IMAGE AND IDENTITY AT EL SANTUARIO DE CHIMAYO
IN CHIMAYO, NEW MEXICO

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Dana Engstrom DeLoach, B.A.

Denton, Texas

May, 1999

El Santuario de Chimayo is a small community shrine that combines both native Tewa Indian and Christian traditions. This study focuses on the interaction between traditions through analysis of the shrine’s two major artworks: a crucifix devoted to El Señor de Esquipulas (Christ of Esquipulas) and a statue of the Santo Niño (Holy Child). The shrine and its two primary artworks are expressions of the dynamic interaction between native and European cultures in New Mexico at the beginning of the nineteenth century. They frame the discussion of native and Christian cultural exchange about the relationships between religious images, how they function, and how they are interpreted.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 25 miles north of Santa Fe, New Mexico, the small village of Chimayo lies peacefully in the high desert valley of the Sangre de Cristo mountains. Tucked into this mountain valley are small rivers surrounded by agricultural plots of land, where a variety of peoples have lived, worked the land, and worshipped various deities for hundreds of years. From the time before European knowledge of the Western hemisphere, native cultures considered the Chimayo valley to have many sacred sites that defined their cosmological and geographical borders. After the conquest, first of Mexico and later of the land that is present day New Mexico, the Spanish created their own Christian holy places, displacing the native religious beliefs, often by placing Catholic mission churches directly over shrines of native importance.¹

El Santuario de Chimayo is a small community shrine that combines both native and Christian traditions. Members of the community, numerous tourists, and faithful pilgrims come to the shrine seeking solace, devotion, salvation, and healing. Drawn by its interesting and rich legends, mystical origins, ancient and modern holy traditions, or the possibility of witnessing or participating in a miraculous event, each visitor to El

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¹ Patrick J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 164. The placement of churches over sites of native importance was standard practice as far back as the sixth century and Augustine of Canterbury's mission to Great Britain.
Santuario de Chimayo comes to experience the mysticism that the church and its images suggest. Yet, little is written about El Santuario, and what literature exists surveys the history of the area, the miraculous founding of the Christian shrine, and the religious cults associated with it. However, the literature does not offer clear reasons why the church was built at Chimayo and how it functions within the community.

The Chimayo valley is strewn with many sacred sites that date from the inhabitation of Pueblo Indians around 1100 to 1400 A.D. Studies into the origin of the name of Chimayo, which is commonly thought to be Spanish, show that it stems from several Tewa Indian words. *Tzimmayo*, or "place where big stones stand" describes one prominent physical feature of the area, while *Tsimajo* has been interpreted to mean "flaking stone of superior quality." Tewa Indian religious myth notes that during the time of the Ancient Ones, great geysers of hot water were located at Chimayo. When the Tewa twin war gods killed a giant, fire erupted and dried the healing springs at Black Mesa, *Obuhegi*, and *Tsimmayo* into mud.2 The mud surrounding the sacred Indian shrines was thought to have healing qualities and to have been used in native rituals. When the Spanish first began to settle in the valley, it is thought that neighboring Pueblo Indians visited the area as a shrine or sacred space.3 With the blending of Indian and Spanish culture, local legends about the sacred nature of the area and its healing mud most likely became known to the Spanish.

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In the spring of 1810, a spiritual event took place that firmly melded Chimayo as both a native and Christian spiritual center. A resident of El Potrero, the small community adjoining Chimayo (now a part of the town) claimed to have found a crucifix buried in the sand on the banks of the river flowing through his land. The resident, Bernardo Abeyta, quickly informed the clergy and a procession was organized to remove the crucifix and deposit it in the church in neighboring Santa Cruz, as neither Chimayo nor El Potrero had a proper church in which to house the miraculous discovery. The next day, the crucifix disappeared, only to be found in its original location on Abeyta's land. It disappeared from Santa Cruz twice more and was found on the banks of the river in Chimayo. After three miraculous journeys from the church in Santa Cruz to Abeyta’s land, Abeyta built a private chapel at the site for the crucifix. He petitioned the church in 1813 to build a chapel for the village; for the crucifix, like other miraculous images and relics, proved that it chose the location by disappearing from the church in Santa Cruz and reappearing at the site of its discovery. That chapel, built in 1816, became the present El Santuario de Esquipulas.

Abeyta’s small santuario (chapel) housed not only the original crucifix found at the site, but also a larger altar crucifix commissioned by Abeyta. The large crucifix, along with an altarpiece and painted reredos (wall paintings), was executed by a local santero (saintmaker) known as Molleno. Both crucifixes are dedicated to El Señor de Esquipulas (Our Lord of Esquipulas). The larger crucifix forms the centerpiece of the altarpiece in the small church and the small crucifix is placed in a small room off the
sanctuary with a well of dirt. The depiction of the crucified Christ is directly associated with the cult of Our Lord of Esquipulas of Guatemala, which developed as a result of the Spanish contact with native Maya Indians. The crucifix of El Señor de Esquipulas in Chimayo is iconographically similar to the original crucifix in Guatemala.

Another similarity exists between the churches in Guatemala and Chimayo. Soon after the crucifix was placed into the church in Guatemala, miracles began to be credited to the crucifix, which led to official church recognition of those miracles in 1737. The area around the new village was also known for the healing properties of nearby hot springs, where pilgrims flocking to the area would participate in geophagy, or "earth eating." The tradition of earth eating at a religious shrine is also affiliated with El Santuario de Chimayo, but it is not found in any other villages in New Mexico where the cult appears. A small well, or pit, sits in a small room off the sacristy of El Santuario, and earth is taken by pilgrims who call it tierra bandita, or blessed earth. By some accounts, this well of sacred earth, called El Posito, is placed where Bernardo Abeyta's chapel devoted to the Chimayo crucifix once stood. At an undocumented date after the discovery of the crucifix in 1810 and the building of the shrine in 1816, miracles that were effected at the site of El Santuario de Chimayo began to be credited to the crucifix known as El Señor de Esquipulas rather than the mud.

After Abeyta's death in 1856, the original meaning behind the shrine of

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4 Stephen F. DeBorhegyi, "The Cult of Our Lord of Esquipulas in Middle America and New Mexico," *El Palacio* 61 (December 1954), 393.
5 DeBorhegyi, 1954, 387.
6 DeBorhegyi, 1953, 87.
Esquipulas was lost and the healing power of El Señor de Esquipulas was subsumed by the cult of Santo Niño de Atocha. The Santo Niño is a holy image of the Christ Child who wanders the earth at night and brings solace to the sick and suffering. Familial politics may be at the root of the shift in devotion. A rival family in Chimayo, led by Severino Medina, built a private chapel near the Santuario in 1857 and placed a statue of the Santo Niño inside their chapel. The cult of the Santo Niño began to grow in the area around Chimayo and quickly began to be credited for the miracles previously attributed to El Señor de Esquipulas. The loss of popularity for the Abeyta family’s church may have also led to a loss of financial income, and the family procured their own Santo Niño statue, placing El Santuario in direct religious and monetary competition with the smaller Medina chapel. In a very short time, the Santo Niño was venerated at both El Santuario de Chimayo and the Medina chapel, and pilgrims who came to worship at El Santuario would follow their visit to the shrine with a stop at the Medina chapel. Today, the miracles are associated with the site of El Santuario de Chimayo, possibly because the well of healing mud is located in El Santuario rather than the Medina chapel.

The story of El Santuario de Chimayo is a fascinating tale of religious mysticism and political intrigue about the Christianization of a native Indian spiritual site. However, the story is far from complete, and it raises more questions about El Santuario than it answers. Throughout its history, the prospect of healing has drawn people to the place where El Santuario de Chimayo now stands. Whether the tradition of healing is based in

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7 Kay, *Chimayo Valley Traditions*, 35.
native Indian myth, the occurrence of a Christian miracle, or the joining of both traditions by a person knowledgeable about both mythologies or traditions, these activities give the site its identity. The stories surrounding Chimayo's history serve as a point of departure into deeper inquiry about the site: why was acculturation of native and Christian traditions possible and so effective at Chimayo, what relationship exists between images of saints and the devotion of saints, what was the political and economic climate in New Mexico in the 19th century, and what were the roles of the images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño in that world?

Review of Literature

Little is written about El Santuario de Chimayo; and what literature exists falls into two general categories: popular or tourist accounts and scholarly writings about the miraculous founding of the church. The popular literature comes primarily from articles published in New Mexico Magazine. Many of these focus on the phenomenon of pilgrimage that draws thousands of visitors to Chimayo each year. Most visitors come to the shrine during Holy Week, though pilgrimages are made to El Santuario year-round. People undertake pilgrimages for a variety of reasons: spiritual devotion, renewal of faith, thanksgiving, healing, and often for the hope of peace in a troubled world. The popular literature written about El Santuario almost always recounts one of the versions of the shrine's miraculous founding. The popular articles about the Santuario are interesting to

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9 Kay, Chimayo Valley Traditions, 77.
read for their contemporary interpretations, and to observe the interest in Chimayo's spirituality and the desire for increased tourism. Unfortunately, these accounts generally do not include source citations for their information, they are anecdotal in nature, and are written for popular appeal, offering only the most superficial and frequently uncritical information about the significance of the church and its relationship to the surrounding community.

The Santuario de Chimayo is mentioned in nearly all the surveys of art and architecture of New Mexico, both popular and scholarly. The amount of information varies widely from source to source, but the miraculous account of Bernardo Abeyta, the link between ancient and contemporary cultures, and the church's pilgrimage status are always mentioned. As with the popular literature, there is not enough information provided that examines El Santuario's significance as a devotional site. One survey of architecture, George Kubler's seminal book *The Religious Architecture of New Mexico*, written in 1940, offers a unique discussion of the Santuario. Kubler's book is a comprehensive look at the building techniques and characteristics of both domestic and ecclesiastical architecture from the time of the first Christian conquest to the early 20th century. Kubler discusses El Santuario from the standpoint of its physical, architectural characteristics, and he explains the reason the church was built by relating the story of

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Bernardo Abeyta.

Outside of one major article from the 1950s, and a short book about the Chimayo area written in 1987, scholarly analysis of the Santuario is scant and difficult to find. An article entitled "The Miraculous Shrines of Our Lord of Esquipulas in Guatemala and Chimayo, New Mexico," by Stephen F. de Borhegyi, published in March 1953, offers a comprehensive history of the shrine and the iconography of two of its primary objects: the crucifix of El Señor de Esquipulas and the small sculpture of Santo Niño. De Borhegyi consulted the accounts of anthropologists working with native informants in the early years of the 20th century for community perceptions about the church. His own research in the catholic archives accounts for a variety of the cult legends and their association with the site at Chimayo. This article was reprinted in a pamphlet by the Spanish Colonial Arts Society in 1956 and continues to be printed and available for contemporary readers. DeBorhegyi's research forms the basis for all subsequent writings about El Santuario de Chimayo and places him as the authority on the history of the church. A related article from 1954 also published in the journal El Palacio, entitled "The Cult of Our Lord of Esquipulas in Middle America and New Mexico," expands on the earlier article's discussions of the church. Its scope is limited to the cult of Esquipulas in both Guatemala and New Mexico and does not mention the Santo Niño. These two articles hold perhaps the richest scholarly information about the Santuario de Chimayo and are the sources for all subsequent writings on the subject.
One such attempt to update the information about El Santuario de Chimayo is *Chimayo Valley Traditions*, written by Elizabeth Kay and published in 1987 and based upon Kay's 1985 Master of Fine Arts dissertation from the University of New Mexico. The book centers around the history of the area, with chapters devoted to the ancient inhabitation at Chimayo, the cults of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño de Atocha, Chimayo as a community, and pilgrimage as both a medieval and modern institution. *Chimayo Valley Traditions* draws heavily on deBorhegyi's information as the basis for discussions about the history and iconography of El Santuario de Chimayo and its images. Included in the book are connections to the European cults of these holy images.

An additional attempt to broaden the discussion about Chimayo is found in *Sabino's Map: Life in Chimayo's Old Plaza*, written by former Chimayo resident Don Usner. El Santuario de Chimayo is discussed in various places throughout the book as the topic relates to the Plaza del Cerro, the original center of the village. Usner brings an interesting perspective to the discussion, as his evidence is grounded in family records and interviews with late twentieth-century citizens of Chimayo, but his research does not add any information not already discovered by other authors with respect to El Santuario.

Although several attempts have been made, little new information has been discovered since the original research by deBorhegyi in the 1950s. The predominant stories about the miraculous founding of El Santuario are anecdotal in nature and raise many questions not answered in a preliminary review of the literature. That Bernardo Abeyta knew of the Guatemalan cult of Esquipulas and directed a local saintmaker to
model the Santuario's crucifix after the Central American example is assumed by the authors though it is never established. Another issue not addressed is the relationship between the Medina and Abeyta families and therefore the reason for the shift of cult popularity from El Señor de Esquipulas to Santo Niño is not adequately explained. Additionally, Severino Medina's knowledge of the Santo Niño cult in Mexico is not discussed. The questions asked and unanswered by the authors still remain a mystery.

The answers to these questions would certainly remove much of the mystery that surrounds El Santuario de Chimayo, though, that mystery is critical to the understanding of the church as a spiritual phenomenon. Cloaked in legend and speculation, El Santuario's religious significance is drawn from the relationship to ancient culture and belief and manifested in its identifying works of art: El Señor de Esquipulas and the Santo Niño. The literature written on El Santuario does not focus on the works of art except for a brief mention of their physical characteristics, iconography, and style. What is missing from the literature is a discussion about the interpretation of the works of art, how they connect the worlds of Native culture, Spanish culture, and New Mexican culture, and their significance and function as cult images. The development of this site as a center for cultural exchange and the link between spirituality and imagery are two intriguing paths this study pursues. In discussing these issues within the framework of the site of El Santuario de Chimayo, a broader understanding of the reasons for the importance of El Santuario to nineteenth-century spiritual practices in New Mexico will emerge.
Statement of the Problem

This study examines El Santuario de Chimayo and its two primary artworks, El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño, as expressions of the dynamic interaction between native and European cultures in New Mexico at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This study seeks to examine new avenues of inquiry about native and Christian cultural exchange, about the relationships between religious images and how they function and are interpreted in the small community of Chimayo.

