

Revising the Narrative of the Conquest of Mexico

Bernardino de Sahagún's 1585 *Relación de la conquista de esta Nueva España*

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ABSTRACT

2021 represents the five-hundred-year anniversary of the fall of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec empire. This essay addresses the rendering of the events that culminated in the Spanish domination of that region in two texts associated with the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún (1499–1590). The first is Book Twelve of the Florentine Codex, a bilingual manuscript written collaboratively with Indigenous intellectuals in Nahuatl with a Spanish translation and accompanied by nearly two thousand illustrations that represent a third text. Completed in 1579, under increasing scrutiny by religious authorities, the manuscript was confiscated and sent to Europe, eventually coming to reside in the Medici Library in Florence. In 1585, Sahagún authored *Relación de la conquista de esta Nueva España*, which sought to revise the narrative of the conquest found in Book Twelve. Sahagún's revision reveals how the narrative of the conquest changed in the hands of the Franciscan friar as the sixteenth century drew to a close.

In Book Nine, where this conquest is treated, certain mistakes were made, namely that some things were improperly included in the narrative of the conquest and others were improperly left out. Therefore, I have revised this book, in this present year of 1585.¹

—Bernardino de Sahagún

1. Cline's 1989 volume contains an introduction by her, a transcription of the nineteenth-century manuscript copy of that text housed in the Boston Public Library, a reproduction of that nineteenth-century manuscript, an English translation based on that text, and a reproduction of an 1840 Mexican edition of the 1585 manuscript. The volume represents a project initiated by her father, Howard F. Cline, but left unfinished at the time of his death. Citations to the text in this essay refer to the English translation published by Sarah L. Cline, which was initially drafted by Howard F. Cline and Mary W. Cline and revised by Peter Boyd-Bowman, Sheryl Coleman, and Sarah L. Cline. As with

OUTSIDE OF BARCELONA, AN HOUR BY TRAIN FOLLOWED BY another five-minute cable car ride up steep mountain cliffs, we find the Montserrat Monastery, where, in the library, an eighteenth-century manuscript copy of Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún's 1585 history of the conquest of Mexico is housed. Evident from the ex libris label inside the cover, this copy belonged to don José Justo Gómez de la Cortina (1799–1860), a Mexican aristocrat, scholar, and diplomat.² In 1989, Sarah Cline published an edition of this history based on a nineteenth-century copy, owned by the U.S. historian William H. Prescott, which he used to write *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843), and now housed in the Boston Public Library. The 1585 text represents Sahagún's revision of the final book, which he names, referencing an earlier version of the text, as Book Nine of the extraordinary encyclopedic account of Aztec culture, society, and history, that is better known today as Book Twelve of the Florentine Codex.³ From the time of his arrival to New Spain, as Mexico was known in the colonial period, Sahagún pursued numerous projects related to learning and documenting Indigenous history and culture. The most expansive of these projects was the Florentine Codex, which was finalized by 1579.⁴

Sahagún's projects, the English translation cited in this essay is the product of numerous hands.

2. The Cortina copy of the manuscript was known but fell out of the public's eye in Spain in the 1930s (see CLINE 1970, 126–27 and NICOLAU D'OLWER and CLINE 1973, 206). While its whereabouts were unknown to H. F. Cline, S. L. Cline, and other researchers who had studied this text, Wayne Ruwet located the Cortina copy at the Montserrat Library after S. L. Cline's publication of the edition and translation of the text in 1989. There are no significant differences between the published edition of the text based on the Boston Public Library manuscript and the Montserrat manuscript.
3. This text will be further discussed in the course of the essay; however, it should be noted that the Florentine Codex is the name commonly used to refer to this sixteenth-century manuscript that came to be housed in the Laurentian Medici Library in Florence. The original title of the text is generally believed to have been *General History of the Things of New Spain* [*Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*].
4. Significant studies have been published in recent years about the creation of the Florentine Codex. For analyses that include the material history of the text and its illustrations, see Diana Magaloni Kerpel's *The Colors of the New World: Artists, Materials, and the Creation of the Florentine Codex* (2014), John Frederick Schwaller's edited volume *Sahagún at 500* (2003), Gerhard Wolf and Joseph Connors' edited volume *Colors Between Two Worlds: The Florentine Codex of Bernardino de Sahagún* (2011), and Jeanette Favrot Peterson and Kevin Terra-

