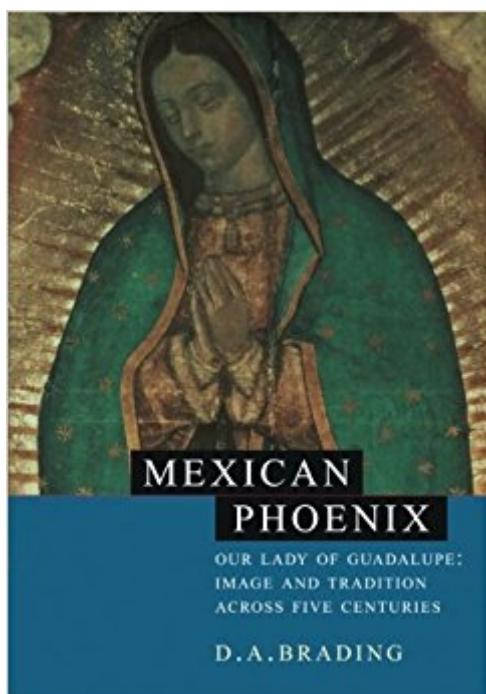


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# **Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady Of Guadalupe: Image And Tradition Across Five Centuries**



## **Synopsis**

In 1999 Pope John Paul II proclaimed Our Lady of Guadalupe a patron saint of the Americas. According to oral tradition and historical documents, in 1531 Mary appeared as a beautiful Aztec princess to Juan Diego, a poor Indian. Speaking to him in his own language, she asked him to tell the bishop her name was La Virgen de Guadalupe and that she wanted a church built on the mountain. During a second visit, the image of the Virgin miraculously appeared on his cape. Through the centuries, the enigmatic power of this image has aroused such fervent devotion in Mexico that it has served as the banner of the rebellion against Spanish rule and, despite skepticism and anticlericalism, still remains a potent symbol of the modern nation. In Mexican Phoenix, David Brading traces the intellectual origins, the sudden efflorescence, and the theology that has sustained the tradition of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Brading also documents the interaction of religion and patriotism, and describes how the image has served as a banner both for independence and for the Church in its struggle against the Liberal and revolutionary state. David Brading is Professor of Mexican History at the University of Cambridge. He began his career at the University of California, Berkeley, and at Yale University. He is also the author of Church and State in Bourbon Mexico (Cambridge, 1994), The First America (Cambridge, 1991), and Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico, 1730-1810 (Cambridge, 1971). Hb ISBN (2001): 0-521-80131-1

## **Book Information**

Series: Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition Across Five Centuries

Paperback: 464 pages

Publisher: Cambridge University Press (January 27, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0521531608

ISBN-13: 978-0521531603

Product Dimensions: 6.8 x 0.9 x 9.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #496,836 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #135 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Catholicism > Mariology #372 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Ministry & Evangelism > Sermons #392 in Books > History > Americas > Central America

## **Customer Reviews**

"This brilliant and deeply researched book looks back at the interpretation of the image and the

various roles it has served throughout Mexican history...Brading has provided a remarkable insight into the continuities surrounding religious practice, doctrine, and ceremony in Latin America." Foreign Affairs" a supremely important book and one that is due to take its place among the standard treatments of Guadalupe. [Brading] casts his net over a wider field, and as a result his book is more comprehensive than other recent works. Also [Brading] deals skillfully with theological and religious matters, terra incognita for most contemporary historians." Catholic Historical Review"Mexican Phoenix is incomparably the most complete and reliable study to have appeared on the Guadalupe tradition hitherto." Religion" This is a work of impressive scholarship.... It makes a valuable contribution to the study of modern Mexican culture and religion.... This is a very valuable and highly recommended book." Catholic Library World" This is undoubtedly the best work yet to appear on the socio-historical meaning of the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. The excellence of the writing style, the academic skill of the author to summarize and interpret previous scholarship, and even the quality of the paper used along with judiciously selected illustrations all serve to make this a superior publication. Catholic Books Review"Brading tells the story engagingly... the book is...a useful reference work on the history of this important devotion." Louise M. Burkhart, The Americas"...Brading provides a comprehensive analysis of the development of the Guadalupe cult... Mexican Phoenix is an important reference for anyone who wants to understand the Guadalupe cult within the context of Mexican history." Verónica A. Gutiérrez, Crisis Magazine"Exquisite." National Catholic Reporter"Brading's treatment is informative, original and interestingly laid out. His book has a compellingly-realized dramatic structure which makes the reader want to know 'how the story comes out', while the discussion of abstruse points in theology and intellectual history is enlivened by gripping and often sympathetic biographical portraits, by deep readings of canonical texts, and by a mastery of contemporary debates. It makes a vital contribution to the study of modern Mexican culture and religious life." Eric Van Young, University of California" This is undoubtedly the best work yet to appear on the socio-historical meaning of the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. The excellence of the writing style, the academic skill of the author to summarize and interpret previous scholarship, and even the quality of the paper used along with judiciously selected illustrations all serve to make this a superior publication. Catholic Books Review

In 2002 Juan Diego--a poor Indian to whom the Virgin Mary appeared in 1531, miraculously imprinting her likeness on his cape--was canonised in Mexico by Pope John Paul II. How did a poor Indian and a sixteenth-century Mexican painting of the Virgin Mary attract such unprecedented honour? This is a story that will fascinate anyone concerned with the history of religion and its

symbols.

Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition across Five CenturiesThose looking for a thorough, researched study of the Guadalupe phenomenon can be thankful for this work that traces how the famous apparition has been viewed, and used, since the 16th century. Its objectivity is evident from the beginning where it is the initial documentation, rather than the Juan Diego story that confronts the reader. Most books on the subject are highly emotional, devotional or political. This one isn't and is a healthy counterbalance.

This is an immensely detailed and informative book on the sources of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Nican Mopohua. It was delivered quickly and in perfect condition -- thank you!!

This is a fantastic book that exceeds my expectations.

In the history of Catholic Marian devotion, the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe has no rivals. When Pope John Paul II recognized her as patron of the Americas in 1999, he was merely building on a tradition stretching back from Pius XII and Pius X in the twentieth century, to Leo XIII in the nineteenth and Benedict XIV in the eighteenth. No other Marian image has been accorded comparable honours. The devotion is based on the story of the Virgin's apparitions to the Indian neophyte Juan Diego in 1531, and the subsequent appearance of her image, miraculously imprinted on the Indian's coarse mantle as he unrolled it to free the profusion of flowers that the Virgin had instructed him to take to a bishop. The mantle (tilma) is preserved in a basilica in Mexico City. The symbolic power of the devotion is impossible to exaggerate. It has been seen as the foundation of national identity, as a link between pre-Hispanic and modern times, as a rallying point uniting a racially complex society, and as a clear sign of divine favour. Historians, however, have often felt uncomfortable with the lack of any convincing proof attesting to the existence of a tradition linked to the story before the publication of Miguel Sanchez's Image of the Virgin Mary in 1648. This disturbing gap has led to a number of attempts to connect Sanchez's treatise with an indigenous oral tradition stretching back to 1531, specifically to the sixteenth-century Indian humanist, Antonio Valeriano, still widely believed to be the author of the native Nahuatl account: the Nican mopohua. But recent scholarship has established that there is no evidence to support such a tradition. More-over, a meticulous linguistic analysis of the Nican mopohua conducted lately has demonstrated not only that the text is written in standard seventeenth-century church Nahuatl, but

also that there is direct linguistic proof of its dependence on the treatise by Sanchez, a conclusion that invalidates all previous attempts to find a common source based on an earlier native oral tradition. David Brading's definitive study, in *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe, image and tradition 1531-2000*, the result of at least three decades' research, is a detailed history of the tradition across five centuries based on a staggering range of primary sources, from theological treatises, chronicles and sermons, to occasional letters and polemical tracts. He laments the "wild, ill-considered arguments derived from a passionate determination to defend the historical reality of tradition", a determination most recently illustrated in the brave attempt by the Jesuit Xavier Escalada "scientifically" to prove the authenticity of a dubious codex, allegedly dating from 1548, which depicts Juan Diego and the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and is adorned by suitably apt contemporary signatures. "Within the context of the Christian tradition," writes Brading, it would have been "rather like finding a picture of St Paul's vision on the road to Damascus, drawn by St Luke and signed by St Peter." But *Mexican Phoenix* is far from being a mere polemic. One of its many merits is that it wisely stays aloof from such fruitless debates in order to place the Guadalupe tradition in the much richer context of baroque piety. Brading demonstrates that Miguel Sanchez and the theological tradition in which he worked drew heavily on Eastern Orthodox spiritual literature, specifically the works of John of Damascus, Theodore the Studite and Basil the Great. Similarly, in the eighteenth century, several Jesuit writers echoed the suggestion, first voiced by Amadeus of Portugal in the fifteenth century, that Mary was present in images in the same way that Christ was present in the Eucharist. Brading has a keen eye for colourful detail and a deep sympathy for the intricacies and convolutions of the baroque, and this allows him to present Sanchez as one of the "most original, learned and audacious of Mexican theologians", the author of a treatise "brimming with devotion, in which religion and patriotism were inextricably meshed, and where audacious claims were sustained with deep learning". *Mexican Phoenix* is incomparably the most complete and reliable study to have appeared on the Guadalupe tradition hitherto. Its conclusions, however, are more than likely to infuriate the zealous apparitionist school; so it is perhaps with this in mind that, in his concluding remarks, Brading makes an interesting theological excursus. Drawing on traditional church teaching, he reminds his potential critics that "in framing the gospels, God employed human authors who . . . could in no sense be seen as mere puppets used by a divine ventriloquist . . . . If that be the case, is there any real reason to suppose that when the Holy Spirit conceived the idea of the Guadalupe, he refrained from employing a human agent to implement that design?"

According to Brading, the "purpose of this book is thus to illuminate the sudden efflorescence and the adamantine resilience of the tradition of Our Lady of Guadalupe." (11) The study, however, reads more like and intellectual historiography of Guadalupan ideas and controversies over the past five centuries. The method of the book is essentially that of an intellectual history. Social historians will not enjoy this book as much as, say, theologians and those interested in literary critique and historiography. What makes this historiography interesting is that the author is able to incorporate the historiographical tendencies in the field while simultaneously inserting his own interpretation of the events. In other words, the theological and historical debates surrounding Guadalupe evolved in accordance with the social and political structures. In the end, the reader emerges not only with an understanding of the debates but also the author's analysis of the literature and its history. By far, this is one the most enjoyable books that I have read on Guadalupe. Brading is fair and discusses the historical literature in context. Impressive research skills and highly readable! Highly recommended.

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