Methodology

One perspective missing from previous discussions of El Santuario is a conversation about the interpretation of the works of art in the church and of audience response to the images. The scholarly discussions about El Santuario have primarily focused on historical and iconographical issues. These methods, although informative and important to opening the discussion of Chimayo as a place of spiritual and cultural exchange, are limited; they can only add so much to the discussion because they consider the images identified with El Santuario as static or decorative. The images are downplayed in favor of the historical context or are studied only for their connections to other historical tropes of holy images. As scholars, we have been taught to study images in certain ways and to repress other responses to images according to the changing fashionable interpretations of our disciplines. David Freedberg notes:

We too feel a “vague awe” at the creative skills of the artist; we too fear the power of the images he makes and their uncanny abilities both to elevate us and to
disturb us. They put us in touch with truths about ourselves in a way that can only be described as magical, or they deceive us as if by witchcraft. But because we have been educated to talk and think about images in ways that avoid confronting just these kinds of effects, the only way we can be frank is to attend to the responses and reports of those whom we regard as either simple, unsophisticated, or provincial. . . 

The previous studies about El Santuario disregard the magical qualities of images, and focus only on their identification and history. El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño do not decorate the small church; they are integral players in the spiritual drama enacted in the community on a daily basis. They are also an active and vibrant component of a pilgrimage system.

One way to broaden the discussion of the significance of Chimayo is to examine El Santuario in terms of its active participation in the lives of the faithful in New Mexico, especially the images and their function and interpretation, from an anthropological perspective. Anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner have studied various pilgrimage systems, looking at all aspects of pilgrimage. In *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, they focus on the behavior of pilgrims and their responses to the total pilgrimage environment, from the devotional images integral to the event to the fairs and commercial aspects:

Some will doubt the propriety of extending the notion of a pilgrimage system to embrace the entire complex of behavior focused on the sacred shrine. But we insist, as anthropologists, that we must regard the pilgrimage system, whenever the data permit us so to do, as comprising all the interactions and transactions, formal or informal, institutionalized or improvised, sacred or profane, orthodox or

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eccentric, which owe their existence to the pilgrimage itself.\textsuperscript{12}

At El Santuario de Chimayo, the images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño are performers in sacred drama, linked to the Tewa tradition of pilgrimage via the healing mud purported to exist at the site. Pilgrims come to the small church to seek divine assistance and healing and ask the holy images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño to intercede on their behalf.

Victor and Edith Turner study pilgrimage as a liminal experience, comparing it to the rites of passage in non-Christian societies.\textsuperscript{13} The pilgrim must leave his or her daily routine behind and assume a new responsibility of piety and often travel long distances to venerate a specific holy image at a miraculous place and ask for spiritual favors. Even if the belief in miracles has decreased, the Turners note, the place of pilgrimage is still holy because faith is strengthened there. This continuity of faith is mediated through the images the pilgrim seeks:

All sites of pilgrimage have this in common: they are believed to be places where miracles once happened, still happen, and may happen again. Even where the time of miraculous healings is reluctantly conceded to be past, believers firmly hold that faith is strengthened and salvation better secured by personal exposure to the beneficent unseen presence of the Blessed Virgin or the local saint, mediated through a cherished image or painting. Miracles of revivification of faith are everywhere regarded as rewards for undertaking long, not unfrequently perilous, journeys and for having temporarily given up not only the cares but also the


rewards of ordinary life.\textsuperscript{14}

In Chimayo, healing miracles are not relegated to the past, but are recognized as happening in the present. Over the past century, thousands of pilgrims have traveled to El Santuario to pray to the images and have rubbed the healing dirt on their bodies to help effect a miracle. The role the images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño play in the social drama of pilgrimage is critical if we are to further our understanding of El Santuario as a holy site.

David Freedberg, in his 1989 book \textit{The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response}, illuminates the function of images in pilgrimage and how audiences are affected by their performance. His method of interpreting the connection of image and pilgrimage picks up where an anthropological study leaves off. Freedberg is concerned with what the response to images tells us about ourselves:

\begin{quote}
If anything they [pilgrimages] are paradigmatic. They tell us about ourselves and how we deal with aspirations and expectations that we are not convinced can wholly be fulfilled by any means on earth, and they illuminate the nature of the mediating role we grant to images in the process of attaining that fulfillment. In other words, they provide further and still stronger testimony to all beliefs about how images work and what they are capable of doing.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

This study uses Turners’ and Freedberg’s ideas of the mediating role of images and notions of audience response to determine how the images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño work to effect miracles at El Santuario de Chimayo.

The spirituality associated with El Santuario is directly linked to the images in the

small church and to the healing mud. The devotion to the holy images of El Señor de
Esquipulas and Santo Niño is dependent upon the sacred mud found at the spot where the
church was built, and continues to be the link between the ancient, native culture, and the
newer, Christian society. Pilgrimage also links the native and Christian beliefs together.
The different layers of reality associated with El Santuario offer a richly textured
narrative. Victor and Edith Turner approach pilgrimage systems in a layered way, "A
fully mature pilgrimage system, or 'field,' is comparable to a series of overlapping,
interpenetrating ellipses whose common area of overlap has the shrine at its center." They see the ellipses as the route a pilgrim takes on a spiritual journey; their ellipses are
two-dimensional lines that cross and intersect in interesting ways. The ellipses can also
be seen as three-dimensional planes of layers of interpretation. In the case of El
Santuario, the different layers consist of native and Christian beliefs, connections to the
historical, political and social environments, and ways of interpreting the site as a holy
place. At times, the different layers intersect and impact other layers, at other times, the
ellipses have little in common. The areas where the metaphorical ellipses overlap form
the mysterious and magical environment of El Santuario.

This study examines the works of art at the Santuario de Chimayo based upon the
different layers of overlap. The first elliptical layer, discussed in Chapter Two, examines
one possible reason why the Santuario was built on the site and will explore the
connections between ancient Tewa beliefs and the modern interpretation of the church.

The next layer investigates the legends and stories surrounding the discovery of the
 crucifix of El Señor de Esquipulas and the acquisition of the Santo Niño figures in
 Chapter Three. After the discovery and acquisition of the images aligned a Christian
 significance on the site of El Santuario, Chapter Four shows how they were further
cemented as holy images by the third ellipse: the naming of the images. In Chapter Five,
the images are evaluated as holy images and are connected to the healing mud. The final
ellipse offers possible conclusions about why Chimayo became a strong spiritual center
and the implications of the cultural exchange that is performed at El Santuario de
Chimayo.

CHAPTER 2

CHIMAYO AS A SITE OF CULTURAL EXCHANGE

The development of the Chimayo area as a site of cultural exchange begins long before any recorded history of the area. Because of this, a variety of perspectives must be investigated in order to develop an understanding of Chimayo's significance as a spiritual center. Looking only at the dominant histories and mythologies offers a myopic view of life at a specific time and place; they only tell a portion of the stories. Chimayo, and its many overlapping layers of meaning, has two primary histories: the beliefs of the Tewa who first settled the area and placed Chimayo within their sacred landscape and the perspectives of the Christians who came to the area much later.

It is important to remember that written history came to New Mexico in the sixteenth century with the first Spanish explorers and that everything that is known about the cultures who came before has been filtered through the lens of a society charged with a political and religious mission. The perspectives of the early Spanish explorers and settlers impacted their interpretation of the cultures they contacted. Our modern reinterpretations of those initial relationships, guided by our own cultural framework, moves us further away from knowing what those early cultures and contacts were like. We can only infer meaning from written accounts of pre-contact life in the southwestern region of this continent because we are separated from native cultures by time and
cosmological points of view.

When the Spanish came into contact with the native peoples living in New Mexico in the sixteenth century, they wrote their accounts of what they thought the Indians believed.¹ The native cultures of the American southwest had no written records of their beliefs or history, rather, they created complex oral myths and stories to explain the universe and their place in it. Because the myths were taught only to members of the society and not shared with outsiders, the Spanish who were able to observe rituals tended to describe what was seen and interpolate meaning based on their Christian worldview. However, description rarely lends itself well to understanding:

Piecing together fragments provided by historian and anthropologist allows us to say something that is general and true, so far it goes, about Pueblo habits and capacities of mind. It does not permit those deeper insights necessary for authentic sympathy and accurate judgement.²

Modern scholars deftly try to gain a more accurate judgement by acknowledging that a Western lens has been applied to our knowledge about cultures that transmit their histories in ways other than writing. Authentic Pueblo Indian voices have been recorded in New Mexico through early court records.³ Anthropologists have attempted to gain greater insights into the beliefs of Pueblo people by using informants in the early years of this century. Through their work, we have learned more about how the Pueblos see their world, but boundaries still separate our views from theirs. By the twentieth century,

¹ Marc Simmons, New Mexico: An Interpretive History (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 47.
³ Spicer, Cycles of Conquest, 22. However, he notes that the Pueblos were unfamiliar with the Spanish system, so the information gathered by the Spanish via court records should also be viewed with a critical
Pueblo culture had been transformed by a variety of outside influences for over 500 years. Over years of persecution for their beliefs, both by Europeans and other native cultures, the Pueblos learned not to share their beliefs with outsiders. We may know more about the Pueblo Indians today, but it is still difficult to understand their beliefs. We must continue to keep in mind that any information we have about the Pueblos is supposition at best and potentially gross misinterpretation at worst.

The area surrounding Chimayo was inhabited long before the arrival of the Spanish and is centrally located within the sacred space of native peoples. The history of New Mexico before Spanish contact comes to us primarily through archeological research. The first inhabitants are thought to have been Paleo-Indian hunters who lived in the area around 9500-9000 B.C., and were nomadic peoples who followed wild game until the herds of animals moved eastward toward the plains. Skeletons of animals imbedded with stone points found in the eastern portion of the state dated at around 6000-5000 B.C. are attributed to a culture group called the Folsom hunters. Other concurrent groups are classified as the Cody hunters and a foraging people called the Cochise. The Archaic period of southwestern history began around 6000 B.C., when the large herds of game were not predominant. Groups of foraging peoples moved into the areas abandoned by hunting groups and created small bands of societies that occupied the area for the next four thousand years.

Around 2000 B.C., foraging traditions began to evolve into agricultural practices,
and by 500 B.C., cultures were developing permanent residences due to the increased dependence on crop cultivation. These distinct societies developed communities, new technologies such as pottery, and expanded belief systems so that “the overriding power of supernatural forces, which seemingly determined the fate of a farmer’s crop, was magnified and dramatized.” The large populations of peoples developed and split into several distinct culture groups who traded ideas, people, and technology. The most prominent of these groups included the Hohokam located in southern and central Arizona, the Mogollon who lived on the border of modern New Mexico and Arizona and northern Mexico, and the Anasazi, whose peoples were spread across the four corners of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado, and who were the ancestors of the modern Pueblo Indians.

The modern Pueblos still hold the traditions of the ancestral Anasazi. The term itself means “the ancient ones”. The peak of Anasazi culture is considered to have been during the ninth to fourteenth centuries, marked by very populous urban centers with large architectural complexes, towering apartment buildings, and ceremonial kivas. They had a detailed network of widespread provinces, one of which was located along the upper Rio Grande River valley near modern Chimayo. Their largest site was Chaco Canyon, and for reasons unknown, they began to systematically abandon the large sites by 1200 A.D. Over the next several thousand years, the population began to cluster in

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7 Lister and Lister, *Those Who Came Before*, 32.
smaller areas in the land, evolving into today’s Eastern and Western Pueblos. The Western Pueblos, Zuni, Hopi, Acoma, and Laguna, became separated in distance from the Eastern Pueblos that scattered along the Rio Grande River in the north-central part of New Mexico. By the time of first contact with the Spanish, these descendants of the Anasazi had evolved into the Pueblos that still exist today.

The Pueblos are linked to the Anasazi in terms of similarities in organization and belief, but are separated by language. There are four primary language families: Keresan, Zunian, Shoshonean, and Tanoan, of which the last is further broken down into the sub-families Tiwa, Tewa, and Towa. This language diversity in a relatively small area ensured that the Pueblos were autonomously organized with strong local controls rather than interlinked members of a larger political organization.7

Of the Tanoan and its subgroups Tiwa, Tewa, and Towa, the Tewa inhabit the area closest to Chimayo. San Juan Pueblo, which sits across the Rio Grande from the first Spanish settlement San Juan de los Caballeros, is probably the original pueblo village that the Spanish encountered. San Juan is important for several reasons:

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7 Spicer, Cycles of Conquest, 153-4. Although Spicer uses the term Shoshonean, current research suggests that the Shoshone language is a sub-family of the larger Uto-Aztecan language group.
First, it is the largest, with approximately 800 inhabitants (Ortiz 1965a). Secondly, it is one of the two most conservative villages, and it has long been regarded by the other four as the “mother village” in ritual and political matters. These factors, along with its northernmost location, furthest away from the Keresan Pueblo influence, suggest that it might reflect an older or more nearly pure form of Tewa social structure and culture.  

Because of these reasons, much of what is known about Tewa culture is based upon anthropological research from San Juan Pueblo. Two authors, Elsie Clews Parsons and Alfonso Ortiz, are considered to be the most reliable sources for information regarding the Tewa. Parsons, an anthropologist who interviewed Tewa informants in the early decades of the twentieth century, published several books on Pueblo culture including an anthology of Tewa myth and folklore entitled *Tewa Tales*. Many of the informants Parsons spoke with were able to recall stories about El Santuario at Chimayo, and had either personal recollections about the cults of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño or once-removed memories from relatives alive at the time of the founding. Ortiz, a native San Juan Tewa, conducted a comprehensive anthropological study of Tewa cosmology and social structure and classification in his 1969 seminal work *The Tewa World: Space, Time, Being, and Becoming in a Pueblo Society*. Together, these two works thoroughly describe the twentieth century interpretation of Tewa society and culture.

