

**Santa Muerte Pantheon Guide for Initiates and Members of**  
***Circulos Tenebris Matrem Arcanas***  
**Circle of the Dark and Mysterious Mother**



**Santa Muerte**

Santa Muerte's full name is Nuestra Senora de la Muerte or "Our Lady of Holy Death". She is a female deity in Mexican culture. She is a personification of death and is associated with healing, protection, and the afterlife. Despite condemnation by the Catholic Church, her religion has become increasingly prominent in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Since pre-Columbian Mexican culture has maintained a reverence toward death, which can be seen in the widespread celebration of Day of the Dead. This holiday includes the use of skeletons to remind people of their mortality.

Santa Muerte generally appears as a skeletal female figure, wearing a long robe and usually holding a globe and a scythe. She is sometimes pictured with an owl (which is similar to images of Lilith). Her robe can be any color and the images vary from devotee to devotee.

Because the worship of Santa Muerte was banned until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most prayers and other rites have been performed privately. Since the 21<sup>st</sup> century, worship has become more public. There is an

estimate of 10-20 million followers in Mexico. Santa Muerte has similar male counterparts in the Americas such as San La Muerte and Rey Pascual.

## **Names**

Santa Muerte can be translated to English as either "Sacred Death" or "Holy Death". A variant of her name is Santísima Muerte which means "Most Holy Death" or "Most Saintly Death". Santa Muerte is also known as The Skinny Lady, The Bony Lady, The White Girl, The White Sister, The Pretty Girl, The Powerful Lady, The Godmother, Lady of Shadows, White Lady, Black Lady, Holy Girl, Beautiful Lady Sebastienne, and The Skinny Woman.

## **History**

Although Santa Muerte's origins are subject to debate, she is mostly likely the combination of the pre-Columbian Mesoamerican religion and Spanish Catholic culture. Death has always held reverence in the Mesoamerican (specifically Aztec) religion. Death was personified in the form of humans with half their flesh missing to symbolize the duality of life and death. Pre-Aztec religion had the gods Mictlantecuhtli and Mictecacihuatl, the Lord and Lady of Death. Even though after the Aztecs were conquered the worship of death diminished, it was never eradicated.

## **Rites**

Rites dedicated to Santa Muerte include processions and prayers with the aim of gaining a favor. Some believers of Holy Death remain members of the Catholic Church. Altars of Santa Muerte temples generally contain one or more images of the Lady surrounded by offerings of cigarettes, flowers, fruit, incense, water, alcohol, coins, and candles.

According to popular belief, Santa Muerte is very powerful and is reputed to grant many favors. Her images are treated as holy and can give favors in return for the faith of the believer, with miracles playing a vital role. As Señora de la Noche ("Lady of Night"), she is often invoked by those exposed to the dangers of working at night, such as taxi drivers, bar owners, police, soldiers, and prostitutes. As such, devotees believe she can protect against assaults, accidents, gun violence, and all types of violent death.

Devotees may present her with a seven-color candle, which it is believed was probably adopted from the seven powers candle of Santería, a syncretic faith brought to Mexico by Cuban migrants. Here the seven colors are gold, silver, copper, blue, purple, red, and green. In addition to the candles and vestments, each devotee adorns their own image in their own way, using U.S. dollars, gold coins, jewelry, and other items.

Santa Muerte also has a "saint's day", which varies from shrine to shrine. The most prominent is November 1, when the believer Enriqueta Romero celebrates her at her historic Tepito shrine where the famous effigy is dressed as a bride. Others celebrate her day on August 15.