more than two centuries. No one doubts that a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe on the hill of Tepeyac in present-day Mexico City has been active since at least the mid-sixteenth century. But disagreement exists on whether the chapel or belief in Guadalupe's reported apparitions to the indigenous neophyte Juan Diego came first. In other words, did reports of Juan Diego's encounters with Guadalupe and her miraculous appearance on his *tilma* (cloak) initiate the chapel and its devotion, or is the apparition narrative a later invention that provided a mythical origin for an already existing image and pious tradition?

Those who hold the latter position note the lapse of more than a century between the standard 1531 date given for the apparitions and the first published accounts on the apparitions. They also point out the lack of documentation about the apparitions and about claims of the miraculous origins of the Guadalupe image among prominent Catholic leaders in sixteenth-century New Spain, including the complete absence of Guadalupe references in the known writings of Juan de Zumárraga, the bishop to whom Juan Diego reportedly transmitted Guadalupe's messages. Conversely, those who uphold the foundational status of the apparition tradition argue that the Spaniards' disdain for the allegedly inferior native people accounts for the lengthy delay before an official inquiry recorded indigenous testimony about Guadalupe and Juan Diego. They further contend there is early written documentation for the apparitions such as a recently discovered codex that Jesuit priest Xavier Escalada argues is Juan Diego's 1548 death certificate depicting his encounter with Guadalupe. The most important document is the Nahuatl-language *Nican mopobua* (a title derived from the document's first words, "here is recounted") apparition account. First published in 1649, the document poses questions for scholars regarding the date when it was composed and thus has implications for the origins of the Guadalupe tradition. The heart of the debate, therefore, is disagreement about the validity of recorded oral testimony; the viability of historical arguments from silence; and especially the authenticity, authorship, determination of proper dates, and significance of critical primary sources, particularly the *Nican mopobua* itself.²

2. Xavier Noguez, *Documentos guadalupanos: Un estudio sobre las fuentes de información tempranas en torno a las marionetas en el Tepeyac* (Mexico City, 1993); Stafford Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531–1797* (Tucson, 1995); Xavier Escalada, *Enciclopedia guadalupana. Apéndice códice 1548. Estudio científico de su autenticidad* (México, 1997); Fidel González Fernández, Eduardo Chávez Sánchez, and José Luis Guerrero Rosado, *El encuentro de la Virgen de Guadalupe y Juan Diego* (1999; 4th ed., Mexico City, 2001).

Major publications of recent decades have collectively extended Guadalupan historical studies beyond the origin debates to analyses of the evolution and influence of the Guadalupe tradition in the centuries since its inception. Jacques Lafaye, an acclaimed Latin American historian at the Sorbonne, authored one of the most renowned twentieth-century books on Guadalupe: *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531–1813*. Examining a broad range of historical actors and forces, Lafaye sought to uncover the role of myth and symbol in the rise of Mexican national consciousness. David Brading's *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe, Image and Tradition across Five Centuries* presents the first intellectual history that spans the breadth of the Guadalupe tradition. Scholars such as William B. Taylor have examined the evolution of devotion to Guadalupe during Mexico's colonial period and beyond. Other historical and ethnographic studies have examined the development and significance of Guadalupan devotion in the United States. These works of Taylor and his colleagues provide important insights for addressing a historical question that has been largely ignored in Guadalupan studies: given the plentiful miraculous images of Christ, Mary, and the saints that dotted the sacred landscape of New Spain, how did the Guadalupe cult arise above all others and grow from a local devotion into a regional, national, and international phenomenon?³

Yet by no means has this groundbreaking research supplanted debates about the origins of the Guadalupe tradition, which were most recently revisited among scholars and in numerous media reports during the years leading up to the 2002 canonization of Juan Diego. Indeed, whereas Spanish-language treatises have long engaged in the controversy, Stafford Poole expanded knowledge of these debates through his *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531–1797*, the first

3. Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531–1813*, trans. Benjamin Keen (Chicago, 1976); D. A. Brading, *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe, Image and Tradition across Five Centuries* (Cambridge, UK, 2001); William B. Taylor, "The Virgin of Guadalupe in New Spain: An Inquiry into the Social History of Marian Devotion," *American Ethnologist*, 14 (1987), 9–33; Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Stanford, 1996), pp. 277–300; Taylor, *Shrines and Miraculous Images: Religious Life in Mexico before the Reforma* (Albuquerque, 2010); Deidre Sklar, *Dancing with the Virgin: Body and Faith in the Fiesta of Tortugas, New Mexico* (Berkeley, 2001); Timothy Matovina, *Guadalupe and Her Faithful: Latino Catholics in San Antonio, from Colonial Origins to the Present* (Baltimore, 2005); Alyshia Gálvez, *Guadalupe in New York: Devotion and the Struggle for Citizenship Rights among Mexican Immigrants* (New York, 2010); Elaine A. Peña, *Performing Piety: Making Space Sacred with the Virgin of Guadalupe* (Berkeley, 2011).

book-length work published in English focused on this topic. Subsequently Poole published another volume, *The Guadalupan Controversies in Mexico*, which examines the history of the apparition debate from the Spanish colonial era to Juan Diego's canonization. Poole meticulously assesses the documentary evidence—more accurately, what he deems the lack of documentary evidence—and concludes there is no “objective historical basis” for the tradition of Guadalupe's appearances to Juan Diego, which he posits was invented more than a century after their alleged occurrence. In his initial study he opined, “it is possible that an Indian named Juan Diego actually existed and somehow became the protagonist of the [apparition] legend,” whereas in the latter work he even contends that “Juan Diego is a pious fiction, a figure out of literature who has no more historic reality than Captain Ahab or Sherlock Holmes.”⁴

Thanks to Poole's work, these historicity debates are well known to English-language readers. Consistent with the arguments of his Spanish-language counterparts, his work is largely a critique of the claim that there is early documentation for the apparition tradition. He systematically contests the evidence presented by opponents; they, in turn, contend that the evidence discounted by Poole and others is well founded. Given the long-standing stalemate between these two camps, this essay addresses the question in an alternative manner. Presupposing as a point of departure Poole's conclusions about the dating and authorship of primary sources, what does a critical reexamination of his sources reveal? Thus this essay presents a critique of Poole as an exemplar of those who have proposed the line of argument he explicates, but based solely on a reassessment of the documents accepted as valid by Poole himself. Such an approach reveals weaknesses in the position of those who argue against early belief in an apparition associated with the Guadalupe cult. More important, it helps clarify at least three important components of the first century of the Guadalupe tradition: the way that the early history of the devotion affects arguments from silence, the participation of indigenous devotees, and the significance of the first published account of the apparitions. Collectively, the reevaluation of these three components sheds light both on the early evolution of Guadalupan devotion and on the origins of the tradition about Guadalupe's appearances to Juan Diego.

4. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 224–25; Poole, *The Guadalupan Controversies in Mexico* (Stanford, 2006), p. 202.

