By examining the cult of saints in Mexico City from the 1650s to the 1780s, the article reinterprets the rise of Mexico’s Virgin of Guadalupe. Archival evidence from the city council and current-events chroniclers show that creole patriotism accounted for little of the growth in the cult of Guadalupe until the 1760s. Far more important were demands for supernatural wonders, shifts in the specialties of leading saints, and promotion by colonial officials. Judging from this revised history of the devotion to Guadalupe the origins of Mexican nationality more appropriately lie in the late colonial period.

Por medio de un análisis del culto de los santos en la ciudad de México de la década de 1650 a la de 1780, este artículo interpreta el ascenso de la Virgen de Guadalupe de México. La evidencia que dan los archivos del ayuntamiento de la ciudad y los cronistas contemporáneos de los acontecimientos muestran que el patriotismo criollo dio poca cuenta del crecimiento del culto a la Guadalupe hasta la década de 1760. Resultaban mucho más importantes los pedidos de maravillas sobrenaturales, los cambios en las especialidades de los principales santos, y la promoción por parte de los funcionarios coloniales. A juzgar por esta revisión de la historia de la devoción a la Guadalupe, los orígenes de la nacionalidad mexicana radican más propiamente en la última fase del periodo colonial.

Key words: religion, Catholic Church, Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico City, Tepeyac, New Spain, nationalism, creole identity, cult of saints, popular devotion, miracles, sermons.
Palabras clave: religión, Iglesia católica, Virgen de Guadalupe, ciudad de México, Tepeyac, Nueva España, nacionalismo, identidad criolla, culto a los santos, devoción popular, milagros, sermones.

The dramatic story of the Virgin of Guadalupe’s triumphant rise in colonial Mexico is familiar to most historians of colonial Latin America. From humble beginnings in the sixteenth century as a regional devotion outside of Mexico City, the devotion to Guadalupe spread throughout New Spain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As Creole patriots adopted Guadalupe to express their local pride, the Virgin came to represent a coalescing sense of Mexican nationality. Although the historicity of the sixteenth-century cult has been the object of much debate, historians have accepted Guadalupe’s close association with creole patriotism with little criticism. A closer examination of the period reveals that the cult of Guadalupe from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries was neither steady nor closely connected to creole sentiment, however.

The great popularity of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico has inspired scholars to scour the historical record to document how the cult began and how it developed over time. Historians have found little evidence to substantiate the classic version of Guadalupe’s apparition. As the apparition story relates, the Virgin Mary revealed herself to Juan Diego, a Nahua convert to Christianity, on the hill of Tepeyac outside Mexico City in December 1531. She wanted Juan Diego to build a shrine dedicated to her on that very spot. When Juan Diego was unable to secure the approval of the bishop-elect, Juan de Zumárraga, the Virgin bolstered his credibility by giving him physical proof of her apparition in a bundle of flowers and a painting of herself on his cape. According to anti-apparitionists such as Edmundo O’Gorman and Stafford Poole, the devotion to Guadalupe began not with a charismatic miracle, but rather formed from an existing indigenous cult and benefited from the promotion of high prelates. Despite this revisionist push for the sixteenth century, scholars have generally maintained the other part of the Guadalupe

1. Stafford Poole has recently assembled a damning case against the historicity of such an event in The Guadalupan Controversies in Mexico (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), esp. 1–25.
2. Edmundo O’Gorman, for example, believes that Archbishop Alonso de Montúfar encouraged the cult of Guadalupe to pry the Indians away from their devotion to Tonantzin and to ensure the Indians would become faithful followers of the Franciscans. Edmundo O’Gorman, Destierro de Sombras: Luz en el origen de la imagen y culto de Nuestra Señora
pan myth, namely that her expanding cult represented a growing sense of creole consciousness.\(^5\) Perhaps most importantly, scholars have focused on a series of apparition accounts written from 1648 to 1688 to show that Guadalupe embodied creoles’ local pride and sense of a special divine providence for Mexico City.\(^4\) While historians have disagreed about some aspects of this interpretation, such as whether the devotion also included Indians, studies have reinforced two of the cult’s characteristics.\(^5\) First, the formative developments in the devotion to Guadalupe

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\(^4\) Woodrow Borah placed the turning point of devotion to Guadalupe in 1648–1649. Woodrow Borah, “Queen of Mexico and Empress of the Americas, ‘La Guadalupana’ of Tepeyac,” MS/EM 12, no. 2 (summer 1996): 336. Miguel Sánchez, Imagen de la Virgen María, Madre de Dios de Guadalupe (Mexico City: Imprenta de la Viuda de Bernardo Calderón, 1648); Luis Lasso de la Vega, Huei tlamahuiçoltica (Mexico City: Imprenta de Juan Ruiz, 1649); Luis Becerra Tanco, Origen milagroso del santuario de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (Mexico: Viuda de Bernardo Calderón, 1666); Francisco de Florencia, La estrella del norte de México (Mexico: Viuda de Juan de Ribera, 1688). Becerra Tanco’s Origen milagroso was revised and republished in 1675, 1685, and 1745 as Felicidad de México.

\(^5\) O’Gorman and de la Maza believe that the early cult of Guadalupe was based in indigenous communities. O’Gorman, Desierto de Sombras, 137–139; de la Maza, El guadalupanismo mexicano, 40. These and other studies also argue that Guadalupe was a symbol that unified all classes and ethnicities. Richard Nebel, Santa María Tonantzintzin Virgen de Guadalupe: Continuidad y transformación religiosa en México, trans. Carlos Warnoltz Bustillos (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996), 160–161; Eric R. Wolf, “The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol,” The Journal of American Folklore 71, no. 297
took place in Mexico City and its immediate environs. Second, critical
decisions that disseminated the cult came from a small group of elite men
like archbishops, chapter canons, city councilmen, and creole intellectu-
als. Heavily influenced by the apparition accounts, historians have con-
sidered the major accomplishments in the devotion of Guadalupe to
show the formation of Mexican nationality. For example, studies from
David Brading, Poole, and Enrique Florescano posit that another defin-
ing moment of early creole patriotism came in early 1737 when Guada-
lupe spectacularly rescued Mexico City from a plague of typhoid fever.
Thanks to the events of 1737, according to Jacques Lafayette, “a sacred bond
was created between all Mexicans, who acknowledged themselves to be ‘serfs of Guadalupe.”
Guadalupe’s ascent in the hearts of all Mexi-
cans was sealed in 1756 as cities all over New Spain acclaimed her as pa-
tron. When Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla declared independence in her name
in 1810, the connection between Guadalupe and the Mexican nation was
enshrined in national history.
All in all, the narrative of the cult to Guada-
lupe condenses the rise of creole consciousness and Mexican nationalism
into a concise, attractive narrative.

Some dissonant facts call into question the standard scholarly inter-
pretation of the devotion to Guadalupe, however. For instance, if the cult
to the Virgin was steadily growing, why was there a conspicuous absence
of activity in the devotion from 1690 to 1731? If the 1737 plague was a
high point in Guadalupan history, why was she only the third holy figure
that the city council invoked? If Guadalupe was such a beloved figure for
creoles, why did an Italian, Lorenzo Boturini, lead the effort to make Gua-
dalupe universal patron of New Spain? Guadalupan literature struggles
to answer these questions precisely because of two generalized short-

6. Florescano exemplified this trend when he asserts that Guadalupe fused with
the eagle and cactus symbol of Mexico City. Florescano, La Bandera Mexicana, 90–110.
Poole, like other historians, has documented other devotions to Guadalupe outside Mex-
ico City—most importantly in Querétaro and Zacatecas; Poole, Our Lady, 143, 180. Tay-
lor asserts that the cult to the Virgin of Tepeyac was centered in Mexico City in “The
Virgin of Guadalupe,” 15.
7. Brading, Mexican Phoenix, 125; Poole, Our Lady, 176–177, 212–213; and Flores-
cano, La Bandera Mexicana, 93, 95.
8. Lafayette, Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe, 255.
Spain,” 10n1.

