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Ethnographer of Sixteenth-Century Aztec
Mexico*

*The Work of
Bernardino de Sahagún
Pioneer Ethnographer of
Sixteenth-Century Aztec Mexico*

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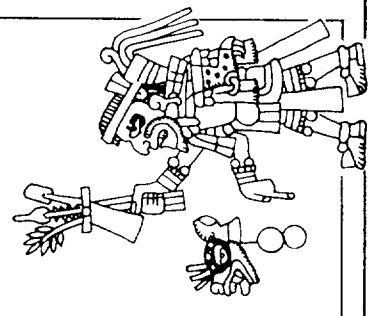
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Yet the text which most closely parallels sections of the *Colloquios* is the *Apéndice*, written in 1579 in reaction to the threat of ongoing idolatry. The texts follow the full circle: from initial conversion, through full indoctrination with occasional warnings against idolatry, to the gradual realization that those warnings are not enough and it is necessary to refute idolatry all over again. Thus an appendix with that intent was added to the *Historia general's* book on the gods, probably for the "recopilación" of 1567-1569 as it does not appear in the earlier *Memoriales en tres columnas* draft (Sahagún 1905-1907:7). The *Apéndice* was added to the *Postilla* in 1579. The 1585 *Arte Adivinatoria* again denounced the old gods and accused the Nahuas of conspiring to perpetuate their worship (in García Icazbalceta 1954:382). In these later texts Sahagún speaks to and for the Indians. It is he, in his own voice, who describes the "old men's" teachings only to refute them. The "old men" are no longer given any opportunity to present their own case.

In 1564 Sahagún was still able to express optimism about the success of conversion (see Klor de Alva, next article). He states in the prologue to the *Colloquios* that the conversion of the Indians is a glorious act of God that he wants to record for future generations. This quixotic conception of the early missionary work persisted. In his *Relación* written in 1576 and inserted into Book X of the *Historia general's* Spanish version, he states that things would not have turned out so badly if missionary work had continued the way it had begun (Sahagún 1938:III:84). But here the emphasis is on the many failures he had witnessed, such as the attempt to create an Indian priesthood, and the continuation of idolatry. The tone is far from hopeful.

One landmark in the decline of the Franciscan mission was 1564. Mendieta, writing toward the end of the sixteenth century, chose the death of Viceroy don Luis de Velasco the Elder as the end of the "golden age" (*tiempo dorado*) of the Indian Church (1870:559). Velasco died in 1564. When the *Colloquios* was written the problems had already started and the optimism was fading. The *Colloquios*, by re-creating 1524, gave the Franciscans a final moment of glory. Aztec culture is described in terms that express a sense of order, nobility, and beauty. The friars, in their turn, know exactly what to say in order to strike down the Indians' opposition in order to effect a sincere conversion. The *Colloquios* is nostalgic dramatization as well as historical reconstruction. Uniting Sahagún's ethnography with his propagation of the faith, it enshrines the Nahuatl-Christian dialogue that flourished under Franciscan patronage. It occupies a singular place in the bibliography of this most remarkable friar.

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SAHAGUN'S MISGUIDED INTRODUCTION TO ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE FAILURE OF THE COLLOQUIOS PROJECT

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SAHAGUN'S FIRST ETHNOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTER?

So little is known of Bernardino de Sahagún's life that hypotheses concerning his introduction to Nahuatl culture must be hedged with many qualifiers. A pioneer biographer of Sahagún, Joaquín García Icazbalceta (1954:328), relying on the information of Antonio de Herrera, argued that Sahagún traveled to the New World in the company of natives who may have served as his initial contact with the indigenous civilization of Central Mexico. Unfortunately, the Franciscan, who divulged little about his biography, is silent on the subject. More recently, Munro Edmonson (1974:3) suggested that the "question of his growing awareness of Aztec culture could probably be greatly illuminated by the examination of his [early] biblical translations and psalmody." This proposal is intriguing, and the systematic studies of these materials by Arthur J. O. Anderson, Charles E. Dibble, Louise M. Burkhart (see, for instance, her article in this volume), and others, are very enlightening in this regard.