Whereas the Florentine Codex, written in Nahuatl with Spanish translation and copious illustrations, was the product of a decades-long collaboration between Sahagún and numerous Indigenous intellectuals, the 1585 revision of its final book was authored solely by the Spanish friar, as he makes clear in his introductory words to the reader found in the epigraph. Sahagún's revision, which would go on to be copied and circulated as it influenced later historical narratives of the conquest of Mexico, reveals how the narrative of that history changed in the hands of the Franciscan friar as the sixteenth century drew to a close, becoming more evangelical in tone and Spanish in perspective. Nonetheless, while the Florentine Codex is overtly multi-layered and multi-vocal with its two alphabetic columns and richly descriptive illustrations crafted by numerous hands, Sahagún's Native interlocutors are also apparent in the later 1585 text. The revisions to the conquest account took place in a complex historical moment defined by disease, shifting political winds within the Franciscan order, growing tensions within the Catholic Church, as well as Sahagún's own octogenarian ruminations after decades of research on Nahua history and culture as a professed mendicant friar.

August 13, 2021 represents the five-hundred-year anniversary of the fall of Tenochtitlan, the seat of the Aztec empire. Hernando Cortés arrived in the great urban metropolis, or *altepetl*, founded on an island in the middle of Lake Tetzaco on November 8, 1519. That date marked the beginning of a nearly two-year period characterized by political negotiations and betrayals, military aggressions, and finally the introduction of a virulent disease (smallpox) that devastated the Mexica, the Native population of Tenochtitlan, debilitating the city and facilitating Cortés's ultimate victory. Cortés's 1519 expedition to the mainland of what is now Mexico as recounted in his *Second Letter of Relation* and other texts, remains a touchstone for the imagining and re-telling of the continuities and disruptions that the Spanish invasion signaled for the peoples and nations Cortés and his men encountered. Historical narratives of the conquest of Mexico have always rested on a range of sources. These alphabetic texts, written in Spanish, Nahuatl, and other Native languages, as well as pictorial texts that drew on pre-Hispanic writing systems in their accounts became more referential and layered as the decades and centuries went by. There is a genealogy of sources that is evident in the Spanish accounts. Francisco López de Gómara's 1552 *Conquest of Mexico* engages with Cortés's urtext in an adulatory

ciano's 2019 edited volume *The Florentine Codex: An Encyclopedia of the Nahua World in Sixteenth-Century Mexico*.

fashion, while Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *True History of the Conquest* offers a more revisionist response, from the perspective of a Spanish foot soldier, to Cortés's aggressively first-person account of events. Texts that are generally regarded as representing Indigenous perspective and knowledge, such as the Florentine Codex or the alphabetic texts of authors aligned with Native communities, such as don Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin (1579–1660) or don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl (ca. 1578–1650), are no less intertextual, as they relied on and interpolated histories from elders or documented in pictorial texts.⁵

A member of the Franciscan order, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (1499–1590) arrived in New Spain in 1529, just a decade after Cortés had first made landfall and eight years after the subjugation of the Tenochtitlan. He bore witness to the transition of the city from its magnificence as a major urban hub in Anahuac, the Nahuatl-speaking Basin of Mexico. Part of a group of twenty Franciscan missionaries, he was at the vanguard of the Catholic evangelical project and arrived in the newly conquered lands eager to spread the word of God and convert the Indigenous to the Catholic faith.⁶ Sahagún worked at different points as a missionary and as a teacher.⁷ This proselytizing endeavor was directly tied to Sahagún's intellectual project, as he saw that it was necessary to learn the language and the culture of the prospective converts. In the opening lines of Sahagún's Spanish prologue to Book One of the Florentine Codex, which deals with "The Gods", the friar communicates this point by way of a metaphor that highlights the importance of knowing the "illness" in order to be able to provide medical treatment:

The physician cannot advisedly administer medicines to the patient without first knowing of which humour or from which source the ailment derives. Wherefore it is desirable that the good physician be expert

5. For the representation of Native knowledge and history in alphabetic texts by Chimalpahin (in Nahuatl), see SCHROEDER 1991, and by Alva Ixtlilxochitl (in Spanish), see BRIAN 2016.
6. Religious friars of the Mendicant Orders — Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians — were charged with evangelization and conversion from very early in the colonial period. Pedro de Gante (Franciscan) arrived in 1523 and was followed the year later by "the Twelve" Franciscans who established missions and schools to support conversions.
7. For an overview of his work and writings while living in New Spain, see NICOLAU D'OLWER 1952, NICOLAU D'OLWER and CLINE 1973, and LEÓN-PORTILLA 2002 [1999].

in the knowledge of medicines and ailments to adequately administer the cure for the ailment. The preachers and confessors are physicians of the souls for the curing of spiritual ailments.

