

A TRANSDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE OF THE PRE-COLOMBIAN ART AND THE ICON OF GUADALUPE : AN ESSAY



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I- INTRODUCTION

The Plastir journal addresses the various attributes of plasticity, and whose characteristics are presented in the minds (thinking, feeling, acting) of human beings. In fact, there are authors who argue that the human mind has “quantum” characteristics that could be “molded” to the ancestral archetypes present in all

cultures (Ponte & Schäfer, 2013). In this regard, Carl Jung (2002) said that *“the Collective Unconscious is the deepest part of the mind that contains the archetypes common to all cultures, shaping their way of thinking, feeling, and acting.”*

This perspective was deepened by Carl Jung and Wolfgang Pauli (Jung & Pauli, 1955), namely on the role of mind-body relationship. Jung and Pauli influenced each other, and it could be said that they concluded that there is an isomorphism between the world of the mind and the physical world. Thus, Jungian archetypal symbols are similar to Gestalt figures constituted by an overlapping of images that comes true through self-conscious observation of the Observer.

Furthermore, the relevance of the inner process of cognition present in the work of creation is described by Eastern and Western cultures. For example, the Yantra is a sacred image with psychosomatic effects whose main objective is to “tune” the Observer’s “conscious mind” (composed by archetypal patterns) to a Divine entity, such as Mother Durga of Eastern culture (Martins, 2024).

Thus, the synchronism between the statue of Toniatzin (symbol of the pre-Columbian sacred feminine) and the image of the Icon of Guadalupe (symbol of the Christian sacred feminine) - as symbols of the primordial archetype of the mother goddess – might have contributed for the harmonious integration between these different cultures during the Spanish conquests, and later to its central role in the emergence of the Mexican nation (Martins, 2022), as mentioned in the historical and psychological section of this essay.

II- THE PRE-COLOMBIAN ART AND THE ICON OF GUADALUPE: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The history of the pre-Columbian art comprises the various types of artistic manifestations carried out by several peoples and cultures that inhabited the Americas (Central and South) from the "Primitive" period (before 2000 BC – 800 AD) to the "Classical and post-Classical" period (800 AD – 1500 AD) (Pano Gracia, 1997).

In the "Primitive" period, we would like to highlight the Mayan culture who lived in the region of the Yucatan Península, including Guatemalan and Honduran territories, where they prospered. The Maya had a script consisting of more than 500 ideographic signs, partly from the Olmecs, but more refined. The complex calculations of the celestial phenomena present in the Mayan calendar was carried out by the priests, as symbols of knowledge and wisdom. There was a sacred calendar where religious festivals were fixed, as well as, a solar calendar for mundane day-to-day activities. The meeting of these two calendars took place every 52 years, and which place them as a milestone in the "primitive" pre-Columbian art period. Also, noteworthy are the ceramics (terracotta figurines), wood carving and architecture, such as the limestone temple of Kukulcán at Chichen Itzá. However, around the IXth century, there was a sudden disappearance of this culture, for which there may have been a combination of several factors, such as, the depletion of the soil (which resulted in famine), internal religious war for power, invasions by external people, epidemics, and natural disasters (earthquakes) (Coe, 1971).

In the "Classic and post-Classic" period, the main cultures were the Incas (South America) and the Aztecs (Central America). The Incas were the successors of several Andean cultures of the "Classical" period, and they were the largest empire in the South America in the "post-Classical" period. The Incas (1438-1533) lived in the

region of the Andes range, which goes from Ecuador to Chile, and stood out in architecture (the famous Macchu Picchu or the “lost city of the Incas”), goldsmithing (intended for religious rituals), among others. The Inca people were religious and gave relevance to naturalistic cults, as evidenced by the worship of the mother goddess Pachamama who was “assimilated” as the Virgin Mary, during the Spanish invasions commanded by Francisco Pizarro (Métraux, 1962).