However, in the present essay I use a different approach that focuses on the confessional prose used by Sahagún to express his belief that, in general, the Christianization effort had failed. I do this in order to address two enigmas. One, what was the nature of the initial study of Central Mexican ethnography that Sahagún pursued as a necessary correlate to proselytizing? Two, why did he fail to publish the *Colloquios y doctrina christiana* manuscript though he had been granted the license to do so? I believe these two questions are related. In 1564 Sahagún edited his *Colloquios* text, depicting the initial Nahuatl-Franciscan contacts as analogous to his own first encounters with the native population. Then, having fully recognized how misguided his introduction to Nahuatl culture had been, he withdrew from the publisher the manuscript that (erroneously) described as successful the conversion efforts of the early missionaries. It is reasonable to interpret this act as an admission both of his early naiveté and of his belief that the Christianization movement may have been doomed from the start.

The work of Sahagún, as noted in my previous essay in this volume, is experimental and frequently (necessarily?) riddled with puzzles and contradictions. His *Colloquios* is no exception. As its lengthy title notes, the document is a record of the 1524 "dialogues and Christian doctrine by which the twelve friars of Saint Francis sent by Pope Adrian VI and the Emperor Charles V

converted the Indians of New Spain in the Mexican and Spanish language" (Klor de Alva 1980:56, 1982a; León-Portilla 1986). Despite the early date of these dialogues, in the prologue to Book X of Sahagún's *Historia general* he claims to have been present during these first debates.

If one considers well the evangelical and apostolic preaching, it will be very clear that the preaching of the Catholic preachers must be vices and virtues, promoting the latter and discouraging the former . . . and there is much material on this in the first six books of this History, and in the Apostilla on the Epistles and Gospels of all the Sundays of the year, that I wrote, and even more resolutely in the Christian Doctrine that the first twelve preachers preached to these indigenous peoples, which I *as an eyewitness* compiled in this Mexican language [Sahagún 1975:543; my emphasis and translation].

From the chronicler Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta (1971:208) and the leader of the twelve pioneer Franciscans, Martín de Valencia (*Cartas de Indias* 1974:1:55), we know the friars arrived in 1524. On the other hand, as is also well known, Mendieta (1971:663) states that Sahagún first set foot on New Spain in 1529, a fact corroborated by Sahagún himself in the *Colloquios*, when he explains the full plan of his proposed doctrinal and early mission history project.

The third book was to be about the success that this conversion had in the hands of these twelve priests and those who came six years later (amongst whom I came) and I knew from those first ones everything that had happened from the beginning until I arrived; and I found myself in everything that happened until this year of 1564 [Sahagún 1564:27v; facsimile in León-Portilla 1986:40; my translation].

The questions are clear. How could Sahagún be an "eyewitness" to an event that occurred in 1524 when he did not arrive until 1529? What does he mean by such a contradiction? García Icazbalceta attempted to make sense of the discrepancy by arguing that,

since at this . . . date [1529] the conversion was still very little advanced, there were still whole regions sunk in idolatry; and if we remember that to convince the priests of the idols the missionaries had "many questions and answers with them," Sahagún was still able to seize some of the later conversations, repetitions of the first ones, and to gather them *as an eyewitness* [1954:339; my translation].

I believe García Icazbalceta is correct. Sahagún's comment in the *Historia general* surely referred to the series of very similar dialogues that took place

between the early Franciscans and selected indigenous leaders from 1524 to long after Sahagún had arrived. However, if this interpretation is correct, and it must be unless we wish to accuse Sahagún of a preposterous lie that he himself manufactured and recorded, then Sahagún's initiation to fieldwork among the Nahuas, a task which he considered a necessary complement to the Christianization process, is encoded in the *Colloquios* itself, which stood in his mind as the discursive representation of his ethnographic-proselytizing inauguration.