(1982, vol. 1, 45)

By way of explanation and most likely justification, Sahagún suggests that the illness in this allegory is idolatry, and its cure is conversion, but that is only achievable, he hastens to emphasize, with direct knowledge of the sin itself. In many ways, the Franciscan friar embodied the possibilities and limitations inherent in the quest for European understanding of Native history and culture.

Undeniably, Sahagún's interest in Native society was entwined with an aspect of the colonialist project, the evangelization of the Natives. In this sense, his motivation was deep and also deeply tied to what some have called the "spiritual conquest".⁸ Other scholars, significant among them Miguel León-Portilla, have characterized Sahagún as an early ethnographer who sought to access Native culture through extensive interviews in Nahuatl with bearers of Native knowledge.⁹ Whether we view him as emblematic of spiritual conquest or an ethnographer *avant la lettre*, it must also be noted that his abiding passion for Nahua language and cultural knowledge inspired him to pursue collaborative projects over the course of decades and those collaborations have left a tremendous legacy. Alfredo López Austin has described the Florentine Codex as "an encyclopedia of the Nahua people, planned and directed by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, and formed from the material supplied by the native elders who lived fully within the world preceding the conquest" (1974, 119). This project, he notes, developed over four stages in three different locations and was developed around a series of questionnaires.¹⁰ The twelve books found in the Florentine Codex present traditions, beliefs, and experiences

8. In 1933, Robert Ricard named this process, from its earliest days, the "spiritual conquest" in his book *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*. More recently, Victoria Ríos Castaño, also adopting this term, has focused on the intellectual traditions that informed Sahagún's projects and impacted his translation of Nahua history and culture in the Florentine Codex: see RÍOS CASTAÑO 2014.

9. In the opening to *Bernardino de Sahagún, First Anthropologist*, León-Portilla emphasizes of the friar that "[i]n his research, he proceeded with a methodology considered to be the precursor of modern anthropological field technique" (2002 [1999], 4).

10. In a careful analysis of Sahagún's research methods, López Austin (1974) teases from the Florentine Codex and associated texts the series of questions that were

of the Nahuas, the Natives of central Mexico, speakers of the Nahuatl language, from before the arrival of Europeans. The text opens with Book One, which explains the pantheon of gods and goddesses, and concludes with Book Twelve, which narrates the Spanish-led conquest of Tenochtitlan from a native perspective.¹¹ The manuscript was written in Nahuatl with a Spanish translation and was accompanied by nearly two thousand illustrations that represent, according to scholars, a third text. Each of the texts reflects a distinct narrative.¹² Completed in 1579, under increasing scrutiny by religious authorities, the manuscript was confiscated and sent to Europe, eventually coming to reside in the Medicea Laurenziana Library in Florence.

Sahagún's work on the Florentine Codex is a direct outgrowth of the intellectual environment of the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, where European education engaged directly with Native knowledge. In 1536, under the direction of the Franciscans and with the support of authorities in the Church and the viceregal government, the Colegio de Santa Cruz was founded in the Tlatelolco district of Mexico City.¹³ Initially there were approximately sixty young male pupils who came from powerful and high-ranking Indigenous families. The friars and some learned Natives, such as

used to elicit information over a period of decades from Nahuas from Tepepulco, Tlatelolco, and Tenochtitlan about topics related to their cultural history.