Arguments from Silence and a Century of *Local Devotion*

Poole states that his work accomplishes a “fine-tuning of the idea of an argument from silence” that dates back to Juan Bautista Muñoz, the Spanish monarch’s official historian of the Indies. As Poole notes, Muñoz’s 1794 address to the Royal Academy of History in Madrid was “the first known public attack on the historicity of the apparitions” and established “a line of argumentation that would endure to the present day.”⁵ Like his predecessors, Poole documents sixteenth-century sources that have no reference to the Guadalupe apparition tradition such as the decrees of the 1555 First Mexican Provincial Council, the writings of the famous Dominican defender of the Indians Bartolomé de las Casas and those of renowned Franciscan missionary Pedro de Gante, and the works of Franciscan chronicler of Nahuatl history and culture Bernardino de Sahagún. The most unexpected of these documentary silences is in the extant primary sources of Zumárraga. Poole acknowledges that “the absence of references [to Guadalupe] in his [Zumárraga’s] correspondence may be attributable, as is often asserted, to the fact that not all of it has survived.” But Poole adds that, given Zumárraga’s supposed foundational role in the Guadalupe event and devotion, the inattention to Guadalupe in primary sources such as his will is puzzling, particularly since various Spanish Catholic wills from the sixteenth century include bequests for Masses dedicated to a special celestial patron.⁶

A further element of this argument involves assessing documents indisputably from sixteenth-century sources that proponents of an early apparition tradition have proposed as evidence, such as various indigenous chronicles that retrospectively mention a Guadalupan appearance at Tepeyac during the mid-1550s. Typical of these brief references, annalist Juan Bautista notes, “In the year 1555: at that time Saint Mary of Guadalupe appeared there on Tepeyacac.” Similarly, Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin wrote, “12 Flint the year 1556. And likewise in this year was when our precious mother Saint Mary of Guadalupe appeared at Tepeyacac.” Poole argues that such references are “fraught with difficulties” in that they cite a date twenty-five years after the traditional date for the apparitions, do not describe any par-

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 172–73; Juan Bautista Muñoz, “Memoria sobre las apariciones y el culto de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe,” *Memorias de la Academia de la Historia*, 5.10–12 (1817), repr. in *Testimonios históricos Guadalupanos*, ed. Ernesto de la Torre Villar and Ramiro Navarro de Anda (Mexico City, 1982), pp. 689–701.

6. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 35–36, 59, 64–65, 77–81, 83.

ticularities of an apparition story, and conceivably could refer to the placement of the Guadalupe image in the shrine at Tepeyac rather than an apparition. He concludes that collectively these sources “seem to agree in assigning some sort of apparition, or positioning of the image in the chapel, to the years 1555 to 1556,” but they are too inconclusive—in short, too “silent” in their narrative detail—to establish an early apparition tradition akin to the account related in the *Nican mopobua*.⁷

Yet another element of the argument from silence is the sparse sixteenth-century references to the Guadalupe image itself. In a controversial 1556 sermon (which is treated more fully below) Franciscan provincial Francisco de Bustamante reportedly attributed the Guadalupe image at Tepeyac to an indigenous painter, although Poole avers that “his assertion is weakened by the failure of any other sources to substantiate it.” Subsequent sources allude to a silver and copper Marian statue that Alonso de Villaseca donated to the Guadalupe *ermita* (literally “hermitage” or chapel) in 1566, which devotees apparently venerated there for more than a century until it was used to make candlesticks. In 1606 Spanish-born Baltasar de Echave Orio, who was widely regarded as the most prestigious artist in New Spain at the time, created the first known dated painting that copies the revered Guadalupe image.⁸

Poole logically concludes that by the time Echave Orio made his painting, devotees had enshrined at Tepeyac the Guadalupe image as it is now known. However, he fails to mention that the Echave Orio painting also depicts the cloth on which the revered image appears, a detail that has led other historians to infer that, for the artist and the (now unknown) person who commissioned his painting, “the cloth were as much the object of veneration as the image.” Poole notes that the lack of previous painted copies or documentary allusions to a canvas Guadalupe image—save for the Bustamante reference—“has led to speculation that the original image in the *ermita* was a statue, not a painting.” Consistent with this hypothesis, he surmises that the later melting down of the statue donated by Villaseca “is

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 50–58, here pp. 51–52, 58. Drawing on sources similar to those Poole cites, Edmundo O’Gorman proffers the most comprehensive argument for a mid-1550s genesis of the Guadalupe tradition at Tepeyac, although, like Poole, he does not contend that a series of reported apparitions initiated the tradition. Instead, O’Gorman asserts that Alonso de Montúfar, the second archbishop of Mexico City, played a leading role in the creation and placement of the Guadalupe image at Tepeyac. Edmundo O’Gorman, *Destierro de sombras: Luz en el origen de la imagen y culto de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe del Tepeyac* (Mexico City, 1986).

8. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 51–52, 58–64, 215–16.

credible only if it had come to be considered a rival to the present image.” However, it is equally plausible to infer that, like many other shrines, the Guadalupe sanctuary had multiple sacred images and eventually the statue became so secondary that it could be eliminated with seemingly little resistance. In any event, Poole avows there is a lack of evidence for the traditional claim that the Guadalupe image on Juan Diego’s tilma was the primary object of veneration from the outset of Guadalupan devotion at Tepeyac.⁹

Intentionally or not, Poole offers some counterevidence to the argument from silence he expounds. He notes, for example, that the diary of canon Gregorio Martín de Guijo encompassing Mexico City events from 1648 to 1664 contains “no mention of the apparitions.” Yet Poole also observes that the diary fails to mention the first published apparition accounts, those of priests Miguel Sánchez and Luis Laso de la Vega in their respective books of 1648 and 1649. Given that these volumes were published in Mexico City and circulated an apparition narrative within the ecclesiastical circles in which Guijo moved, the fact that his diary alludes to neither is clearly not a documentary silence that indicates the books or their apparition narratives did not exist. In other instances Poole’s logic seems inconsistent, as when he explicates the documentary silence of the Franciscan missionary Toribio de Benavente, also known as Motolinía (the poor one). Poole hypothesizes that the absence of references to Guadalupe in Motolinía’s writings could stem intentionally from a “positive hostility to the shrine and devotion at Guadalupe” among the early Franciscans in New Spain, as is evident in the records of Bustamante and Sahagún, two friars who spoke of Guadalupan devotion in a negative light. But Poole does not consider how such hostility may have influenced other Franciscans such as Pedro de Gante, whose writings do not refer to Guadalupe. Nor does he explicate how he can generalize about sixteenth-century Franciscan response to Guadalupan devotion based solely on the negative reactions of two friars, given that Franciscan attitudes toward the devotion easily could have varied among members of different community houses or even according to the training and inclinations of individual missionaries.¹⁰

The greatest weakness in the Guadalupan argument from silence is the failure to acknowledge the implications of an assertion about the

9. Taylor, *Shrines and Miraculous Images*, p. 111; Jeanette Favrot Peterson, “Canonizing a Cult: A Wonder-Working Guadalupe in the Seventeenth Century,” in *Religion in New Spain*, ed. Susan Schroeder and Stafford Poole (Albuquerque, 2007), pp. 125–56, here pp. 129–31; Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, p. 52.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 127.

Guadalupe tradition that does have considerable documentary evidence. During its first century, Guadalupean devotion was still largely a *local* affair. Poole contends that “an argument from silence is not usually persuasive in itself, but it is very strong when the sources would logically be expected to say something.” Consequently, arguments from silence are weakened to the degree that an event or tradition is less prominent during a particular source’s lifetime and therefore less likely to be mentioned in their written records. The *Nican mopohua*, which for devotees has the status of a foundational text, states that news of Guadalupe’s apparitions attracted people from “everywhere” who came “to see and marvel at her precious image.” Presumably such an immediate and widespread response would have merited comment in the writings of Zumárraga and his sixteenth-century contemporaries. But in fact, scholarship on the historical evolution of Guadalupean devotion, particularly the influential work of Taylor, demonstrates a more measured growth. These studies document the gradual spread of Guadalupe paintings, medals, sermons, *cofradías* (confraternities or pious societies), and feast-day celebrations, as well as the incremental increase of Guadalupe as a chosen name for places, children, shrines, and churches. The construction of the first church edifice dedicated to Guadalupe beyond the vicinity of Tepeyac, for example, did not occur until 1654 in San Luis Potosí (approximately 250 miles north of Mexico City). Over the previous century Guadalupean devotion was largely confined to the immediate vicinity of Mexico City, and even there it was but one among many pious invocations and practices.¹¹

