

# SIXTEENTH- CENTURY MEXICO

The Work of Sahagún

EDITED BY  
MUNRO S. EDMONSON

A SCHOOL OF AMERICAN RESEARCH BOOK

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# The Research Method of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún: The Questionnaires\*

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## INTRODUCTION

It has been justly asserted by Jiménez Moreno (Sahagún 1938:xvi) that Sahagún followed for his time the most rigorous and demanding methods in his study of the culture of the Nahuatl people.

In describing the steps which permitted him to obtain the rich material that was to reach its full expression in the *General History of the Things of New Spain* and in the parallel manuscript in Nahuatl that is included in the Florentine Codex, Sahagún mentions as his starting point a draft in Spanish, a "memoir of all the subjects that had to be treated" (Sahagún 1956:1:105), which, had it been preserved for us, would permit us to appraise accurately each of his books. From it we could deter-

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mine the degree of the contribution of the native informants to the work, not just to attribute to one or another the glory of the results of the enterprise, but also to provide the historian who consults this master-work with standards of judgment that would permit accurate evaluation of the information it contains.

In spite of the lack of the draft plan, abundant valuable and contradictory opinions exist on the role of Sahagún on the one hand and of the informants on the other (Garibay in Sahagún 1956:1:11; García Icazbalceta 1954:375; Robertson 1966:625-26, n.26; Jiménez Moreno in Sahagún 1938:liii; Anderson 1960:35). But it is essential to try to reconstruct the method followed by Sahagún in order to determine surer limits in the investigation of the problem.

The present study attempts to ascertain as far as possible the origin of the content of the questionnaires Sahagún used and the way the contributors answered him. This intention can be justly contested by adducing the necessity of first having the complete translation of the Nahuatl documents, but one can reply that the growing use of the texts that are being translated day by day makes an effort of this sort necessary, despite its wholly provisional character. Eventually the draft plan will be reconstructed in more detail, but in the meantime this approximation will have some utility.

### SAHAGÚN'S PURPOSES

According to the author himself, the research was conducted with the fundamental goal of creating an appropriate instrument for preaching the Christian doctrine in New Spain, and for its proper conservation among the natives:

... It was ordered me as holy obedience to my superior prelate to write in the Mexican tongue what I thought would be useful for the doctrine, culture, and subsistence of the Christianity of these natives of this New Spain, and for the aid of the workers and ministers who indoctrinate them (Sahagún 1956:1:105).

Quite apart from the fact that he began the investigation some time before receiving the order from the provincial, Sahagún's motives seem totally directed towards the goal he himself notes. He chose as specific purposes of his work the knowledge of the former religion, in order to

prevent the return to idolatry (as did Acosta 1962: 14, 45, 215, 278, et al.), the recording of an extensive Nahuatl vocabulary which would help in preaching, and the disclosure of the old customs in order to correct the false opinion that the natives possessed a low cultural level before the arrival of the Spaniards (Acosta 1962:318).

Sahagún expresses the first specific purpose in the prologue of his *General History*:

A doctor cannot correctly apply medicines to the ill without first knowing from what disposition and cause the sickness proceeds; therefore a good physician should be knowledgeable in medicines and in sicknesses so as to apply correctly to each disease the corrective medicine; and the preachers and confessors, being doctors of the soul, should be experienced in the medicines and illnesses of the spirit in order to cure the spiritual ills: the preacher [should know] of the vices of the republic in order to direct his teachings against them, and the confessor in order to know what to ask, and to understand what is said relevant to his charge; it is highly useful that they know what is relevant to the exercise of their offices, nor should the ministers be careless in this conversion, believing that among this people there are no sins other than drunkenness, theft, and lust, because there are many graver sins among them which are in dire need of remedy: the sins of idolatry, idolatrous rites and beliefs, omens, superstitions, and idolatrous ceremonies have not yet totally disappeared.

In order to preach against these things and even to know whether they exist, it is indispensable to know how they were used in the time of their idolatry. For in the absence of this knowledge they do many idolatrous things in our presence without our understanding; and some say in excusing themselves that these are stupidities or childishness, not knowing the root of their creation—which is mere idolatry, and the confessors do not even ask or believe such things to exist, not knowing even the language for asking them, nor would they understand it even if they were told. So that the ministers of the Gospel who will succeed those who came first in the cultivation of this new vineyard of the Lord will have no occasion to complain about the first [of us] for having left in the dark the things of these natives of New Spain, I, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún . . . wrote twelve books of the things—divine, or better idolatrous, and human and natural—of this New Spain (Sahagún 1956:1:27–28).

A little further on he mentions the purpose of obtaining from the books he had collected the necessary vocabulary to make a dictionary

and of creating a corpus of works which did not exist in a land without phonetic writing:

When this work was begun, those who knew of it began to say a dictionary was being made, and even now many ask me: How is the dictionary coming along? It would certainly be highly advantageous to prepare such a useful work for those who want to learn this Mexican language, as Ambrosio Calepino did for those wanting to learn Latin and the meanings of its words, but there has certainly been no opportunity because Calepino took the words and their meanings, their errors, and their metaphors from the reading of the poets and orators and Latin authors, substantiating everything he said with the authors' sayings, a foundation that I have not had due to the lack of letters and writing among this people; but whoever would want to do it could do so with facility, because by my labor twelve books have been written in the proper and natural language of this Mexican tongue, which besides being an entertaining and profitable composition presents all the ways of speaking and all the words this language uses, just as well substantiated and true as those written by Virgil, Cicero, and the other Latin authors (Sahagún 1956:1:31-32).

But Sahagún does not mention the goals that the Franciscans had for the firm establishment of Christianity in New Spain, which undoubtedly influenced his objectives. This is no place to go into detail about the politico-religious utopia of the Franciscans (Maravall 1949: 199-228, *passim*; Nicolau D'Olwer 1952:155-70); nevertheless we can refer briefly to Sahagún's personal ideas. Although he dares not say, with Acosta, that the triumph of the church in the New World "will be a kingdom, not for the Spanish nor for the Europeans but for Christ Our Lord" (Acosta 1962:45), Sahagún does nonetheless justify the establishment in New Spain of a government quite different from the Spanish one. He tells us that the weather and constellations of this land make the men—natives or foreigners—incline toward lust and sensuality; the natives in their gentile days counteracted this influence by exercises performed with iron discipline, which were lost with the implantation of soft European customs. It was essential to collect and record the testimonials of the old life, to separate the young Indians as much from their fathers (and hence idolatry) as from the Spaniards (and hence corruption), to initiate them into a truly Christian life, and then, after suppressing everything idolatrous in the pre-Hispanic norms and practices, to reimplant these practices for the benefit of Christ (Sahagún 1956:3:158-61). The land that

the infidel and the heretic had alienated from the church (Sahagún 1956:1:31) was being recovered in New Spain, whose men had sufficient capacity—as Sahagún was demonstrating in his work—to initiate there the Republic of Christ. For this reason, he could compare the Nahuas to the Greeks and Romans (Sahagún 1956:2:53).