(Received January-March 1958): 34; Enrique Florescano, La Bandera Mexicana: breve historia de
su formación y simbolismo (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998), 110. William
B. Taylor argues that, although Indians venerated Guadalupe, they esteemed her for help
Inquiry into the Social History of a Marian Devotion,” American Ethnologist 14, no. 1 (Feb-
comings. First, too often studies of Guadalupe have shown her in isolation. Without a sense of other saintly devotions, judging whether Guadalupe was, in fact, extraordinary is difficult. Second, historians have been far too credulous of the flowery language and dense symbolism of Baroque authors writing about Guadalupe. Although creole consciousness figures prominently in Guadalupan sermons and apparition accounts, historians have largely chosen to de-emphasize other relevant concerns such as the desire for miracles, non-creole identities, and personal ambition. 10 In sum, studying Guadalupe in isolation and concentrating on sermons have led academics to overestimate her importance and to misjudge the reasons for her popularity. 11

By analyzing the context of saintly devotions in Mexico City from the 1650s to the 1780s, this article makes three specific arguments that revise the accepted wisdom on Guadalupe. First, developments in other saints’ cults, particularly in that of the Virgin of Los Remedios, allowed for Guadalupe’s intervention in 1737. Second, evidence suggests that residents of Mexico City regarded the intercession of Guadalupe in 1737 as more practical and commonplace than unique and mystical. Third, the imperial context of the 1760s to 1780s discouraged new saintly devotions and, therefore, strengthened existing cults like the one to Guadalupe. The story of the Virgin of Guadalupe, as shown through the minutes of the Mexico City council and the Cathedral chapter as well as current-event chroniclers, seems 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 timing.

10. Scholars such as William B. Taylor and Jeanette Favros Peterson make the strongest argument that Guadalupe played a number of roles beyond creole symbol, such as divine intercessor, mediator between king and subject, as well as a convenient figure for religious orders to promote Christian evangelization. Taylor, Magistrates of the Sacred, 293; William B. Taylor, “Mexico’s Virgin of Guadalupe in the Seventeenth Century: Hagiography and Beyond,” in Colonial Saints: Discovering the Holy in the Americas, 1500-1800, eds. Alan Greer and Jodi Bilinkoff (New York: Routledge, 2003), 284; Jeannet Favrot Peterson, “The Virgin of Guadalupe: Symbol of Conquest or Liberation?” Art Journal 15, no. 4, Latin American Art (winter 1992): 40.

11. The assumption that saints primarily demarcated ethnic identity led Stafford Poole, for one, to wonder why the city council would support a European holy figure like the Virgin of Los Remedios. Poole, Our Lady of Guadalupe, 24. Francisco Miranda Godínez and Linda A. Curcio-Nagy show that the devotion to Remedios was not simply a means to signal loyalty to Spain. Francisco Miranda Godínez, Dos cultos Fundantes: Los Remedios y Guadalupe (1521-1649): historia documental (Zamora, Mexico: El Colegio de Michoacán, 2001) and Linda A. Curcio-Nagy, “Native Icon to City Protectress to Royal Patroness: Ritual, Political Symbolism and the Virgin of Remedies,” The Americas 52, no. 3 (Jan 1996): 367–91.
I. The Cult of Guadalupe, 1650s to 1680s

In the second half of the seventeenth century, several signs in the historical record indicate that the devotion to Guadalupe was gaining popularity in Mexico City. As scholars have established, the cult of the Virgin boasted more financial support, a series of publications, and a campaign led by the Mexico City council for more liturgical privileges. While these facts are accurate, an analysis of the cult of saints in Mexico City shows that Guadalupe was not a particularly distinguished holy figure among the multitude of celestial intercessors. Furthermore, the context of saintly devotions suggests that creole identity was not a significant factor in explaining the prominence of holy figures, including that of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Historians have found evidence of a growing devotion to Guadalupe in such factors as new buildings, new publications, and attention from colonial officials. The physical infrastructure at Tepeyac was rebuilt in 1622 and again in 1634, suggesting that it was a well-trafficked pilgrimage site. Donations in money and in real estate strengthened the financial foundation of the devotion. Most importantly, four new publications about the Virgin came out in the last half of the seventeenth century. The works, each written by a creole cleric, began to establish the apparition narrative and have heavily shaped how academics have interpreted devotion to the Virgin of Tepeyac. In them, clergymen praised the Virgin, Mexico City, and creoles. Lafaye quoted Sánchez as writing his 1648 apparition account for “the honor of Mexico City . . . the glory of all the faithful who live in this New World.” As Poole found, Carmelite Manuel de San José wrote in a 1687 Guadalupan sermon that “(t)here is no brush, there is no finery or beauty like that of our criollo kingdom in all the kingdoms of the world.” Historians following these apparition accounts have surmised that creole patriotism caused the upswing of interest in Guadalupe. There are, however, two main problems with this conclusion. First, the term “creole” assumes a unity of purpose among every American-born person of Spanish descent. Despite the apparently universal meaning of “patria,” or homeland, the place so beloved by local peoples referred more correctly to their “patria chica,” or mu-
municipality. The second and broader objection is that even the attraction of local identity cannot account for all the growth in the cult of Guadalupe. For instance, the Mexico City-born San Felipe de Jesús, a holy figure who authorities called the “creole saint” was virtually ignored in his hometown outside his saint-day feast. In the case of Guadalupe, several factors other than the appeal of a local holy figure can better explain the growing interest in her cult.

Although the historical record did not capture the words of pilgrims to Tepeyac, it is reasonable to assume that the majority did not travel there to reflect on their creole identity. Rather, devotees of Guadalupe hoped that the mother of God would be a kind advocate on their behalf in heaven. No saint rivaled her when a parisioner needed a favor. Theologians ranked her below only God; “from the very first moment of her Conception, Our Lady had more grace . . . than all the Angels and Saints together.” When the canons of the Mexico City Cathedral discussed Guadalupe in May 1663, they referred to the “milagrosa aparición” and gave thanks for her “tantos amparos en las necesidades en las inundaciones,” rather than acclaiming her as proof of special divine providence for Mexico City. The canons referred to the mystical power of the acheiropoietic image as well as to the episode where officials brought the Guadalupan image to Mexico City during the terrible floods from 1629 to 1634. The Virgin’s reputation for working miracles meant that

21. “Afirman gravísimos Teólogos, que en el primer instante de su Concepción, tuvo la Señora mas gracia, que toda quanta gracia han tenido, y tienen todos juntos los Ángeles y los Santos.” Juan Martínez de la Parra, Luz de verdad catholicay explicación de la doctrina cristiana (Madrid: Imprenta de don Antonio de Sancha, 1775), 114. Martínez de la Parra cited theologian Francisco Suárez as his source.
22. Archivo de la Catedral de la Ciudad de México (hereinafter cited as ACCM), Actas del Cabildo Eclesiástico, vol. 15, fols. 64v-7.
growth in her devotion did not directly equate to a rise in the strength of creole sentiment, which is a point often lost in Guadalupan studies. Like the devotees’ desire for miraculous intervention, Spanish promotion of the cult of the Immaculate Conception also obscured the role of creole identity in the growth of Guadalupe in the seventeenth century. With the support of the royal family, the devotion to the Immaculate Conception grew robustly in Spain throughout the seventeenth century. Colonial peoples emulated their peninsular counterparts. For instance, the University of Mexico began an annual celebration in 1653 to honor the Conception of the Virgin “in imitation of all the Universities of Castile.” In October of that same year, the Spanish king further raised the prestige of the Immaculate Conception by requiring that all of the Spanish Empire’s military orders and royal tribunals swear to defend the theological assertion that the Virgin Mary was conceived without original sin. Another round of public ceremonies dedicated to the Immaculate Conception came in the early 1660s. At the instance of the Spanish king, Pope Alexander VII on May 8, 1661, forbid even questioning the purity of the Virgin’s Conception. In thanks, Mexico City organized an extraordinary celebration lasting from September to December 1662 where at least fourteen major religious institutions hosted special ceremonies dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. Less than six months later, in May 1663, the canons of the Mexico City Cathedral chapter voted to promote the city’s own advocacy of the Immaculate Conception—the Virgin of Guadalupe. They requested a mass and proper office for December 12, the day of Guadalupe’s apparition. Despite taking testimony