The initially limited geographic range of Guadalupean devotion is by no means surprising. Religious traditions that emerged in the Spanish colonial period tended to be locally focused, a pattern that enhanced the probability their origins would be somewhat shrouded in mystery. For example, Jennifer Hughes’s recent study of the Cristo Aparecido (Christ Appeared), a graphic carved image of the crucified Christ enshrined in the Mexican village of Totolapan, narrates the emergence of a local devotion to the Cristo after its initial “appearance” in 1543 when a mysterious Indian visitor presented it to Augustinian friar Antonio de Roa. Similarly, María Elena Díaz

11. *Ibid.*, p. 219; Lisa Sousa, Stafford Poole, and James Lockhart, ed. and trans., *The Story of Guadalupe: Luis Laso de la Vega's Huei tlamahuiçoltica of 1649* (Stanford, 1998), p. 89; Taylor, “Virgin of Guadalupe in New Spain”; Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred*, pp. 277–300; Taylor, *Shrines and Miraculous Images*, esp. part II, “Our Lady of Guadalupe: Toward a History of Devotion”; Jorge E. Traslosheros H., “The Construction of the First Shrine and Sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe in San Luis Potosí, 1654–1664,” *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*, 5, no. 1 (1997), 7–19.

recounts the early genesis of devotion to Our Lady of Charity, Cuba's national patroness, among seventeenth-century slaves in the mining settlement of El Cobre. Juan Moreno was reportedly one of three residents who found the image with the inscription "I am the Virgin of Charity" in the Bay of Nipe around 1612, a childhood experience to which he gave documented testimony some seventy-five years later when ecclesiastical officials sought further information on this communal tradition in El Cobre. The local character of such traditions in the New World reflected established patterns of religious life on the Iberian Peninsula, as William A. Christian has shown in his widely cited studies of religion in late-medieval and Renaissance Spain. Christian summarizes one mid-seventeenth-century inventory that described 182 Marian shrines in Catalonia alone. Apparition narratives tended to be transmitted through local oral traditions such as one reported apparition "in a Segovian village around 1490 [that] was quite fresh when recounted to an ecclesiastical investigator over 120 years later." Christian's conclusion that such apparitions were "predominantly rural events" with a circumscribed sphere of influence is consistent with analyses of religious phenomena in the Spanish colonies of the New World.¹²

Poole agrees that Guadalupan devotion evolved gradually. Contrary to the common presupposition signaled in the *Nican mopohua*, Poole concludes that "there is no evidence of mass conversions of the Indians after 1531, only that some missionaries, especially Franciscans, baptized in large numbers after rudimentary instruction." He further notes that Nuestra Señora de los Remedios (Our Lady of Remedies), the Spanish Virgin whose image reportedly assisted Hernán Cortés and his men in the conquest of Mexico and who then had her own sanctuary outside Mexico City, enjoyed precedence over Guadalupe, at least in the city. Civil and ecclesiastical records pertaining to a deadly 1576 *matlazahuatl* (typhus or typhoid fever) epidemic state that the devout in Mexico City and the environs called on Remedios for protection, but those same sources provide "no evidence of a recourse to Guadalupe during that epidemic." Remedios "was given credit for stopping the epidemic" as well as for ending a drought two decades later—an occasion when, once again, the Mexico City populace apparently did not collectively invoke Guadalupe in its hour of need.¹³

12. Jennifer Schepher Hughes, *Biography of a Mexican Crucifix: Lived Religion and Local Faith from the Conquest to the Present* (New York, 2010); María Elena Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre: Negotiating Freedom in Colonial Cuba, 1670–1780* (Stanford, 2000); William A. Christian, *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Princeton, 1981), pp. 4, 15–16; Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton, 1981).

13. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 68, 89, 98, 216–17.

Devotees propagated the Guadalupe cult through their patronage of new facilities at Tepeyac. Their efforts reached a high point with the completion and 1622 dedication of a more imposing Guadalupe shrine built in proximity to the original chapel constructed on the site. Yet even as the new shrine was under construction, the history of the image of Our Lady of los Remedios in Mexico by Mercedarian friar Luis de Cisneros was published posthumously in Mexico City. Although Cisneros stated that Guadalupe was the oldest Marian sanctuary in New Spain, he also enumerated the various Marian images that received significant veneration. Moreover, given his primary focus on Remedios, his work recounted her many favors to her devotees such as a heavy rain in 1616 that occurred in Mexico City following a citywide invocation of her intercession to end a drought. Cisneros's book reflected the ongoing development of multiple pious traditions among New Spain devotees and what some analysts have exaggeratingly deemed a pitched rivalry between the Spanish Remedios and the Mexican Guadalupe. The relatively inconsistent flow of financial contributions to the Guadalupe shrine throughout the remaining decades of the seventeenth century further reveals that Guadalupe's ascent to prominence was still not complete.¹⁴

Even when the Guadalupe image was brought from Tepeyac to the Mexico City cathedral to combat the devastating floods of 1629 to 1634—an occasion that scholars like Lafaye assert was pivotal in Guadalupe's rise to eminence over other celestial patrons of the city—Guadalupe's "triumph" over other holy images invoked during this disaster was by no means absolute. Poole observes that the novena to Guadalupe at the cathedral did not bring immediate relief from the flood. He further states that "not all were in agreement that the Virgin of Guadalupe deserved credit for ending the flood," citing sources that at least partially attributed the celestial aid received to a Marian invocation other than Guadalupe or to saints like St. Dominic or St. Catherine. Poole concludes that, for at least a century after the traditional 1531 date for the Guadalupe apparitions, "Remedios was more frequently invoked" by local devotees than Guadalupe, as they typically called on Remedios for help with droughts and associated Guadalupe with help against the less frequent occurrence of floods.¹⁵

14. Luis de Cisneros, *Historia del principio y origen, progresos venidas a México y milagros de la santa imagen de Nuestra Señora de los Remedios* (Mexico, 1621); Taylor, *Shrines and Miraculous Images*, pp. 103–10, 139–60." For an overview of the contents of Cisneros's book, see Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*, pp. 47–53.

15. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 97–98, 163, 218; Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe*, p. 254.

Yet throughout his analysis, Poole never makes an explicit connection between the still developing and decidedly *local* character of the Guadalupe tradition during the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries and his premise that arguments from silence are “very strong when the sources would logically be expected to say something.” On the contrary, despite his recognition that Guadalupe was still one among a number of evolving devotions in the Mexico City vicinity, Poole consistently presumes that historians should expect to find ample documentary evidence about Guadalupe from the sixteenth century onward if it is indeed “the foremost religious event of Mexican history.”¹⁶ Since Poole and other scholars argue persuasively that the significance of Guadalupe for Mexican history was still in its genesis during the first century of devotion to her, it is inconsistent to expect that chroniclers and noted figures of the period would necessarily have written about her. In short, although Poole disagrees with the claim that Guadalupe had a notable impact throughout New Spain immediately after 1531, he—in presenting his argument about the silence of those he states inexplicably left no documentary mention of Guadalupe—effectively accepts this claim about her impact at face value. Although this inconsistency does not completely invalidate Poole’s argument, the extent to which he is correct about the gradual increase of a local devotion undermines his argument from silence among those he asserts historians should reasonably expect to have spoken.

Indigenous Devotion

Poole presents a second argument from silence—albeit implicitly—in his assessment of the early development of Guadalupan devotion among the native peoples. He contends they participated sparingly in what was largely a faith expression among Spaniards. According to Poole, “it was not until the eighteenth century that the Indians began to seek refuge under the shadow of the Virgin of Tepeyac.”¹⁷ This claim is consistent with Poole’s primary purpose of contesting the foundational role of the apparitions to Juan Diego for the Guadalupe tradition, since presumably a religious event involving an indigenous protagonist would have incited devotion among his fellow natives.