Sahagún's work, as many have already pointed out (León-Portilla 1958b:12), could not have been the result of a merely academic restlessness. The epoch did not permit it, and the active life dedicated to evangelization gave Sahagún no time for it. But what about his dictionary? It was not the result of disinterested study either (Nicolau D'Olwer 1952:171). It is true that in that period the Nahuatl that had been recorded was known only to Fray Alonso de Molina, Sahagún himself, and the old men born before the arrival of the whites (García Icazbalceta 1941:61; Mendieta 1945:114), even though Olmos and Motolinía were not far behind, but the language had to be recorded because it was the vehicle with which to penetrate the native mind (León-Portilla, 1966b: 21) and because it was to be retaught to the young Nahuas as a cultured language once the Republic of Christ was established.

The Franciscan dreams were not realized. Without them, the work of Sahagún lost much of its original meaning. That work continues today to serve other different but no less noble goals, maintaining its usefulness on the solidity of an extraordinary method.

### SAHAGÚN'S METHOD

Sahagún himself provides us with the pertinent information about the steps followed in the collection of the material for his work (see also García Icazbalceta 1954; Jiménez Moreno in Sahagún 1938; Garibay in Sahagún 1956; Toro 1924; León-Portilla 1958b, 1966b; Ricard 1947: 124-25; Nicolau D'Olwer 1952; Anderson 1960). Once the draft outline was prepared, which in this case should be understood to mean only the initial plan and not the developed questionnaire, he asked in the Acolhua village of Tepepulco for the services of people knowledgeable about native antiquity:

In the said village I had all the leaders assembled, together with the lord of the village, Don Diego de Mendoza, an old man of great distinction and ability, very experienced in all civil, military and

political, and even idolatrous matters. Having met with them, I proposed what I intended to do and I asked that they give me qualified and experienced persons with whom I could talk and who would be able to answer what I asked. They answered that they would discuss the proposition and give me an answer another day, and thus they took leave of me. Another day the lord and the leaders came and, having made a solemn speech, as they used to do then, they pointed out to me ten or twelve leading elders and told me I could speak with them and that they would truly answer everything that might be asked of them. There were also four Latinists, to whom I had taught grammar a few years earlier in the College of the Holy Cross in Tlaltelolco.

With these leaders and grammarians who were also leaders I conversed many days, nearly two years, following the order of the draft outline I had made (Sahagún 1956: 1:105-6).

We have then: an investigator who adds to a profound knowledge of the language the proper character to enter into contact with the informants—"gentle, humble, poor, and in his conversation prudent and affable to all" (Mendieta 1945:4:114-15); a people of cultural importance ruled by the son-in-law of the famous Ixtlilxochitl II, lord of Texcoco (García Icazbalceta 1954:345); ten or twelve cultured elders willing to serve as informants; and four youths who have been influenced by both cultures, willing to serve as intermediaries in the gathering of information (Anderson 1960:35; Ricard in Garibay, 1953-54:2:345). One more element must be mentioned: the pictorial codices that served as a basis for the inquiry.

All the things we discussed they gave to me by means of paintings, for that was the writing they had used, the grammarians saying them in their language and writing the statement beneath the painting (Sahagún 1956:1:105-6).

And further on:

These people had no letters nor any characters, nor did they know how to read or write; they communicated by means of images and paintings, and all their antiquities and the books they had about them were painted with figures and images in such a way that they knew and had memory of the things their ancestors had done and had left in their annals, more than a thousand years back before the arrival of the Spanish in this land.

Most of these books and writings were burned at the time of the destruction of the other idolatries, but many hidden ones which we have now seen did survive and are still kept, from which we have understood their antiquities (Sahagún 1956:2:165).

This is to say that Sahagún obtained information directly derived from the pictorial codices and that he used this system to record the information obtained and, as will be seen later on, to interrogate the Nahuatl elders.

The work of Tepepulco, schematic if compared to what followed, was the foundation that permitted Sahagún to obtain greater information from the Mexicans among whom he went to live in 1560.

At the time of the Chapter at which Father Francisco Toral, who gave me this charge, celebrated his seventh year, I was transferred from Tepepulco; taking all my writings I went to live at Santiago del Tlaltelolco, where, assembling all the leaders, I proposed to them the business of my writings and asked them to designate for me several able leaders with whom I could examine and discuss the writings I had brought from Tepepulco. The governor and the mayors pointed out to me eight or ten leaders chosen from among all of them, very skillful in their language and in the things of their antiquities, with whom (in addition to four or five collegiates, all of whom were trilingual), while closed off in the college for a period of more than a year, everything I had brought from Tepepulco was corrected and expanded, all of which had to be rewritten from a terrible copy because it had been written hurriedly.

Having done what has been related in Tlaltelolco, I came to stay at St. Francis of Mexico with all my writings, where for a period of three years I read and reread these writings of mine by myself, went back and corrected them, and divided them into books, into twelve books, and each book into chapters and some books into chapters and paragraphs . . . and the Mexicans added and corrected many things in the twelve books while they were being put into smooth copy, so that the first strainers through which my works were sifted were those of Tepepulco, the second those of Tlaltelolco, the third those of Mexico; and in all of these scrutinies there were college-trained grammarians (Sahagún 1956:1:106-7).

At the present time four stages of the work in question are known through documentation: (1) a brief schematic plan which may well be

identified with the information received in Tepepulco and which Paso y Troncoso baptized with the name "Primeros Memoriales"; (2) an extensive manuscript later divided into two parts which have come to be called the Madrid Codex of the Royal Academy of History and the Madrid Codex of the Royal Palace, which, as Ramírez (1903b:6) correctly states, could originally have been a smooth copy (although written in various hands) but was later converted into a rough draft; (3) a beautiful and extensive bilingual manuscript now known as the Florentine Codex, subsequent to the Madrid Codices, the Nahuatl column of which Sahagún must have considered definitive (Garibay 1961:8), the Spanish column constituting a version (not a literal translation) of the *General History of the Things of New Spain*; and finally (4) there exist among the pages of the Madrid Codex passages known as "Memoriales con Escolios" in which Sahagún translated the Nahuatl text word for word and with ample explanations. This translation constitutes an unfinished foundation for the dictionary, which was also never finished. It can be said that the first three stages, which are the important ones for our purposes, mark the work done in Tepepulco, Mexico-Tlaltelolco, and Mexico-Tenochtitlan, respectively. The difference between the latter two is not as great as has been claimed. In Mexico-Tenochtitlan, Sahagún gave his work final divisions into books, chapters, and paragraphs; the grammarians added the specific headings in Nahuatl, polished the language (but not excessively), omitted things by error or mistranscribed them, and added beautiful illustrations, albeit with marked European influence. For purposes of investigation the Tlaltelolcan and Tenochtitlan documents constitute a unit, so much so that the book corresponding to the conquest preserves, even after its passage into the document elaborated in Mexico-Tenochtitlan, its totally Tlaltelolcan character.