On the other hand, in the region of the present Central America, in the “Classical” period, we would like to highlight the Toltecs (800-1200) who stood out for being great craftsmen (meaning of Toltec in the Nahuatl language) and for their architecture. Although there is no evidence of the authorship of some of its architectural constructions, we still want to refer the «Road of the Dead» and the emblematic pyramids of the Sun and the Moon located at Teotihuacan, 50 Km from present-day Mexico city. Also, noteworthy is the mythical god Quetzalcoatl – “The Feathered Serpent” - who disappeared at sea during the barbarian invasions, but having promised to return later. In fact, several situations contributed to an internal crisis within Toltecs people, namely the looting of barbarian people from various Mesoamerican regions, which led to the ruin of Teotihuacan (Anequin, 1977).

In the “post-Classical” period, the Aztecs (1300-1521) prospered in this region of Central America, as a mythical place of their ancestors, with Tenochtitlan (now Mexico city) as their capital (Soustelle, 1970). Here, we could find the Temple Mayor that houses the famous Sun Stone – symbol that represent the Aztec calendar on the cycles of the Sun and Moon – that governed its ceremonies and rituals. Thus,

Aztec architecture is characterized by the existence of main temples, where sculptures were used to adorn architectural constructions. Also, noteworthy is the Aztec paintings that used bright colours (orange, red) to represent religious and mythological scenes of their culture. But, the religious Aztec people saw the Spanish Hernán Cortez, as the return of the god Quetzalcoatl, which made him fearsome. Together with the technical and military superiority of the Spaniards, and the epidemics brought by the Europeans, they contributed to the easy “evangelization” of the Aztecs people (Vaillant, 1951).

It is within this context that we want to interconnect the ancestral devotion of the Aztec people to mother goddess Tonantzin, called Tonantzintla or “place of Our Mother”, located at Tepeyac, and the current place of devotion to the Icon of Guadalupe (Martins, 2022). In fact, one of the sculptures on Tonantzin is presented as a dark woman on a top of a half-moon, having various designations according to her different facets: Ilamatecuhtli (goddness of midwifery due to her association with childbirth and the well-being of mothers) and Cozcamiauh (goddness with a necklace of maize flowers connecting with the abundance provided by corn). For its side, the Christian image of the Icon of Guadalupe also symbolizes life and fertility, presenting Herself as a pregnant woman, with a dress all richly adorned, on a top of a half-moon, during the three apparitions that took place with Juan Diego, in 1531, as drawn in Figure 1 (Taylor, 1961).



Figure 1: Icon of Guadalupe

In fact, at the beginning of December 1531, during the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, the Aztec Juan Diego, whose native name was Cuauhtlatouac or “Speaking Eagle”, came face to face with a bright Lady who introduced Herself as the Virgin of Guadalupe, while Juan Diego referred to Her as Tonantzin, in Nahuatl language (Valeriano, 1560). Thus, Juan Diego went to Tenochtitlán (now Mexico City) to inform Bishop Juan Zumárraga of the intention of Our Lady of Guadalupe to build a *teocalli* (“temple”) in that place dedicated to Tonantzin, and where it is currently located the Basilica of Guadalupe (Wahlig, 1974). Also, some other authors (Carlos Caso-Rosendi, 2017 & Johnston, 2011) have highlighted that Our Lady of Guadalupe named the Aztec Juan Diego Her son and

told him to gather roses from Tepeyac in order to show them to Bishop Juan de Zumarraga, as a proof of the authenticity of the apparitions (Monter, 2013). Then, during the meeting of Juan Zumárraga and Juan Diego, the image of the Virgin Mary appeared on his cloak, and it has remained unchanged over the centuries with no scientific explanation for it. Later, it occurred some other unexplained facts, such as the bombs that destroyed part of the church in the 1920s, but which did not affect the image of the Icon of Guadalupe; Also, the dyes used in the painting of the mantle do not belong to the chemical elements of the Periodic Table that support the singularity of this portrait (Gorny&Rosikon, 2016).