24. As A. Katie Harris has found, controversy on the nature of the conception in the 1610s led to an explosion of interest in this invocation of Mary. A. Katie Harris, From Muslim to Christian Granada: Inventing a City’s Past in Early Modern Spain (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 137–139.
28. Guijo mentions the following places specifically: Santo Domingo, the Holy Office of the Inquisition, the Casa Profesa of the Jesuits, San Agustin, San Gerónimo, the convent of Nuestra Señora del Cármen, the convent of Jesús María, the convent of Nuestra Señora de la Merced, the convent of Nuestra Señora de la Balvanera, the parish church of Santa María la Redonda, the parish church of Santa Catarina Mártir, the Hospital Real de los Indios, the Cathedral chapel of the silversmith guild, and San Bernardo. Guijo, Diario, vol. 2, 176–183.
and appointing a proctor in Rome, the chapter canons did not obtain any of their desired liturgical privileges, but the initiative led to an inquiry in 1665 to 1666 that helped establish a basis for the historical origins of the apparition. Rather than a declaration of creole identity, the canons’ decision seemed more likely to be an imitation of Spanish devotion designed to curry favor with the king or an opportunistic projection of the municipality.

Seeing as leaders chose Guadalupe as a representative of their city, arguably some amount of municipal pride contributed to their promotion of Guadalupe in the 1660s, but it was neither a patriotism tied exclusively to the Virgin nor one particularly defiant of imperial control. In the 1660s, Mexico City chapter canons also applied to Rome for more liturgical privileges on behalf of San Felipe de Jesús and Gregorio López. The sudden spurt of self-promotion in the prestigious Catholic liturgy came not from the desire to express a burgeoning sense of creole identity, but rather from a twinge of inferiority to other colonial cities in the Spanish Empire such as Lima, Peru. Envious Cathedral canons stated that they wanted liturgical privileges for their devotions “just like [those of] the admirable Virgin Sta. Rosa of Santa Maria native of Lima.”

While the devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe gained prominence in the second half of the seventeenth century, cults to a number of other holy figures surpassed it. For instance, Guadalupe was not among the sworn patron saints of Mexico City nor did any city councilman in the seventeenth century propose taking her as celestial protector. Guadalupe’s exclusion did not stem from the councilman’s unwillingness to add new patron saints; they adopted seven new celestial protectors over the course of the seventeenth century. When disaster threatened, however, councilmen most consistently relied, not on these patron saints or on the miraculous image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, but on the mirac-

30. In 1661, the cathedral canons first voted to ask Madrid and Rome for new concessions for San Felipe: a church, a jubilee for his chapel, and relics. Ibid., vol. 14, fols. 8–8v. Only months after the Virgin of Guadalupe process started, the chapter resurrected the stalled beatification process of hermit and mystic Gregorio López, a candidate who presented serious theological problems. Ibid., vol. 15, fols. 101–01v. For the failed López process, see Antonio Rubial García, La Santa Controvertida. Hagiografía y conciencia criolla alrededor de los venerables no canonizados de Nueva España (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; Fonda de Cultura Económica, 1999), 93–128.


ulous image of the Virgin of Los Remedios. As historian Linda Curcio-Nagy has found, leaders brought her image from her sanctuary in Naucañapan to Mexico City seventeen times over the seventeenth century whenever a threat faced the city. With the exception of the floods of 1629, officials never invoked Guadalupe to save the city from disaster.

Although new religious infrastructure has served as evidence to show the popularity of Guadalupe, an examination of the period from 1650 to 1690 reveals a more complex story. At least twenty distinct holy figures served as titular saints for new or refurbished religious buildings dedicated from 1650 to 1690; some of these included San Juan Bautista, San Lorenzo, and Nuestra Señora de la Piedad. At least thirteen holy figures such as Santa Rita de Casia, Nuestra Señora de Loreto, and San José were the objects of a newly built altar or a chapel. Despite this flurry of building, no church or altar was dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico City. More studies are needed to explain exactly why residents of the viceregal capital chose these particular saints; the overwhelmingly European cast of holy figures should raise questions about the strength of creole patriotism in the religious realm. This lack of new


34. Ibid., 378.

35. Although the city council in 1629 did not mention bringing the image of Guadalupe to Mexico City, later commentators considered Guadalupe’s divine intervention beyond doubt. For the city council’s record of events, see Barrio Lorenzot, “Compendio,” AHCM, vol. 436ª, fols. 152, 152v, 158. For a poem written about how Guadalupe saved Mexico City, see de la Maza, El guadalupanismo mexicano, 44–47. Francisco de Florencia also credited Guadalupe with saving Mexico City. de Florencia, La estrella del norte, 119–122.


37. These figures were located in the friary of San Agustín, the Jesuit college of San Gregorio, and close to the friary of San Francisco. Others were Nuestra Señora del Perdón in the cathedral, San Juan de Dios in his church, Santa Gertrudis in the convent of Nuestra Señora de Monserrate, San Gregorio also in Nuestra Señora de Monserrate, Santo Domingo in his friary, San José at Nuestra Señora de la Merced, Nuestra Señora de Aranzazu in the Colegio de Vizcaínas, Nuestra Señora de Loreto in the Colegio de San Gregorio, Jesús Nazareno in his hospital, and Ecce-Homo in the Oratory of San Felipe Neri. Guijo, Diario, var. and Robles, Diario, var.
infrastructure during the time when the four Guadalupan “evangelists” published their formative works on the Virgin’s apparition should also call into doubt how accurately their exuberant praise reflected devotional trends.

Broadening the scope of analysis past patron saints and religious infrastructure to the personal devotions of Mexico City demonstrates that residents of the viceregal capital embraced a variety of saints as diverse as the population itself. Confraternities venerated dozens of distinct holy figures as such as San Miguel, Nuestra Señora de los Dolores, Santo Ángel de la Guarda, and San Vicente Ferrer among many others. The multitude of devotional saints mirrored the complex internal organization of Mexico City. Holy figures like the Virgin of Aránzazu brought together the Basque community in the viceregal capital. Black confraternities venerated saints like San José and Sta. Efigenia. Guilds such as the silversmiths with San Elogio and the tailors with San Homobono had their special patrons, which they commemorated with processions and donations. Religious orders celebrated their own saints among their founders or other coreligionaries. Wills also attested to the particular devotions of individuals to saints such as San Francisco, San Agustín, and San Ignacio de Loyola. In addition, Catholic peoples did not choose only one saint, but rather a variety according to their particular need and the specialty of the holy figure. In sum, the cult of saints in Mexico City reflected the complexity of colonial society. While historians analyzing the Guadalupan tradition acknowledge the tremendous number of venerated saints, the studies concentrate so closely on Guadalupe that they misrepresent the devotional culture in this city. Because of this exclusive focus, these works also overstate the importance of creole patriotism. I contend that


42. A good example of this is David Brading’s section on other Marian images and Christ-centric devotions covering 6 pages in a 368–page book. Brading, Mexican Phoenix, 139–45.
situating Guadalupe as one holy figure in a large celestial host reduces creole identity to its rightful place as just another shifting personal concern along with such issues as sickness, affiliation of religious order, and individual choice.