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The building of the Santuario at Chimayo may in part be explained by investigating the native Tewa culture that shared the physical geography with the village. Instrumental to the knowledge of Tewa culture is the origin myth, which helps to explain the underlying social and religious structure of Tewa life. Before emergence, all living things, humans, animals, and spirits, were living underneath a lake in the north. Parsons' informant notes that in discussions about how to ready themselves to "go up from the water," the Winter Mother and the Summer Mother were born and led the people. They sent one male to explore how to leave the lake, and when he went forth and looked in all four directions, he saw haze and mist, and so reported to the people "that he had seen nothing, that the world above was still ochu, 'green' or 'unripe.'" He went out again and came to the place of game animals that befriended him and named him the Hunt Chief by smearing black mud on his face. The Hunt chief again returned to the place below the lake and named two other men the Winter chief and the Summer chief, thus dividing the Tewa people into two moieties, social divisions similar to clan relationships. The chiefs turned to six pairs of brothers called the Towa é and sent them out in each direction. The blue Towa é named the north, the yellow pair to the west, the red pair to the south, and the white pair to the east. The six pairs of Towa é brothers represent the four cardinal directions plus the directions of up and down. The pairs who did not name the cardinal directions named the zenith and the nadir, therefore mapping sacred space in three

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10 Ortiz, *The Tewa World*, 13
dimensions. Each pair reported that they had seen mountains in each direction but could not travel far because the earth was still soft. The chiefs told the brothers, "You have to put up the big hills now to the north. So they took a little mud and they threw it this way (indicating the directions) and there were the hills."[13] By throwing mud in the four cardinal directions, they created the flat-topped hills known as tsin.[14]

Now able to leave the lake, the chiefs led the people out, but the ground was still too soft when the Summer chief stepped onto it. When the Winter Chief stepped on the ground, frost appeared and hardened the ground enough to travel across. The Towa é then traveled to their tsin to stand watch over the people. As the people moved away from the lake, many began to fall ill. The chiefs returned them to the lake four times to help "finish" them, creating the clown society to entertain the discouraged, the Scalp chief to lead them in warfare, and the women's society to assist the Scalp chief.[15] Upon leaving the lake for the last time, the chiefs split the people into two groups; one to follow the Winter chief to the mountains on the east side of the Rio Grande and the other to accompany the Summer chief to the mountains south along the river. Each group made twelve stops, and at each stop built a village, joining back together at the twelfth stop. Eventually, illness swept the last village and it was abandoned. The village divided into six different groups that left village and founded the six modern Pueblos.[16]

The origin myth, or myth of emergence, explains much about the dualities

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associated with the social structure of the Tewa. Ortiz identifies "the associated tendency to think in dualistically contrasting sets are basic in understanding the Tewa." He uses the term "dual organization" to describe a "system of antithetical institutions with the associated symbols, ideas, and meanings in terms of which social interaction takes place." The Tewa people are separated into six categories of existence represented by three human classes and three supernatural classes. Each human level is linked with a corresponding supernatural level, which define all aspects of Tewa life. The Tewa who serves in no organizational or ritual capacity are known as the "Dry Food People," named for the fact that they emerged from the lake to eat food from a dried earth. This is the category that all Tewa belong to at some point in their lives. At death, a Dry Food person becomes a soul in their related supernatural level, the "Dry Food People Who are no Longer." The second level of society, the human Towa é, consists of those Tewa involved in the political organization of the society. Their linked spiritual group is also called the Towa é, and consists of the original pairs who watch over the Tewa from the sacred hills. The third and last level of society is known as the Made People, the chiefs and members of societies. Their linked counterpart, the "Dry Food Who Never Did Become," include all Tewa deities and the souls of all Made People. They are thus named because they did not walk on the earth after emergence, and therefore did not

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16 Ortiz, The Tewa World, 16.
17 Ortiz, The Tewa World, 4.
18 Ortiz, The Tewa World, 5.
become dry food.\textsuperscript{20}

The myth of emergence also offers a brief description of the Tewa world, which is organized into four categories. Four sacred mountains form the outer boundaries of Tewa space, and each has a Tewa name along with a Spanish one. From San Juan, the northernmost mountain, Conjilon Peak, is approximately sixty miles away, Tsikomo sits about fifteen miles west, Sandia Crest is eighty miles south, and Truchas Peak is twenty miles east. Closer to the Pueblos are the four sacred hills, or the tsin created by mud thrown by the Towa é. The hills are today associated with the Spanish villages they are nearest: Tema Yoh is near La Madera to the north, Toma Yoh is close by to the southwest, Tun Yoh is between the Pueblos of San Ildefonso and Santa Clara to the south, and to the east is Tsi Mayoh. Associated with the village of Chimayo, the name Tsi Mayoh is a loose translation of the Tewa name for the hill.\textsuperscript{21} Each of the hills has a system of caves or tunnels where the Tewa believe the Towa é reside. At the outskirts of each Tewa village, shrines are dedicated to each direction, along with other lesser shrines. The final category of sacred space is defined within the village itself, and consists of the dance plazas.

The Tewa share a very interesting relationship to their physical landscape in which the earth, and by extension, mud, plays a recurring role. Although the Made People are the official mediators between the common Tewa and spiritual forces, any Tewa can visit all shrines and leave offerings of feathers and white cornmeal to connect

\textsuperscript{20} Ortiz, \textit{The Tewa World}, 18.  
\textsuperscript{21} Ortiz, \textit{The Tewa World}, 40.
to the ancestral souls. The souls, people, and the earth are all interconnected. Within the sacred hills and mountains are earth navels where sacred beings reside and are linked with the spiritual world. Located in the south plaza of each village, the "Earth mother earth navel middle place" serves as the center for all ritual to begin as the source for blessings. Whereas the mountain and hill navels direct blessings from the supernatural world toward the Pueblo, the earth mother navel directs them out to the spirits. After death, the spirit of a Tewa travels to one of the shrines to join the ancestor soul, which together travel to all sacred spaces of the hills and mountains of the Tewa world. A Tewa prayer, spoken when talking to a spirit includes this phrase that links all Tewa and all spirits together: "Within and around the earth, within and around the hills, within and around the mountains, your authority returns to you. . . ." It is the earth that gives the Tewa their authority, and their reason for existence.

This sacred earth that forms the foundation of Tewa thought and belief first manifested itself in the mud that characterized the world upon the Tewa emergence from under the lake. The world is compared between ochu ("unripe") before the emergence and seh t'á ("hardened matter") the earth became once the Winter chief stepped on it. The mud that the Towa é threw to create the sacred tsin hills was known as poshu. It may refer to "the black and sparkling fine sand seen on water-washed sand surfaces along the

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22 Ortiz, The Tewa World, 59.
24 Ortiz, The Tewa World, 21.
26 Ortiz, The Tewa World, 23.
27 Ortiz, The Tewa World, 16.
banks and islets of the Rio Grande”, which was used as body decoration for rituals and offerings to Lightning and the Horned water serpent. Additionally, the highest class of Tewa deities, the *oxua* (cloud people) lives in the lake of emergence. The leading *oxua* of the Summer moiety is named "Black mud" for the mud gathered from ponds during the summer and used for ritual body adornment. This mud also gives the Tewa the authority to exist outside the lake of emergence.

The Tewa were not isolated, but had close connections to the other Pueblos. The Rio Grande Pueblos traded with a variety of other native peoples, Pueblo and nomadic societies alike, and were often the victims of attacks and raids as late as 1525. Their precarious positions allowed for loose alliances among the Pueblos to guard against common enemies and outsiders, but none were sustained past the period of danger or crisis. The outsiders to have the most impact on the lives of the Pueblos were the Spanish. The relationship between the Spanish and the Pueblos has fluctuated throughout history, with periods of calm punctuated by times of discord. This constantly shifting relationship lays the foundation for analyzing El Santuario as a site of cultural exchange at Chimayo.

The first instance of Spanish contact came in 1540 with the arrival of Coronado and his expedition looking for the fabled seven cities of Cibola, which were thought to be built of gold. When the expedition arrived in a western Zuni town (*Hawikuh*), they were devastated to discover “instead of a dazzling city, there, perched on a flat and sandy hill,

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was a rock-and-mud pueblo 'all crumpled together.'" The famed cities of Cibola were, in all probability, adobe Pueblo structures seen brightly lit by the sun. Unable to subdue the peoples living in the pueblo, Coronado moved eastward toward the Rio Grande, and eventually returned to Mexico City without fortunes or the satisfaction of settling the new land for the Spanish crown. For the next forty years, several other expeditions would attempt, without success, to discover the wealth of gold and silver so prominent in interior Mexico.

In the 1580s, the Spanish again turned their attention toward New Mexico, not for mineral wealth, but for the expansion of spiritual wealth. In 1581, a lay Franciscan brother was granted permission to investigate the missionization of the peoples to the north. The expeditions were again turned back by distrusting Pueblos, forcing the Spanish to wait until 1598 to colonize the Rio Grande valley. At that time, Don Juan de Oñate rode into New Mexico, established relationships with and received pledges of allegiance from representatives of several pueblos, and began an extensive program of colonization that would last nearly a century. Oñate created his capital across the river from a pueblo village named Okeh, renamed the pueblo San Juan de los Caballeros (Saint John of the Knights or Gentlemen), and quickly built a mission church to begin the Christianization of the Pueblos. This pueblo, known today as San Juan, is located near Chimayo and includes the Spanish village within Tewa sacred space.

31 Simmons, *New Mexico*, 20.
Initially, the Pueblos offered the Spanish access to their surplus food and allowed them to partake of their resources. As colonization continued, the Spanish began to exact tributes from the Indians, often exploiting their labor and crafts for personal riches. This system, known as *encomienda*, demanded that each household should pay the government in blankets and corn. Another system, *repartimiento*, ordered the Pueblos to organize labor forces to work the lands of the government. Both systems, originally accepted by the Pueblos, eventually led to abuses by both the civil and church authority. The Spanish began to fight among themselves and dissent cropped up between the government representatives of the crown and the church. The governors of New Mexico "...saw the missionaries as building up little kingdoms of their own which robbed the civil authority of labor supply and at the same time created a rival power and authority."  

As the seventeenth century progressed, the church became increasingly more powerful. Numbers of Pueblos were converted to Christianity, and the church became wealthier and developed its own capital at Santo Domingo Pueblo, complete with an agent of the Inquisition. Distant from the civil government in Santa Fe, the church was the authority in individual villages. The responsibility to transform the Indians into Spanish citizens fell to the priests in the churches, who taught more than the Catholic catechism, instructing the Indians on civil law, culture, and social norms. At the onset of colonization, the priests gently converted through teaching and modeling moral and

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33 Spicer, *Cycles of Conquest*, 156.
35 Simmons, *New Mexico*, 57.
36 Simmons, *New Mexico*, 58.
Christian behaviors. After 1650, the techniques of Christianization became more militant as the church realized that the Pueblos had merely added the Christian doctrine to their own religious beliefs rather than replacing them. The Pueblos accepted Christianity, but also continued to dance, hold rituals, and worship their own deities. In response, the Franciscans decreed that all native religious activities be banned, and religious objects were destroyed in an effort to stamp out the native practices. The church often turned to physical abuse of what were, in their minds, the heathen Pueblos who refused to forsake all other gods. By the end of the 1670s, the increasing abuse of Pueblos by both church and state combined with the rivalry between the Spanish civil authority, and the Church authority had eroded the strength of the provincial Spanish government to the point that the Pueblos were able to join together and expel the Spanish from New Mexico.

The Pueblo Revolt of 1680 has its roots in an incident that occurred in 1675 and was led by Tewa Indians from San Juan and nearby pueblos. The governor decreed that 47 pueblo leaders should be charged with sorcery and were brought to Santa Fe to stand trial. The spiritual leaders were whipped, and four convicted of practicing a spell against a priest were hanged. Several Tewa, carrying weapons, marched into the city and demanded the release of the prisoners. The Pueblos began to band together, responding to the leaders of Santo Domingo and San Juan Pueblos, the initial centers of Spanish authority. At a predetermined time, a large number of Pueblo warriors marched into Santa Fe, besieging the capital, while the mission churches were burned and many clergy

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37 Franklin Folsom, *Indian Uprising on the Rio Grande* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press,
and missionaries killed. After nine days of siege, the governor and the remaining Spanish were allowed to leave, and after receiving conflicting reports about the strength of the Pueblos, marched southward out of New Mexico. The alliances forged between the Pueblos for the uprising dissolved as soon as the Spanish left the territory. New Mexico remained free of Spanish domination for twelve years, until 1692, when the Spanish had enough strength to attempt to re-conquer what they considered their province.

Another instance of rebellion by the Pueblos was centered in the village of Chimayo. When Don Diego de Vargas, the appointed governor of New Mexico, rode back into the Río Grande Valley in 1692, he was met with mixed reactions. Some pueblos did not resist while others fought for their independence and split when overrun by the Spanish. A group of Tano Indians, who had been pushed from their original home south of Santa Fe to land north of the capital, had to move again when the Spanish built a new town named Santa Cruz to be the administrative center for all of the province north of Santa Fe. They moved only a few miles south and east of the new village to a patch of land that would become Chimayo. The Second Pueblo Revolt was led by the Tano from the Chimayo area in 1696, but was quickly suppressed. Many insurgents were given to Spanish nobles as slaves, and many Pueblos moved out of the area and joined the Pueblos in the western part of the province. After the revolts the uprooted Tano and other local Tewa were forced out of Chimayo to the Hopi lands in the west, creating a small enclave of Tewa known as the Hano.