AMBIVALENCE BETWEEN TEXT AND CONTEXT, REPRESENTATION AND REALITY

A decoding of the *Colloquios*, then, may provide important information concerning Sahagún's reconstruction of the beginning of his interest in what today is called ethnography. A full-fledged decoding must await a future study of the *Colloquios*, but here it is safe to assert that the *form* of the text, coauthored with his native assistants, portrays Sahagún as ambivalent from the beginning about his interpretation of Nahuas religious beliefs and practices (cf. Burkhardt, this volume).

In his article in this volume, Dibble points out that as early as 1540 Sahagún was already taking the natives to task for being "idolaters" (Sahagún 1563, revision of 1540 text). Indeed, in what could be called his early fieldwork—which was primarily concerned with studying contemporary Nahuas, rather than reconstructing the pre-Contact world, as was later the case—Sahagún could not have escaped the fact that traditional spirituality was still very much a part of indigenous religiosity. However, until the late 1560s Sahagún publicly supported the self-congratulatory myth that maintained the first Franciscan mission was a success from the start. The representation of the triumphs said to have been experienced by the twelve, especially in the course of their initial and subsequent encounters with the Nahuas leaders, gained such hegemony in the first forty years of Christianization that it became "idiomatic" (Crapanzano 1980:14-23) in both written and oral discourse on the mission effort. That is, the ideal account of the feats of the pioneer Franciscans provided the narrative through which these events were understood and described, particularly by those whose interests were served by such representations.

It is evident from the content and purpose of his early sermons (e.g., Sahagún 1563; Burkhardt, this volume) that from an early date Sahagún was skeptical about native affirmations of Christian devotion. And it is clear, as Dibble notes in his study of the appendices (this volume), that he had already written extensively on and for the natives (including many sermons, possibly Books VI and XII, and the *Primeros Memoriales*) in order to make the missionaries aware of and persuade the natives to reject the ever popular, but forbidden, religious beliefs and rites. Still, Sahagún's own intellectual archive seems to have been so permeated by the optimistic idiom of the Franciscan myth that he was unable to escape from it when he edited the *Colloquios*.

The pre- and post-1564 texts edited outside the triumphant *Colloquios* tradition (particularly the prototypes related to the *Historia general* project, like the *Primeros Memoriales*, or the *Sermonario* [1563], which highlighted what was considered an accurate rather than an idealized representation of Nahua culture) exhibit the type of striving for realism to which modern anthropologists are accustomed. They reflect a detailed and critical ethnographic understanding of both the complexity of culture change and the diversity of native resistance and adaptive strategies to that change. Therefore, it is not altogether surprising that by the 1570s the old bromides concerning culture contact in New Spain had been completely abandoned by Sahagún. They had to be put aside, but not because of the very real struggles between himself, his order, the Church, or the secularizing government of Philip II; rather, as he himself was to note, because his extensive experience with the Nahuas was making it progressively more difficult to continue using them to describe what had taken place and what was still going on.

Nonetheless, in 1564 Sahagún had much difficulty overcoming the panegyric shortcomings of the *Colloquios*. To be sure, there was much distance between what Sahagún and his assistants were editing, based primarily on written and oral sources supplemented by the memory of his early personal experiences, and what he was learning through his everyday interactions with the Nahuatl-speaking communities that continued to be strongly committed to the faith and ways of their forefathers. However, though the later experiences in the field were giving him a new perspective from which to interpret the "true" meaning of native cultural practices, he was still constrained by what appears to be too much reliance on selected informants who represented only a limited sector of indigenous society.

As was the case with the early friars, whose initial proselytizing strategy focused on the conversion of the native nobility, the majority of Sahagún's initial contacts with the Nahuas seem to have been centered on the native nobility or the upwardly mobile sectors. Sixteenth-century mission practices, coupled with this heavy reliance on elite informants and the use of assistants drawn almost exclusively from relatively privileged backgrounds, logically compelled him in the *Colloquios* to present the behavior of the native leaders, the protagonists of the 1524 debate on religion depicted in the text, as the archetype of the Nahua response to Christianity. Consequently, unlike the works written by Ruiz de Alarcón (1982, 1984) and others, which were based on the experiences of a full cross section of the community, Sahagún's text synecdochically collapses the range of Nahua responses to Christianity to those found among the privileged sectors, who logically appear more Europeanized since they had the most access to, and the most to gain from participating in, the ritual and social life of the Europeans. Thus, he reduces the Nahua world to the elites' representation of their society, culture, religion, politics, and interests.