While the cult to the Virgin of Guadalupe was on the rise in the later seventeenth century in Mexico City, her cult lagged behind those of other prominent holy figures. Rather than a simple outlet for creole pride, devotees also hoped that Guadalupe would grant supernatural wonders or would promote Mexico City in the Catholic liturgy. Even so, the shifts in the devotion to Guadalupe seem less impressive compared to developments in other saintly cults. If not for later events during the eighteenth century, it might be easy to overlook the small changes in the cult of Guadalupe within the complexity of the larger devotional culture of the viceroyal capital. This conclusion suggests that the great academic attention to Guadalupe in the seventeenth century is disproportional to the Virgin’s importance to Mexico City. The evidence also suggests that since Guadalupe did not stand out among the host of devotional saints in the seventeenth century, the reasons for the surge in her popularity must lie in the eighteenth century.

II. Guadalupe’s Rise to Universal Patron, 1690s to 1750s

From the 1690s to the 1750s, the devotion to Guadalupe spread from its strongest regional base in Mexico City to all of New Spain. The traditional interpretation has held that creole patriotism fueled steady growth in Guadalupe’s cult until the 1737 miracle in Mexico City and her acclamation in 1746 and 1756 as patron of New Spain solidified her as the people’s premier holy figure. Unfortunately for scholars, there is a lacuna in the historical documentation directly dealing with the Virgin for the forty years immediately preceding the 1730s. This section works around this limitation by examining the context of saintly devotions in Mexico City from the 1690s to the early 1730s. In so doing, it explains exactly why Guadalupe was in a position to defend Mexico City from the plague in 1737 and how people interpreted the miracle.

Historians have argued that the cult to Guadalupe, buoyed by creole sentiment, steadily rose from the 1690s until the 1730s. As David Brading wrote, “The creole elite turned with ever-increasing fervour to the Mexican Virgin.” Lafaye saw a similar process among creoles, stating that

43. For instance, Lafaye skipped from 1700 to 1728; Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe, 51, 77. When choosing documentary material, Ernesto de la Torre Villar and Ramiro Navarro de Anda jumped from Florencia’s Estrella del norte in 1688 to the 1738 letters for Guadalupe’s coronation. Testimonios históricos guadalupanos, 359, 400.
44. Brading, Mexican Phoenix, 119–120.
“there slowly germinated a Mexican national consciousness.”

Despite the confident assertions, however, historians have struggled to uncover documentary evidence to connect the 1688 publication of Estrella del Norte to the 1737 miracle in Mexico City. Perhaps the best evidence of a rising cult to Guadalupe supported by creole patriotism was the dedication of a new sanctuary at Tepeyac in 1709. The building project started in 1695 and cost an estimated 475,000 pesos. This considerable sum required deep-pocketed supporters and implied a large public demand. The dedicatory sermon in 1709, which extolled the image of Guadalupe as “the Mexican eagle . . . the eternal Phoenix” also suggested that local pride contributed to the Virgin’s cult. A total of seven other sermons were published during this period, one of which thanked the Virgin for aiding the Spanish king in battle. Beyond these achievements, only piecemeal evidence suggests a growing devotion to Gua-
dalupeduring this time. No other building in the Valley of Mexico was
dedicated to Guadalupe. 50 The Mexico City councilmen were only tepid
supporters. In 1720, they rediscovered the 1665–1666 application for
liturgical privileges and promised to renew the process. 51 Other than
questioning two witnesses in 1722, nothing became of the effort. On
the whole, historical sources do not conclusively prove that the cult to
the Virgin was strengthening from the 1690s to the 1720s—much less
that creole sentiment fueled its rise.

As measured by the same variables historians use to show the state
of the cult to Guadalupe (buildings, publications, and official attention),
the devotion to other holy figures continued to surpass that given to the
Virgin of Tepeyac at the turn of the eighteenth century. In 1703, the Car-
melites dedicated a new church to San Joaquín. 52 In 1699, Mexico City
celebrated the opening of a church, convent, and hospital of San Juan
de Dios, a sixteenth-century founder of the Brothers Hospitallers who
was canonized in 1690. 53 Sta. Teresa of Ávila, the patron of Spain, had
an even more distinguished record. The Carmelite nuns of Mexico City
dedicated a new church to her in 1684. They extended the convent in
1699 and rebuilt the church in 1701. 54 If holy figures represented poli-
tical loyalties, then Mexico City leaned more toward European devotions
than local ones. In terms of publications, too, other saints surpassed
Guadalupe: San Pedro had ten published sermons and San Francisco had
seventeen. 55 Moreover, at a time when the city council ignored the Vir-

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50. In 1708, the Franciscans completed the most significant building dedicated to
the Virgin during this time, a teaching facility in Zacatecas for missionaries called the Apos-
tólico Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. Poole, Our Lady, 180.

51. Poole, Our Lady, 174–175.


53. Ibid., vol. 3, 76.

436, fol. 367v. The church also held the famous image of Christ of Ixmiquilpan, which
might also explain the success of the Carmelites. See William B. Taylor, “Two Shrines of
the Cristo Renovado: Religion and Peasant Politics in Late Colonial Mexico,” The Amer-

55. These sermons were published during the period from 1685–1717. For San Pe-
dro, see José Toribio Medina, La imprenta en México (1594–1821), vol. 3 (Santiago, Chile: Impreso en casa del autor, 1907–12), n1559, n1604, n1638, n2065, n2080, n2119, n2172,
n2190, n2231, n2410. For San Francisco, see ibid., n1403, n1416, n1427, n1573, n1699,
n1748, n1842, n2089, n2175, n2270, n2341, n2397, n2421, n2442, n2459, n2471, n2483.
gin of Guadalupe’s cause in Rome, the councilmen spent twenty years lobbying the pope for a series of devotional privileges on behalf of Sta. Gertrudis.\(^\text{56}\) By 1716, the councilmen had received papal authorization to move the date of her feast and to use the liturgical embellishments of a semi-double rite.\(^\text{57}\) They then authorized their representative to Rome to request that the pope “perfect the zeal and devotion” to Sta. Gertrudis by enhancing the feast to a double rite and extending the privilege to all New Spain. All this evidence suggests that the cult of Guadalupe was not significantly outpacing her saintly peers from the 1690s to the 1720s. Stated another way, internal changes to the cult do not explain the rise in popularity of Guadalupe in the 1730s.

Profound shifts in Mexico City’s patron saints from the 1690s to the 1730s, however, disrupted their cults and put Guadalupe in a position to intervene in the Mexico City plague of 1737. Perhaps most importantly, miracles and political tension modified the advocations of Mexico City’s principle patron saint, the Virgin of Los Remedios, especially in the 1690s and in the 1720s. As explained previously, city leaders invoked Remedios to alleviate any misfortune threatening Mexico City; she had no particular specialty. Events in 1692, however, began to alter how Mexico City used Remedios. In May 1692, Mexico City brought the image of Remedios to the capital to lift a bad spell of drought and sickness. As clerics were saying the novena to Remedios on May 29, the long-desired rains started.\(^\text{58}\) This supernatural wonder emphatically boosted her reputation. The miraculous power of the image was fresh in Mexico City’s memory when a riot broke out a week later in the city center. On June 8, 1692, a mob of people burned and looted shops, the city hall, and the viceregal palace.\(^\text{59}\) When assessing the causes of the disorder, clerics believed that God had punished Mexico City for its sins and had taken as his instruments “some pitiful Indians, unclothed, unaware, and disarmed.”\(^\text{60}\) Because the root causes for the disaster were religious, the city council

56. The council asked the pope to move the feast of Gertrudis in 1696 because it fell on the same day as the feast of San Gregorio Taumaturgo (November 17). Councilmen wrote again in 1709. This privilege was granted by November 15, 1715, when the council voted to request the pope to authorize a double rite to Gertrudis instead of a semi-double rite. Barrio Lorenzot, “Compendio,” AHCM, vol. 436ª, fols. 339v-40; vol. 437ª, fol. 50v; vol. 437ª, fol. 97.