The first half of the eighteenth century was characterized by upheaval, but eventually the political situation settled and Spanish life dominated the Pueblos once again. There were many differences between Spanish authority before and after the revolts. The systems of *encomienda* and *repartimento* were not re-instituted after the second revolt in 1694. The missionary aspect by the church decreased in importance, probably for several reasons. In 1694, the parish priest at San Juan repeatedly destroyed a religious shrine that the Pueblo faithful continued to rebuild. The priest wrote to his superior that when he asked the Indians why, they replied, “that the kingdom had revolted [in 1680] because this [religious custom] had been taken away from them, and that if it were to be taken away from them they would again rise in rebellion.” Additionally, when de Vargas returned the Spanish presence to New Mexico, he brought with him several hundred settlers and the Spanish population increased. As there were many more Spanish colonists to be attended to, the church began to focus on serving the needs of established colonists.

The combination of the movement of several hundred Pueblos to the west and the dramatic decreases in Pueblo population, due to internal conflict with the Spanish, other raiding Indians, and disease, served to focus the newest Spanish government on developing a strong colony of native Spanish New Mexicans. French expansion threatened in the early days of the century and British and American expansion marked

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39 Dozier, 142.
the last decades of it, but it was the bands of nomadic Indians who raided both Spanish villages and Pueblos who were considered the main threat to the province. The constant threat of invasion, coupled with church tolerance of Pueblo beliefs, drew the fledgling Spanish villages and established Pueblos together in a common defense.

The nineteenth century brought many changes to New Mexico, from the transfer of Spanish rule to Mexican authority after the Mexican Revolution to its annexation as a United States Territory in 1848. When the Mexicans took power of the province in 1821, the trade restrictions were lifted and the borders were opened. The isolated life that marked the existence of New Mexicans until the early nineteenth century came to an end.

The Santa Fe Trail, stretching from the Santa Fe to Independence, Missouri and the Missouri River, brought in traders and trappers, new wealth, cheaper goods, and more Americans to New Mexico. The Mexicans found they had the same problem with the territory that the Spanish struggled with: the distance of the province from the central government in Mexico City. The long distance between Mexico City and Santa Fe meant that the Mexican government only tangentially controlled affairs in New Mexico, leaving the citizens of New Mexico with no great loyalty to the Mexican republic.

The lack of governmental support also impacted church support, and the Mexican church ignored its northern outposts. Churches in New Mexico had been locally controlled from the late 1700s, and the Franciscan priests had all but disappeared from the province when the Mexicans gained control. The few new priests to arrive could not

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41 Calvin A. Roberts and Susan A. Roberts, *New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press,)
bring the individual churches together into a cohesive whole. The missions had been turned over to the Pueblos, who relished their independence, and the village churches fell into disrepair with little local financial support and the sharing of priests among several parishes.43

It is in this climate that El Santuario de Chimayo was founded. The history of the relationship between the Pueblos and the Spanish is important for several reasons. First, the recorded history of New Mexico tells only part of the region's story. The beliefs and myths of the peoples who were there before Spanish accounts tell a different, but equally interesting, story of this area. First, the Spanish who encountered the Pueblos felt no particular connection to the land, bringing only their quest for mineral, physical, and spiritual wealth to their outpost in New Mexico. Second, the Pueblos were willing to accept the beliefs and customs of the more dominant Spanish as long as they could continue to worship their own beliefs along with the Christian views. It is only when the Spanish upset the balance of the relationship by abusive policies and inflexibility to understand the importance of native beliefs that the Pueblos rebelled. Third, the two histories of New Mexico, the written Spanish accounts of the land and their subsequent interpretations of the people they found living with the land, allow for a comprehensive Western perspective of the region. Although we cannot be completely certain of our interpretations of Pueblo myth and reality, we can analyze our perceptions of their cosmological beliefs and very carefully discuss our conclusions. The Pueblos,
specifically the Tewa, who lived in conjunction with their land, were actually a part of both the physical and metaphorical landscape. The Spanish predisposition to dominate both the land and the people they found living with the land and the Pueblo inclination to retain their independence intermingled over the nearly four hundred year history of cultural contact, creating a blend of cultures that has become uniquely New Mexican. This perspective sets the stage for the cultural acculturation that occurs in nineteenth century Chimayo with the founding of El Santuario de Chimayo.

42 Roberts and Roberts, New Mexico, 96.
43 Roberts and Robert, New Mexico, 97-8.
CHAPTER 3

THE DISCOVERY OF THE IMAGES OF EL SANTUARIO DE CHIMAYO

Legends and stories have long played a powerful role in the history of places and Chimayo is no exception. Oral traditions often give us a clearer glimpse into what a community believes than do written accounts, for they do not focus on events:

Tales such as these are what folklorists call legends – narratives that are believed and told as the truth by at least some members of the community in which they have currency. . . . Many of the details may be hard for contemporary Americans to believe, but they are nonetheless important documents that illuminate, not a series of actions that took place in the past, but a community’s beliefs concerning what happened. . . . To the extent that these beliefs are acted on, they influence reality and indeed become reality.¹

The Tewa, original settlers of the area, told of the spiritual qualities of the land long before the discovery and appearance of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño through their extensive oral myths and stories of the twin war gods and other deities. The stories of the images’ appearance have become the reality for the people of Chimayo and tell us about how they interpret the presence of the holy images in their midst.

A variety of legends and myths surround the founding of the shrine at Chimayo. Although the legends often differ in their details, they all center upon the discovery of a crucifix that gives El Santuario its Christian authority. The crucifix, known today as El Señor de Esquipulas, is the undisputed holy founder of the shrine, and thus, by

¹James S. Griffith, Beliefs and Holy Places: a spiritual geography of the Pimería Alta (Tucson & London: the University of Arizona Press, 1992), 43.
extension, Christ becomes the founder of El Santuario. The stories of the miraculous
discovery of the crucifix are at the center of several legends where the crucifix is found
by a local Chimayo villager, an unknown person or persons, appears along with an
animal, inside a hollow tree or near a rock. Despite the differences in the stories, several
key elements stay the same: the finding of the crucifix, its removal to another site, its
subsequent return to its place of discovery, and its miraculous ability to heal. Four
legends illustrate the diversity and richness of the discovery of the crucifix.

The most commonly repeated story begins on Good Friday in 1810, when a
miraculous event is said to have taken place on the property of Chimayo villager
Bernardo Abeyta. The discovery of the crucifix on Good Friday is particularly
auspicious as it suggests an active and ongoing participation of Christ as the founder and
patron of El Santuario. Abeyta saw a bright light emanating from the portion of the Rio
Santa Cruz that ran through his land. Upon investigation, he found a crucifix buried in
the sandy bank of the river. Abeyta alerted Father Sebastian Alvarez and organized a
procession to carry the crucifix to the closest church in nearby Santa Cruz, where it was
placed on the altar. The next day, the crucifix was missing, and after frantic searching, it
was finally found in its original position on the bank of the Rio Santa Cruz. The
procession to the church was repeated, only to have the crucifix disappear again the
following day. When it was found on the river bank for the third time, the clergy
proclaimed a miracle and ordained that the crucifix should stay in the small village,
where Abeyta built a small private chapel (hermita) adjacent to his house. In 1813,
Abeyta wrote a letter to the diocese requesting permission to build a chapel at the site.
The request was granted, and in 1816, the chapel was built on the site of the existing hermita.\(^2\) At some unknown point after its construction, the crucifix became known for its ability to heal the afflicted, and was associated with the healing mud in the area.

An original written account of the miracle does not exist, however, and the story was passed from generation to generation through Abeyta's granddaughter and members of the community. Variations of this legend abound in which Abeyta's name is not mentioned. Another version offers a possible explanation for the connection of the crucifix to Latin America. A booklet on Chimayo published by the Sons of the Holy Family notes that documents in the archives of the Diocese of Durango (Mexico) tell the story of a Guatemalan priest travelling to Chimayo with the first settlers:

He preached to the indians in surrounding pueblos and carried with him a rather large crucifix. He was eventually killed by the indians and the settlers buried him at El Potrero. In 1810 the Santa Cruz river flooded and both the crucifix and the body of the martyred priest were uncovered by the water. Some older people who had known the priest while alive shouted: "Miren, el Padre de Esquipulas", ("Look, the Father from Esquipulas"), and so the crucifix came to be called, Our Lord of Esquipulas, named after the village where the priest came from.\(^3\)

The time frame makes this story improbable, as the first settlers to Chimayo would have arrived during the 17th century, before the Pueblo Revolt in 1680.\(^4\) The second wave of Spanish settlers would have come to Chimayo in 1696, when the second conquest of New Mexico was undertaken. In any case, none of the older residents who claimed to recognize the crucifix of the buried priest from Guatemala would have been among the

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original settlers of Chimayo, as the early settlement is dated from 150 to 114 years previously.

In a third version, an animal brings the discovery to the attention of Chimayo. A mule with a coffin shaped box on its back appeared at the site of El Santuario and stood until a clergyman came to investigate. Inside the box was a small crucifix, which was placed on the altar and named El Señor de Esquipulas. News of the miracle quickly spread and the villagers came to visit and revere the crucifix. This legend notes that miracles were being attributed to dirt from a hole several years before the Santuario was built. “People deformed or suffering with a malady beyond the curative powers of physicians flocked to the Santuario, inspired with faith that the Divine Providence, through the supernatural remedial power manifested in the soil and in the miraculous statue, would alleviate their suffering or restore their health.”

5 In this case, healing properties are attributed to both the crucifix and the mud.

A fourth version of the legend of the crucifix comes from an informant at Isleta Pueblo, approximately 90 miles south of Chimayo:

One time when a man was out herding sheep he found Escapu’la, a little head sticking out from the ground. He dug this santu out from the ground and carried him all the time on his back while he was herding. He went home. “My wife, “ he said, “I found this pastor. I am going to keep him. Whenever I go he shall go with me.” . . .They kept him in that little hole. When the man went herding, he carried him on his back again. The santu was right there with him. Then the man went and told the priest that he had found him. The priest told him to carry him to Santa Fe. He carried him there. When he came home, he found him back in his little hole. “Well, come out herding with me,” he said to him. The old woman said, “Someday I am going to burn him up.” “No!” The man went out herding. On his return, he found his wife all crooked, her mouth pulled to one side. He prayed and she prayed, to the santu, to make her look as she did before. So she

5 Kay, Chimayo Valley Traditions, 40.
got well again. So people say that when they make a promise to San Escapu'la they must keep it.\textsuperscript{6}

This version of the story gives the crucifix the power to heal those who believe in its power. It also instills in the image the authority to both heal and harm. These same qualities are also associated with the black crucifix devoted to San Esquipulas in Guatemala.\textsuperscript{7}

The legends surrounding the introduction of the Santo Niño figurerine are equally as interesting, although they differ from El Señor de Esquipulas in one major way.\textsuperscript{8} Santo Nino was not discovered at Chimayo, but can be thought of as having been sent there by divine intervention. The story published most often begins with the death of Bernardo Abeytta. After Abeyta's death in 1856, another family in Chimayo, led by Severino Medina, built a chapel near the Santuario in 1857. Severino Medina was stricken with severe rheumatism and had a revelation that told him to pray to the Santo Niño de Atocha. Santo Niño de Atocha, known as the Christ Child who wandered the landscape at night wearing out his shoes, is traditionally thought to help the sick and afflicted. When he recovered, Medina embarked on a pilgrimage to Fresnillo, Mexico where the shrine devoted to the Santo Niño de Atocha was located. In Mexico, he told the priest at the shrine about his experiences and requested a statue of the Santo Niño to take back to Chimayo to worship.\textsuperscript{9} The people of Chimayo donated land approximately

\textsuperscript{6} Elsie Clews Parsons, \textit{Tewa Tales} (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1962), 415-416.
\textsuperscript{7} Stephen F. deBorhegyi, “The Miraculous Shrines of Our Lord of Esquipulas in Guatemala and Chimayo, New Mexico,” El Palacio 60 (March 1953), 84.
\textsuperscript{8} While the legends indicate that the images found in Chimayo should be identified as the Santo Niño de Atocha, a holy figure originally from Spain; the statue is often just referred to as the Santo Niño by the community members.
\textsuperscript{9} Kay, \textit{Chimayo Valley Traditions}, 48.
two hundred yards northwest of El Santuario de Chimayo, and a private chapel was built and dedicated to Santo Niño with the image procured in Mexico installed on the altar.

Another similar legend tells of an old man who is told by the Christ child to go to California and buy a statue, bring it back to Chimayo, and build a church for its veneration. On the return trip, the man slept with the statue next to him, and waking one night, noticed the statue was missing. When he awoke the next morning, the statue had reappeared at his bedside. After the statue disappeared and returned to the old man’s bed a second time, he and the statue returned to Chimayo and built a shrine to the Santo Niño. This behavior of the statue is not considered extraordinary as, “it is believed that the Holy Child walks around at night helping the poor and ill and all those in need of help. It is said that they have found his little shoes worn out completely and that is why they replace his shoes.” The statue is not inanimate; it fully participates in the lives of the faithful at Chimayo and elsewhere in New Mexico.

One additional legend appears to link together the crucifix of El Señor de Esquipulas and the Santo Niño figure. A farmer was taking his team of oxen to a field and was accompanied by his young daughter. The girl heard a church bell ringing under the ground and urged her father to stop and find it. After digging and finding the bell, the farmer also found a small Santo Niño statue. Variations of this story have the farmer digging and finding the statue in the hole that holds the healing mud.