Yet in his analysis Poole fails to consider that, since elite societal members typically produce the vast majority of available documents, the activities

16. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 75, 219.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

and significance of marginalized groups tend to receive comparatively less attention. Therefore the relatively scarcer mention of early indigenous devotion conceivably says as much about the perspective of those who produced the sources as it does about the actual scope of the devotion. Moreover, in assessing written records the potential biases of their authors must be taken into account, particularly in cases like that of New Spain in which observations about the native peoples largely come from members of the conquering group. Of course, as in arguments from silence caution is needed in ascertaining what an historian can reasonably infer from a critical analysis of primary documents, the context in which they were constructed, and the persons who produced them. A reexamination of Poole's sources from this perspective leads to a different conclusion about early indigenous involvement in the devotion than the one he expounds.

Depositions from a 1556 investigation into a controversial oration are the first uncontested primary sources that illuminate devotion to Guadalupe. Fray Francisco de Bustamante's sermon on the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary sharply criticized Mexico City archbishop Alonso de Montúfar for promoting Guadalupan devotion. No natives were included among the nine witnesses who testified in the subsequent inquiry that Archbishop Montúfar ordered, since Bustamante preached his sermon to the viceroy and other dignitaries in the chapel of a Franciscan cloister. Nonetheless, Bustamante reportedly avowed that "one of the most pernicious things that anyone could sustain against the proper Christianity of the natives was the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe" and called on the viceroy and other royal officials present in the congregation to "remedy this great evil." He accused the archbishop of being "very deceived" in thinking that the indigenous were not particularly devoted to "Our Lady," warning of the danger that natives would abandon or waver in the Christian faith if their pleas to her for miracles went unanswered. A lawyer related that he had seen both Spaniards and native peoples enter the Guadalupe chapel "with great devotion, many of them [proceeding] on their knees from the door to the altar where the blessed image of Our Lady of Guadalupe is located." The final witness commented that "all kinds of people, noble citizens and Indians" frequented the Guadalupe chapel, although some natives had grown lukewarm in their devotion at the command of the Franciscans. He added, however, that Bustamante's sermon "had not stopped the devotion, but rather it had increased even more" in the weeks following his oration.¹⁸

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 58–64. Cited quotations are from "Información por el sermón de 1556," repr. in de la Torre Villar and Navarro de Anda, eds., *Testimonios históricos*, pp. 36–72, here pp. 44, 58, 71.

Bustamante's reticence about Guadalupean devotion was echoed in the observations of his fellow Franciscan, Bernardino de Sahagún. He decried Guadalupean veneration, stating it disguised the "idolatry" of indigenous devotees who in precolumbian times "had a temple dedicated to the mother of the gods, whom they called Tonantzin" on the hill of Tepeyac, the same site as the Guadalupe chapel. Thus he alleged that the natives continued to worship Tonantzin in the image of Guadalupe. Poole contests the claim that there was a shrine and cult to a mother goddess at Tepeyac in the precolumbian era, citing Louise Burkhart's argument that Tonantzin was not a proper name but a common noun denoting "our mother" used to address the Virgin Mary under various titles beginning in the sixteenth century. Whether Poole is correct or not, the protestations of Sahagún and Bustamante reveal that at least some missionaries feared Guadalupean devotion was sufficiently prevalent among the native peoples to endanger Christian missionary endeavors. Conversely, like Montúfar, other Catholic leaders extolled the good influence of Guadalupean devotion among the natives, as in 1576 when Mexico City archbishop Pedro Moya de Contreras and Jesuit Superior General Everard Mercurian requested that Pope Gregory XIII extend a plenary indulgence to those who visited and prayed at the Guadalupe chapel. The official decree for the indulgence noted that the indigenous people's "eminent devotion" to Guadalupe had induced the conversion of numerous natives "to faith in Christ."¹⁹

Like primary documents that provide glimpses of early Spanish devotion to Guadalupe, various sources reveal indigenous veneration. Sahagún's protestation of the Guadalupe cult included his testimony about substantial indigenous devotion, although his claims are probably exaggerated given his intent to thwart what he perceived as dangerous native enthusiasm. The 1563 will of Francisco Verdugo Quetzalmamalitzin, a Nahuatl lord from Teotihuacan (about thirty miles from Mexico City), bequeathed four pesos so the priest assigned to the Guadalupe chapel would offer Masses on his behalf after his death. His will also stated that "to Our Lady the Blessed Virgin Mary, queen of heaven, I ask that she be my advocate

19. Bernardino de Sahagún, "Sobre supersticiones," appendix to *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, book XI (1576), repr. in de la Torre Villar and Navarro de Anda, eds., *Testimonios históricos*, pp. 142–44; Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 76–79, 92–93; Louise M. Burkhart, "The Cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico," in *South and Meso-American Native Spirituality: From the Cult of the Feathered Serpent to the Theology of Liberation*, ed. Gary H. Gossen in collaboration with Miguel León-Portilla (New York, 1993), pp. 207–09; Gregory XIII, *Ut deiparae semper virginis*, March 2, 1576, repr. in González Fernández, Chávez Sánchez, and Guerrero Rosado, *El encuentro de la Virgen de Guadalupe y Juan Diego*, pp. 557–60.

before her precious son, the redeemer of the world.” An entry in Indian official Juan Bautista’s chronicle of events described a 1566 procession to Tepeyac in which Spanish dignitaries “and all of us Indians” participated. An anonymous author’s 1634 poem recounted the return of the Guadalupe image from Mexico City where she was brought to intercede during the floods of 1629–34. The poet attested that the general populace processed Guadalupe part of the way back to Tepeyac, whereas the following day indigenous devotees held a separate procession to escort her image the rest of the way. Other sources reveal that by the early-seventeenth century, native peoples and Spaniards each conducted their own fiesta seasons at Tepeyac.²⁰

As is typically the case with sacred sites and images, the growth of Guadalupe’s fame among both indigenous and Spanish devotees is linked to testimonies of miracles and favors granted through her intercession. Three primary sources present the earliest composite records of Guadalupe’s reported interventions on behalf of her faithful, most of them involving cures from various afflictions. Samuel Stradanus, a Flemish artist and New Spain resident, made an engraving (c. 1613) that depicts the Guadalupe image surrounded by eight scenes of miracles devotees attributed to her, apparently drawn from ex-votos enshrined by these supplicants at the Guadalupe chapel. These eight scenes and six other miracles are presented in narrative form in the *Nican motecpana* (“here is an ordered account”), first published in Laso de la Vega’s 1649 Nahuatl-language work *Huei tlamahuicōltica* (“By a Great Miracle”). Sánchez’s book published the previous year, *Imagen de la Virgen María*, recounts seven miracles attributed to Guadalupe; six of these are also narrated in the *Nican motecpana*, and three are depicted in the Stradanus engraving.²¹

20. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 51, 78, 87; Sahagún, “Sobre supersticiones”; Francisco Verdugo Quetzalmamalitzin, *Testamento* (Will), April 2, 1563, repr. in González Fernández, Chávez Sánchez, and Guerrero Rosado, *El encuentro de la Virgen de Guadalupe y Juan Diego*, pp. 363–64; Juan Bautista, *Anales*, repr. in *ibid.*, pp. 325–26; Martinus Cawley, *Anthology of Early Guadalupean Literature* (Lafayette, OR, 1984), pp. 79–80; Taylor, *Shrines and Miraculous Images*, p. 125.

21. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 118–24; Sousa, Poole, and Lockhart, ed. and trans., *Story of Guadalupe*, pp. 92–115; Miguel Sánchez, *Imagen de la Virgen María* . . . (Mexico City, 1648), repr. in de la Torre Villar and Navarro de Anda, eds., *Testimonios históricos*, pp. 152–267, Guadalupean miracles recounted on pp. 245–55. The Stradanus engraving is reprinted in Jaime Cuadriello, Carmen de Monserrat Robledo Galván, and Beatriz Berndt León Mariscal, *La Reina de las Américas: Works of Art from the Museum of the Basílica de Guadalupe* (Chicago, 1996), p. 106. The most detailed treatment of the Stradanus engraving is Peterson, “Canonizing a Cult,” pp. 125–56.

Poole points out that, in the Stradanus engraving, “all the persons involved were Spaniards; no miracle benefits an Indian.” However, although he also mentions that Archbishop Juan Pérez de la Serna of Mexico City commissioned the Stradanus engraving and its prints to solicit donations for a new church edifice at Tepeyac, he draws no connection between the fund-raising purpose of the engraving and its focus on miraculous occurrences among Spanish devotees. It is at least as plausible to conclude that the exclusive depiction of Spaniards reflects a desire to attract potential donors as it is to deduce that these depictions indicate the ethnic composition of Guadalupean devotees. Similarly, although Poole notes that “Laso de la Vega’s few commentaries [on the miracle narratives] tended to stress the Virgin Mary’s love and concern for the Indians,” he also observes that “the majority of the miracles narrated by Sánchez and Laso de la Vega involve Spaniards, not Indians.” But he does not point out that, of the four incidents narrated by Sánchez that Stradanus did not depict, three exclusively involve native peoples as beneficiaries of Guadalupe’s care, and the fourth concerns the 1629–34 flood in Mexico City, when Guadalupe aided residents of all social backgrounds. In Laso de la Vega’s work, four of the six incidents not depicted in Stradanus involve indigenous devotees, as might be expected from a book that is functionally a manual for clergy working among native communities. One “miracle” even recounted Guadalupe’s defense of natives against the decrees of the Spanish viceroy—she reportedly convinced the official to rescind his mandate to remove the Franciscans from their community at Teotihuacan and to desist from punishing the natives there who had opposed his order. Seen in this light, the two earliest narrative collections of Guadalupe miracles actually counteract the Spanish exclusivity of the Stradanus engraving, which their authors apparently used as a source.²²

The first official initiative to gather indigenous testimony about the Guadalupe tradition provides yet further evidence of indigenous devotion. When the cathedral chapter of Mexico City sought papal promulgation of a Guadalupe feast day and proper office for all of New Spain, they con-

22. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 108, 119, 122, 124; Sousa, Poole, and Lockhart, ed. and trans., *The Story of Guadalupe*, p. 111. Poole states that only three of the fourteen incidents recounted in the *Nican motecpana* benefit Indians, but in his own summary he actually presents four, and that number is consistent with the original document. Peterson contends that the Stradanus engraving depicts one miracle that benefits a native—the cure of sacristan Juan Pavón’s son. Although none of the cited primary sources categorize Pavón’s ethnic background, Peterson’s identification of Pavón as a “token” native in an engraving predominantly intended to entice elite patrons is plausible. Peterson, “Canonizing a Cult,” pp. 139, 150, 155n26.

ducted an inquiry into the Guadalupe tradition to bolster their case. The 1665–66 investigation encompassed testimonies from twenty witnesses—twelve Spaniards or *criollos* (the designation in the Spanish caste system for persons of Spanish blood born in the New World) interviewed in Mexico City and eight residents of Cuauhtitlan, the place traditionally considered Juan Diego’s hometown. Seven of the Cuauhtitlan interviewees were indigenous and gave their testimony through a Nahuatl-Spanish interpreter. The other was a *mestizo* (a person of mixed European and Native American ancestry). Although the Sánchez and Laso de la Vega volumes were published before the inquiry and clearly shaped its findings, the witnesses encompassed a number of elderly informants who had a much longer lived experience of Guadalupan devotion than these two clergy authors. Nonetheless, caution must be exercised in assessing the value of the testimonies. As Poole observes, “those who spearheaded the inquiry were enthusiastic advocates of the devotion” and “the questions asked were very leading and contained a synopsis of the entire apparition account, which the witnesses were asked to verify.” Moreover, interviewees’ “responses generally followed the interrogatory closely, almost verbatim, though with variations in detail, more so among the Indians than among the Spaniards [and *criollos*].” Hence, witnesses were influenced both by the information provided in the questions and by what they thought the officials interviewing them wanted to hear.²³

Consequently, the most useful information from the inquiry is contained in statements that go beyond what the interviewers specified or implied in their questions. In this regard, the fifth of the nine questions is particularly important. It addressed Juan Diego’s life and virtues, a crucial consideration since the holiness of someone who had allegedly experienced an apparition is one sign—or countersign—of the apparition’s validity. All the witnesses affirmed Juan Diego’s integrity; in the words of the question posed, they stated he was indeed a “good Christian.” But the responses of the Mexico City witnesses tended to affirm merely a general tradition of Juan Diego’s virtuous reputation, whereas those of the Cuauhtitlan witnesses offered various further details about Juan Diego not expounded in the questions. Multiple witnesses attest, for example, that an aged picture in a room at the local Cuauhtitlan parish church depicted Juan Diego; his

23. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 128–43, here pp. 138–39. A facsimile and transcription of the official inquiry are in Eduardo Chávez Sánchez, *La Virgen de Guadalupe y Juan Diego en las informaciones jurídicas de 1666* (2nd ed., Mexico City, 2002). For the questions asked in the inquiry, see pp. 149–54.

uncle, Juan Bernardino; and the Franciscan missionary Pedro de Gante. Another distinguishing feature of the Cuauhtitlan respondents, who reportedly ranged in age from seventy-eight to over 100 and were nearly all older than the Mexico City interviewees, was that most of them recounted parents, grandparents, aunts, or neighbors who knew Juan Diego personally and told them about him. Marcos Pacheco recalled his aunt's frequent plea that "God would do to you [and your brothers] what he did to Juan Diego." Echoing an incidence conveyed in the books of Sánchez and Laso de la Vega and mentioned in various interviews from the official inquiry, Gabriel Suárez stated that his parents told him Juan Diego resided and served at the Guadalupe ermita after the apparitions. But he also added a further observation: local natives often visited Juan Diego there "to ask that he intercede for them with the Most Holy Virgin to give them good seasons [harvests] in their maize fields."²⁴

Although Poole does not specify a time frame, he concludes that

the Indian witnesses at the 1665 to 1666 inquiry gave evidence of an incipient cultus: how the Indians sought Juan Diego's intercession for good harvests and how they regarded him as a holy and upright man who led a retired and penitential life at Tepeyac.