57. Some of these liturgical elements include two Vespers and nine lessons in Matins (a simple feast has only one Vesper and three lessons). Barrio Lorenzot, “Compendio,” AHCM, vol. 437ª, fol. 104v.


looked to a pious solution to avoid further disturbances.61 The town council and Cathedral leaders decided to make the Virgin of Los Remedios a focal point to atone for Mexico City’s sins and to reinforce Indian fidelity. On June 14, 1692, two weeks after Remedios’ miracle and one week after the riots, the Cathedral held a novena to the Virgin for city dignitaries.62 The next month on August 10, the Indians marched in procession with the image of Remedios, carrying standards, arches, and flowers.63 In September 1692, Mexico City held a mass of thanksgiving to Remedios.64 Mexico City kept the image of Remedios until March 1695, and no further rioting marred normal municipal affairs.

With the miraculous power of Remedios clearly demonstrated to lift drought and to dissipate the sins of Mexico City, she was the first choice among saintly intercessors when a plague threatened the viceregal capital in September 1692. On this occasion, however, Remedios failed Mexico City. Even though the Cathedral invoked her protection with a novena, the plague ravaged the population anyway.65 City leaders then appealed to a number of other holy figures in a search for a more helpful intercessor. By the time the plague subsided in mid-November 1692, the Mexico City community had called upon the Santo Cristo de la Columna and the Nuestra Señora de la Gracia in addition to organizing five separate penitential processions.66 The failure of Remedios to end the plague did not shake Mexico City’s belief in her miraculous ability, but it did convince municipal leaders that she was more effective when invoked for matters other than disease.

Throughout the 1690s, highly public miracles due to Remedios’s intervention continued to demonstrate to Mexico City that the Virgin’s supernatural efficacy was powerful but selective. Procuring rainfall was her particular specialty. A week after invoking Remedios to lift a drought in June 1694, it began to rain.67 The city council ordered a celebration to thank the Virgin saying that “this year when waters were lacking, the Señora was brought out and it rained.”68 Two years later in May 1696, the viceroy and the city council again carried the image of Remedios into

61. Curcio-Nagy believed this appeal meant that Remedios protected only the city and royal governments. Cucio-Nagy, “Native Icon,” 385. However, because leaders considered the riots to be the work of the devil, the 1692 invocation of the image was more in keeping with its traditional use.
63. Ibid., 265.
64. Ibid., 269.
65. Ibid., 270.
66. Ibid., 271, 274, 276. These were the first penitential processions since June 22, 1663. Guijo, Diario, vol. 2, 198.
Mexico City to lift a drought.\textsuperscript{69} Within eleven days, a downpour ended the dry spell.\textsuperscript{70} Her quick and direct response reinforced her reputation as a holy figure blessed with an abundance of supernatural ability. Perhaps the culminating moment of this Virgin’s miraculous power came in August 1696 when a French naval force threatened the Caribbean. Fearing a raid on New Spain’s coastal cities, the Archbishop-Viceroy Juan de Ortega Cano Montañez y Patiño ordered a novena to the Santísimo Sacramento in August 1696.\textsuperscript{71} For its part, the city council processed the image of Remedios through the streets and said a novena to her.\textsuperscript{72} To general amazement, Mexico City later heard that the very day they brought Remedios into Mexico City, the enemy French abandoned Havana harbor.\textsuperscript{73} Chronicler Antonio de Robles considered it a “great miracle.”\textsuperscript{74} Although Mexico City had invoked Remedios to protect the Atlantic fleet before, this particular wonder created an even stronger perception of the Virgin’s competency in naval matters. All these miracles, however, served more to accentuate the increasing specialization of Remedios than to restore her as a general protector.

Over the same exact period that the Virgin of Los Remedios proved her miraculous ability in effecting rainfall and protecting shipping, Mexico City invoked a variety of holy figures to stave off the plague. Sometimes the substitution of Remedios was explicit. In response to widespread illness in December 1696, the religious community invoked the Santo Cristo de la Columna from the Santa Catarina Mártir parish, using “the form in which it is customary to bring Nuestra Señora de Remedios.”\textsuperscript{75} As an added measure, the Mexico City community also appealed to San Sebastian, the patron saint of the plague from medieval times, for the first time in the seventeenth century. In a similar fashion, Mexico City recurred to the Santo Cristo of the Sta. Teresa parish church against disease in January 1697.\textsuperscript{76} In March 1699, the councilmen elected a new patron, San Bernardo, to protect Mexico City from the plague.\textsuperscript{77} The rapid succession of holy figures suggested that through the late 1690s Mexico City was searching for an effective replacement for Remedios.

\textsuperscript{69} Robles, \textit{Diario}, vol. 3, 46.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{73} Robles, \textit{Diario}, vol. 3, 51.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Robles, \textit{Diario}, vol. 3, 54.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{77} This was in addition to protection from \textit{chabuistle} or wheat rust, a fungus that destroyed the plant’s stem. Barrio Lorenzot, “Compendio,” AHCM, vol. 436ª, fol. 368.
specifically for the threat of illness. No one single saint emerged as an alternative to her.

The miracles and failures of the Virgin of Los Remedios over the five years from 1692 to 1697 shifted the public’s perception of the Virgin’s saintly advocations for decades. Over the next twenty years, Remedios became more a specialist in drought, naval affairs, and victory over Spain’s enemies and less a general protector of Mexico City. The Spanish king encouraged this transformation in 1700 by requiring the city council to hold an annual feast for Remedios to thank her for liberating the Spanish fleet from enemy ships. Overall, of the nine occasions from 1701 until 1719 when Mexico City held novenas to implore the help of Remedios in her sanctuary, seven dealt with drought and the safety of merchant fleets. On the orders of the viceroy, Mexico City sponsored the entrance of Remedios seven times over the same period; six of these processions dealt with Spanish wars, royal heirs, or the safety of the fleet. Thanks to high-profile miracles, the monarch’s influence, and the viceroy’s authority, the Virgin of Los Remedios’s saintly specialties narrowed at the turn of the eighteenth century. While, at first glance, the confirmed miraculous ability of Mexico City’s primary protector should have proved a blessing to city councilmen, in reality, they expressed concern that Remedios’s specializations left a void in the city’s saintly defenses.

For a short period from 1701 to 1702, the city council experimented with other holy figures in an unsuccessful attempt to identify a new generalist saint. For instance, the first disaster that faced Mexico City after the king’s declaration in favor of Remedios was a drought in May 1701. Even though drought was one of the Virgin’s specialties, the city first said a general novena and rogative in the Cathedral and the San Agustín friary. Only after these steps had yielded no apparent effect did the city

and Spanish military victories in December 1706. Ibid., fol. 32v. Birth of heir in February 1708. Ibid., fol. 39v. Remedios likely stayed in Mexico City from 1708 until October 1710 to assist the Spanish military. October 1710. Ibid., fol. 56. Fleet in December 1712. Ibid., fol. 7. Fleet in May 1716. Ibid., fol. 105v. Health of ex-Viceroy Fernando de Alencastre Noroña y Silva, Duke of Linares (secondarily public health and fleet) in May 1717. Ibid., fols. 118–18v. Pacific fleet in January 1719. Ibid., fol. 134. Although our data do not perfectly match, Curcio-Nagy also identifies this tendency in “Native Icon,” 386–387.
sponsors a novena in Remedio's sanctuary in Naucalpan. Confronted with another drought in May 1702, the religious community first held a novena in the Santo Cristo chapel of the Cathedral before later sending for Remedios. These experiments apparently convinced the city council that the Virgin was their most effective intercessor. From 1704 until 1719, Remedios was the exclusive choice for a municipal protector—even for the threat of sickness.