11. The thirteen-volume Anderson and Dibble edition (1982) of the twelve books of the Florentine Codex provides the Nahuatl text and English translation. Lockhart's translation of Book Twelve includes the Nahuatl and Spanish texts, accompanied by English translations, and the illustrations. Currently, there is no edition that includes the Nahuatl, Spanish, and illustrations of all twelve books, except for the facsimile of the original. However, Kim Richter, senior researcher at the Getty Research Institute, is shepherding a major initiative that "aims to make the codex and its content more accessible through online publications, scholarship, and the contribution of 4,000 multilingual entries to the Getty Vocabularies in English, Classical Nahuatl, Eastern Huasteca Nahuatl, and Spanish" (see RICHTER et al. 2020); in 2022, they will publish the Digital Florentine Codex.
12. Kevin Terraciano has noted that there is 30% less text in the Spanish columns than the Nahuatl columns of Book Twelve (2019, 46). The Spanish translation, he says, "often tones down Nahuatl passages that present Spaniards as treacherous, evil or greedy" (2019, 48).
13. For a foundational study of Colegio de Santa Cruz, see GIBSON 1964. His chapter "The City" provides an overview of the history of the school and its impact as well as the context in which it emerged. The information in this paragraph is a summary of what is found there.

Antonio Valeriano, instructed them in the fundamentals of humanistic learning, Latin, and the trivium and the quadrivium, with the idea that they would eventually train as clergy. Though that goal was impeded from early on, the school became a center of learning with wide-ranging impact on the native population in the decades after Spanish colonization. The students participated in collaborative projects with the friars, such as the Florentine Codex, and they also pursued their own research and documentation of native cultural knowledge, such as the study of plants in Nahuatl and Latin by Juan Badianus. By the late sixteenth century, the school was no longer a hub of advanced study, but it had established a model for Natives and Spaniards of writing about native history and culture that continued to be relevant well into the seventeenth century. The *colegiales* also served as bridges to the elders of their communities who served as resources for the research that served as a foundation for the Florentine Codex.

In 1585, roughly five years after finalizing preparations of the twelve books found in four manuscript volumes (later re-bound as three volumes) that would eventually make their way to a repository in Florence, Sahagún revised the 41 chapters of Book Twelve as he rewrote the history of the conquest seeking to, as he himself says, correct “certain mistakes”. Sahagún’s 1585 revision of the conquest narrative is built upon the work he pursued with the *colegiales* from the school in Tlatelolco and the elderly Nahua informants. In fact, the title foregrounds his sources: “Account of the conquest of this New Spain, as the Indian soldiers who were present told it. Translated into Spanish, plain and intelligible, in the year 1585”. Nonetheless, as his signatures at the end of the prologue and again at the end of the final chapter would indicate, the later version bears a stronger imprint of Sahagún’s own point of view. By drawing attention to Sahagún’s editorial interventions in the revision, his role and voice are placed in greater relief. This allows us to see both how the friar sought to refine the narrative in 1585 and discern the Indigenous perspectives that are registered in that text as well as the earlier Florentine Codex.

The organization of the 1585 revision roughly follows that of Book Twelve of the Florentine Codex. Each one opens with prefatory sections that provide context and motive for the writing of the text. In Book Twelve, Sahagún opens with a paragraph “to the reader”, in which he, in the first person, explains that the reason for the book on the conquest was “not so much in order to extract some truths from the very Indians who took part in the conquest as in order to set down the language of the things of war and of the weapons that the natives use in it” (LOCKHART 1993, 49). Sahagún’s motivation for writing the narrative of the conquest is, he

says, to register and illuminate Nahuatl vocabulary related to war and not, he hastens to clarify, to provide an account of the events from the Native perspective. From the opening of Book One, the friar framed the twelve books as benefiting the evangelical project by providing insight into native customs, traditions, and language, which would then allow missionaries to better communicate the Catholic faith. Yet, it is also evident that for Sahagún and his collaborators the Florentine Codex represents a multilingual archive of native knowledge and history that preserves Nahua history, culture, customs, and traditions in Nahuatl, Spanish, and a vast array of illustrations. Though the 1585 revision is emphatically Sahagún's own, as his two signatures would indicate, he nonetheless refers to the "prominent elders", who had participated in the war and then served as informants for the narrative of the conquest that he began to work on thirty years earlier (CLINE 1989, 25).