Therefore two stages can be considered fundamental to the Franciscan's investigation: the initial one of Tepepulco, which has as a result the information contained in the "Primeros Memoriales," and the investigation of Tlaltelolco, from which derive the Madrid and Florentine codices, even though the latter was done in Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Further on we shall see the most notable differences between Sahagún's first and second contacts with the native informants.

The result is a priceless work. One notes in it a continual departure

## *The Research Method of Sahagún*

from the original plan, since it appears that it was not intended to be a book in Spanish (Garibay 1953-54:2:65); rather the work took on a very different shape which depended on the particular circumstances of the subject matter, the formation of the questionnaires, and the will of the native elders, on contradictions in the text derived from the differences among the informants, and on the *General History*—even on frequent errors by the Franciscan who, despite his knowledge of the language, misinterpreted several passages (Garibay in Sahagún 1956:1:12; Anderson 1960:41). All of this is helpful in judging the authenticity of the work's contents. It is an encyclopedia of the Nahuatl 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.

Once the author himself has explained the process he followed and has presented the two principal stages of its development, the question of the originality of his method arises. In spite of Chavero's assurance that no historian had used this method before (Chavero n.d.:34), it is known that Olmos had already initiated the collection of the *huehuetlatolli*, or ancient speeches, and that he and Ramírez de Fuenleal had used the pictorial codices as a basis for the acquisition of information, steps that were followed by Tovar, Durán, Alva Ixtlilxochitl, and Alvarado Tezozómoc, among others (Garibay 1953-54:2:71-73, 1961:14). Moreover, Olmos may have used the question method to obtain the information which was the foundation of his work, and it would not be farfetched to think that Durán may have done the same thing. I think the problem of originality is secondary. Sahagún's importance rests on the results of his efforts. The method emerged from the contact between the cultures. Nahuatl man, upon being questioned either about the history of his people, or about his ancient customs, or even, during confession, about his sins, brought forth, with a peculiar sense of authenticating his words, the pictographic document which was both a mnemonic device and a proof. This was the basis of the Nahuatl's knowledge, which could be written down immediately by the translators or provisionally recorded verbatim when the Latin system of writing was adapted to the native language. It was also of interest from the beginning to record the chants of the ancient religion in order to try to shape

the new ones on this foundation, and to record the *huehuetlatolli* with all their valuable information on the ancient morals. This made the system of verbatim transcription unquestionably preferable to that of simultaneous translation—at least for the friars who knew the language—and it was only a short step from verbatim transcription to the formulation of the questionnaires.

### THE GENERAL PLAN OF THE WORK

Indicated as antecedents and possible inspirations to Sahagún's work are the *Archaeology* of Flavius Josephus, the *History of Animals* and *Parts of Animals* of Aristotle, the works of Albert of Cologne, and especially the *Natural History* of Pliny (Garibay 1953-54:2:57-71) and *On the Properties of Things* by the Franciscan Bartholomew de Glanville (Robertson 1966:passim). Sahagún could have known them all, both in New Spain and in Salamanca, where he was a student, and they are all examples of a continuous and evolving line of human thought that originates with the systematic Greek studies of animals, passes through the Latin natural histories, and arrives in the New World in the form of medieval encyclopedias which included all beings in rigorous hierarchical order, beginning with the Trinity and ending with mineral forms.

In spite of the continuous variations in the Franciscan's plans, they all follow a scholastic and medieval hierarchy, adapted of course to the religion and customs of the ancient inhabitants of New Spain. In the index of the successive arrangements of the *General History* provided to us by Jiménez Moreno (Sahagún 1938:illustration between xl & xli), we can see that in the "Primeros Memoriales" Sahagún began with the gods, continued with heaven and hell, went on to the lordships, and concluded with earthly things. Already in the Madrid Codices the books on the natural things are placed fourth. In the design of Mexico-Tenochtitlan the book on rhetoric and moral philosophy and the one on the conquest are included. Up to the Madrid Codices the hierarchy is strict; in the definitive presentation of the work, Sahagún had already introduced modifications that can make one who does not know the previous plans doubt the hierarchical order that ruled the distribution of subjects.

The book corresponding to the gods was divided into a treatise on

the gods, an account of the religious celebrations, and a description of the places the Nahuas believed men went after death. It is, in sum, a study of divinity, of the divine-human relationship as worship, and of the divine-human relationship as punishment and reward—the latter, at least, from the Christian viewpoint. The last of these three books was subsequently modified for the reasons listed below; but still, in the prologue of the *General History*, Sahagún says that the third will treat of the “immortality of the soul and the places where they said souls go upon leaving the body, and of the vows and offerings they made for the dead” (Sahagún 1956:1:28).

Afterward come the books of heaven, which should logically treat of heaven as an entity related to the secrets of man’s soul—judicial astrology—and of heaven as a physical body—natural astrology. Between these two themes, which constitute a book apiece, another was initially placed treating omens and predictions, which were tied in some way to the theme of judicial astrology, according to Sahagún. Later yet came the book of rhetoric, moral philosophy, and theology, which is assumed to have been completed much earlier but which was not included in the original plan as part of the body of the work. After some hesitation, Sahagún felt it pertinent to place this treatise in sixth place among his books. His reason is unclear; perhaps he considered that it was necessary to situate the Nahuas’ knowledge of philosophy and theology, expressed in rhetoric, before the treatment of their knowledge of heaven as a physical entity.

Heavenly things are followed by the human: first of all the social divisions in hierarchical order, starting with the lords, going on to the merchants and officials, and concluding with the vices and virtues of all men; secondly man as a physical being, with the parts of the human body and diseases and their remedies; thirdly man as a member of national groups.

Animals, plants, and minerals—the eleventh book—occupy the next place. Actually the encyclopedia ends here. But just as there existed an independent treatise on rhetoric which had to be interpolated as a book (Book 6), so Sahagún possessed a valuable history of the conquest as told by the conquered. He simply chose to include it at the end; it remains a mere addition to the general conception which, but for its value, could be considered a leftover.