Therefore, the conventional ("idiomatic") images used in the *Colloquios* and the ethnographic reality they sought to represent seemed more consonant

It is impossible to date with precision when Sahagún first identified a link between the survival of pre-Contact beliefs and the failure of the earliest attempts by the twelve to evangelize the general population. But by asserting that he had been active in the missionary activities from the beginning, he could not escape some responsibility for their lack of success. But in 1564 he was not yet ready to accept his share of the blame, either directly or indirectly. However, though the *Colloquios* narrative does not betray a hint of his skepticism, the rhetorical structure does. After all, the bilingual work could serve no other purpose than to promote, among priests and natives, the Christianization of supposedly already faithful Nahuatl speakers. Its exemplary story of initial rejection followed by subsequent conversion was explicitly meant to be a useful instrument for missionaries bent on converting recalcitrant Nahuas, not merely a devotional work.

It is true that in the prologue to the *Colloquios* (1564:26v) Sahagún asserts that he edited the work in order to leave for future generations the memory of the deeds of the twelve friars—so that God might be praised by these "marvels." However, as just noted, since the work is written in Spanish and Nahuatl, it is also evident that the practical end of its proposed publication was the instruction and edification of Nahuatl-speaking listeners. The licenses granted for its aborted publication confirm this conclusion (García Icazbalceta 1954:322-323). Sahagún's prologue to his *Psalmodia christiana y sermonario*, published in 1583, which follows these licenses, also underlines the fact that the texts that accompanied the *Colloquios*, which were edited at approximately the same time (1558-1564), were written in order to substitute the still popular "idolatrous" songs and ideas with Christian hymns and themes (Sahagún 1583; García Icazbalceta 1954:323).

Though the narrative is firmly in the tradition of the early optimistic literature portraying the conversion process as an unqualified success, soon after its completion Sahagún began to explicitly condemn its naive position. Later texts, especially those written after the middle of the 1570s, reflect a critical posture much at odds with the ambivalence present in the *Colloquios*, where Sahagún was suspended between his desire to support the Franciscans by using representations clearly within the conventional lines that followed the idiom of his peers, and his belief that an objective reconstruction that reflected his own encounters with indigenous culture would be more useful in the evangelization of the Nahuas. In effect, after the *Colloquios* Sahagún breaks with the Franciscan Contact-period view of native culture and turns to a perspective that more uniformly reflects the realistic representations that were resulting from the ethnographic experiments he was undertaking (see my first essay, this volume). Therefore, a study of the *Colloquios*, like that initiated by Burkhart in this volume, which compares it with his later writings, religious and ethnographic, could help elucidate the difference between Sahagún's early understanding of the Nahua world and that which resulted when, by the late 1540s, he began to use methods and narrative forms that would come to resemble those used by ethnographers today.

to the Franciscan editor than they were in fact. This state of affairs was replicated in his ethnographic work beyond the *Colloquios*, wherever the focus is skewed too far towards the world of the elite, educated, or Christianized informants. As was both common and expected, the more traditional folk, less affected by European culture, were too frequently far off in the horizon of his field of vision, but their ever-present world, relegated to the margins of his texts (see Dibble's article and mine, this volume), continually challenged the official version of Nahuatl culture.

CONFESSING TO FAILURE AND THE REJECTION OF THE COLLOQUIOS PROJECT

The shift from the *Colloquios*' ambivalent (ironic?) discursive strategy to confessional prose is evident as early as the 1576 "Relación del autor digna de ser notada," inserted between chapters 27 and 28 of Book X of the *Historia general* (Sahagún 1975:584). There the author wrote a brief but candid history of the dismal fruits the Christianization efforts had yielded.