The research, compilation, and writing of the Florentine Codex took place in multiple stages over numerous decades, which meant that portions of the project were registered in notes and drafts that were dispersed to different locations.¹⁴ In 1577, King Philip II ordered Sahagún to turn over all materials in Spanish and Nahuatl related to the Natives. The order indicated that the sovereign was concerned that the Franciscan friar's twelve-book project was potentially harmful because of its documentation of idolatry. In the main, Sahagún complied, sending to the viceroy to be forwarded to the king a complete manuscript of the twelve books. This text would be lost. However, at the same time, with the support and protection of the commissioner general of the Franciscans, Fray Rodrigo de Sequera, Sahagún was working to finalize a clean copy of the manuscript that would later become known as the Florentine Codex. Though Sahagún had been ordered to turn over materials related to the research that informed the Florentine Codex, according to scholars including León-Portilla, "he had kept in his possession an important portion of his 'writings'" (2002 [1999], 225). Working at the Colegio de Santa Cruz in Tlatlelolco and utilizing the materials that had been secreted away, Sahagún continued to work on four writing projects including the revised account of the conquest.¹⁵

14. For a detailed discussion of the trajectory of Sahagún's writings, see LEÓN-PORTILLA 2002 [1999], NICOLAU D'OLWER 1952, and NICOLAU D'OLWER and CLINE 1973.

15. León-Portilla describes the projects in this way: "The topics were these: a new *kalendar* in Mexican, Spanish, and Latin; a revised exposition of *The Art of Divination That the Mexicans Employed in Times of Their Idolatry, Called Tonalamatl*,

In the opening paragraphs of the 1585 revision, in a section marked “To the reader”, Sahagún indicates that the text was written in three columns:

The first in the Indian language, just as unpolished as the elders related it and as it is written among other books. The second column is a correction of the first, in words as well as in style. The third is in Spanish, based on the revisions in the second column.

(CLINE 1989, 26)

Sahagún registers his interest in the accounts conveyed to him from the Native informants in Nahuatl, both on the level of language and narrative. The documentation of the accounts required, Sahagún asserts, clarification and correction that he provided in Nahuatl. The third column, which represents his Spanish translation, is all that remains of the text. León-Portilla suggests two possible motivations for Sahagún’s rewriting of the conquest account: first, enduring concerns over idolatry; and, second, a desire to preserve and then correct the original Nahuatl text (2002 [1999], 246). Howard Cline proposes that Sahagún’s interest in revising Book Twelve was to utilize the three versions of the text — two in Nahuatl accompanied by Spanish translation — in order to teach the Nahuatl language and that the friar chose that book because it did not contain the sort of documentation of idolatry that had provoked suspicion (1970, 123). Sarah Cline has suggested that the enhanced evangelical tone evident in the 1585 revision is the product of a heightened and politically charged series of conflicts within the church in New Spain. “The changes in the 1585 revision”, she says, “are the product of a climate increasingly hostile to the early evangelical Franciscans [. . .] and designed to alert the reader to the importance of the military conquest of New Spain led by Cortés and the contributions of the Franciscan order to the spiritual conquest” (1989, 14). As these scholars note, the historical context in which Sahagún wrote undoubtedly provided the impetus for his rewriting of the conquest account.

What is also clear is that the cleavage between Sahagún’s perspective and that of his sources is more distinct and marked in the 1585 revision. Sahagún asserts his voice strongly in the prologue, which follows the “to the reader” preamble in the 1585 revision and is absent in the earlier ver-

Which Means Book Dealing with the Fates and Fortunes of Those Born, According to the Signs and Characters into Which They Are Born; a new account of the Spanish Conquest; and his project for a grammar and trilingual vocabulary in Nahuatl, Latin, and Spanish” (2002 [1999], 230).

sion. The prologue orients the reader to the content of the text that follows, focusing attention on the relevance and importance of the lands and people of New Spain to the Catholic Church. Providence figures in the arrival of Europeans to the “New World”, where, he says, “our Lord God purposely kept secret this hidden portion of the world until these times” (CLINE 1989, 28). Significantly, Sahagún goes on to say that God “has seen fit to reveal it to the Roman Catholic Church, not with the objective that its inhabitants be destroyed and oppressed; but rather that they be brought out of the darkness of idolatry in which they have lived, and be brought into the Catholic Church and instructed in the Christian religion, in order to reach the kingdom of Heaven by dying in the Faith of true Christians” (CLINE 1989, 28). The figure who facilitates the introduction of Christianity to Anahuac is Hernando Cortés and the battles Cortés waged, from Sahagún’s perspective, were battles for the souls of the Nahuas held under the yoke of the tyranny of idolatry. After the hard-fought victory, Cortés requested that missionaries be sent to the newly conquered lands in order to convert the natives. Sahagún signed his name after this passage, before proceeding with the presentation of the revised text.