Furthermore, throughout Mexican history, the protective action of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Mexican people has been present in several occasions, such as, the cessation of plagues, in 1544 and 1736, and the minimization of the flood damage, in 1629, among others. In fact, the influence of Our Lady of Guadalupe goes beyond the realm of faith, and its symbolism is deeply connected with the Mexican history (Petruzzello, 2024). For example, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla displayed the image of the Icon of Guadalupe as the Patroness of the Mexican Independence from Spain (1810-1921) (de Gómara, 1979); Also, Emiliano Zapata's rebels carried the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), and later, during the civil war in Mexico (1926-1929) the rebels also carried the same sacred image (Poole, 1995).

Our Lady of Guadalupe is the current Patroness of Mexico and Hispanic America (Lee, 1947), just as Our Lady of Aparecida is the current Patroness of Brazil (Brustoloni, 1998). In this regard, we have to refer to the research work of Rosemary Ruether (2005), who have examined the role of the sacred female imagery throughout Western history, highlighting the complexity of the social forces that emerged during the Spanish and Portuguese conquest of the various people that have been "shaped"

by the symbolism of the sacred feminine. Thus, she played a relevant role in the appeasement of the clash of different cultures that contributed to the birth of the mestizo and multicultural nation of modern Mexico.

III- THE PRE-COLOMBIAN ART AND THE ICON OF GUADALUPE: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Looking at pre-Columbian cultures, we understand how much gods and mystical figures played a central role in the psychological structure of these societies. By introducing Christianity into the indigenous culture, the Spaniards gave rise to a significant cultural syncretism. This process cannot be described simply as the imposition of religious concepts, as it involved a blending and adaptation of beliefs exemplified by the reinterpretation of the Virgin of Guadalupe as a continuation of the indigenous mother goddess Tonantzin. Her worship was fundamental to the foundation of a collective identity and the preservation of social harmony in these cultures. (Ruether, 2005). Through this phenomenon, we understand that there was a cognitive flexibility and a capacity for cultural adaptation, specifically related to the concept of mental plasticity.

This concept, also known as neuroplasticity, has been studied by many scholars over the years; However, Norman Doidge brought it to widespread attention with the book "The Brain That Changes Itself" (2007). It describes the remarkable brain's ability to modify and reorganize itself, allowing the formation of new neural connections in response to new experiences and learning. This adaptability has proven to be not only fundamental from an individual perspective but also crucial for cultural evolution. (Kolb&Gibb, 2011). By introducing new ideas and beliefs, neuroplasticity allows people to integrate these new concepts in a way that is meaningful to their culture. (Davidson&Begley, 2012). As referred to above, Diogo Ponte and Lothar Schäfer

(2013) also defend the idea of a "quantum" mind characterised by the same flexibility and ability to adapt to new circumstances and cultural influences, aligning with the concept of neuroplasticity. The authors argue that this adaptation is crucial for humans to survive and thrive in a world filled with cultural diversity, fostering development in response to cultural influences and the challenges of the modern environment. The quantum psychology proposed by the authors is both consistent with the principle of neuroplasticity and also highlights the importance of cultural and intellectual openness for the continuous development of the human being.

Throughout our research, we understand that indigenous communities accepted both the new religious concepts and also preserved their ancient traditions. This process shows how people and cultures are psychologically flexible to change their beliefs and practices in response to new influences, while maintaining continuity with the past. This phenomenon demonstrates the intellectual spirit of the natives, who managed to introduce new religious forms without completely abandoning their traditions. According to Ponte and Schäfer (2013), this fusion of beliefs contributed to the survival of indigenous religious traditions under colonial rule and reinforced the role of women in continuing these practices.

With the transition from the worship of the Aztec goddess Tonantzin to the veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe, we can understand how the archetypes proposed by psychologist and psychiatrist Carl Jung work. Archetypes are universal patterns of human experience, innate psychic structures that manifest in dreams, myths, and religions around the world. Through these archetypes, it is possible to access an ancestral and universal wisdom that transcends individual experiences (Jung, 2014). This collective identity, formed around Tonantzin, can be related to another concept developed by the author on the collective unconscious, which remains a very relevant and influential concept in psychology today.