Yet arguably the greatest oversight in Poole's assessment of early indigenous ties to Guadalupe is his lack of attention to those who lived near—and presumably cared for—the Guadalupe shrine. Evaluating the observations of Englishman Miles Philips when he passed by Tepeyac in 1573, Poole concludes that "Philips's account described the devotion as being a Spanish rather than an Indian one." But his long quotation from Philips encompasses the remark that "about this Church [the Guadalupe chapel] there is not any town of Spaniards that is inhabited, but certain Indians do dwell there in houses of their own country building." Poole draws a comparable conclusion about comments in an official visitation report of Franciscan houses in New Spain, which was conducted by Alonso Ponce, the order's Commissary General. In Poole's words, the report "emphasized that the devotion at Guadalupe was a Spanish, not an Indian, one." The report itself states that in July 1585, the party passed near Guadalupe, "a small town of Mexican [Nahua] Indians and in it, situated on a hill, an ermita or church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, where the Spaniards of Mexico [City] go to keep vigil and to have novenas." Although this passage

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 152, 166, 178–79.

highlights the devotion of Spaniards who visited the shrine, it equally relates that native peoples were the only ones who actually lived around it. A 1570 report of the chaplain of the shrine, Antonio Freire, stated that about 100 unmarried and 150 married adult Indians lived there, and in the surrounding area there were about thirty or forty slaves and six sheep ranches owned by Spaniards.²⁵

Poole cites these three independent sources, but does not allude to the indigenous population living at Tepeyac, nor inquire as to their significance for developments at the Guadalupe shrine. Moreover, he draws no connection between this indigenous community and the claim of Cuauhtlan witnesses in the 1665–66 inquiry that a native named Juan Diego lived and prayed with his fellow devotees at Tepeyac. The lack of more detailed sixteenth-century records about the native residents around the Guadalupe shrine is not surprising, since Tepeyac was three miles outside the colonial city where ecclesiastical and civil authorities resided, and activities conducted apart from the watchful eye of authorities are less likely to be noticed or commented upon, particularly everyday occurrences among lower status residents. Nonetheless, it is highly unlikely that the residents of Tepeyac did not participate in whatever processions and festivities they were allowed to attend. It is even less likely that they neglected to seek celestial aid from Guadalupe amidst growing reports that she affected “a number of miracles.”²⁶ The fact that, save for the resident chaplain, everyone living near the Guadalupe shrine was of Nahuatl background—according to indigenous testimony that included, for some span of time, the venerable Juan Diego—is yet another element of the evidence for early native involvement in the evolution of the Guadalupe tradition.

Poole’s repeated statements that the Guadalupe cult was “more a Spanish than an Indian devotion in 1556 [the year of the Bustamante sermon and inquiry]” and that there is “no clear evidence of a strong Indian devotion, at least not after 1556”²⁷ fail to account for the indicators of indigenous devotion discernible through analysis of the documentary evidence. His conclusion is based on the more numerous and relatively more elaborate descriptions of Spanish devotion in predominantly Spanish-authored sources. Given the relative scarcity of indigenous-authored sources, however, documents like those of natives Verdugo Quetzalmamal-

25. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 67, 70–71, 88, 224–25.

26. Miles Philips, description of 1573 visit to the Guadalupe shrine at Tepeyac, as cited in *ibid.*, p. 70.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 99.

itzin and Bautista and the subsequent recorded testimony of the Cuauhtlan interviewees suggest the more extensive remarks about Spanish devotion reflect the perceptions of the Spaniards who primarily recorded those observations. Moreover, even the sources produced by Spaniards and other Europeans provide evidence of indigenous devotion, sometimes directly and in other instances only through a critical reading of their contents. Although the magnitude of early indigenous devotion remains an open question, it cannot be answered conclusively through a quantitative assessment of comments in sources largely produced by Spaniards. Poole is correct that indigenous devotion was not widespread. But the same was true of Spanish devotion during the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, which also was largely confined to the immediate environs of Tepeyac and Mexico City. Even in that vicinity, it was not yet the most influential among a wide array of pious traditions. Accordingly, in examining the origins of the Guadalupe tradition, it is important to bear in mind that indigenous devotion evolved simultaneously with that of Spaniards. As Taylor concludes, “it was not primarily an Indian devotion” in the early period, yet in the vicinity of Tepeyac and Mexico City, “clearly there were many Indian devotees of Our Lady of Guadalupe.”²⁸

Sánchez and the Search for Origins

Poole’s conclusions regarding the limited extent of early indigenous devotion and the lack of early documentation for an apparition tradition support his “suspicion that the apparition story, as it is now known, was largely the work of Miguel Sánchez,” who wrote the first published account of the apparitions (*Imagen de la Virgen María*, 1648). Sánchez studied at the Royal and Pontifical University in Mexico City and was respected for his learning and preaching. His assignments as a priest included service as chaplain at the Our Lady of los Remedios sanctuary near Mexico City, but he lived out the last phase of his life at the Guadalupe shrine until his death and burial there in 1674. Poole allows that Sánchez’s “primary source . . . seems to have been some form of oral tradition among the natives.” He even hypothesizes that “the interrogatory of 1665 to 1666 [reveals] the possibility of an unwritten native tradition of an apparition,” and “in all probability the works of Sánchez and Laso de la Vega popularized one version of the native tradition.”²⁹ But Poole contends that, whatever the precise content of this oral tradition (or tradi-

28. Taylor, *Shrines and Miraculous Images*, p. 125.

29. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 150, 223.

tions), Sánchez liberally modified it in his written version. Thus, contrary to the position that the substance of the apparition tradition originated among indigenous converts and Spanish church officials—particularly Juan Diego and Zumárraga—Poole asserts that Sánchez was not only the first published author but also the primary architect of the apparition narrative and of the claim for its foundational status in Guadalupe devotion. Sánchez had an undeniably pivotal influence on the Guadalupe tradition; however, Poole's assessment of his contribution and its relation to the origins of the tradition require critical scrutiny.

Readings of *Imagen de la Virgen María* have encompassed positivist condemnations for Sánchez's lack of historical documentation and laudatory praise for his defense of pious tradition. The ambiguous statement about historical sources in the opening pages of Sánchez's book only serves to exacerbate debate about the significance of his work for the Guadalupe apparition tradition:

With determination, eagerness, and diligence I looked for documents and writings that dealt with the holy image and its miracle. I did not find them, although I went through the archives where they could have been kept. I learned that through the accident of time and events those that there were had been lost. I appealed to the providential curiosity of the elderly, in which I found some sufficient for the truth. Not content I examined them in all their circumstances, now confronting the chronicles of the conquest, now gathering information from the oldest and most trustworthy persons of the city, now looking for those who were said to have been the original owners of these papers. And I admit that even if everything would have been lacking to me, I would not have desisted from my purpose, when I had on my side the common, grave, and venerated law of tradition, ancient, uniform, and general about the miracle.

Various Guadalupan writers have bemoaned Sánchez's failure to cite clearly sources such as José Patricio Fernández de Uribe, who stated in an eighteenth-century book on Guadalupe that "this respectable author [Sánchez] would have done a great service to posterity had he left us with a precise record of the documents used in his volume." Poole echoes such laments in his statement that "Sánchez is maddeningly vague when referring to his sources."³⁰

30. *Ibid.*, p. 102; Sánchez, *Imagen de la Virgen María*, p. 158; José Patricio Fernández de Uribe, *Disertación histórica . . .* (Mexico City, 1801), p. 71, as cited in de la Torre Villar and Navarro de Anda, eds., *Testimonios históricos*, p. 1158.

Art historian Francisco de la Maza opened a new chapter in the interpretation of Sánchez's work, if not in the understanding of the Guadalupe tradition itself, with the publication of his *El guadalupanismo mexicano* (1953). His fascination with New Spain's baroque period and his sympathetic reading of Sánchez and subsequent Guadalupean writers fashioned his bold new thesis—the energetic promotion of Guadalupean devotion was rooted in the intrinsic association of patriotism and religious piety, particularly among clergy like Sánchez who were *criollo* natives of New Spain. Lafaye expanded on de la Maza's thesis, positing that a central theme in Sánchez's work is his *criollo* claim of New Spain's divine election. He concludes that Sánchez is

the true founder of the Mexican *patria*, for on the exegetic bases which he constructed in the mid-seventeenth century that *patria* would flower until she won her political independence under the banner of Guadalupe. From the day the Mexicans began to regard themselves as a chosen people, they were potentially liberated from Spanish tutelage.³¹

Poole only briefly cites de la Maza's work, disagrees with some of Lafaye's findings, and contends in general that the "weakness [of Lafaye's study] lies precisely in his flawed analysis of the growth and development of the apparition/devotion" that, in Poole's view, exaggerates native people's involvement in that growth and development. Yet overall, Poole concurs with the *criollo* interpretation developed by de la Maza and Lafaye. Poole categorizes Sánchez's *Imagen de la Virgen María* as "a florid, complex celebration of *criollismo*" and concludes that "criollismo is the central theme of the book." He argues that Sánchez is significant both for providing the first published apparition account and for "bonding it [the apparition narrative] to *criollo* identity." According to Poole, "the story of the apparitions is little more than a framework on which Sánchez can build his *criollo* interpretations" of the providential election of New Spain's native sons and daughters revealed through the singular blessing of nothing less than the Virgin Mary's "second birth" in their homeland. Hence, if Sánchez is indeed largely the creator of the apparition narrative, Poole posits his motive—the story served the cause of Sánchez's *criollo* patriotism.³²

Such conclusions overstate the *criollo* emphasis that Lafaye and de la Maza unveiled in Sánchez's writing. Indeed, although Sánchez professed

31. Francisco de la Maza, *El guadalupanismo mexicano* (Mexico City, 1953); Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe*, p. 250.

32. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 2, 6, 100, 106.

Guadalupe as “a native of this land and its first creole woman,” he also presumed that the Spanish conquest of Mexico was an act of divine providence, deeming Guadalupe as Spain’s “assistant conqueror” and attesting that the “heathenism of the New World” was “conquered with her aid.” Overall, Sánchez addressed the Spanish conquest and indigenous conversion far more extensively than he did the divine election of *criollos*. The general tone of his book is an explicit validation of Spanish conquest and evangelization alongside an implicit *criollo* native pride. Moreover, Sánchez asserted that, among Marian images, the *criolla* Guadalupe complements the Spanish Our Lady of los Remedios in a manner that parallels the biblical figures of Naomi and Ruth. Like Naomi, the native of Bethlehem, Guadalupe was a native of Mexico; like Ruth, Remedios was a foreigner who migrated to provide her love and assistance in a new land. According to Sánchez, both virgins were equally deserving of veneration. Although the seeds of *criollo* patriotism planted in Sánchez’s text would in time bear fruit among his fellow American-born priests and their compatriots, reading *Imagen de la Virgen María* merely as a *criollo* patriotic oration by no means exhausts the meaning of this crucial work in the development of the Guadalupe tradition.³³

Poole’s analysis is based on the premise that Sánchez wrote “as a hagiographer, not a historian.” In fact, Sánchez was, first and foremost, a theologian and pastor. Even a cursory reading of Sánchez’s work reveals his admiration and extensive study of St. Augustine and other Fathers of the early Church. Although he cites a wide range of thinkers from Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas to his own theological contemporaries, Sánchez refers to Augustine more than two dozen times and also liberally quotes from other leading theologians of the early Church such as St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, Tertullian, St. John Chrysostom, St. Cyprian, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory Nazianzen, and St. Clement of Alexandria, among others. *Imagen de la Virgen María* encompasses five major sections: Guadalupe’s providential role in the conquest of Mexico; the apparition account; a theological reflection on the image itself; a summary of post-apparition developments in the Guadalupe site and tradition; and a narration and analysis of seven miracles attributed to Guadalupe. Throughout his treatise, Sánchez liberally interjects theological references and scriptural images, as in his analogy of Moses, Mount Sinai, and the Ark of the Covenant with Juan Diego, Tepeyac, and the Guadalupe image. Collectively, the five sections of Sánchez’s book are intended to incite the reader

33. Sánchez, *Imagen de la Virgen María*, pp. 179, 191, 247–48, 257.

toward a deeper contemplation of Guadalupe: in Mexican history, in the apparitions, in her image, in the providential site of her sanctuary, and in the favors she bestows on those who turn to her. Whatever his *criollo* biases and historical sources (or lack thereof) for the apparition narrative, Sánchez's primary focus was to expound a series of biblical and theological reflections on what he presented as an established pious tradition.³⁴

Recognizing the core intention and contents of Sánchez's work helps address what Poole deems the "strange" juxtaposition in *Imagen de la Virgen María* of an apparition story "directed toward the Indians" with Sánchez's "unrestrained *criollo* interpretations." Poole concludes that "Sánchez took a cult story that should have been exclusively Indian and appropriated it for the *criollos*."³⁵ But he does not offer a convincing rationale for Sánchez's choice of Juan Diego as protagonist in the apparition narrative, if indeed Sánchez himself largely invented the apparition account to foment *criollo* patriotism. Neither does Poole present a logical justification for Sánchez adding three miracles that solely benefited natives to the three miracle accounts benefiting Spaniards that he apparently borrowed from Stradanus, while failing to recount a single miracle with identified *criollo* beneficiaries. Clearly the *criollo* emphasis in Sánchez is a subtext to his primary contribution to the Guadalupe tradition: his is the first and arguably the most influential theological attempt to examine that tradition in light of Christian scriptures and teachings, particularly as filtered through the interpretive lens of the church Fathers.³⁶

Origins of the Guadalupe Tradition

Extant documentation reveals that Guadalupan devotion was still largely concentrated in the Mexico City area at the time Sánchez wrote his volume. It also shows that Sánchez's book marks a transition point between a tradition that initially evolved among both indigenous and Spanish devotees, and one that grew among *criollos* as they became more demographically and socially prominent in New Spain. No available records from Sánchez's contemporaries recount any accusations claiming he contrived the apparition account. No debate about his statements is known to have occurred during Sánchez's lifetime that parallels the

34. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, p. 106; Sánchez, *Imagen de la Virgen María*, esp. p. 257.

35. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, p. 107.

36. Timothy Matovina, "Guadalupe at Calvary: Patristic Theology in Miguel Sánchez's *Imagen de la Virgen María* (1648)," *Theological Studies*, 64 (2003), 795–811.

Guadalupan Bustamante-Montúfar controversy a century earlier. The growth of New Spain's *criollos* and their increasing enthusiasm about Guadalupe's election of their homeland—as evidenced in numerous passages from the nearly 100 Guadalupan sermons published in the 150 years after Sánchez's book was released—comprise one plausible explanation for this lack of criticism. Moreover, it was a Spaniard who first publicly contested the historicity of the apparitions, doing so in a 1794 address to the Royal Academy of History in Madrid amidst rising *criollo* patriotism that finally sparked the war for Mexican independence from Spain less than two decades later. Yet the extensive—and no doubt largely unforeseen—effects that Sánchez's ideas ignited among his fellow *criollos* do not constitute evidence regarding his intentions when he actually composed his volume. Furthermore, as Cornelius Conover has convincingly argued, the spread of Guadalupan devotion over a century after the publication of Sánchez's volume was “less determined by the triumphant rise of creole consciousness than by such factors as her reputation for miraculous power, changes in the cult of saints in Mexico City, the support of high-ranking men, and excellent [fortuitous] timing” in the history of the devotion's evolution.³⁷

Thus one insight about the origins of the Guadalupe tradition is conventional but nonetheless important: *Imagen de la Virgen María* and its first published account of the Guadalupe apparitions are best interpreted in light of the Guadalupan devotion that preceded them and shaped Sánchez at the time of their composition, not the posterior influence of his publication on *criollo* consciousness. Sánchez was not a historian—and certainly not one according to the modern standards of the discipline. Attempts to read his work as a source for the origins of the Guadalupe tradition pose questions that his writings were never intended to answer. In the end, the only clue offered by Sánchez regarding the genesis of the apparition narrative is that he presumed it was a local pious tradition, which he sought to make known and interpret theologically.