Sahagún (1975:578-581), discouraged and puzzled by the Nahuas' widespread rejection of the Christian faith, begins with a deflective tactic: attributing the lack of success to a mixture of cultural and natural phenomena, the former founded on the contrast between pre- and post-Contact practices and the latter on the character of the forces that lie beyond human control. In the pre-Contact period the Indians had been rigorously disciplined and had been kept continually occupied with matters profitable to the commonwealth. Though he argues that this was a reasonable regime, because otherwise "the climate and the abundance of the land, and the constellation that reigns" tended to make the inhabitants prone to vices, sloth, and sensuality, he adds that since this austere discipline had ceased with the Conquest the natives had turned to drinking and other debaucheries. This made them unfit for the priesthood and, even worse, it had made it difficult to get more than a few of them to accept any of the sacraments besides baptism. Thus the (nonelite) majority had "progressed little [through] Christianity," a situation that Sahagún assessed as "almost impossible to remedy."

It is not until these observations are laid out, placing the blame on the natives' constitutional and astrological ill fate, that Sahagún records for the first time his opinion that the pioneer Franciscans were not fully aware of the meaning Christianity had for many (most?) of the natives. With studied circumspection and the logic of an ethnographer, who knows his informants but wishes to avoid contradicting his predecessors in the field, Sahagún (1975:582) posits that the original zeal and solicitude of the friars lessened "because publicly there appeared nothing that merited punishment: and [therefore, the Indians] lost the fear which they had had at first."

In the appendix to chapter 12 of Book XI, titled "Adición sobre supersticiones," also written in 1576, Sahagún expands on the theme he called the "palliation of idolatry": that is, the cloaking of ancient customs under the

mantle of Christianity. Having given a number of examples of traditional Nahuatl rites still being performed more than fifty years after the Franciscan missionaries arrived, he turned his attention to the dissimulation prevalent in the continued adoration of the indigenous gods under the cover of Christian images, cunningly christened with the names of the deities they concealed. As is well known, Sahagún (1975:704) points an accusing finger at "Tepeyacac" (Tepeyac), where he claims the ancient Tonantzin ("Our Dear Mother") was still worshipped in the guise of (the Christian) Tonantzin Guadalupe.

But in the text that brings to a close Book XI, Sahagún's admonitive stance becomes fully confessional by openly revealing his personal opinions, doubts, and criticisms. Here—at last, given his claim to have participated in the conversion process from the start—he undertakes a self-examinational and self-accusatory position. He begins by summarizing in broad strokes the many roads on which the Church had trod in its long history until it reached New Spain, where the Catholic church had been "peacefully established." But then he adds that, in what

concerns the Catholic Faith, [New Spain is a] sterile land very difficult to cultivate, where the Catholic Faith has very weak roots, and with much toil comes a very small yield, and at the slightest cause what was planted and cultivated dries up [Sahagún 1975:706-707; my emphasis and translation].

He concludes with great sadness by observing that,

we can consider well understood that having preached to them more than fifty years, if today they were left on their own . . . I believe that in less than fifty years there would be no trace of what has been preached to them [Sahagún 1975:709; my translation].

In other words, approximately twelve years after the *Colloquios* was written, Sahagún, putting aside any ambivalence on the subject, confessed that the Catholic faith had failed to pierce the native soul, however widespread the visible church clearly was. How, then, had Toribio (de Benavente) Motolinía (1973:202), one of the twelve Franciscan pioneers who began the Christianization process, been able to exclaim forty years earlier that the Indians "have forgotten the idols as though one hundred years had already passed by"?