Unlike the personal unconscious, which is connected to repressed thoughts and memories influencing individual behaviour (Jung, 1933), the collective unconscious involves common memories and patterns of behaviour inherited by all humanity (Jung, 2014). Jung believed that the collective unconscious would have a significant impact on the lives of individuals and societies, and that many people's conflicts and psychological problems arise from a disconnection or imbalance with these archetypes (Jung, 2014). Archetypes serve as a profound tool for understanding the complexities of the human mind and experience, indicating that, at a fundamental level, we share a universal psychic heritage (Jung, 1969). This framework not only deepens our understanding of psychological principles, but also enables the integration and harmonization of various aspects of our psyche (Jung, 1969). Offers a unique perspective on how individuals are inherently connected to the wider fabric of humanity.

The goddess Tonantzin, previously mentioned, as symbol of fertility and motherhood provided emotional and spiritual unification for indigenous communities, just as the icon of Our Lady of Guadalupe, blending Christian and indigenous cultures, reinforces this archetypal symbolism of connection. In fact, we are facing the maternal archetype elevated to its divine or sacred meaning, which transcends religions and cultures (Jung, 2014). As previously noted, the theory of archetypes has proven indispensable in unraveling the complexities of the human psyche and its diverse cultural and religious expressions. According to Jung (1959), the maternal archetype represents the universal and primordial nature of the mother, which resides in the collective unconscious of humanity. Jung (1964) also describes the archetype as a collective unconscious structural factor that governs the expression of maternal behaviour and shapes social expectations, behaviours, and attitudes towards motherhood. The maternal archetype is not limited to the image of the biological mother but encompasses many symbols and images that personify the role of

motherhood. This archetype has a dual function: it can represent a kind and gentle mother, providing protection, nourishment, and care, or a terrible and evil mother, demonstrating her destructive and overprotective side. This duality reflects the complexity of the human experience with the maternal figure, which can affect the way individuals relate to other authority figures and to the concept of care and protection throughout their lives. Thus, the maternal archetype elevates the role of the mother from a purely earthly level to a spiritual and archetypal level. In this way, the presence of the maternal archetype contributes to the continuity and stability of society by promoting the values of care, nourishment, and protection. Through this perspective, motherhood not only influences individual development but is also a fundamental pillar for the cohesion and functioning of human societies.

In the Mother-Humanity relationship, we can find a bridge to the mother-child relationship advocated by John Bowlby, a psychologist known for his contributions to developmental psychology. Through his "Attachment Theory", Bowlby (1969) highlights the importance of the mother-child relationship for emotional security. This concept is echoed in Jung's maternal archetype, which argues that from the first years of life, the relationship with the mother figure is crucial for the formation of the psyche (Jung, 1969). This perspective not only enriches the understanding of children's emotional, cognitive, social and physical development, but also highlights the importance of motherhood as a sacred and universal role.

The concepts presented by Carl Jung are not only limited to the field of psychology, but also extend to various disciplines, such as anthropology and religion, where we observe how these patterns of life influence myths and rituals (Lévi-Strauss, 1963).

Archetypes are analyzed to understand the nature of spiritual practices and religious beliefs, revealing universal themes of spirituality (Eliade, 2016). This analysis allows us to understand the nature of archetypal symbols and narratives in different cultures and religious traditions, providing a deeper understanding of the common roots of the human experience. It is relevant to mention that, in addition to the archetype of the Great Mother, Carl Jung presents us with other significant archetypes. We can mention, for example, the archetypes of the "Anima" and the "Wise Woman", which play crucial roles in structuring the human psyche and spirituality. They provide a rich tapestry of symbols and meanings that shape our understanding of the sacred and the feminine (Jung, 1967). "Anima" is described by Jung as an archetype that personifies the feminine side of the male psyche and represents sensitivity, emotion and creativity.