When surveying the changes to the cult of patron saints from 1690 to 1719, two major points emerge, both of which help explain why the Virgin of Guadalupe could work her miracle in 1737. First, the period shows that the attributes of Mexico City's principal patron did not remain stable. Even though Mexico City returned to the patronage of Remedios as general protector, traces of her specialties lingered. Second, city officials occasionally gave other saints the opportunity to work miracles. During this particular period of fluctuation, however, none of the potential substitutes delivered a supernatural wonder of the type that might have won the loyalties of a grateful Mexico City public.

In the 1720s, social tensions among the political elite of Mexico City again disrupted the devotion to Remedios. As Curcio-Nagy has found, the Spanish viceroy and merchants increasingly used the image for their personal interests and kept the image in Mexico City for long periods of time. The city council and devotees in Naucalpan reacted in frustration by complaining to colonial authorities and even to the king himself. The cult of Remedios became politicized to the point that, in 1726, Mexico City rebelled against bringing her image to assist the Atlantic fleet. The council reluctantly approved sending for Remedios but imposed the condition that the visit last only the duration of the novena. When Viceroy Juan de Acuña y Bejarano endorsed the restrictions, the city council and the other corporations that traditionally sponsored a day of the novena then refused to provide any funds to defray the cost of the celebration. The councilmen flatly told the Atlantic fleet mer-

85. Curcio-Nagy, “Native Icon,” 387–388. These personal reasons are far more prevalent in the documentation than any negative association with Spanish domination; even though, in 1721 the city council sponsored a novena to the Virgin of Los Remedios as the “Conquessor of Mexico” for the 200-year anniversary of Cortés’s capture of Mexico City. Barrio Lorenzot, “Compendio,” AHCM, vol. 437ª, fols. 173v-74v.
86. Ibid., fol. 158v.
87. Ibid., fol. 253v.
88. These included the Audiencia, the Treasury, the University, and the Mint. Ibid., fols. 253–4.
chants that if they wanted to bring the image of Remedios, they would have to shoulder all the expenses themselves. Even when the merchants agreed, the confraternities of Sto. Domingo refused to take part in the procession. The dispute centered on how to use public resources—both money and the patron saint Remedios. The bitter political climate made the conflict over Remedios even more divisive. Perhaps in retribution the viceroy attributed the 1727 safe landing of the fleet in Veracruz to the miraculous intervention of Remedios and ordered a public procession and celebration to give her thanks. In 1728, the next time the city council heard a proposal to bring Remedios into Mexico City to mark the happy arrival of the Atlantic fleet, councilmen rejected it outright and did not even allow a novena in her sanctuary. The political disputes and the merchants’ instance that Remedios specialize in shipping matters caused instability in the cult of Mexico City’s primary celestial defender.

As in the 1690s when the saintly advocations of the Virgin of Los Remedios narrowed, in the 1720s the city council again searched the celestial host for other options. In January 1722 after a month during which several fires occurred in Mexico City, the city council decided to take San Antonio Abad as patron saint. When a measles epidemic raged through Mexico City in October 1727, filling hospitals with sick people, the city council did not choose Remedios. Instead, the councilmen followed a medieval precedent of casting lots to determine which saint wanted to intercede, a move not taken for at least a century in Mexico City. San Nicolás Tolentin won the lottery, and the city council paid for a novena to him. In March 1729, the city council elected to take San José as patron saint of earthquakes. None of these saints, however, filled the role of general protector.

89. Ibid., fol. 254v.
90. The city council minutes record many examples of conflict among colonial authorities. For example, in February 1728, councilmen argued over personal interests. Ibid., fol. 273. The faculty of the Real Universidad and the Colegio de Santos quarreled for years. Ibid., fol. 293.
91. Ibid., fol. 263v. The celebrations took place in July 1727. Ibid., fol. 268.
92. Ibid., fol. 278v.
93. Ibid., fol. 185v.
95. The cathedral chapter did not ratify the councilmen’s decision so they sponsored a special prayer to San José in the church of San Francisco. Barrio Lorenzot, “Compendio,” AHCM, vol. 437², fols. 283, 290v, 305v-6.
In the 1730s, the Mexico City council stopped experimenting with saints and began to invoke, instead, different advocations of the Virgin Mary. A return to an exclusive reliance on Remedios seemed unpromising given that merchants continued to consider her a special advocate for Atlantic shipping. Mexico City held novenas to solicit her celestial intervention on behalf of the Spanish merchant marine in 1730, 1731, 1733, and 1734. Councilmen in the early 1730s began to experiment with other Virgins, particularly Guadalupe and Loreto. Thanks to the 200-year anniversary of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe in 1731, her cult was highly visible during this time of transition. Other signs of interest followed. In 1732, the city reaffirmed its commitment to defending the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. In 1735, the council approved an application for a new building dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Despite this interest, the Marian cult that the city council seemed to prefer was not that of the Virgin of Guadalupe, but the Virgin of Loreto. Supported by the Jesuits, the cult had been growing since the late seventeenth century. The church of San Gregorio built a chapel to the Virgin of Loreto in the 1680s and then proceeded to rebuild it in the same decade. In the late 1720s, Loreto had relieved Mexico City of the measles and was credited with power over health. By the early 1730s, the city council regularly attended the feast of Loreto on September 8 as part of its corporate obligations. Such was the reverence for this Virgin that the city council chose her over Guadalupe in 1734.

In January, Councilman Felipe Cayetano Medina y Sarabia suggested a novena to Guadalupe for disease and proposed an annual feast to her, but the city council permanently tabled the discussion. Later that year, in June, the city council held two novenas to Loreto to lift illness and drought. The next year in March 1735 councilmen approved an application to build a chapel to Loreto. Loreto seemed to hold a slight edge over the Virgin of Guadalupe and Virgin of Los Remedios, but the city council did not invoke her exclusively. Councilmen also held a no-

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96. Ibid., fols. 290, 291, 305v, 317v, 328v.
97. Ibid., fol. 306v.
98. Ibid., fol. 314.
99. Ibid., fol. 336.
100. Robles, Diario, vol. 1, 263, 273, vol 2, 120.
101. Lafaye, Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe, 86, and Bartolomé Felipe de Itta y Parra, Consejera de la salud María Santíssima en su soberana imagen de Loreto, que venera esta corte mexicana en su Collegio de s. Gregorio de la sagrada Compañía de Jesús (Mexico: Imp. real del superior gobierno de los herederos de M. de Rivera, 1728).
103. Ibid., fol. 325v.
104. Ibid., fol. 327.
105. Ibid., fol. 336.
vena to Remedios in July 1735 for flooding. However, for the first time in at least a century, the city council diversified its institutional attention and requests for intercession among several Marian advocations.