What is intriguing about the legends surrounding the crucifix of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño is the images the stories evoke and what they tell us about the
relationship between the works of art and the people of Chimayo. First, the discovery of
the crucifix and Santo Niño’s appearance bring life to the images. They are not
inanimate objects, rather they play a vital role in the community. David Freedberg notes
that images representing an idea become infused with the presence of that idea and that
"the sign has become the living embodiment of what it signifies...The slip from
representation to presentation is crucial, from seeing a token of the Virgin to seeing her
there."12 A parallel to Freedberg’s example of the Virgin’s presence is found in the roles
the crucifix of El Señor de Esquipulas and the statue of Santo Niño play in the lives of the
faithful at Chimayo. Viewers look upon the images of holy figures and the holy figures
look back at viewers. The connection does not stop with gaze, however. Images of holy
figures play an instrumental and influential role in the lives of the faithful. They have the
ability to intercede and either harm or help.

In the legend where the wife of the farmer threatens to burn the holy image of El
Señor de Esquipulas, she is stricken with paralysis immediately until she pledges her faith
to the figure. It is only through her devotion that she can be healed. The figure has the
power to physically harm those who do not believe or who blaspheme the figure. The
stories of Santo Niño wearing out his shoes on his nighttime missions also convey the
idea that the statue is animate. The faithful often bring new baby shoes to the churches in
order to ensure that the Santo Niño figure will continue to help the afflicted. Other

10 Stanley L. Robe, *Hispanic Legends from New Mexico* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University
12 David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago and
stories note that the Santo Niño figure is taken out into the fields to see drought or blight and asked to help heal the soil.\(^\text{13}\)

The images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño are participatory members of the Chimayo community and have chosen to make Chimayo their home. The crucifix, despite the clergy’s attempts to install it at an existing sanctuary, chooses to stay at the place of its discovery, where a shrine must be built, similar to the power of relics who also choose their place of residence. The place of discovery is its place and there can be no other. By disappearing three times from the church in Santa Cruz, El Señor de Esquipulas let the village know where he belongs. Santo Niño, on the other hand, appears and requests to be housed in Chimayo. The images are tied to the places their holy presences have chosen. It is their location, coupled with the devotion to them that allows for their power to heal and intercede on behalf of the community.

Second, the discovery and appearance of the images appear to give them validity by acting to consecrate them. Consecration is critical to holy images, as it “either turn the image into a receptacle for the sacred or confirms the sacredness already present by publicly heightening it.”\(^\text{14}\) In the case of El Señor de Esquipulas, consecration only confirms its sacredness, which is first evident in its discovery in, and travels to, the mud of the riverbed in Chimayo. The sacred mud in which he was found originally gives him authority. This authority is both Christian and native, as the spot where the crucifix was discovered had long been considered sacred by the Tewa Indians. The person who found it, Bernardo Abeyta, was one of the spiritual leaders in Chimayo, a member of the lay

\(^{13}\) Robe, *Hispanic Legends from New Mexico*, 513.
brotherhood of penitentes. As Chimayo had no permanent clergy at the time of discovery, lay priests were responsible for the day-to-day spiritual guidance of the community. Abeyta was the Hermano Mayor (Major Brother) or leader of the local penitente order, and was a devout and pious man who cared for the religious needs of his neighbors.

This original consecration - the discovery of the image in the healing mud - is also found in the legends of the Santo Niño in which the statue is found in the pit of sacred mud. The reasons for this may be twofold: first, to develop the link between Santo Niño and the sacred mud, and second, to connect the concepts of El Señor de Esquipulas, healing, and pilgrimage with the Santo Niño. In the case of the other legends of Santo Niño, members of the Chimayo community are told to acquire a statue of an already consecrated and accepted holy figure of the church. Santo Niño does not need to be consecrated, his authority is already well established through Severino Medina's divine revelation and subsequent pilgrimage to Fresnillo, Mexico.

Both images are consecrated a second time, which only increases their authority. Each had a private chapel built for it for worship by individual families and the community members of Chimayo. Additionally, Bernardo Abeyta petitioned church officials in Durango, Mexico to build a public church “where they could give glory to the Lord under the advocation of Esquipulas and to have offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.” With the building of El Santuario, El Señor de Esquipulas is no longer privately worshipped, but becomes the devotional image of the public. It is after this second

\[15\text{ Freedberg, } \textit{The Power of Images}, 85.\]
“church sanctioned” consecration that El Santuario becomes a busy pilgrimage site. This additional consecration also gives validity to the original consecration by officially legitimizing the choice of El Señor de Esquipulas to be venerated and to be eternally present at the exact spot of his discovery.

Third, the appearance of the Santo Niño and the discovery of El Señor de Esquipulas prove their miraculous powers. Each of the stories and legends notes a villager, who, going about his or her everyday duties, is drawn to a miraculous phenomenon. These phenomena include a bright light emanating from the spot where the crucifix is found, a mule suddenly appearing on the doorstep of a non-extant church with a holy image on its back, a small child hearing church bells tolling underground, a vision instructing a sick man to pray to Santo Niño, and a figure of the Santo Niño found in the healing mud attributed to El Señor de Esquipulas. All of these discoveries serve to remind the community of the images’ healing properties. They have been proven to be miraculous by their finding and their subsequent consecration, so they have the promise to continue to work miracles. Their power lies not only in their past (their discovery or appearance), but in the present and future (miracles to come).

The images were miraculously discovered or appeared at a moment when Chimayo seemed to need them most. By virtue of their discovery, the images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño verify God’s mercy and active involvement in the present.

In his discussion about relics, Peter Brown notes:

God gave the relic; in the first instance, by allowing it to be discovered, and then by allowing it to be transferred. As Augustine said in a sermon on Saint Stephen:

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‘His body lay hidden for so long a time. It came forth when God wished it. It has brought light to all lands, it has performed such miracles.’ Nowhere did the silver lining of God’s amnesty shine from behind the black cloud of the late-antique sense of sin than in the accounts of the discovery and translation of relics. For these accounts are shot through with a sense of the miracle of God’s mercy in allowing so precious a thing as the praesentia of the holy dead to become available to the Christian congregations in their own place and in their own time.  

Although Brown is speaking of the cult of saints, and specifically about the discovery and translation of relics, his words are also valid for the discovery of the holy images at Chimayo. If the crucifix had been submerged in the mud, why then was it discovered at the specific moment it was found?

One answer is that God wished it to be found and that miracles needed to be performed. Several possible factors may have necessitated the discovery in 1813. First, during the smallpox epidemic of 1780-1, no vaccination was available to New Mexicans. Consequently, the settlers may have turned to native remedies to heal the sick and “... Spanish women rapidly assumed many of the basic beliefs of the Indians through contact with their Indian servants. Possibly one means of coping with the smallpox epidemic was a sudden faith in Indian remedies such as the belief that the dirt from below the hill Tsi Mayoh had medicinal powers.” Second, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the population in New Mexico dramatically increased, with over 10,000 Spanish settlers living in the province. Third, with the purchase of the Louisiana territory in 1803, the United States claimed their borders extended to the Rio Grande River, creating tensions.

17 Elizabeth Kay, “Perceptions of Three Cultures: Traditions within the Chimayo Valley” (M.F.A. diss., University of New Mexico, 1985), 17.
with Spain and opening New Mexico to an influx of traders.\textsuperscript{19} After decades of virtual isolation, the inhabitants of New Mexico had to contend with another government interested in expansion and the acquisition of land.

Perhaps the most influential reason the crucifix was discovered in the early nineteenth century is liturgical. At the time of the discovery of El Señor de Esquipulas, Chimayo had no formal church or trained clergy to serve the community. Residents had to travel approximately ten miles to Santa Cruz to attend services. Without any resident clergy to attend to the daily needs of the faithful, duties were performed by members of the Brotherhood of Our Lord Jesus of Nazarene, a local penitente order. Additionally, the constant threat of Indian attack, variances in climate and weather, political strife between Spain and Mexico, and their physical isolation from Spanish ecclesiastical authority may have prompted the villagers of Chimayo to accept any divine assistance offered. This idea is not unique in the Christian tradition. Michael Carroll found that in Italy, Christians often turn to magic when they are faced with some perceived danger that they lack the methods to control their environment.\textsuperscript{20} Magic only works, however, when the heart is faithful and the community is penitent. Magic also occurs in pilgrimages, where holy water [and by extension mud] has “supernatural efficacy.”\textsuperscript{21} El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño offer their help and support to the community and their presence let the community know that they were not alone during turbulent times. The villagers looked

\textsuperscript{19} Calvin A. Roberts and Susan A. Roberts, \textit{New Mexico}, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 64.
\textsuperscript{19} Roberts and Roberts, \textit{New Mexico}, 73-4.
to their images for protection and for continued good will by their God in addition to considering the images responsible for the healing miracles effected at Chimayo.

The discovery of the crucifix may have also given Bernardo Abeyta additional authority in the community. Although God ultimately gave the holy image by placing it and drawing attention to it, Bernardo Abeyta became his faithful servant who brought the image to the community. Abeyta did not keep the crucifix for himself, but petitioned the church and built a shrine for the community to venerate El Señor de Esquipulas. He became God's messenger to the villagers. Given his status as the leader of the penitente brotherhood that looked after the day-to-day religious affairs of Chimayo, Abeyta's finding of El Señor de Esquipulas strengthened his link to the clergy and the organized church. After Abeyta's death, and the link is weakened, Severino Medina brought Santo Niño to Chimayo, translating the saint to the community in another act of gift-giving and validating Chimayo as spiritually special. Both men, by virtue of their discovery or translation of a holy image, offered their supplication or goodwill to the community as the messengers of God. Their reasons for assuming these roles are unknown and any explanation is only speculative. Perhaps both men, devoted to their church, wanted their community to have a divine presence and identity that sustained the long spiritual traditions of Chimayo. They certainly were aware of the hardships facing the small community and may have seen the spiritual and economic importance of an identifying holy figure. Both Abeyta and Medina profited from the popularity of the shrines and the pilgrimage trade, but at their foundation, they were the human manifestations of God that
brought the presence of holy images to and introduced a measure of spiritual stability to the community.

The discovery and appearance of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño in Chimayo, combined with the legends that tell of these miracles, imbue these images with a sense of place. They both have chosen to be discovered at Chimayo and participate in the lives of the faithful there. El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño appear when God wishes, and in the place that God designates; they have ipso facto become the patron saints of Chimayo. They confirm their sacredness in several ways: initially in their discovery, their subsequent recognition by the church, and their continued promise to perform additional miracles and heal the afflicted.

The legends and stories allow the authority of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño to be passed from generation to generation. That many of the stories cannot be disproved or exposed as untrue or impossible is not at issue. Facts can be disputed, but beliefs cannot. Beliefs must be based on faith, and faith is subjective. The legends surrounding the discovery and appearance of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño have become the subjective reality for the community of Chimayo. They form the foundation of the belief in the devotion and miraculous happenings of the healing mud found at Chimayo.
CHAPTER 4

THE NAMING OF EL SEÑOR DE ESQUIPULAS AND SANTO NIÑO

The legends surrounding El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño help lay the foundation for any interpretation of the images, yet their miraculous discovery is not specific to the images. All of the legends and scholarly writings note that the images came to be known by the community as El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño. The names of the images give the community its Christian identity. The community does not depend upon just any images; it depends on the specific, named images. The finding of each of these images had to come first. According to David Freedberg, "Naming or consecration, as we shall see, may make the object work, but first there must at least be something to suggest its divinity."¹ The suggestion of divinity in this case, is the miraculous discovery or appearance of both images in Chimayo. The naming of the image, more so in the case of El Señor de Esquipulas than of Santo Niño, allows the image to be irrevocably linked to the site of its discovery. The image of El Señor de Esquipulas is no longer just an image of the crucified Christ, he is a particular Christ, the black Christ of Guatemala. The introduction of such a specific image, known only in a small village in Guatemala, raises the question of how and why did this name come to be linked with an even smaller village in northern New Mexico?

Perhaps it is easier to address how the name traveled to New Mexico before speculating on why this image came to be called El Señor de Esquipulas. By the time of the discovery of the crucifix, routes to and from the interior of Mexico had been established for several centuries. Therefore, it is not extraordinary to suggest that someone with the knowledge of the shrine devoted to Esquipulas in Guatemala might have traveled to the frontiers of New Mexico, and upon learning the local, native traditions of Chimayo, told of similar traditions in Guatemala. Some of the stories devoted to the discovery of the crucifix appear to do more than suggest that this event took place. In the legend where the crucifix is uncovered, members of the Chimayo community immediately recognized the crucifix, exclaiming, “Miren, el Padre de Esquipulas.” They called the image by the name “the father (priest) from Esquipulas,” who was thought to have traveled to Chimayo during the early days of settlement. When the Spanish church first came to New Mexico, the educated clergy may have known about the church in Guatemala and told of its miracles. Regardless of how the name came to Chimayo, it is presumed that Bernardo Abeyta knew of the parallels between the sacred landscape in Guatemala and Chimayo, even though no written evidence exists that he, and not someone else, named the crucifix.

Despite the ambiguity of how the name traveled the vast distance between Guatemala and Chimayo, there are intriguing parallels between the two sites. When the Spanish first began to conquer the native cultures living in southern North America and Central America, they often built Catholic churches on top of previous native sacred sites. This practice is widespread throughout the world, including Mexico. The churches
built to venerate the Virgin of Guadalupe in Chalma and Mexico City and Our Lady of
the Remedies in Mexico City were built on land sacred to the native population. In
1524, the Spanish encountered a group of Chorti Indians living near sulphur springs in
modern Guatemala, where they would make pilgrimages to drink the water and ingest the
earth. In the interest of avoiding unnecessary deaths, the Chorti chief surrendered with
little resistance and the Spaniards named the place Santiago de Esquipulas to honor the
name of the chief.