The most important insight is that, from the first stages of the Guadalupe tradition, indigenous devotion and understandings of Guadalupe grew simultaneously alongside those of their Spanish counterparts, albeit in the local context of the Mexico City area. Available evidence shows Nahuatl approaches to Guadalupe's celestial aid were consistent with

37. Francisco Raymond Schulte, *Mexican Spirituality: Its Sources and Mission in the Earliest Guadalupan Sermons* (Lanham, MD, 2002); Cornelius Conover, “Reassessing the Rise of Mexico's Virgin of Guadalupe, 1650s–1780s,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 27 (2011), 251–79, here 255.

the Spanish Catholic tendency to view God as stern and distant, inciting appeals to Guadalupe and other Marian figures as compassionate mothers and intercessors. As Louise Burkhart concludes, the Nahuas learned well the Spanish practice of approaching Mary in her various representations as a “protector and advocate.” Yet to some extent natives also adapted Spanish Catholic practices and the symbolic world they mediated to suit their own life situations. Thus, as Burkhart also concludes, the Guadalupe cult “developed over time in answer to the spiritual and practical needs of a wide variety of worshipers.”³⁸ Separate indigenous processions, seasons of feasts, and accounts of miraculous assistance are consistent with this observation, as is some natives’ everyday contact with Guadalupe through their residence near Tepeyac. According to the Cuauhtitlan witnesses in the 1665–66 Guadalupan inquiry, indigenous veneration of Juan Diego was yet another distinct strand of Nahuatl devotion. The absence of references to existing Juan Diego devotion in other sources—including Sánchez, Laso de la Vega, and the Mexico City witnesses in the official inquiry—lends further credence to the conclusion that these native witnesses spoke of a devotion to Juan Diego generated among their own communities, not one borrowed from Spanish or *criollo* informants.

Evidence for early indigenous Guadalupan devotion is particularly important for examining the origins of belief in Juan Diego’s encounters with Guadalupe, since the existence of natives’ devotion necessitates considering their possible influences on the apparition tradition. It is not surprising, of course, that indigenous devotees would be the first to honor the unanticipated hero Juan Diego, both because he was one of their own and because most Spaniards and *criollos* did not tend to regard the natives highly. As a number of contemporary commentators have observed, the apparition story at its core is neither about *criollo* election nor about Spanish election, but rather about Guadalupe’s providential choosing of an indigenous neophyte as her emissary. These commentators point out, for example, the dramatic reversals effected in the course of the apparition narrative such as Juan Diego’s transformation from rejected native to messenger of Guadalupe, the bishop’s changing attitude toward Juan Diego from initial suspicion to confidence, and the shifting geographic focus from the

38. Burkhart, “Cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe,” pp. 198, 211; Burkhart, *Before Guadalupe: The Virgin Mary in Early Colonial Nahuatl Literature* (Albany, NY, 2001), esp. pp. 115–48. For a similar argument about Guadalupe’s multivalent appeal to diverse groups and classes, see Peterson’s analysis of artistic representations of the Guadalupe image from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries in her “The Virgin of Guadalupe: Symbol of Conquest or Liberation?,” *Art Journal*, 51 (1992), 39–47.

bishop's residence in the capital city to the outlying indigenous settlement of Tepeyac, where in the end the bishop and his entourage accompany Juan Diego to build the temple that Guadalupe requested.³⁹

Poole notes that such interpretations were not articulated in written form until recent decades and avers that they are largely fanciful projections, contending that without documented historical evidence about the apparitions "the symbolism [of Guadalupe] loses any objectivity it may have had and is at the mercy of propagandists and special interests." He further notes that Sánchez and the vast majority of *criollo* preachers who published sermons after him did not treat the indigenous focus in the apparition story, their occasional references to Juan Diego and the native peoples vastly overshadowed by the themes of "criollismo and the sense of [criollo] special election."⁴⁰ But the failure of these Guadalupan writers to consider the election of the native Juan Diego does not negate the obvious elevation of a native in the apparition narrative itself—a certainly surprising occurrence given the *criollo* authors of the earliest published versions. If Sánchez planted seeds of *criollo* patriotism that subsequently gave rise to the struggle for Mexican independence, the story that he and his fellow *criollo* Laso de la Vega recounted also planted seeds of native dignity and celestial election that reaped a harvest among indigenous devotees and eventually among Guadalupan writers as well.

None of this is surprising, since influential sacred stories and texts inevitably have a history of interpretation. Indeed, typically the meaning of powerful religious traditions like Guadalupe is not debated because their origins are disputed; their meaning is debated precisely because the tradition has such a potent sway over devotees and, in Guadalupe's case, even over entire populations. In the search for the genesis of the Guadalupe apparition story, the heart of the matter is not whether or how *criollo* patriots or any subsequent group interpreted it to suit their own purposes. Rather, what matters are the people and the circumstances that initially gave rise to the apparition tradition. The history of indigenous devotion, a critical analysis of Sánchez's publication, and the contents of the apparition narrative itself point to a greater native influence in the formation of that tradition than Poole posits.

39. For an overview of contemporary theological interpretations of Guadalupe, see Timothy Matovina, "Theologies of Guadalupe: From the Spanish Colonial Era to Pope John Paul II," *Theological Studies*, 70 (2009), 78–88.

40. Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, pp. 14, 187.

Poole employs a decidedly all-or-nothing approach—either there are documents verifying to his satisfaction that the standard apparition story and the current Guadalupe image existed at the very outset of the devotion, or these traditions are later inventions and therefore lack credibility. He discounts any potential evidence that does not closely coincide with the narrative details in the accounts of Sánchez and Laso de la Vega (which, between them, do not agree in every detail), even to the point of contending that sixteenth-century documents mentioning a Guadalupean appearance at Tepeyac in 1555 or 1556 are dubious because they do not cite the 1531 date given in the consensus account. More generally, Poole fails to consider how the decidedly local character of the devotion during its first century of development affects arguments from silence. Consequently, he fails to address adequately how this local character decreases the likelihood that extant sources will answer all the questions asked retrospectively by scholars, devotees, and the curious about a tradition that later came to have such a pervasive impact on Mexican history and Catholicism.

Ultimately, Poole's intent is not to ascertain what a historian can reasonably infer from the primary sources he himself accepts as valid, but to disprove the claim that reports of an apparition initiated the Guadalupe cult. His argument from silence presumes a tradition about the experiences of an ordinary devotee that evolved simultaneously with other—even competing—local traditions loses all credibility if only later it gains foundational status through its codification in a written text. This presumption is inconsistent with the developmental trajectory of various religious movements, holy places, and the sacred texts associated with them, from the multiple accounts of the Exodus written down centuries after the fact in the Hebrew scriptures to origin stories associated with miraculous crosses and apparition sites throughout the Americas.

Poole's conclusions rest on at least three shaky foundations: an argument from silence weakened by the local character of Guadalupean devotion in the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, a refutable claim that the devotion began and evolved among Spaniards with little or no native involvement, and the hypothesis that Sánchez largely constructed the apparition narrative to bolster *criollo* patriotism. Moreover, Poole offers no explicit evidence for his inference that Sánchez either exercised extensive poetic license or outright lied in his writing and that other sources like the interviewees in the 1665–66 inquiry were then complicit in his fabrication. Given the available evidence that Poole and nearly all historians of the origins debate accept as valid, a more plausible conclusion is that natives participated in the development of a local devotion—one that encompassed an

oral tradition about a saintly indigenous neophyte whose experiences of Guadalupe eventually were codified and elevated to foundational status through the publications of Sánchez and Laso de la Vega. Admittedly this conclusion leaves various questions unanswered, not the least of which is a precise timeline for the origin and development of the apparition tradition. Nor will this conclusion satisfy many devotees who understand the apparition account first published in Sánchez more as eyewitness testimony than as a theological reflection on an oral tradition about a mystical experience. Nonetheless, the reassessment of Poole's sources presented in this essay reveals that exploring the early history of Guadalupan devotion sheds significant light on the search for its origins and on the apparition tradition that has so powerfully shaped its development.

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