



Digging the Days of the Dead: A Reading of Mexico's Dias de Muertos

Juanita Garciagodoy

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Dias de muertos -- Days of the Dead -- is celebrated in Mexico each year in late October and early November. It is a family reunion in which the dead are the guests of honor who are welcomed with their favorite foods, carefully chosen gifts, and ritual paraphernalia such as candles and incense. Some of the objects show tenderness, some, a sense of perspective about life and death, and some, a frank sense of humor.

In *Digging the Days of the Dead*, Juanita Garciagodoy depicts various aspects of the celebration -- including Prehispanic and Spanish Catholic traces on its development as well as folk and popular culture versions -- and describes its changing place in contemporary Mexico. She dedicates two chapters to close readings of calaveras, figures and scenes of "lively" skeletons that reveal details of popular philosophy about, for instance, gender and class relations and identity politics. There is also an analysis of the struggle between the traditional holiday and Hallowe'en. Garciagodoy examines in detail differences in attitudes towards death in Mexico and the United States. In part because the living do not exclude the dead from their family circle, celebrants of Dias de Muertos treat death as an intimate life companion and fear it less than their northern counterparts, who tend to view death as inimical. Lavishly illustrated with 96 black and white photographs and reproductions of Posada's engravings, *Digging the Days of the Dead* is indispensable for scholars interested in Mexican religion and culture.

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