## SAHAGÚN'S QUESTIONNAIRES

Sahagún's three specific purposes—to know the ancient religion, to create or inspire texts from which a rich vocabulary could be obtained, and to record the Nahuatl's great cultural possessions—largely determined the method he followed in his books, a method which varies considerably. Sometimes it seems as though he had only the linguistic aim in mind, and even in this case he sometimes collected vocabulary by means of a constant set of questions and sometimes permitted the informants to give him whatever sentences and speeches they chose. He was conscious that the materials obtained by the first system were sometimes only valuable for the formation of his planned dictionary, so he provided no Spanish translations of these in his *General History* (see Chapter 27, Book 10). In other cases he included translations but warned the reader of the Nahuatl text of the trouble they could cause:

Another thing about the language which will also annoy those who may understand it, is that for one thing there are many synonymous names, and one way of speaking and one sentence is said in many ways. It became a challenge to know and write down all the words for each thing and all the ways of saying one sentence, and not only in this book (7) but in the whole work (Sahagún 1956:2:256).

In the chapters where the informants answered under pressure of a questionnaire, the questions are shown in a more or less clear form. The comparison of the contents of the paragraphs gives an approximate idea of the list of questions. Of course the approximation will be closer when each book has been analyzed on the basis of a complete translation.

## FIRST BOOK

*In Which Are Treated the Gods Worshipped by the  
Natives of this Land of New Spain*

Paragraphs 5 and 10 of the "Primeros Memoriales," which treat respectively the ornaments and the powers of the gods, can be considered antecedents to the first books of the Madrid and Florentine codices. The positions of the figures and of the text of paragraph 5 lead to the

supposition that they were copied or drawn from memory in the pages of "Primeros Memoriales" and that on the basis of the pictures the Franciscan followed along asking for their meaning. The grammarians wrote to the left of the gods' figures a brief description of the ornaments, which were all the elder informants had described. The rigidity of the language suggests that the informants were repeating phrases learned in the *calmecac*; these schools were attended almost exclusively by the *pipiltin*, or nobles. At the end of the list, however, the uniformity of the answers breaks down; the reason is easy to guess, since the many small figures that appear there are not really gods but rather the images of the mountains, the *tepictoton*, and Sahagún must have asked for their meaning, what they are made of, and why they had those adornments. The answer to the latter question, to the effect that the figures are dressed like Tlaloc because they bring rain, perhaps motivated Sahagún to initiate a new interrogation, this time to find out each god's powers. This question is answered in paragraph 10, only for the main gods and always in a very rigid and laconic fashion.

In spite of the brevity of the information received in Tepepulco, Sahagún arrived at an analysis of the situation which permitted him once he reached Mexico-Tlaltelolco to shape an interview. First of all, he could already rely on a list of the gods as a foundation, even though the Tlaltelolcans' revision caused the suppression of those considered repetitive (Xochipilli is eliminated because he is already mentioned under his name Macuilxochitl) and of those that were unimportant to the Mexicans. Each god's name constituted a heading, which formed the guideline on which the questions were formulated:

1. What were the titles, the attributes, or the characteristics of the god?
2. What were his powers?
3. What ceremonies were performed in his honor?
4. What was his attire?

The order of the questions must be supposed to have been strict, since it varies in only one case. Not all the questions are answered under each heading. The answer to the first question is more or less rigid, abounding in participles, which may reflect the memory of instruction in school. As the topics proceed, the answers become more spontaneous and free, including various names of the divinities, villages that particularly wor-

shipped them, things the gods had invented, histories of the deities, and the like. The answer to the second question seems freer, although it is brief. Here Sahagún permits the informants spontaneous exposition, and he even seems to formulate cues or circumstantial questions, motivated by the preceding answers, when he thinks he sees something interesting. The answer to the third question is very brief in the early sections, but as the chapters advance it appears that the informants gain confidence and talk freely, making valuable contributions. They talk about the month during which the god was feasted, about the places of worship, about the guilds that dedicated particular service to him, and in the case of Tlazolteotl they include important words of the confession made to the goddess by those burdened with guilt from transgressions, especially sexual ones. The answer to the fourth question is rigid. It is only missing in cases like that of Tezcatlipoca, in which the Mexicans were talking about the supreme deity and not about the specific god with this name and hence could not describe his dress because they conceived of him as invisible and intangible. This answer is strict and brief, as in the case of Tepepulco, where it is based on what was learned in school and perhaps was also aided by figures. But the content is different from that of the first responses.

The answers show that the informants are cultured and educated men of pre-Hispanic Mexico. However, they may not have been priests before the conquest: the importance they give to Yacatecutli, to travel, and to the feasts given to the organized merchants makes one suppose that at least some of them belonged to that merchants' guild, a fact not to be wondered at if notable Tlaltelolcans were chosen. As experienced men they had sufficient preparation to answer Sahagún's questions on the meanings of obscure terms. Thus in Chapter 1 they say in reference to Huitzilopochtli, ". . . *Tepan quitlaza in xiuhtli, in mamalhuaztli, q. n. yaoyutl, teuatl, tlachinolli*" (" . . . he casts over the people the turquoise serpent, the lighter of the flame"). This signifies war, the divine water, the hearth fire—the informants give themselves the luxury of answering with another *disfratismo* (divine water, hearth fire)—which is a synonym for war in elegant speech.

Although this is not the place to discuss Sahagún's translation in the *General History*, one can respond to the indictment of the informants for having referred to their ancient gods by comparisons with the Greco-

Roman deities. Some have considered this a sign of a high degree of acculturation, which has been linked in ill-founded criticism to the forgetting of the old beliefs. It was not the informants, however, who compared the Nahuatl gods to those of Mediterranean antiquity: in the Madrid Codex the comparison is found in the margin in Sahagún's handwriting. Such comparisons continue into the *General History*, but they are not written in Nahuatl, not even in the Florentine Codex.

## SECOND BOOK

*Which Discusses the Calendar, Feasts and Ceremonies, Sacrifices, and Solemnities Which These Natives of New Spain Performed in Honor of Their Gods*

The second book can be divided according to method into the main body and first appendix, which treat the religious ceremonies, and then into each of the remaining appendices, on the buildings of the great temple, the offerings and rites, the ministers of the gods, the striking of the hours and oaths, the ritual hymns, and the priestesses. I shall examine most closely the means used by Sahagún to obtain information about the ceremonies and the hymns, mentioning only in passing matters which concern the other appendices. It should be noted that Chapters 1-19 of the *General History* do not proceed directly from any Nahuatl manuscript.

The antecedent to the main body of the second book is in the "Primeros Memoriales." A small codex including drawings of the main events of the feasts is the foundation used by Sahagún to formulate the questions, but one should consider that in this case the drawings are included more to aid the informants than to help Sahagún, because he asks about the feasts one by one with a predetermined questionnaire. The questions are:

1. What is the name of this feast (in reference to the rectangle containing the drawing)?
  2. Why is it called that (when the name arouses his curiosity)?
  3. What human sacrifices or offerings were made for this feast?
  4. How was the ceremony performed?
  5. On what date of the Julian calendar did this month fall?
- The order varies only in the material on the first two monthly feasts.