In late 1737, an epidemic of *matlazagua* or typhoid fever put the three Virgins to the test. The city councilmen first turned to the Virgin of Loreto in mid-December 1736. When Loreto failed to stop the sickness and death, the council next appealed to the Virgin of Los Remedios and brought her image into the city in early January 1737. Alleviating illness was not a strength of the Remedios devotion in Mexico City, and, indeed, the plague raged on. Two weeks later on January 23, 1737, councilman Conde del Valle suggested the council bring the image of Guadalupe to Mexico City to implore her intercession and to mark her feast with an annual novena. The council postponed the feast question but did request permission to move Guadalupe’s image from Archbishop-Viceroy Juan Antonio de Vizarrón y Eguíarreta. Seemingly, del Valle was more concerned with abating the plague than promoting a particular holy figure because the very next day he also proposed requesting clerics to urge their parishioners to do penance for the sins of the city. When the city council received word that the archbishop had refused to authorize the removal of the image of Guadalupe from her sanctuary, they instead sponsored a novena in Tepeyac. Even as the plague continued, the city council voted to take Guadalupe as patron on February 11 and to sponsor a novena to her annually. In April 1737, the city council together with the Cathedral chapter duly swore to recognize Guadalupe as a celestial protector of Mexico City. Unfortunately, the epidemic continued to ravage the Mexico City population. In the search for an effective celestial intercessor, the Mexico City community invoked a variety of other holy figures, venerated images, and relics, including San Bernardo and the Cristo Renovado. It was only after the Mexico City community completed the public ceremony in May 1737, recognizing Guadalupe as patron and promising to promote her as universal saint of all New Spain, that the plague relented. By taking

106. Ibid., fols. 331v-2.
107. Ibid., fol. 349.
108. Ibid., fol. 350.
109. Ibid., fol. 350v.
110. Vizarrón y Eguíarreta served as archbishop from 1730 to 1747 and viceroy from 1734 to 1740.
111. The council voted this measure down saying the clerics were too busy with ministering to the sick or burying the dead. Ibid., fol. 350v.
112. Ibid., fol. 351-51v.
Guadalupe as official celestial protector, the city council permanently boosted the Virgin’s prestige and set the stage for expanded devotion to her. While this was a triumph for Guadalupe, the key factor explaining her success was external to her cult—disruptions to Remedios’s saintly attributes.

Although studies of Guadalupe have asserted the 1737 miracle represented a crowning moment that sealed the Virgin’s ascent into the hearts of Mexicans, the historical record from 1737 to 1742 shows little evidence of a massive surge in devotion. As Poole has written, it was “the epidemic of 1736 to 1737, not the flood of 1629, that marked the triumph of Guadalupe over other devotions in New Spain.”114 Some signs did point to a surge in interest in the Virgin of Tepeyac. In the months after the 1737 miracle, a number of cities adopted Guadalupe as patron of their municipality and authorized Mexico City dignitaries to apply to Rome for official approval of Guadalupe as universal patron of New Spain.115 While these measures could signal a sudden blooming of authentic devotion to the Virgin, explicit commands from Archbishop-Viceroy Vizarrón y Eguiarreta and influence from the viceregal capital also assisted the spread of the cult of Guadalupe.116 Independent-minded Puebla voiced concerns over this pressure from Mexico City, however, and refused to adopt Guadalupe.117 Even the principle supporter of Guadalupe, the Mexico City council, did not exclusively embrace its new patron saint. The councilmen continued to encourage the various favored devotions of residents and to invoke the celestial protection of other holy figures. In October 1739, the council granted the order of San Juan de Dios permission to publicize the devotion to Nuestra Señora de la Bala and to collect money on her behalf.118 In 1741, the city council agreed to attend the Bethlemites’ celebration of the Holy Innocents.119 Mexico City even returned to the patronage of the Virgin of Los Remedios. In April 1738, councilmen partially attributed the end of the 1737 plague to Remedios, stating that they should send her image back to its sanctuary because “the needs for which Remedios was brought, the epidemic and the happy voyage of the fleet, had ended.”120 During the next decade, the city again implored Remedios for assistance with rain (in 1735, 1739, 1756, and 1758).

114. Poole, Our Lady, 177.
115. Ibid., 176; Brading, Mexican Phoenix, 127.
116. For a similar case of politically motivated support for another religious figure from Mexico City, San Felipe de Jesús, see the file “Testimonio del expediente sobre el beato San Felipe de Jesús,” ACCM, Correspondencia, caja 4.
117. Poole, Our Lady, 176; Brading, Mexican Phoenix, 127.
119. Ibid., fol. 378v.
120. Ibid., fol. 36.
and 1741) and even for sickness (in 1741).121 This more traditional use of Remedios as a generalist protector continued, despite her continued advocacy for the Spanish monarch and merchant shipping. In 1741, the viceroy asked that the Cathedral say a novena to Remedios for the health of the king, success at war, and a safe Atlantic fleet.122 Surprisingly, the city council did not invoke Guadalupe at all during this time. This counterintuitive fact indicates that the councilmen did not consider Guadalupe as a replacement for Remedios. Rather, they regarded her as another specialized holy figure in the mold of other patron saints—essentially they gave thanks to her in an annual ceremony but did not invoke her for celestial protection. For instance, in 1762, the next time Mexico City faced another outbreak of matlazagua, the city council sponsored a novena to the Virgin of Loreto.123 Even the provinces of New Spain recognized Remedios as the principal heavenly defender of Mexico City. In 1741, when the Querétaro city council wished to honor its protector, the Nuestra Señora del Pueblo de San Francisco, it requested the ceremonial etiquette for the Virgin of Los Remedios rather than for the Virgin of Guadalupe.124 On the whole, the historical record suggests that contemporaries considered the 1737 miracle of Guadalupe less as a definitive statement of the Virgin’s power than as a welcome, but normal incident, in Mexico City’s devotional culture. This belief also explains why the city council and Cathedral chapter delayed promoting Guadalupe as patron of all New Spain as they had promised in their initial vows to the Virgin.

The initiative to name Guadalupe universal patron of New Spain came not from the grateful townspeople and creole leaders of Mexico City, but from a foreign resident, Lorenzo Boturini. During his time in the viceregal capital, the Italian Boturini had become a devotee of the Virgin and had privately begun to secure privileges for her cult in New Spain. As officials discovered to their surprise in 1742, Boturini had successfully obtained papal approval for the coronation of Guadalupe and for her election as patron of New Spain.125 By December 1742, Archbishop Vizarrón y Eguiarreta and Viceroy Pedro Cebrián, Count of Fuencleta, assumed control over the matter and suspended the privileges

121. Ibid., fols. 331v, 366, 379v, 380. In June 1741, the city of Querétaro asked for the procedures and ceremonies that Mexico City used when bringing Remedios, which they wanted for their venerated image of Nuestra Señora del Pueblo de San Francisco. Ibid., fol. 380v.
125. Brading, Mexican Phoenix, 137.
until they could determine their legitimacy. These authorities took nearly four years to endorse the new liturgical concessions. When they did, though, they started a decade of unprecedented promotion of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The true beginning of the rapid growth in the devotion to Guadalupe came with the 1746 festivities commemorating Guadalupe as patron saint. Within ten years, the Virgin became the premier holy figure of New Spain. Because much more documentation exists on this period than previous periods, scholars can record the growth and tenor of the Guadalupean cult more precisely. For instance, in September 1746, the Archbishop-Viceroy Juan Antonio de Vizarrón y Eguizarreta commanded that city councils across New Spain elect Guadalupe as patron saint. In December 1746, dignitaries celebrated the affirmative results of the election in Tepeyac. In 1749, a new endowed chapter of canons increased the prestige and splendor of worship at the sanctuary of Guadalupe. These clergymen added their voices to the longstanding request for even greater liturgical recognition from the pope for Guadalupe. In 1754, Benedict XIV granted papal confirmation of Guadalupe’s patronage in New Spain, moved her saint day to December 12, and granted her feast a proper office and octave. As Taylor has written, the 1756 festivities celebrating these impressive privileges solidified the Guadalupan tradition and began “a new era of popular devotion and promotion.”

If 1756 represented a turning point in the cult of Guadalupe, the decades leading to that moment set the stage for the Virgin’s triumph. Short-term fluctuations in the cult of Remedios provided several other saints the opportunity to defend Mexico City from disaster. Of all these holy figures municipal leaders judged that it was the Virgin of Guadalupe who saved them through her miraculous intervention. The promotion of the cult of Guadalupe by colonial authorities and the prestige of papal recognition cemented her place among the highest echelon of holy figures venerated in New Spain. Creole patriotism, which had contributed little to Guadalupe’s rise, took pride in the steep ascent of a local favorite. Even so, resistance to the devotion of Guadalupe in the 1730s showed that, for some, the “creole” represented by the Virgin was, in fact, only relevant to the Valley of Mexico. Nonetheless, the spread of the cult of Guadalupe in the 1730s to the 1750s started to make good the universal aspect inherent in “creole.” It would take another two shocks exter-

127. Ibid., vol. 438ª, fol. 32.
128. Ibid., fol. 35v.
nal to the cult of Guadalupe—namely the Bourbon reforms and independence movement—to transform the Virgin into a bona-fide symbol of the Mexican nation.