Cortés is represented in heroic terms in the 1585 revision with a European point of view that is attenuated in Book Twelve of the Florentine Codex, where the focus of the narrative is on the experience of the Native people who were faced with the arrival of foreigners, who eagerly sought to assume control of their lands and wealth. For instance, in Book Twelve, chapter 5, after Motecuzoma’s messengers meet Cortés and offer him a set of meticulously described precious gifts in the form of bejeweled ornaments, Cortés is reported to say, “Is there anything more than this?” After they responded that they had given him all they had, he “ordered them bound, and he ordered the artillery pieces fired” (LOCKHART 1993, 73). The greed coupled with a cruel display of intimidation is even more acutely evident in the Nahuatl, where the messengers are described as being not only tied up, but also placed in irons on their feet and necks, before the Spaniards shot off the cannon causing the natives to faint and lose consciousness. In Sahagún’s 1585 rendition of this interaction, there is no sign of Cortés’s cruelty. He, or, as the text states, someone speaking for him, asks about more gifts, but with what appears to be more curiosity than greed: “Well, do you not bring more than this to welcome me with?” (CLINE 1989, 42). In direct contrast to Book Twelve, Cortés responds to their negative response by asking his men to “treat the messengers very kindly” and that they should “be given Spanish food to eat with all our courtesy and kindness” (CLINE 1989, 42). At the very end of the chapter, Sahagún mentions

that the natives had been placed in chains and intentionally frightened by cannon shot, but he does not directly attribute this act to Cortés; rather, he states that it was the work of the Spaniards in broad terms.

These modifications to the narrative point of view and the representation of character and motivation are found throughout the 1585 revision. With one exception, the two versions share the same topics in each of the chapters. The 1585 text contains an extra chapter: Book Twelve consists of 41 chapters, while Sahagún's later rendition has a total of 42 with the addition of chapter 28, "Concerning the time in which the Spaniards were in Mexico in peace and friendship with the Indians and the time that they were their hated enemies" (CLINE 1989, 98). Opening with the statement that the Spaniards arrived in New Spain on July 22, 1519, this chapter represents a very brief, 400-word summary of the major events of the conquest. Sahagún declares there was a period of friendship, which was followed by a period of enmity brought on by the Spaniards' massacre of Mexicas during the festival of Toxcatl in May of 1520. This massacre was, as Sahagún goes on to note, a major turning point in the relations between the Spaniards and the Mexica. After these events, the native population of Tenochtitlan rose up against the occupying Europeans and their allies from other towns and regions of Anahuac.

Sahagún's description of the massacre in the Main Temple of Tenochtitlan during the Toxcatl festival highlights significant narrative shifts between the collaboratively authored Florentine Codex and his own rendition written in 1585. This violent incident, occurring in May of 1520, precipitated the ouster of the Spaniards and their allies from Tenochtitlan during the famed *Noche Triste* on the last night of June in the same year. In Sahagún's rendition, the unarmed attendees were attacked on orders from Pedro de Alvarado, known in Nahuatl as Tonatiuh, without warning, and many high-ranking natives were killed. Chapter 20 of both the Florentine Codex and Sahagún's 1585 revision address the massacre though with distinctly different perspectives. Whereas the Florentine Codex begins, rather neutrally, "At the time that seemed opportune to them the Spaniards came out from where they had been and took all the gates to the square so that no one could get out" (LOCKHART 1993, 133), the 1585 revision opens with this sentence: "The greatest evil that one can do to another is to take his life when [the victim] is in mortal sin. This is what the Spaniards did to the Mexican Indians because they provoked them by being faithless in honoring their idols" (CLINE 1989, 76). According to Sahagún, the Spaniards committed a terrible offense by killing the Indigenous people while they were worshipping their idols, but he is equally quick to assert that the

Spaniards were provoked into this act. Concerns of faith were an enduring theme in Sahagún's writings and central to his revisions in the 1585 text.

These prefatory and indicting comments, which are not present in the Florentine Codex, make the Native elements of the story stand out in greater relief in the later text. Though not altogether distinct from a similar passage present in the Florentine Codex, the following horrific description of the massacre is in tone and content unlike Sahagún's prefatory remarks:

So great was the bloodshed that rivulets [of blood] ran through the courtyard like water in a heavy rain. So great was the slime of blood and entrails in the courtyard and so great was the stench that it was both terrifying and heartrending. Now that nearly all were fallen and dead, the Spaniards went searching for those who had climbed up the temple and those who had hidden among the dead, killing all those they found alive.