Sahagún answers this in his revisionist admonitions of 1585 (García Icazbalceta 1954:376-387), which were subsequently excluded from the finished manuscript of the *Historia general*. There he condemns the gullibility of the twelve early friars and laments the lack of sincerity in the Christian-like gestures of the so-called converted Nahuas. For instance, in the admonition to the reader ("al lector") that follows the "Calendario mexicano, latino y castellano," Sahagún again takes up the question of dissimulation. After discussing at length the many forms of deception still being practiced, he turns to the reason all the feigning had survived so successfully and how it had originated. As the following text points out, it is difficult to imagine he could

have written this without having on his mind both the earlier ambivalence that had surrounded the editing of the *Colloquios* and the (by then very faint) remembrances of his first experiences with the Nahuas:

in the beginning, the [Indians], not having understood the things of the faith, nor having [sufficient priests] to teach them, nor having seen any miracles, they declared themselves Christian and that they received Our Lord Jesus Christ as their God, and that they wished to serve and obey Him like all the other Christians. But in leaving all the other gods, and believing truly that they were not gods but devils, and leaving all the images and culture, disowning them and all their ceremonies, services, and doctrines, they did not [really] do this; [but, rather,] they thought this out carefully and discussed it among themselves that they would [in fact] never abandon it at any time, as it was later discovered that they had done this and determined among the satraps, lords, and principal people. About the first [the alleged conversion] they affirmed it with great humility and tears before the preachers of the Gospel, and concerning the second [the conspiracy] they said not a word about what had transpired among them, instead, when asked if they disowned their gods and their idolatries, etc., they responded "yes" to everything, and with this catechism they were baptized, and the priests . . . were left persuaded that [the Indians] had received the Catholic Faith . . . and disowned all the idols and all the ancient idolatries with all sincerity and truth, and thus [the friars] affirmed it and preached it to all of us who came later. Thus, this palliation remained hidden, until it appeared publicly in the provinces of Huaxaca and in those of Campeche, and here in this New Spain many things have been found and are being found which signify the same thing. But everything has been made right [has been covered up] in order to preserve that early reputation of both the baptizers and the baptized [García Icazbalceta 1954:381-382; my emphases and translation].

In this confession he contradicts the *Colloquios* and retracts his assertion that his participation in the early evangelization had taken place from the time the first friars set out to proselytize. More importantly, by underlining his subsequent rejection of the significance of his initial missionary fieldwork, he clearly points to the poverty of his introduction to ethnography at the hands of its earliest practitioners, especially Motolinía. In effect, sometime in the past Sahagún's ambivalence towards the accuracy of the pioneer friars' reading of native behavior and cultural forms must have served as a stimulus to break away from their fieldwork and narrative practices and to chart his own course.

The naiveté of the first missionaries, and thus his own, is again taken to task in his prologue to the *Arte Adivinatoria* (García Icazbalceta 1954:382-383), written for but not included in Book IV of the *Historia general*. There he

stated that when the twelve friars arrived in New Spain they did not forget the admonition the Redeemer had given His disciples and apostles, "Be prudent like serpents and simple like doves." However, he adds, "though they proceeded with care as to the second, they failed in the first." And so they were unable to see the dissimulation of the indigenes when these affirmed their true belief, never having abandoned the ancient faith. For the second time Sahagún recounts how when he and the other friars arrived they had been told:

that these people had come to the faith so truly [that] almost all were baptized and so wholly in the Catholic Faith . . . that there was no need to preach against idolatry, because they had left it very truly. We held this information as very true and miraculous, because in such a short time and with such meagre [linguistic skills] and so little preaching, and without any miracles, such masses of people had been converted and brought into the fold of the Church. And, thus, we put down the very sharp arms we had brought to counter the idolatry, and on the advice and persuasion of these priests we began to preach about the moral things concerning the articles of the faith and the seven sacraments of the Church. After a few years it became very evident the lack of serpentine prudence there had been in the foundation of this new Church. . . .

And thus this new Church was established on a false [foundation], and even after placing some supporting buttresses it is still very damaged and ruined [García Icazbalceta 1954:382-383; my emphases and translation].

Sahagún's admission that he became aware of the Nahuas' resistance to the Christian faith "a few years" after his arrival underlines two points: the historicity of the *Colloquios* Nahuatl text (Klor de Alva 1982a), wherein this knowledge is properly excluded since the dialogues took place in 1524; and the genuine ambivalence toward the nature of Nahua spirituality that Sahagún still experienced in 1564, while writing the Spanish text that affirmed the successes of the twelve.