The answers are brief, although those that correspond to the fourth question are more detailed. The last chapter, on the feast of Atamalqualiztli, does not follow any questionnaire and is substantially more extensive.

Once in Mexico-Tenochtitlan, Sahagún had no need of the outline. The order of the headings was that of the Nahuatl months (or that of the nonmonthly feasts) and the Franciscan quite rightly believed that he would receive more valuable information if he let the informants narrate freely the course of the ceremonies. It was just a directed interview, not structured by a questionnaire, although the informants themselves had as guidelines the important moments of the ceremonies that received special names in Nahuatl. For example, *netzompaco*, "the hair is washed," during Tozoztontli; *calonhuac*, "the retreat was made in the houses," in Huei Tozoztli; and *toxcachocholoa*, "the leaps of Toxcatl are made," during the month of that name. Sahagún intervened only with circumstantial questions and perhaps with prompting.

The freedom of exposition allowed the informants can be proved by their constant use of connecting terms, which show that the Franciscan rarely intervened. Among them can be noted *niman ye ic*, *mec*, *niman*, *auh in icuac i*, and the preterit perfect used as a connective between paragraphs. There is also the indication that the informants finished their statements with phrases like *ye ixquich*, *nican tlami*, or *nican tzonquiza* ("that is enough," "here it concludes," "here it ends"). Furthermore, the answers do not correspond to information learned in school but to a memory of the splendor of the past. This is indicated by the predominant use of the preterit imperfect and by descriptions more of living social customs than of an abstract succession of religious rites. Some of Sahagún's circumstantial questions can be guessed. As an example I cite a request for information on a variety of corn unknown to him—*cuappachcintli*. The informant answers, "*Yuhquin cuappachtli itlachieliz*" ("it resembles shrub hay").

The hymns and the material composing the sixth book are the first fruits of Sahagún's work, for it is calculated that they were collected between 1547 and 1558 (Garibay 1958:10). The Franciscan intervened little in collecting this material; he asked the elders for the hymns and ordered the collection of the poems. Perhaps he inquired later about the meaning of these extremely obscure texts, but if so he did not interro-

gate the right people, or perhaps he did not insist in the face of the informants' reticence (Garibay 1958:23). His failure to discover the meaning of these texts may be due in part to his inexperience as a text collector, but undoubtedly he was also strongly motivated by his aversion to materials he judged diabolical.

The question about the great temple of Mexico-Tenochtitlan is answered with an overly schematic drawing of the plan in the native fashion, and fifteen names of buildings existing within the enclosure. In Mexico-Tlaltelolco, as we would expect, the list grows, and brief descriptions are given with it. The rites are also accorded brief descriptions corresponding to requests for explanations of the previously sketched figures. The informants first drew the religious pose; then to the left they put down the name of the rite. Sahagún asked for an amplification, and this was given and written in the blank spaces. The variable amount of amplification filled the spaces for the figures or crossed into the next answers, thus making it necessary to draw lines of demarcation to prevent the attribution of a text to the wrong heading. The information is not exactly that learned in school, as is proved by the use of the preterit imperfect and by the existence of words like *diablome* and *juramento*. The priests' section is also very brief. Sahagún first asked their names, as can be seen in a list of only five names which appears in the "Primeros Memoriales" (Sahagún 1905-8:6:(2):41), and in a fuller one which later served as a basis for questions about their activities. In the second list the names of the ministers were placed at equal distances on the pages; having made the list, the Franciscan initiated the questioning, asking only for an explanation. The answers, some long and some short, occasionally made the estimated space insufficient. The past imperfect was again used here. (On the appendices, see also León-Portilla 1958a.)

### THIRD BOOK

#### *The Beginning of the Gods*

As previously noted, this book was originally concerned with the place the Nahuas believed the dead went. Sahagún must have considered the antecedent of Book 3, from Tepepulco, a failure. In that village he had asked to be told only of the world beyond, and the result was four texts:

about the different things that are lost in the world of the dead, about the place to which those who died young went, about the offerings for Mictlantecuhtli and Mictecacihuatl, and about a woman who was resurrected and who told what she had seen in the other life. There may have been more collected from another manuscript in addition to this story; the texts seem to have been mixed up during their transfer to the "Primeros Memoriales," and the story was not even concluded (unless perhaps the following page was lost). The exposition in all these texts is completely free, and their information, which may have been useful, was disregarded by Sahagún. When he asks in Mexico-Tlaltelolco about the places the dead went, he does not even notice the omission of the Chichihuacuauhco, the paradise of dead children, of which he should have had knowledge from the Tepepulco data. Possibly he remembers the resurrected woman, but the text he uses is different and is in another section of his work. In Tlaltelolco he poses the initial question about the places the dead went and uses the names as headings. He may have added circumstantial questions upon hearing the statements. In the other two places he asks who went where after he realizes that the manner of dying determined the destination. The answers seem completely free; most are given by the informants on the basis of funeral prayers.

In discussing the first book, I mentioned that the informants had answered the first questions briefly and that as the interrogation advanced the answers became richer and more spontaneous. The result was a markedly uneven book in which the four gods of greatest importance did not receive sufficient attention. Sahagún, conscious of this weakness, reinterrogated the informants, but, uneven as the first book was, he refused to take it apart and amend it with this new information. The new material had such value that it could constitute an independent book; it became the third book in the final work, in which the original main theme was relegated to an appendix. The problem was to give it an appropriate title, and Sahagún did not hesitate to choose one that was fully related only to the first chapter and only slightly to the rest: "The Beginning of the Gods." Nevertheless the final order is given in Tenochtitlan, for even in the Madrid Codex of the Royal Palace the texts concerning the other life precede those narrating the origin of Huitzilopochtli.

Sahagún asked for additional information only on the four major gods.

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As Garibay affirms (Sahagún 1956:1:256), the Nahuas answered with a beautiful fragment of an epic when referring to Huitzilopochtli. They gave brief explanations, perhaps in answer to Sahagún's circumstantial questions, upon finishing their statements, and they closed by saying "*ye ixquich*," "that is enough." The Franciscan evidently did not agree, as he continued to question them about the religious ceremonies, particularly the communion, related to the Mexican god. In this latter part, the answer is very similar to that of the main body of the second book.

Tezcatlipoca was next, and the informants were unable to answer in a similar fashion about the supreme divinity, invisible and untouchable, creator of history but without a history. They answered with small prayers directed to him, and with the many names given him, with a few explanations of these names, and with information about the places where he was worshiped.

Tlaloc was described next, but the texts referring to him were used to enrich the seventh book. Another epic was offered about Quetzalcoatl, making this book, so haphazardly formed, one of the most beautiful of the work.