(CLINE 1989, 77)

Though Sahagún's framing of the evocative description attempts to ascribe blame to the Nahua participants in the Toxcatl festival, the passage itself speaks so directly and poignantly of the Native experience that it stands apart, and powerfully so, from that critical context.¹⁶ This arresting image offers a vestige of another voice, another perspective that has survived Sahagún's European inflected revisions of the narrative.

Kevin Terraciano has said of the Florentine Codex that "[r]eading between the lines of Book Twelve reveals how Nahua writers and artists succeeded in telling their side of the story in their own words and images" (2019, 60). We could also say that reading Sahagún's 1585 revision next to Book Twelve highlights even further the Native voices in the earlier text. The rare moments in the later text where we find critiques of the actions of the Spaniards are the exception that prove the rule, in that they underline how deliberately and consistently pro-Spanish the revision is. In the concluding paragraph of the 1585 revision, Sahagún focuses on the deeds and legacy of Cortés. It was Cortés, he says, who was responsible for bringing the mendicant friars to New Spain when he "wrote to the emperor a letter in which he requested that preachers of the Catholic Faith and monastic

16. The tone and content depicting the gruesome suffering of the Mexica due to the violence and brutality of the Spaniards of the passage are reminiscent of the *Annals of Tlatelolco*, a Nahuatl text presumed to have been written in the 1540s: see LOCKHART 1993, 42.

friars of St. Francis be sent to these parts to preach the law of God to this idolatrous Indian people and convert them to the Catholic Faith of the Holy Roman church" (CLINE 1989, 142). As Sarah Cline points out in her edition, this passage and many elements of the final paragraph are unique to the 1585 revision. In a footnote, she underlines the importance of the "final linkage of Cortés to the Franciscans" as revelatory of the motivation for Sahagún's rewriting the conquest account (1989, 142). Cline and other scholars have pointed to the pragmatic context for this text, a context in which the archbishop sought to remove local parishes from the hands of the Franciscans and turn over their charge to secular priests.¹⁷ Sahagún, as with other Franciscan friars, was in a defensive posture and eager to demonstrate the longstanding mission of his order in New Spain and the fact that it was promoted by Cortés and endorsed by the king. In his ninth decade of life, his attention was drawn to the evangelical project in ways that motivated him to revise and rewrite the earlier work.

Beyond the pragmatic context that informed Sahagún's rewriting of the conquest account, there is another element of the revision that is worth highlighting — its heterogeneity. The Florentine Codex and Sahagún's 1585 revision of Book Twelve are heterogeneous texts that preserve multiple perspectives and voices. Sahagún's projects throughout his life relied on collaboration and engagement with intellectuals and elders from the Native community. Even in the moments when Sahagún sat alone with his notes and drafts seeking once again to give shape to the story of the conquest, other voices made an appearance, as we witness in the description of the Toxcatl massacre. Antonio Cornejo Polar draws our attention to heterogeneity as a means of identifying the complexity of Andean literature, "in which two or more social-cultural universes intersect [and] actually produce new forms of expression" (2013, 5).¹⁸ Sahagún's intellectual life and endeavors were circumscribed by the Franciscan missionary project, which was being undermined in the 1580s. Without doubt, his rewriting of Book Twelve was influenced by and impacted by that historical context. However, the 1585 revision also provides a window into another aspect of

17. For discussions of the initiative to secularize the parishes, see LEÓN-PORTILLA 2002, CLINE 1970, and CLINE 1989.

18. Though Cornejo Polar focuses on Andean works, including those of Garcilaso de la Vega, *el Inca* and José María Arguedas, his objective is to untangle the multivocal texts that were produced in the aftermath of conquest and colonization by heterogeneous subjects who had been impacted by the clashing of multiple cultures, and in this way his analytical lens can also be productive for the Mexican context.

Sahagún's work, which is the presence of, in the words of Cornejo Polar, "a complex, scattered, multiple subject" (2013, 7). Even in the distinctly solo-authored 1585 revision, Sahagún's writing displays multiple perspectives that emerge from his collaborative and dialogical research as well as his religious profession. In the moments of plurivocal tensions we witness the two impulses that motivated the extraordinary work of the Franciscan friar — to promote the evangelical project in New Spain and to document the language, history, and culture of Anahuac.

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