III. A Brief Coda: Guadalupe as Creole Symbol, 1760s to 1780s

Even though a string of successes expanded the devotion to Guadalupe from the 1730s to the 1750s, the Virgin only slowly came to embody a politicized symbol of Mexican nationality. It was not until 1810 that Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla famously declared his independence movement in the name of Guadalupe.\footnote{Hugh M. Hamill, Jr., “Early Psychological Warfare in the Hidalgo Revolt,” \textit{Hispanic American Historical Review} 41 (May 1961): 210. For other studies on this period, see Nebel, \textit{Santa María Tonantzin Virgen de Guadalupe}, 162-163, n. 212.} Even during that period, the protests in Mexico City to Hidalgo’s appropriation of Guadalupe showed that some people rejected the Virgin as representative of a larger Mexican nation.\footnote{Brading, \textit{Mexican Phoenix}, 233; Taylor, \textit{Magistrates of the Sacred}, 295.}

As the analysis of the cult of saints in Mexico City from the 1650s to the 1750s has suggested, several factors other than creole identity better account for the Virgin of Guadalupe’s increased popularity. This small section extends the same methodology to the late colonial period when creole identity does appear to have played a larger role in the cult of Guadalupe. Even during this time, the larger context shaped how people venerated Guadalupe by concentrating piety on existing devotions and by shifting the predominant concerns of the Virgin’s devotees.

Unbeknownst to Boturini or the leaders of Mexico City, they had secured their liturgical privileges for the Virgin of Guadalupe at a particularly favorable moment. Less than a decade after Guadalupe’s ascension to patron saint of New Spain, Bourbon bureaucrats as well as some clergymen began to restrict the time and money dedicated to existing devotions in the Spanish Empire. For instance, Visitor José de Gálvez carefully circumscribed the Mexico City council’s public commitments to Catholicism in a series of regulations culminating in 1771.\footnote{AHCM, \textit{Actas}, vol. 752ª, fols. 173v-82v.} He cut the council’s sponsorship of San Francisco Xavier’s saint day altogether and limited the amount of public funds spent for other patron saints. These rules had a real effect; the council neither adopted another patron saint nor did they attend any new saint feast day for the rest of the colonial period. Royal institutions such the Audiencia likewise began to trim the number of feast days they formally attended.\footnote{At the Audiencia’s request, in 1789, Charles IV authorized a reduction in the feasts that judges were required to attend formally. ACCM, \textit{Actas}, vol. 57, fols. 50v–52v.}
1771 the Fourth Mexican Provincial Council significantly reduced the
days parishioners of New Spain spent in church. For non-Indians the
required feasts of precept dropped from fifty-three to twenty-two in ad-
tion to all the Sundays of the year. The emphasis on fewer celebra-
tions worked in Guadalupe’s favor. When an earthquake struck Mexico
City in 1776, the city council paid for a novena to the Virgin of Tepeyac,
and the council wanted to require all the royal officials to attend a sep-
arate novena to Remedios. Both the viceroy and city superintendent,
however, discouraged the proposal, arguing that the business of the cap-
ital should take priority over the novena. Why have two functions, the
superintendent asked, since Guadalupe was the “very most principal pa-
tron of the entire kingdom”? Ironically, perhaps, the desire of Bourbon
authorities to encourage work and to economize public budgets concen-
trated official veneration on the Virgin of Guadalupe.

By redrawing the social landscape, Bourbon-era reforms also trans-
formed the central concerns of the people in New Spain. Academics,
most notably Brading, have argued that Spanish bureaucrats blamed many
of the ills of colonial government and of society on the American-
born. While reforms did not uniformly disadvantage all creoles and
reward all peninsulares, the period did make the issue of birthplace a
pressing public issue. Devotees with new problems made new demands
of their saints. As Taylor has found, individuals considered Guadalupe
an ally against Bourbon reforms; those whose prospects were harmed
by new regulation recourse to the intercession of the Virgin. The de-
votion to Guadalupe, which had always maintained an element of cre-
ole identity and was undergoing expansion, was well positioned to of-
fer solace and hope to the American born facing a common problem.
To the insurgents Hidalgo and José María Morelos, Guadalupe seemed a
natural symbol for their rebellion. Their choice established a precedent
for early nationalists for whom Guadalupe signified an appeal for unity.
respect for Catholicism, and God’s promise of special favor for the people born in Mexico.  

Although the devotion to Guadalupe attracted more adherents thanks to the political influence of the capital and to miracles, her cult also benefited from the Bourbon-era reforms. These institutional shifts put social and economic pressure on creoles and, in so doing, created a common need for a religious figure representative of New Spain. Moreover, larger imperial reforms discouraged new saintly devotions shortly after colonial officials had so conspicuously promoted the Virgin of Guadalupe. The growth in Guadalupe’s cult in the 1740s to the 1750s established the foundation for her transition from a devotional saint to a national icon over the late colonial period to the nineteenth century.

IV. Conclusion

The Virgin of Guadalupe’s steep rise from the 1730s to 1750s inspired widespread creole patriotism. From the 1650s, the promise of miracles, the larger shifts in the devotional culture of Mexico City, official promotion, and excellent timing better explain why Guadalupe attracted more followers than did local identity. Perhaps most importantly, disruptions to the cult of Remedios, Mexico City’s primary patron, caused municipal leaders to experiment with other Marian intercessors including Guadalupe. Her opportunity to rescue Mexico City came not from identity concerns, but from a practical search for the most efficacious resolution to a crisis. Even so, the tepid response of the city council and residents of Mexico City suggested that they considered Guadalupe’s intervention less a long-awaited declaration of creole religious achievement than part of a continuum of celestial intervention from a variety of holy figures. Only after the encouragement from a foreigner and promotion by high officials did the 1737 miracle take on greater importance. Even during the late colonial period when Guadalupe began to develop into a national political symbol, distinguishing whether attention to her cult came from creole patriotism, religious fervor, or acquiescence by provincial bureaucrats, is difficult.

The conclusions of this study force a rethinking of the scholarly interpretation of Guadalupe. Because studies have linked Guadalupe with creole patriotism, the spread of her cult seems to indicate a steady development of protonationalism from a base in Mexico City to encompass all of future independent Mexico. Before the 1760s, though, Guadalupe served as a political symbol only in two instances: in the 1665 to 1666 inquiry and in the 1750s. In each case, she represented Mexico

140. Ibid., 296, and Brading, Mexican Phoenix, 237.
City rather than all New Spain. The formation of Mexican nationalism was a recent and reactive product of the late colonial period rather than an autonomous and slowly building process lasting centuries. In the mid-colonial period, Guadalupe was a poor indicator of creole identity in Mexico City, let alone in the larger territory of New Spain. This reinterpretation of the Virgin of Tepeyac may be overdue given the current model of identity formation that emphasizes multiple loyalties, shifting concerns, and intentional manipulation. Rather than conveniently tracing out the development of the Mexican nation, Guadalupe more appropriately shows the vicissitudes of the cult of saints in Mexico City. Dethroning the Virgin of Tepeyac as the mother of the Mexican nation will free historians from an unnecessary political burden to capture religious life of the mid-colonial period more accurately.

141. Although this trend is unlikely to have escaped scholars, one might consult some recent works in the helpful review essays in *Latin American Research Review* 40, no. 3 (October 2005).