In the appendix were included two more texts which would have been more appropriate in other books: one concerning education and one dealing with the priesthood. The first may have as an Acolhuan antecedent a free and extensive statement, which appears in the "Primeros Memoriales," about the activities of boys and girls in their respective schools and the functions of the teachers (Sahagún 1905-8:6(2):130). Nevertheless Sahagún paid little attention to such matters among the Mexicans, for he does not discuss the theme of the girls' school. He used the names of the two boys' schools as headings and asked:

1. How did men offer their sons to these schools?
2. How did the young men live in them?
3. How were transgressors of the rules punished?

As in previous instances the informants based their information on well-known speeches, which were used to answer the first question both for the *telpochcalli* and the *calmecac*. The second answer is based on school teachings, also known by memory, and since the informants mention punishment, the third question is not answered. From the text referring to the priesthood the following questions may be inferred:

1. What hierarchy existed in the priesthood?

2. What was the social origin of the two highest priests?
3. What were the ranks of those who served in the temple?

The wording of this last question is suggested to me by a note in the margin in Sahagún's own hand.

#### FOURTH BOOK

*On Judicial Astrology or The Art of Divining Used by These Mexicans to Know Which Days Were Fortunate and Which Were Unfortunate and What Conditions Would Be Met by Those Born on the Days Attributed to the Signs or Symbols Which Are Placed Here, This Seeming More Like Black Magic than Astrology*

Even in the title one notes Sahagún's aversion to this subject; what he called "judicial astrology" was not adjusted to the course of the stars—reason enough to consider it false and belonging to magic. But from the "Primeros Memoriales" on, he was determined to understand a system as foreign to him as the calendar of 260 days. He had recorded with drawings the signs of the days, divided into twenty groups of 13. Before each group was written the information on the destinies, from which the following questionnaire arises:

1. Was the sign that started the 13-day group good or bad?
2. What fate did the noblemen born under it have?
3. What fate did commoners born under it have?
4. What fate did noblewomen born under it have?
5. What fate did common women born under it have?

Undoubtedly the informants had previously told Sahagún that it was customary to answer separately as to the fortunes of males and females, nobles and commoners. The order of the questions is not strict, and they are seldom all answered. The answers are brief. The information given by the Acolhuas will in some cases differ from that of the Mexicans.

The Tepepulco data certainly served as a basis for the questionnaire Sahagún later formulated for the Mexicans, but the fact that in their extensive information the Mexicans referred not only to the initial days of the groups of thirteen but also to intermediate signs of great significance makes one believe that either they had on hand a table of days

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similar to the one the Franciscan had made in Tepepulco or they knew with precision and by memory the order of the signs. Sahagún used the initial signs of the thirteen-day groups as headings; the Mexicans established the intermediate signs of importance as well, and the following questionnaire was used:

1. What sign begins the thirteen-day group?
2. What signs follow?
3. In general terms are they good or bad?
4. What is the fate of the noble born that day?
5. And of the commoner?
6. Of the woman?
7. What is the fate of one born on this day who does not act correctly?
8. And of one who does?
9. On what day is it convenient to offer to the water one born under this sign?

As can be supposed, the analysis of the situation which permitted Sahagún to formulate questions 1–8 is based on the answers from Tepepulco, while the knowledge of the possibility of changing destiny by offering the infant to the water on various dates could have been acquired in previous conversations. Sahagún soon realized that in several of the groups of thirteen days there was an easily understood relation between the sign and the fate, and the question of why it was favorable or unfavorable became very important.

The increasing confidence acquired by the informants as they gave their answers made them hasten their responses to the Franciscan's questions or vary the imposed order in their accounts. Sahagún realized the value of the spontaneous information he was receiving, so he let them expound freely, answering questions in the order they wished and narrating digressions that occupy whole chapters. In return, he also began formulating circumstantial questions related neither to the initial questionnaire nor to the theme of the book.

The answers are extensive and spontaneous, not based upon a rigorously memorized knowledge such as the *tonalpouhque* or readers of fates may have possessed. The style, elegant but occasionally arcane, is the same when they refer to the destinies as when they digress. When they decline to go into further detail, one may suppose they don't have any more information. Moreover, the great importance placed on the

speeches and customs of the organized merchants leads again to the assumption that at least some of the elders belonged to that guild. It is not surprising, on the other hand, that an educated person should know the science of destinies, even if not with the specialist's depth, if it was taught in the calmecac.

Besides the fact that this tonalamatl, or book of destinies, is of prime importance, its living picture of the ancient Nahuatl enhances its merits. In it is found information about drunkards, about merchants' speeches, about the ceremony of offering infants to the water, about the witch doctors known as *temacpalitotique*, and other subjects.

### FIFTH BOOK

*Which Treats the Omens and Forecasts Which These Natives Took from Certain Birds, Animals, and Were-Animals in Divining Things of the Future*

In Tepepulco Sahagún simply asks for a list of the ancient omens and obtains a summary statement listing them as cause and effect. This is accompanied by another similar list on the meaning of dreams, which unfortunately was not developed in Tlaltelolco. The first is doubtless the basis for the ample information received later from the Mexicans, for with almost insignificant modifications it constitutes a simple questionnaire:

1. What is the omen concerning . . . ?
2. How were the effects of the omen counteracted?

Other questions, relating to the sounds produced by the animals or their appearance, are occasionally added with the clear and simple purpose of obtaining a vocabulary rather than some other kind of information. The questions are answered freely at some length, but with little intention of giving more information than is requested.

Then in Tlaltelolco there follows a second part of the work relating to superstitions, which was to become an appendix. It does not seem to have either a structure or guidelines in the form of headings. The informants speak one after another with no more order than that determined by mere associations of ideas. They begin by describing a superstition about a flower and continue with two other such descriptions; they speak of the action of stepping over a child, which impedes

his growth, and this gives them the opportunity to warn of another action producing the same damage; they refer to the consequences of eating from the pot, continue with what is said of tamales stuck to the pot, then mention the dangers of the battlefield. They go on to state the obligation of leaving the umbilical cords of children on such a field; this suggests the theme of the pregnant woman and then of the woman in labor; the superstition about the three stones of the hearth is followed by the one about the tortilla on the griddle, and then the one about the grindstone. After speaking of the newborn child they go back to the pregnant woman. It seems that they are responding only to the Franciscan's urging that they mention yet another superstition.

### SIXTH BOOK

*Of the Rhetoric, Moral Philosophy, and Theology of the Mexican People, Where There Are Very Curious Things Concerning the Skills of Their Language, and Very Delicate Things Concerning the Moral Virtues*

If, as has been said, this book is incorporated into Sahagún's work by forcing the general plan to a certain extent, that does not mean that its inclusion is inappropriate. For the Franciscan's purpose of having in hand sufficient material for a return to strict morality, no other part of his work is more essential. For those trying to gain an acquaintance with the people of ancient Mexico, whether in the sphere of ethnohistory or that of literature or of the broadest humanism, no other book among the twelve has the value of the sixth book.