The Spanish quickly commissioned a local woodcarver to create a crucifix to
hang above the altar of the newly constructed church. The crucifix was carved out of
balsam and orange wood and the flesh of Christ was not painted but left the original color
of the wood. Several reasons have been posited for this action. One explanation is that
stories of Spanish cruelty and mistreatment of native cultures may have preceded their
arrival and the conquistadors worried that the Indians would not accept a deity capable of
such cruelty. Alternately, another explanation hinges on the social perceptions of the
Spanish church. They may have felt that they would have more luck converting the
Indians if their God looked similar to the indigenous deities worshipped by the Chorti
Indians. However, this interpretation requires speculation that the unpainted crucifix was
deliberately left unpainted to closely resemble the Chorti.

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significant, as Saint James the Greater, Santiago in Spanish, appeared to a Spanish king before a great
battle in a dream and galvanized the troops to victory. After the battle, Saint James was known as Santiago
Matamoros (the Moor Slayer). The strong militant character of Santiago forged Spanish Catholicism and
exploration together in the outposts of the Spanish Empire, extended the connection into other realms of
triumph over infidels, and resulted in the naming over 150 villages and cities after Santiago.
The crucifix was placed in a shrine close to the springs thought to have healing properties. Soon miraculous healing of the sick was attributed to the crucifix. Guatemala's archbishop, who, according to legend, was cured of a disease after a visit to the shrine in 1737, built the large Baroque church. Over the years, the candle smoke has turned the exposed wood black. The site of the church at Santiago de Esquipulas quickly became a place for the sick to make pilgrimages because of the miracles effected there. Small tablets of the healing mud from the River de los Milagros (River of Miracles) were molded, stamped with the images of the Virgin, Our Lord de Esquipulas, and other saints, and sold to the pilgrims as tierra del Santo, or earth of the saints, for the faithful to eat. The tablets were thought to cure a variety of ailments associated with the stomach, eyes, heart, and pregnancy.

The tradition of geophagy, or earth-eating, is found in many places throughout Central and South America, as well as in many places in the American Southwest. However, the only two instances of geophagy connected to native and Christian pilgrimage is at Santiago de Esquipulas in Guatemala and El Sanutario de Chimayo in New Mexico. In both locations, the earth is dissolved in water and drunk and is removed from the site to take it to loved ones who are not present. The Chimayo area was visited by native Tewa pilgrims to partake of the healing mud, created when the twin war gods killed a giant and caused the pools of water to partially dry. This legend was

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5 DeBorhegyi, 4.
6 deBorhegyi, 4.
7 deBorhegyi, 6.
8 Elizabeth Kay, Chimayo Valley Traditions, (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1987), 16.
known to the Spanish settling in the Chimayo area, for it is thought that the Tewa located at nearby San Juan Pueblo also visited the landscape around Chimayo. With the finding of the crucifix near the riverbed, in Tewa sacred space, and the subsequent building of El Santuario, the Christians of New Mexico laid their beliefs over the existing native traditions, just as they had in Esquipulas in Guatemala and numerous other sites in the New World.

The parallels between the two places would imply knowledge of the existing shrine in Guatemala and the local traditions in Chimayo. The name of a saint is key; saints come into being by being named, and those names must in some way be approved by the church. The name of Esquipulas had already been sanctioned by the organized church in Guatemala, and therefore was accepted by the Spanish clergy. This link to Guatemala gives the Chimayo image added Christian authority by connecting by name the crucifix in Chimayo to the events in Guatemala.

One reason for this connection may be the capitalization of the similarities in order to develop a pilgrimage site much closer to New Mexico. Travel to Guatemala for a pilgrimage would have taken several months from New Mexico. It would have required dangerous travel through Indian controlled lands and leaving family members isolated and vulnerable to attack by nomadic Indian parties. In addition, the establishment of Chimayo as a holy pilgrimage site gives Christian authority to the mud that is responsible for the healing. It had long been understood that the mud had

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miraculous healing qualities for the native Tewa, but is with the introduction and naming of the crucifix of El Señor de Esquipulas that the Christian Spanish inhabitants of Chimayo could believe and partake of the tradition of miracles.

Another reason for naming the Chimayo crucifix El Señor de Esquipulas is to distinguish it from any other crucifix. Pilgrims undertake the hardships of a pilgrimage to see a specific image, to pray for the image’s assistance, and to connect with that image’s unique attributes. New world pilgrimages followed a rich tradition of pilgrimage in Europe, particularly the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compestela in Spain. Devout Christians can remain in their own communities to pray for the intercession of Christ or the Virgin. Instead they often travel great distances to venerate a specific image, as noted by David Freedberg:

In strict theological terms – as is so often insisted in the course of Western Christianity – it is the Virgin or saint represented by the image what works the miracles, that arouses veneration, and – for that matter – attracts the crowds. But in every case, the aim is to reinforce the implicit claim that it is this particular image and not another that works in such and such a miraculous or beneficient way.”

Its specificity is important, for another image of Christ will not have the ability to heal the afflicted through the sacred mud. The connection is between the image of Christ of Esquipulas and the mud. Therefore, the crucifix must be named Esquipulas in order for the image to work.

In this way, the crucifix named El Señor de Esquipulas gives Chimayo its Christian spiritual identity. The role of El Señor de Esquipulas is expanded; he is not just a member of the community, he becomes the de facto patriarch or the patron saint, the
reason for all devotion and veneration in Chimayo. He, like saints in other locations, is physically present at all times, and is responsible for the "social integration, identity, protection, and economic support for the communities in which there were found."\footnote{David Freedberg, \textit{The Power of Images}, 119.} El Señor de Esquipulas played the role of patriarch until his popularity began to wane, around the time of Bernardo Abeyta's death in 1856. It is at that time that Santo Niño assumed the duties of El Señor de Esquipulas, including the attributes of healing.

The naming of the Santo Niño figure is slightly less important than that of El Señor de Esquipulas, since the cult of Santo Niño de Atocha was spread throughout the world and well established in the church.\footnote{Patrick J. Geary, \textit{Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages}, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 171.} It is important to note that in the legends of the statue's appearance in Chimayo, Severino Medina's vision called for him to pray to the Santo Niño by name and then required the acquisition of a statue to be venerated. This may be explained by local familial politics. If Medina was searching for a way to increase his family's revenue by capitalizing on the pilgrimage trade from \textit{El Santuario}, the widespread devotion to the Santo Niño cult throughout Mexico and the Southwest would have validated a local pilgrimage shrine in Chimayo. The closest pilgrimage shrine devoted to the Santo Niño was in Fresnillo, Mexico. The development of a local shrine meant that people would not have to travel for months to venerate the image. The introduction of the Santo Niño image in the Medina chapel and its increase in popularity

\footnote{Elizabeth Skidmore Sasser's "Under the Protection of the Saints," \textit{Southwest Art} (July 1989), 90. The cult of Santo Niño de Atocha was founded during the religious wars with the Muslims. Spanish Christians were tortured and imprisoned by the Moors in the city of Atocha. A small child wrapped in pilgrimage robes appeared and poured water and fed the prisoners bread from a bundle that was never depleted. The popularity of Santo Niño in New Mexico may stem from the constant threat of Indian attack.}
began to overshadow the cult of El Señor de Esquipulas, until the original devotional image was forgotten. In response, the Abeyta family announced that they had procured for the Santuario their own image of Santo Niño, along with other saints that wandered outside and protected the crops and community. The Abeyta family placed their Santo Niño figure in the small room with the well of healing dirt. The naming of the Santo Niño of Chimayo is important because it is the first and only place that healing by sacred mud is attributed to the Christ child of Atocha. Local spiritual identity shifted from El Señor de Esquipulas to Santo Niño quickly and completely.

The names of both El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño play a defining role in the community of Chimayo, and were introduced before their cults became popular. The connection between a saint’s name and the naming of community members comes from the medieval period:

The importance of the bonds formed by names extends quite beyond their role in liturgy. By reusing certain name elements or entire names from generation to generation, families or individuals were consciously preserving their own names and those of their ancestors. Names were a form of immaterial inheritance, and with them might well go the possibility of likelihood of other inheritance . . .

The naming of children in Chimayo after the holy figures offered the children the promise of having the same attributes of the holy images.

The name Esquipulas is documented in the Chimayo area even before the discovery of the crucifix in 1810. In 1805, the child of Abeyta’s brother was baptized with the name Juan de Esquipulas, and in 1813, the same year Abeyta petitioned the church for formal recognition and permission to build a public church for the veneration of the crucifix.
of Esquipulas, he named his own son Tomas de Esquipulas. An indicator of the cult of the Santo Niño occurred in 1857, one year after the death of Bernardo Abeyta; a child was christened Manuela de Atocha in Santa Cruz parish, about ten miles from Chimayo. This evidence of naming members of the community only serves to increase the links between the identity of the holy image as a community image. Peter Brown notes, “The later spread of Christian names reflects the need to link the identity of the individual to a saint. A Christian name stood for a new identity associated with a new birth.” The naming of a child in the community was one way for the saint, and by extension a holy figure, to be reborn and given a living personality.

The roles of the holy images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño were securely linked with the spiritual landscape of Chimayo first by virtue of their discovery and then by their naming. The images located at Chimayo are specific images; they represent a certain holy image at a certain time and place. Naming the crucifix El Señor de Esquipulas created the Christian spiritual connection between the site and the mud and further validated it in the eyes of the church by bringing it together with the site of Santiago de Esquipulas in Guatemala. The Santo Niño, already an established name throughout the world, needed less validation for the cult to take hold. However, the Santo Niño at Chimayo is not like every other image of that holy figure, for the Chimayo Santo Niño subsumed the healing attributes of El Señor de Esquipulas. Both of these

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14 de Borhegyi, 21.
15 Geary, Living with the Dead, 88.
16 de Borhegyi, 53.
17 Kay, Chimayo Valley Traditions, 48.
images give Chimayo its Christian identity; they have become responsible for the healing that is transmitted via the ancient mud.
CHAPTER 5

THE ROLE OF EL SEÑOR DE ESQUIPULAS AND SANTO NIÑO AT

EL SANTUARIO DE CHIMAYO

What role then do these specific images, which have been proven to be miraculous by their discovery and naming, perform in Chimayo? The images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño play a very important role in the church; over time they have become understood as responsible for the healing properties of the mud. Image and location have become intertwined and even conflated. The miracles associated with a specific place demand images that specifically relate to that place. In *The Power of Images*, David Freedberg uses the example of Altdorfer’s painting entitled *Schöne Maria* of Regensburg to illustrate this idea. Freedberg notes that because Altdorfer’s image of the beautiful Madonna was a derivative of the more famous example in Rome, it could not be an exact copy and had to be uniquely different since the miracles performed were unique to Regensburg.¹ In the same light, the images associated with Chimayo must be different from images affiliated with other pilgrimage holy sites. This concept offers an explanation as to why the Chimayo’s crucifix named El Señor de Esquipulas is visually distinct from its related image located in Guatemala.

The five-foot crucifix of the Señor de Esquipulas in the church in Santiago de Esquipulas, Guatemala, was carved in the baroque manner popular in the outposts of Spain in 1594. Carved by Quirio Cataño, it was dedicated in the small chapel in 1595, and remained there until the large, baroque church was built in 1759. Made from orange and balsam woods, the figure of Christ was not painted, but instead left the original color of the wood. Perhaps coincidentally, the color closely resembled the skin tones of the native Maya living in the community. The cross itself is completely gilded and has sculpted vines and leaves. Christ appears to be crowned with a golden crown and the sculpted musculature of his arms and shoulders suggest the physical toll hanging takes on the body.

In contrast, the large crucifix of El Señor de Esquipulas in Chimayo is simpler and carved in the local style of northern New Mexico by the santero (saintmaker) known as Molleno. The approximately six foot tall figure of Christ is attached to a dark green cross made of smooth boards with rounded corners and set into a large niche of the altar screen. The cross is neither gilded nor decorated with vines, but does have protrusions that resemble stylized leaves on both crosspieces. Christ’s body is not modeled naturalistically, but rather hangs rigidly from the horizontal beam. The torso is flat and planar, with painted blood pouring out of the wound on the right ribcage that radiates up the neck and down the abdomen. It appears to have been painted a light brown color that has a greenish cast to it. The differences in appearance may be explained primarily by

regional style as the Chimayo crucifix resembles other sculpted works by the santero Molleno.

The crucifix in Chimayo is not a copy of its predecessor in Guatemala; in fact, little connects the two crucifixes visually. The image of El Señor de Esquipulas was created specifically for the site in Chimayo. It is connected to the crucifix in Guatemala more by virtue of its name and discovery than by its likeness to the original image. The only two visual parallels are the stylized and gilded leaf-like protrusions on the Chimayo crucifix and the technique of leaving or painting the wood of the Christ figure to resemble the local inhabitant's natural color, rather than painting it the fair-skinned flesh color of most European crucifixes. It appears that in this example the importance and authority of the image in Chimayo is not linked to its likeness or resemblance to the original image from Santiago de Esquipulas, but rather by their likeness of name. It is linked to the response of the community and the roles that the image plays in spiritual drama.

The images of Santo Niño can be looked at similarly, even though they were not created for the site at Chimayo, but brought to New Mexico and subsequently appropriated the miracles attributed to the crucifix. They are not required to be specific images aligned with a specific place because El Santuario already had its identifying image: the crucifix had been considered responsible for the healing miracles at the shrine. The Santo Niño figures eventually subsumed the crucifix’s significance as the catalyst for miracles from the healing mud. The legends and stories began to blur, and the cult
devoted to the Santo Niño blanketed and enveloped the cult of El Señor de Esquipulas, resulting in its adoption of the miracles. Over time, Santo Niño replaced the image of El Señor de Esquipulas and became the image that identifies the miraculous happenings at El Santuario. Perhaps to further capitalize on the reputation of the El Santuario as a miraculous and healing site, the Abeyta family placed their Santo Niño figure into the small room that contained El Posito, the pool of healing mud. The small crucifix of El Señor de Esquipulas, the crucifix of legend found in the adjoining riverbank, has also been placed in the room with the pool of mud. This action reestablishes the link between native and Christian culture at the site and also augments the process of conflation between the holy image and the mud.