According to the author, it is essential for the psychological balance of men, allowing them to connect with their own emotions and gain a greater understanding of the feminine. It often appears in the form of feminine figures in dreams and myths, representing the search for wholeness and inner truth (Jung, 1969). Regarding the archetype of the "Wise Woman", Jung presents her as a symbol of wisdom, intuition, and profound knowledge. She is often represented as an elder or healer, possessing profound knowledge of the mysteries of life and death.

In the religious field, we find numerous examples of archetypes, especially concerning the feminine. The maternal archetype, which is the main example of our essay, serves as a bridge between the conscious and unconscious side of the human being, it allows individuals to access deep feelings such as love, protection and security (Jung, 2014). Maternal figures present in various religions provide models of values and behaviors that can serve as examples for believers. This identification also provides a sense of connection and continuity with ancestral traditions, strengthening

the spiritual and cultural identity of individuals (Stevens, 2001). Our Lady of Guadalupe and the goddess Tonantzin are thus examples of this significant figure for those who follow them.

In the many religions existing around the world, we can find numerous examples of how the maternal archetype manifests itself. Here are some examples: The Virgin Mary, considered by Jung to embody this archetype, is seen not only as the Mother of God but also as the Mother of Humanity (Jung, 1969). This archetype manifests itself in countless ways in Christianity, such as through the Our Lady of Guadalupe, mentioned in our article; Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal; Our Lady of Lourdes in France; and Our Lady of Aparecida in Brazil. In Hinduism, we find Durga, who represents protection, power, and maternal strength; while Kali is seen as a mother who destroys to create a new pattern, symbolizing the destruction of the ego and its renewal (Jung, 1969). In Afro-American religions like Umbanda and Candomblé, we find female orixás such as Yemanjá and Oxum, who symbolize motherhood and fertility, respectively (Bastide, 1978). In Greek mythology, we find examples such as Gaia and Demeter. Gaia is considered Mother Earth, the mother of all living beings; while Demeter is the goddess of agriculture and harvest, associated with the cycle of seasons and the fertility of the earth (Jung, 1969). In Egyptian mythology, we find Ísis, the goddess of humanity, magic, and protector of the dead and the gods (Jung, 1961).

IV- Conclusions

In the study on the transdisciplinary perspective of the Pre-Colombian Art and the Icon of Guadalupe, we would like to highlight the research work performed by Mariana Loisel and Marc-William Debono (Loisel&Debono, 2024) who have written a remarkable article on role of the "Plasticity of Spirit" (Marc-Williams Debono's term):

“Pour être médiateur entre deux camps opposés, il faut aussi être médiateur pour soi-même....Alors comment apprendre à se traduire, se transduire, pour pouvoir traduire ce qui circule de l’un à l’autre?....On peut s’en inspirer pour saisir l’inconscient collectif du groupe, ce qui le porte non intentionnellement: héritages familial, social, culturel, imaginal (universal symbols)... ”, where it is stated that different cultures naturally tend to adjust and accommodate themselves with their family, social and cultural environment where “conflicts” might occur due to different perspectives and experiences; However, they have also the ability to “transcend” themselves through universal symbols and archetypes, existing in the Collective Unconscious of all cultures, and so contributing to the evolution of the original situation - the “human mutations” (Loisel, 2024) that have taken place throughout history.

Thus, the “Plasticity of Spirit” or “Autopoiesis” of the biological systems (Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela’s term (2000)) might allow to overcome the “original conflict” and give birth to a stronger and more cohesive “web of complexity”. The transdisciplinary Logic of the Third Included might allow to overcome the conflict between the opposites through their unification in another “Level of Reality” (Nicolescu, 1999).

In synthesis, the transdisciplinary and complex approach on the synchronism between the ancestral goddess Tonantzin and the Icon of Guadalupe performed in this essay, it has given a broader overview on this thematic that a strictly historical, psychological, social and cultural study cannot give separately by itself (Morin, 2008).

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ICONOGRAPHY : **Figure 1**: Pyramid of the Sun and Moon. Photo Source: Cortesy of Juan Carlos Jaime. **Figure 2**: Icon of Guadalupe. Photo Source: Cortesy of Lyricma.