The date of the collection of the material should be fixed, as has been noted, between 1547 and 1558. The fact that by the first of these dates Fray Andrés de Olmos had already included part of his *huehuetlatolli* in his *Arte de la lengua mexicana* has led to the belief that the two Franciscans worked together or that Sahagún was inspired by his fellow friar (Garibay in Sahagún 1956:2:41-42). The texts referring to modes of courtesy and censure between nobles and commoners which appear in the "Primeros Memoriales" should not be considered as antecedent but as a pale parallel to Book 6. The discourses of the sixth book follow a much more ambitious plan both in contents and in selection. They can be classified as prayers to the gods, speeches of the king, paternal

exhortations, speeches for ceremonies and solemn occasions—marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, addressing the newborn, cutting the umbilical cord, washing the infant, salutations of ambassadors to the parents of a noble child, offering to the water, offering to the temple—and proverbs, riddles, and metaphors. Antecedents to the structure of this last part have been sought in the *Book of Proverbs* (Sullivan 1963:94), Erasmus's *Proverbs*, and the *Diálogo de la Lengua* by Juan de Valdés (Garibay in Sahagún 1956:2:46). The idea of hierarchy that appears first in Book 6 will recur below.

The opinion that specialists were consulted for this book (Garibay in Sahagún 1956:2:43) seems correct, particularly in reference to the speeches pronounced by the midwife. The Franciscan had only to ask that prayers, speeches, proverbs, riddles, and metaphors be mentioned, perhaps with an outline of the themes noted, but without knowing beforehand, for example, that he would obtain a prayer which asks a god for the death of the governing tyrant. However, not everything is strictly an account of such literary material. There is valuable free exposition which connects some speeches with others and explicates the themes treated. One may cite a brief item about the villages that worshiped Tlazolteotl, where the speeches of confession are given; the account of the marriage ceremonies; and the medical and magical care of the pregnant woman by the midwife. It seems unquestionable that much of this information was solicited by Sahagún. But did he solicit it during the collection of the material, or afterward in Tlaltelolco or Tenochtitlan when he arranged his texts in order? The necessary linkage between certain parts seems to indicate that the formulation of the questions took place during the gathering of the data.

## SEVENTH BOOK

*Which Treats the Natural Astrology Attained by  
These Natives of This New Spain*

If Sahagún could have avoided treating this subject without damaging the general plan of the work, he would probably have eliminated it and thus deprived us of some truly valuable information. As he addresses himself to the reader at the beginning of this book, he says:

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The reader will have reason to be annoyed at the reading of this seventh book, and all the more so if he understands the Indian language as well as the Spanish, because in Spanish the language gets very base, and the material touched on in this seventh book is very vulgarly treated. This is because the natives themselves related the things treated in this book in a vulgar fashion, the way they understand them, and in a vulgar language, and it was thus translated in Spanish in a vulgar style and with low level of understanding, pretending only to know and to write what they understood on this subject of astrology and natural philosophy, which is very little and very lowly (Sahagún 1956:2:256).

He could not be more unjust. This book is a personal failure; it is worth a great deal in certain chapters, but they are precisely those where his questionnaire did not interfere. Sahagún asked about the nature of the sky with totally Occidental expectations, perhaps anticipating replies which might deal with celestial spheres, the density of strata, universal rotation, the origin of temperature variation in attractions and repulsions of cold and heat, explanation of climates in different latitudes and altitudes, chronometry—all this and more constituting the celestial science of his time. His intentions, however, were confronted with an unexpected cultural barrier. If he attacks the Indians for their low level of understanding, they must have felt the same way about his intelligence when confronted with questions they considered ingenuous in their lack of knowledge. If Sahagún had understood something about the clash of ideas, perhaps his book would be one of the best sources on the cosmic vision of the Nahuas, discussing the upper to lower floors, the course of the stars through them, the supporting trees—information that is seldom available from other sources.

His failure in this book is foreshadowed in the “*Primeros Memoriales*.” As on previous occasions, he asked that drawings be made on the right side of the sheets; thus he obtained pictures of the sun, the moon, the eclipses of these two bodies, three constellations, Venus, a comet, the star arrow, two more constellations, and also the meteors, which represent the wind, lightning, rain, the rainbow, ice, clouds, and hail. The following information was given to him: that the sun was worshiped so many times a day; that the moon was venerated by those of Xaltocan; that people were terrified by the eclipse of the sun, believing the star would end and the monsters called *tzitzimime* would descend; that blood sacrifices

were made at eclipses of the sun; that pregnant women were frightened of eclipses of the moon because they believed that they might cause their children to turn into rats; that children were shaved every month so they would not get sick; and that the constellation of Mamalhuaztli served to indicate the time when fire should be offered or flutes should be played. There is silence about the other constellations, of which they could say nothing, but Sahagún is told that Venus shines brightly, that the comet announces a war or the death of a nobleman, that the star arrow worms dogs and rabbits, that the constellation of Xonecuilli shines brightly, that the constellation Colotl shines brightly, that the wind produces effects depending on the place from which it proceeds, that lightning bolts are made by the Tlaloque, that rain is made by the Tlaloque, and so forth.

All of this he should have put aside, but upon arriving in Tlaltelolco he insisted on his routine. He asks, "What names does the star receive?" and he is answered more or less satisfactorily. He then asks about its nature, and he is answered as to its appearance and phases when possible, with an ingenuousness suggesting that the informants tried to answer the questions at the level on which they were asked. Faced with this attitude, Sahagún has to return to the matter of worship, which is what the elders will discuss most freely, and with that is coupled the matter of the ills caused by the celestial bodies and the ways of avoiding them.

The gap of understanding between questionnaire and informants is so great that the Franciscan can follow only two roads: he searches for vocabulary on the subject, and he lets the Nahuas express their ideas freely. Thus arises, in an explanation of why a rabbit is seen on the moon, what Garibay considers the prose version of a sacred epic poem (Sahagún 1956:2:251), a text of immense ethnological and literary value.

When Sahagún returns to the meteors he finds that everything leads to the Tlaloque. He therefore includes the information on Tlaloc, in order, I believe, to correct some of the imbalance of the first book.

After speaking of meteors, and perhaps acting on the suggestion of the section in the "Primeros Memoriales" that the winds influence people according to the direction they come from, he asks about the course of the years, knowing that according to the Nahuas they run in a spiral in space, ending a cycle in thirteen horizontal revolutions at the completion of a "century" of fifty-two years. Building on this information and

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on a note from Tepepulco about the feast at the end of the period, he urges a free description of the ceremony. Related to this theme is that of the calamities expected every year 2 Rabbit, the account of which is also quite free.

Sahagún was either unconscious or unappreciative of the value of the information he had received, perhaps because he was annoyed at his relative failure.