Here too, it is the naming of the images that is crucial. Ironically, neither of the statues in Chimayo are actually depictions of Santo Niño de Atocha. Most accounts of the Santo Niño de Atocha describe Him as "seated, dressed in pilgrim's clothing with a broad brimmed hat, carrying a staff and gourd, and wearing shoes. He also carries a basket generally containing roses and his staff is sometimes decorated with ribbons." The statue Severino Medina was given in Mexico is actually a paper mache doll from Germany that has been forced into a sitting position. The attributes of Santo Niño have been added to dress the figure. He wears the cape and hat of a pilgrim and carries a small purse into which pilgrims often tuck money or letters. Similarly, the El Santuario's Santo Niño statue has been found to be an image of the Holy Child of Prague, who carries a

small globe in his right hand. He is seated and wears the cloak of a pilgrim, along with a hat and a pair of baby shoes, and has also been renamed the Santo Niño. In effect, the doll figures originally made in Europe have been remade in Mexico or New Mexico as images of the Santo Niño. They are placed in both chapels and both have been named Santo Niño. This action allows the faithful to "see" Santo Niño because legends justify the inclusion of an image of Santo Niño. No evidence exists of the veneration of the Holy Child of Prague in Chimayo. As in the case of the crucifix of Señor de Esquipulas, the Santo Niño images are identified by their names, even when they are dressed with the attributes of another image, such as the globe held in the hand of the Holy Child of Prague.

Because of the differences in visual characteristics between the Guatemala and Chimayo crucifixes dedicated to Esquipulas and the misidentification of the Santo Niño figures, the likeness of an image cannot be the sole reason for it to "work" in certain situations. In this case, likeness has little to do with their acceptance and effectiveness. The power of these images is not found in their execution or visual identification, but rather it is the authority that their discovery and naming gives them combined with the physical presence with which each image is imbued.

The image of El Señor de Esquipulas is not the image of a saint; it neither carries a visual connection to a specific saint, nor is it named for a saint. It is a sacred image of Christ, the special Christ found at Santiago de Esquipulas in Guatemala and plays a

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4 DeBorhegyi, 86.
similar role in the community of Chimayo that the patron saints of other communities play. It is a holy image that emulates the roles that saints often play in their local communities. Saints, including Christ and the Virgin, play different roles at different times, but several characteristics are constant. Carroll notes that popular saints have “two sorts of supernatural power: (1) the power to heal (or more generally, to improve some aspect of the present situation); and (2) the power to protect from future dangers.” Geary adds that relics of holy images have the power and responsibility to “provide the continual action of divine Providence.” Señor de Esquipulas and later Santo Niño play the same roles at Chimayo that holy images play in other communities; they are holy images with divine power and the power of relics. Historically, they have been given the responsibility for the healing mud at Chimayo; the mud “works” because of their divine intervention. They also give a face and identity to the mud.

Santo Niño was often asked to protect the fields, just as Christ and the Virgin protect the land and the people in other communities. In one story, villagers from Chimayo were worried that a drought would ruin the crop and they prayed for intervention. Upon going out to the fields the next day a farmer found them irrigated,

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with small tracks in the mud. When he returned to the church, “[he] found that the statue of the Santo Niño had mud all over its feet.”

Both images provide a continual presence of divine power, something that was important in the early history of El Santuario of Chimayo, when the church had no clergy of its own. They served to make the community spiritually significant in lieu of a resident priest and consistent support from the Spanish Church. The images of El Señor de Esquipulas and the Santo Niño brought Christian authority to the small community of Chimayo by announcing the site of El Santuario as their chosen site for miracles and divine presence. They further validated the Christian perspective by becoming the conduit for the healing mud and the intercessors for pilgrims who traveled to Chimayo to venerate the images and receive favors and miracles granted by the images.

The power of both the images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño comes from the healing mud with which each image is associated. The tradition of the mud’s healing properties is older than the erection of El Santuario and the acquisition of the images. The original Tewa beliefs about the miraculous nature of the mud in the Chimayo area have been overlaid by the Church’s assertion that divine Christian powers are responsible for the miracles. Regardless of perspective, the mud has been the connection to the site and the images have been layered on top of it; they have become inseparable. The mud gives the images their power and authority and the images give the mud a face and personality; they anthropomorphize the mud. How each image can be

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understood as responsible for the healing miracles at El Santuario can be explained by the argument that anything in contact with a holy shrine or place has the same power as the saint or holy figure worshipped there. The mud, along with spiritual solace, is sacred at Chimayo; it is the reason pilgrims come to Chimayo. The images humanize the experience of traveling to El Santuario by creating a dialogue between Christ and the pilgrim that allows miracles to be affected.

It may be helpful to return to the issue of consecration discussed previously. The power of an image is evident both because it is consecrated by the Church and before its official consecration. Freedberg expands on this idea:

Images work because they are consecrated, but at the same time they work before they are consecrated. They may do so in different ways and on different levels, and response to them may depend in the first instance on the perception of purely aesthetic qualities and in the second instance on apparently supernatural ones. In either event, the phenomenon of consecration fully demonstrates the fact of the potentiality of all images; it dramatically activates that potentiality and realizes it.

The images identified with El Santuario are consecrated, first by their discovery and second by the official recognition and acceptance by the church and community. However, the ultimate reason for their connection to El Santuario is the Christianization of the healing mud located at the site. If the mud and the images are inseparable, then the division of the roles the mud and the images is also conjoined and the healing mud is also consecrated in the same actions that validated the images. The authorization by the organized Church to build El Santuario for the veneration of El Señor de Esquipulas as an

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agent of miraculous happenings also consecrated the physical entity of the miracles, the mud. The mud and El Señor de Esquipulas “work” because the Church identifies them as miraculous. When the cult shifted in popularity to the Santo Niño figure housed in the Medina chapel nearby, El Santuario needed to acquire its own image to keep the attribution between mud and image within El Santuario. The mud at Chimayo had power before its Christian interpretation and was initially consecrated by the discovery of the image of El Señor de Esquipulas. The image was, quite literally “born from” the mud, as it was found in the riverbank that produced the healing substance.

Pilgrims who travel to holy shrines often pray to a holy image to assist in some affliction or guidance. The pilgrims who travel to Chimayo come to pray for the divine power the healing mud possesses and to ask for a cure or intercession. Although the site had been considered holy long before the arrival of Christianity, whether or not the pilgrims knew of the pre-Christian connection is unknown, and due to the lack of written journals, probably unknowable. The stories about experiences at El Santuario, however, indicate that people came to Chimayo to venerate the images of El Señor de Esquipulas and the Santo Niño and ask for their divine favor in curing some ailment of health or heart by removing the holy dirt. However, the mud itself cannot be venerated; it is inanimate. The images of El Señor de Esquipulas and the Santo Niño anthropomorphize the mud, they “give the mud a face” and make it supernatural. In the Christian framework, this consecration legitimizes its healing power, whereas in the Tewa worldview, the mud was an animist concept and did not need a human form to perform
its healing. The Christian interpretation, which is not that different from the Tewa view, has been layered over the original interpretation of the mud, so the consecration makes the mud Christian and gives it the authority or, as Freedberg calls it, the potentiality, to continue to work miracles.

It is difficult to consider the mud as equal to the image, so the faithful consider the presence of the images as primary and connect the mud by its association to the image. In this instance, it can be argued that the mud serves as a relic of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño. Relics are not images, but are worshipped as the physical remnants of saint's earthly bodies or their belongings and as the physical presence of a holy figure. The relic helps the faithful know that the saint is present, or in Peter Brown's words, "In a relic, the chilling anonymity of human remains could be thought to be still heavy with the fullness of a beloved person." The images associated with Chimayo are not relics, they do not have bodily remains, however, and the mud acts as if it were a relic by being the catalyst for healing. Stories and legends tell us that the mud and the veneration of the holy images are intertwined together:

As early as 1890, Maria Martinez, the famed potter of San Ildefonso pueblo, visited the "Santuario of the Santo Niño." Maria had been ill with a serious disease when her mother made a vow (promesa) that if she recovered she would make a pilgrimage to the Santuario to give thanks. By this time the healing power of the earth had been attributed to the Santo Nino. While the little Maria rubbed herself with the sacred earth, she offered fervent prayers to the Holy Child.12

The holy image must be present for the mud to heal, for the image is responsible for the mud’s healing qualities. The mud becomes a contact relic; by rubbing themselves with the holy mud, the pilgrims are physically connected to Christ. If the holy image is not present, the mud will not be sacred, for it is the image that allows the mud to work.

Interestingly, the small crucifix thought to be the object found in the mud of the river bank and the Santo Niño statue have been placed in the room with the well of mud, creating not only philosophical or theological connections, but visual links as well. The images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño visually empower the mud.

Another argument for the mud acting as a relic of the images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño is the claim that particular images work miracles, not the saints themselves, because the images become conflated with the saints. This appears to be true in Chimayo, as well, for three reasons. First, the Santo Niño images in Chimayo are images of an unnamed secular doll and the Holy Child of Prague, but are identified as the holy child Santo Niño. The location, naming, and function give the images of the Santo Niño their identity. It is not important that they originally were designed to depict a different person; they have become the Santo Niño and thus are venerated as that specific image of the Christ child.

The second and third reasons are interrelated. The images of the Santo Niño and devotion to Santo Niño’s cult are found throughout New Mexico, but it is only the Chimayo images that are given healing properties via the mud. The image of Santo Niño

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and the mud are tied only to the specific site of El Santuario. Similarly, the image of El Señor de Esquipulas is central to Chimayo and only four other images of the Christ of Esquipulas are found in New Mexico. They are all located within 50 miles of Chimayo: a crucifix in the church devoted to Christo Rey (Christ the King) in Santa Fe, images in the mission church at Santa Clara pueblo and in the new church at the pueblo San Ildefonso, and a painted image in the church at Ranchos de Taos, indicating that the popularity of the cult has not spread far from the site of the healing miracles. None of the other images of El Señor de Esquipulas are venerated with pilgrimages or looked to for the purposes of healing.

The images at Chimayo are irrefutably linked to the mud and the site of El Santuario in Chimayo. They are specific images that have chosen to link themselves with Chimayo by their discovery and naming and therefore have specific interpretations that can only be found in Chimayo. They are visually unique; El Señor de Esquipulas has similarities to its namesake in Guatemala, but is not a direct copy, and the Santo Niño images have been fabricated to visually resemble other iterations of the figure, even though they were created as something else. These holy images behave like saints and function within the community as if they are local patron deities. The mud’s inherent importance, which makes the site spiritually and thaumaturgically significant, creates a situation whereby the mud becomes anthropomorphic, with the images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño becoming the mud’s advocate. In a related concept, when the image becomes the reason for the mud to continue its ability to heal, the mud becomes a
relic of the image; it gives the image a holy potency. The images are alive because they allow the mud to heal the faithful. Ultimately, the images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño exist to validate and Christianize the tradition of the healing mud. The long connection between the mud and the images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño has mostly been lost and modern pilgrims no longer refer to the images in El Santuario by name, but rather by the generic title of the "lords of Chimayo." However, even after the consciousness of the identities of the images is absent, the tradition of the mud remains.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

What then, is the significance of El Santuario de Chimayo, with its spiritual place in both ancient and Christian worlds? The spirituality associated with the site has manifested itself in both worlds through pilgrimage. For all of recorded history, and even before, people have traveled to Chimayo for a variety of spiritual reasons. Initially, the Tewa came to care for and connect with the spiritual ancestors living there, and later, the Christians came to revere the holy images associated with the site. Both the Tewa and the Christians traveled to Chimayo to interact with the spiritual presence and to participate in the healing potential of the sacred mud.

This interaction and participation implies that the person seeking divine intercession, or pilgrim, plays an integral role in what occurs at a holy place. Victor Turner notes that social drama "is propelled by passions, compelled by volitions, overmastering at times any rational considerations...."¹ One aspect of social drama is pilgrimage. "Pilgrimage is part of a lifelong drama of salvation or damnation, hinging on individual choice, which itself involves acceptance or rejection of an individual of 'graces', or freely volunteered gifts, from God."² Pilgrimage is one example of social drama. Pilgrims choose to undertake a pilgrimage, they remove themselves from the

everyday and give themselves over to something that is larger and more powerful than themselves.

The early Christians looked to "escape the structures of their everyday existence by finding a place of local liminality - a place not so removed physically from their familiar surroundings and yet sharing with the great pilgrimage sites of Palestine a direct connection with divine power." Although this passage discusses Christian pilgrimage in particular, its concepts are true for non-Christian desires to connect with the spiritual realm. Pilgrimage and the worship of deities at a specific place is not exclusively a Christian ritual. As late as 742, the people of Rome would celebrate pagan practices on saint's days, implying that "although the popular devotion to saints was strong, it was not particularly Christian." This idea also describes the actions of the faithful at Chimayo. Regardless of belief in either the Christian or Tewa traditions, Chimayo can be explained as a sacred space, a site of liminality, where people who believe in its extraordinary power come to seek a relationship with the supernatural. Pilgrimage is the performance whereby pilgrims step outside their normal, everyday practices to access the potential gifts or favors from the holy presence at a sacred place.

It is instructive at this point to return to an idea introduced in the first chapter. Victor and Edith Turner create the analogy that pilgrimage systems are akin to overlapping shapes similar to a Venn diagram, where the areas of overlap have certain commonalities. "A fully mature pilgrimage system, or 'field,' is comparable to a series of

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2 Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*, 181-2.
overlapping, interpenetrating ellipses whose common area of overlap has the shrine at its center.” The different ways of interpreting Chimayo as a spiritual center can be seen as overlapping, transparent ellipses, as ideas from one ellipse may affect the concepts in another. There are several layers of interaction occurring at Chimayo beginning with the relationships between the native Tewa inhabitants and the landscape of Chimayo and the initial contact and relationship between the Tewa and the early Spanish conquistadors.