In conclusion, though he had been busy doing serious and innovative ethnographic and apostolic fieldwork since at least 1547, up until the *Colloquios* Sahagún had much difficulty overcoming both his initial impressions of Nahua culture, forged at the side of the twelve, and the idiom in which their experiences came to be expressed. But following the death of Motolinía, the last of the twelve, in 1569, he probably felt free, at last, to express and act on his suspicions that their work had fallen far short of the myth that represented it. Thus, rather than blame his supposed censors, the Inquisition, the Council of the Indies, or Philip II for his failure to publish the *Colloquios* in 1583, along with the *Psalmodia christiana* which was printed that year, I suggest the following: the fact that Sahagún had adamantly rejected the false optimistic message embodied in the *Colloquios* may explain not only why he did not

publish it, but also why he fails to mention the *Colloquios* in the prologue that precedes the *Psalmódia christiana*, even though both the viceroy, El Conde de Coruña, and the religious examiner, Dr. Ortiz de Hinojosa, praise the *Colloquios* by name and give their permission for its publication (García Icazbalceta 1954:322-323). Consequently, the failure of the *Colloquios* project marked the end of the effect on Sahagún's work of his misguided introduction to ethnography and set him firmly on the road to doing, for the first time anywhere, ethnography that we can understand as modern for self-consciously aiming (to the extent then possible) to objectively, comprehensively, and systematically understand and record the world of others on their own terms.

REVISIONIST CONQUEST HISTORY: SAHAGÚN'S REVISED BOOK XII

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Fray Bernardino de Sahagún is responsible for two histories of the conquest of Mexico. One account comprises Book XII of his magnum opus, *The General History of the Things of New Spain*, finished by 1579 (Nicolaus d'Olwer and Cline 1973:197), known as the *Florentine Codex* (Sahagún 1979a). In 1585 Sahagún completed a second manuscript on the Conquest entitled, "Account of the Conquest of New Spain, as the Indian Soldiers who were Present Told It" (Bustamante 1840; Sahagún 1585).¹ The two accounts differ substantially in point of view, emphasis, and tone. The 1579 version presents the Conquest principally from the Tlatolecan perspective with virtually no intervention in the narrative by Sahagún. The revised version of 1585 is, I suggest, clearly shaped by Sahagún himself. It is a paean of praise to Hernán Cortés and a justification of the Spanish victory. Sahagún's motivation for revising his account of the Conquest and the substance of those revisions are the subject of this study.

Why did Sahagún significantly change his narrative of the Conquest? Sahagún himself said that in the first version "certain mistakes were made, namely that some things were improperly included in the narrative of the conquest while others were improperly left out" (Sahagún 1585: "To the reader").² Sahagún does not name an agent for these defects. Many modern scholars, including Wigberto Jiménez Moreno (Sahagún 1938:IV:9), believe that the account in the *Florentine Codex* was composed, not merely copied, by Indians. In contrast, in the 1585 revision, it seems clear that Sahagún himself took command of the text. Since he was old and in ill health, he could no longer write, but with a native aide, identified as Agustín de la Fuente,³ he revised both the Nahuatl and the Spanish texts (Cline 1969:136).

Sahagún does not explicitly say what was omitted from the 1579 account. However, a comparison of the two versions (to follow in some detail below) indicates that the 1585 revision includes specifics about the role of Cortés, casting his actions in a favorable light, while drawing on non-Tlatolecan native sources, as well as on Spanish informants.

Scholars have examined the two versions, but have not seriously grappled with Sahagún's reasons for the revision. Jiménez Moreno (Sahagún 1938:IV:8) noted that considerable time had elapsed between Sahagún's collection of the original information and the revision, during which his thinking and judgment could have changed. However, Jiménez Moreno did not elaborate on what might have motivated Sahagún's change in perspective. Howard F. Cline