After the establishment of New Mexico as a Spanish colony, the interaction is concerned with relationships between the holy images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño and the sacred space of Chimayo. Finally, as the influence of the images fades, the interaction between El Santuario, its images and concepts and the faithful community and pilgrims who come to the shrine for a specific devotional reason describe the interpretation of Chimayo.

For the Tewa, the power of Chimayo is in its sacred geography. The sense of place was determined in the myth of emergence, when the Towa é threw mud from the lake of emergence to create the sacred hills and then took up residence in the caves of the hills to watch over the Tewa. The Tewa name of the easternmost sacred hill, known as Tsi Mayoh, was probably modified to be pronounced Chimayo in the Spanish language and is adjacent to the village. Before the arrival of the Spanish, the Tewa visited their shrines to connect themselves with the spiritual world. It was the custom for the people to make pilgrimages “to their sacred hills and mountains to clean shrines, sweep the trails.

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to them, and pray for rain."\(^7\) Alfonso Ortiz, a contemporary Tewa and an anthropologist, notes that shrines are important "throughout life whenever the common Tewa feels the need of spiritual assistance. By visiting any shrine and placing an offering of feathers and white cornmeal on it, he can enlist the aid of the ancestral souls in his undertaking."\(^8\) He also stresses the importance of the east as the direction of the rising sun and the Tewa belief that the sun is the source of all life, indicating that the eastern shrines held an important position in Tewa cosmology.\(^9\) The east also has important connotations in Christianity; most churches are oriented toward the holy land in the east.

Two interesting parallels occur between the Tewa and Christian concepts of sacred space. First, in both instances the place is designated or chosen by a divine presence. The six sets of Tewa brothers, the Towa é, created the sacred place by throwing mud in each of the four directions to designate four sacred hills. In the Christian mythology, that same sacred space is renamed in Christian terms by the miraculous finding of a crucifix in the mud of a Chimayo riverbank and its subsequent naming of El Señor de Esquipulas. The sacredness of Chimayo is renamed again with the introduction of the cult of the Santo Niño.

Second, both traditions consider a spiritual being or beings to be present in the sacred space. Tewa mythology tells that the Towa é live within the caves on the sacred tsin (hills) and shrines on the hills are kept so that at death the soul "...is believed to go immediately to one of the four directional shrines, where it is met by the ancestral souls.

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\(^7\) Elizabeth Kay, *Chimayo Valley Traditions*, (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1987), 11.
\(^8\) Alfonso Ortiz, *The Tewa World: Space, Time, Being, and Becoming in a Pueblo Society*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 59. This is presumably since the time of Spanish arrival as Ortiz speaks in the present tense rather than in the past tense.
From here they journey together to all points in the Tewa world, to the sacred mountains, hills, and other shrines. Therefore, the original Tewa deities and the dead ancestors of the contemporary Tewa inhabit the shrines. Conversely, in the Christian mythology, the divine presence is visually seen in the images of El Señor de Esquipulas and the Santo Niño. They are the holy figures who inhabit the small chapel at Chimayo and who are able to grant special favors or prayers.

The interaction between the Tewa and the Spanish occurred when the Spanish attempted to appropriate Tewa sacred space. The Spanish imposed their culture and cosmology upon Tewa space initially by placing their settlement across the river from the main Tewa pueblo. However, they did not appropriate the sacred shrine located on the sacred hill Tsi Mayoh itself, but instead linked the Christian point of view to the Tewa outlook by appropriating a site in between San Juan Pueblo and the sacred tsin. Additionally, folktales in the Chimayo area purport that an ancient pueblo, where healing was said to have occurred, once existed on the site. This layering of a Christian god over native beliefs does not obliterate those beliefs. The Spanish could not eliminate the native spiritual connection and power of the sacred space of Chimayo, but they could rename it. The Tewa were able to accept the Spanish belief system and incorporate it into their secular lives. However, they did not invite Christianity into their sacred landscape. They neither afforded the Christian pantheon a sacred hill or mountain nor did any references to Christianity appear in their mythology. They instead laid the Christian beliefs alongside their own and over time the two different audiences at the site

9 Ortiz, The Tewa World, 154.
blended and became one. In the Christian interpretation of the site of Chimayo, the spiritual power of the site is directly linked to the images in El Santuario, whereas the Tewa have no such connection to images. This difference indicates another ellipse of interaction between the Christian images and El Santuario built upon the Tewa sacred space. The images of El Señor de Esquipulas and the Santo Niño supply Chimayo with its Christian identity and authority. Their discovery (or in the case of the Santo Niño, its acquisition) and naming link them to the sacred space at Chimayo. They are considered responsible for the healing powers of the mud. The devotion to these specific holy images is dependent upon the sacred mud found at the spot where the church was built, and continues to be the link between the ancient, native culture, and the newer, Christian society.

The function of the images at Chimayo is not didactic, as so many other Catholic images are. By the nineteenth century, Catholicism had been an influence in New Mexico for nearly two centuries, so the introduction of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño must be explained in another way. The social upheaval of the early nineteenth century due primarily to politics, previously discussed in chapter three, offers one possible reason for their introduction. The lack of clergy in New Mexico suggests another explanation. In 1812, two years after the building of the Santuario, only 22 priests remained in New Mexico. The implications of these two factors may be significant.

10 Ortiz, *The Tewa World*, 52.
The images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño became the protectors and supporters of the community of Chimayo. Their discovery mandated their authority, claiming that Chimayo was a place that needed intercession by divine presence. The images strengthened the bond between the community and the organized Church. Chimayo may not have had a resident priest, but it had resident holy images and spiritual presence watching over it.

The naming of the images assisted in developing the spiritual identity of Chimayo by connecting the small village to an established Catholic pilgrimage center and the established traditions of healing earth in Esquipulas, Guatemala. That connection assisted in re-connecting Chimayo to its past Tewa traditions of sacred mud and further validated the Christian authority of the site by asserting the parallels to Guatemala while also appropriating the native traditions. By establishing the connection to both traditions, the idea of pilgrimage was rekindled; if the faithful in the past came to access the healing mud, then the faithful will come again to be healed by the sacred earth.

The mud gives the images their power and authority; they make the mud “work.” In turn, the images give the mud a face. They allow an inanimate concept to have supernatural presence in the same way the relic of a saint is the physical manifestation of a saint’s presence or more particularly, in the same way a figural reliquary gives a relic, and thus the saint, a face. At Chimayo, the iconography of the images is downplayed, primarily because they are identified by their discovery and naming rather than their likeness to a particular saint or holy image. The main function of the images is to serve as the animate conduit of the mud.
This becomes more apparent in the last ellipse of interaction between El Santuario, including the images and the healing traditions of mud, and the faithful who visit the site. The relationship between the miraculous images and their response by the faithful supplicant is often communicated by the presence of ex-votos, the physical offerings left at a pilgrimage site by the faithful to give thanks for favors or prayers answered. South of the small room where the pool of healing dirt and the small crucifix of El Señor de Esquipulas are located is a room that runs parallel to the nave of the sanctuary and contains the Santo Niño figure and numerous votive offerings.

Freedberg refers to Kriss-Rettenbeck’s four-fold system of classification for ex-votos: (1) representation of a holy image, (2) image of the supplicant, (3) depiction of the event causing the supplicant to seek intercession, and (4) an inscription recording the event or hope of intercession. Examples of each type abound at El Santuario. Several painted or drawn ex-votos of the Holy Child hang on the walls along with images of several crucifixes (none identified as El Señor de Esquipulas), Our Lady of Guadalupe, and angels. One prominent ex-voto is a painting of the room where the well of healing mud is located and is painted with bright red and blue colors. The second type, images of the faithful is seen in a photo accompanied by a two page statement regarding “My flame.” In the statement, the supplicant, who met the Pope in Amarillo, Texas, describes himself as a yellow flame.

The third type of ex-voto is probably the most prominent at El Santuario. Dozens of crutches, walkers, and canes hang from the ceiling and along the walls of the room. A

large six foot cross standing in the sanctuary facing the altar is an offering from a pilgrim grateful to God for a prayer answered. A typewritten placard accompanies the cross and reads:

This cross is a symbol in thanking God for the safe return of my son Ronald E. Cabrera from combat duty in Viet-nam. [sic] I Ralph A. Cabrera, promised to make a pilgrimage, which constituted of walking 150 miles from Grants, New Mexico to Chimayo. This cross was given to me Ralph A. Cabrera by Fr. Ferringo in San Francisco which was made by Reverend Fr. Cleese in 1937 for St. Veronica’s church in San Francisco. This pilgrimage was finished on the 28th day of November 1968. /“Thank God for his love”/Ronald E. Cabrera/Ralph A. Cabrera

The final type, or inscription ex-voto, is also very numerous at the Santuario. One supplication, dated October 1998, asks “God, all the Angels and the saints of Santuario and St. Jude” to help a family in a business crisis. Another, written in Spanish, thanks the miracles at the Chimayo church for favors received.  

Two conclusions can be drawn from the ex-votos present at the El Santuario. First, the images of the Santo Niño in ex-votos indicate the connection between the miracles and the Santo Niño. Unfortunately, many ex-votos are not dated, so there is no definite way of knowing if the Santo Niño is still seen as the conduit for the miracles. Also telling is the absence of ex-votos depicting El Señor de Esquipulas, indicating that the original connection with the miraculous happenings has been lost. The image has lost its specificity to the site and has become an image of the crucified Christ instead of an image of El Señor de Esquipulas.
Second, the ex-votos are testimonies to the long tradition of miracles at Chimayo. They give power to this sacred space through their extra validation of the sacred. While the miracles may only last moments and may only be experienced by the person who requests help, the ex-votos are the tangible remains of miracles. Freedberg notes that pictorial ex-votos “in a sense, absolved one from further demonstrating one’s thanks. The picture remained as the perpetual record of gratitude: prayers of thanks would always be transient; one would have to renew them; and if one were rich, one would ensure their renewal after death.”\textsuperscript{14} This is reminiscent of the idea of potentiality discussed earlier.

The ex-votos hold the promise of future miracles. They prove that the miracles that happened in the past are still happening and have the potential to occur in the future. The ex-votos become the images associated with Chimayo, in a sense, they are the proof of its miraculous stature.

Ultimately, the mud is the constant among all levels of interaction at Chimayo.

The role of the mud almost forms the shape of an ellipse itself. At different times in Chimayo’s history, the mud is a part of the spiritual landscape and then becomes a contact relic of the images of El Señor de Esquipulas and Santo Niño. Finally, when the connection to the images wanes, it becomes an integral part of the spiritual geography again. This is most explicitly evidenced in the souvenirs taken by pilgrims from Chimayo as they leave the liminality of a pilgrimage to return to their everyday routines.

Souvenirs removed from a pilgrimage site often are thought to have similar properties as

\textsuperscript{13} “Mi sincero agradecimiento a la milagrosa iglesia Chimayo por su bondad y por el favor recibido de que el Sr. Rambon Gallindo recuperara su salud.”

\textsuperscript{14} Freedberg, \textit{The Power of Images}, 138.
the shrine they came from.\textsuperscript{15} Inventories of the small shops surrounding the Santuario show that very few souvenirs depict the images that have been historically associated with the shrine. Ornaments, key chains, and note cards often depict the façade of the church. What is most often removed from the Santuario is the mud, which follows a long tradition of removing holy effluents such as oil or water from a pilgrimage site. On any given day, several pilgrims can be observed scooping the holy dirt into a variety of containers, from plastic soda bottles to zippered plastic bags. The shops sell a variety of unadorned containers, such as pill bottles, for the pilgrim to remove the dirt. The healing dirt no longer needs an image to make it work.

In his discussion of pilgrimage, Peter Brown argues that, “...the experience of pilgrimage activated a yearning for intimate closeness.”\textsuperscript{16} Chimayo has held people in intimate closeness for centuries. From the original inhabitants the Tewa who revered the landscape as the place their ancestors chose when the world was new to the contemporary pilgrims who come to pray at the sacred shrine to the tourists who visit and wonder why the small, unassuming shrine holds so much mystique for the faithful. One ex-voto, written on piece of pressboard with black magic marker, sums up the miracle of Chimayo for a modern visitor:

I am blind, travelled many miles to Chimayo, a place I love, in its’ silence and peace I left this gift...a poem –

If you are a stranger, If you are weary from the
Struggles in life, whether you have a handicap, whether you
Have a broken heart, follow the long mountain road, find a
Home in Chimayo.

\textsuperscript{15} Freedberg, \textit{The Power of Images}, 124.
\textsuperscript{16} Brown, \textit{The Cult of the Saints}, 87.
It's a small Spanish town settled many years ago by 
People with a friendly hand, their culture still lives today
They will tell stories about miracles in the land. Since 1813
Santuario is the key to all good.

A church built as graceful as a flower swaying in a summer
Breeze, nestled in a valley protected by wild berry trees
In the dusty roads of Chimayo little children with brown faces
Smile, majestic mountain tops rule over the virgin land.
When the day is done the sun falls asleep without regret,
Sleeping in the twinkle of a starry, starry night,
It's that old country feeling in Chimayo I can't forget
In all the places in the world I have been
This must be heaven.

G. Mendoza
Las Cruces, NM
APPENDIX
El Señor de Escuipulas in El Santuario de Chimayo
Photo by Custom raft Ltd. Santa Fe, NM

Santo Niño de Atocha in El Santuario de Chimayo
Photo by Virginia Lee Lierz ©1997

Santo Niño de Atocha in Chapel of Santo Niño de Atocha
Photo by Ed Taylor
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