### *EIGHTH BOOK*

#### *Of the Kings and Lords and of the Way They Held Their Elections and the Government of Their Kingdoms*

I shall consider this book succinctly. The diversity of the subjects and forms of the questionnaires do not permit a more detailed description here.

When asked about matters of lordship, the informants thought Sahagún wanted information on the history of the lords, and so they gave him a copy of the pictorial codices that contained very brief accounts of the lives of the rulers. Their explanation in Nahuatl was noted in the margin. The Acolhuas referred to the rulers of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Huexotla. The Tlaltelolcans added their own. These are poor texts, entirely in Nahuatl style, with very brief narrations of little value. They are not at all comparable to other codices which, under the same pre-Hispanic norms, had furnished the Nahuas for centuries with the knowledge of their past. Despite the fact that his question was misunderstood and that this information brought nothing new, Sahagún not only collected it, but also included it in the Florentine Codex and translated it into the *General History*. Moreover, he did the same with similar fragmentary information about Tula, about the forewarnings of the arrival of the Spaniards, and about the notable things about Mexico up to 1530.

He continues with the attire of the lords and with the finery they used in their dances. Both in Tepepulco and in Tlaltelolco these are simple vocabulary lists, which do not coincide. In the second part some of the ornaments are sketchily described.

For the lords' pastimes there is a simple mention of eight recreational activities in the "Primeros Memoriales;" these serve as headings for the fuller treatment by the Mexicans.

In treating the furniture used by the rulers, Sahagún was also satisfied with a mere vocabulary. The lists are different in the first and second collections. The experience of Tepepulco only aided him in clarifying terms, since household furniture was initially translated as *tlatquiltl* ("goods"), and the first answers included flowers, tobacco, fine food, cacao, and the like.

In relation to military dress, Sahagún follows a double procedure in Tepepulco. In one case he asks for names and then, in the margin, requests amplification. In the other he asks for drawings, first of attire and then of insignia, and he asks for amplification of the former and only the name of the latter. In the Mexican information there are only names, a real shame considering the rich information that could have been obtained on the basis of the beautiful Acolhuan drawings.

In the "Primeros Memoriales" there are questions for both nobles and commoners about food:

1. What were the foods of the nobles?
2. What were their drinks?
3. What meats did they consume?
4. What did the commoners eat?

Not only do the informants answer the direct question, but they also tell what the complementary dishes were. In Tlaltelolco the questions were:

1. What did the lords eat?
2. How was the food served?

The responses are very meagerly developed.

In Tepepulco he asked only for the names of the royal houses, and later he tried to use the nine mentioned as a base in Tepepulco, allowing the Mexicans to amplify their answers freely. More and more buildings appeared on the list, and Sahagún abandoned the questionnaire made with the Acolhuan information.

In relation to women's attire, the Franciscan asks the Tepepulcan women what clothes they wear and how they adorn themselves. In Tlaltelolco he successively asks about blouses, skirts, earplugs, facial shaving, coiffure, care of the body, and the manners of courtesy. In both cases the answers are simple statements. To learn the activities of the noblewomen he asks only for vocabulary, although the answers in Tepepulco include the occupations of common women.

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When he is asking about the rule of the republic, Sahagún pays closer attention. In Tepepulco he obtained a long list of the activities of the ruler, some topics of which were briefly developed to the right of the list. He chose those that seemed most important to him and in Tlaltelolco he asked for amplification on the following:

1. War
2. Selection of judges
3. Preparation of dances
4. Organization of guards and protection of the city
5. Amusement of the people
6. Concession of grants to the village

The answers were free and quite extensive. Afterward, and separately, a seventh question was answered on the running of the market. His questions about the selection of the lord suggest that he had first asked about the system and then about the ceremony.

All this has another Acolhuan antecedent—a text that begins with the history of the Chichimecas and ends with a long list of what they obtained by their conquests and power.

The final report of this book presents a problem. In the Madrid Codex, apart from what concerns the lordship, there are answers to the following questions concerning education:

1. How was a common child educated from birth on?
2. What were the levels of ascent in the *telpochcalli* to reach the rank of *tecuhтли*?
3. How were the sons of lords and leaders educated?

The answers were transferred to the Florentine Codex incorrectly, for only the third and second ones were taken and they were so placed as to imply that it was the sons of nobles who rose in the *telpochcalli* to become *tetecuhtin*.

### NINTH BOOK

*On the Merchants and Artisans of Gold, Precious Stones,  
and Rich Feathers*

The most important part of this book, that concerned with the merchants, has been carefully studied by Angel María Garibay K. in his *Vida Económica de Tenochtitlan* (Garibay 1961), where his Spanish

translation appears. Here, consequently, I shall simply relate how Sahagún obtained this material, repeating the idea that he got all of it in Tlaltelolco, the merchant capital, undoubtedly from the Pochtecas themselves. Because of the method followed, these texts should be divided into three parts: (a) the history of the Pochtecas or organized merchants, chapters 1 and 2; (b) data on their customs and activities, end of chapter 2 and all of chapter 5; and (c) customs and ceremonies of the Pochtecas, described in passing in the rest of these texts. In the first part, Sahagún asks in general about the history of the Pochtecas, and the answer comes almost certainly from a historical pictorial codex peculiar to that group, of definite pre-Hispanic style and high quality. In the second part one notes the constant questioning of the Franciscan. The answers are open and precise but not elegant, partly because the questionnaire does not appear to have been structured. It is probable that in the third part Sahagún asked about broad areas; the answers are free and very elegant, giving the correct structure of the temporal order of the ceremonies. The firm, sure narration is very similar to that of the religious ceremonies in the second book, but it is reinforced by long speeches.

As for the artisans, the different occupations constituted the headings. With that outline Sahagún poses the following questions:

1. What are they called and why? (If the name derives from the origin, the informants allude to it; if the occupations are subdivided the different names are explained.)
2. What particular gods did they venerate?
3. How are their gods attired?
4. How were they worshiped? (The answers include the dates, sacrifices, dances, economic collaboration for the buying of slaves and so on—all at length.)
5. What do they produce?
6. How did each occupation work? (When there are several methods, the answer is given separately for each. It is extensively explained in the logical order of the process, even depicting the tools.)

In the case of the *amantecas*, or makers of feather mosaics, circumstantial questions seem to have been asked, mainly in order to ascertain the importance of the occupation during pre-Hispanic times and the causes of contemporary decadence.

TENTH BOOK

*Of the Vices and Virtues of this Indian People,  
of the Interior and Exterior Parts of the Body, of the  
Sicknesses and Countervailing Medicines, and of the Nations  
Which Have Come to This Land*

This book can be divided by reason of method into the following parts: (a) kinship, age, occupation, and offices; (b) parts of the human body; (c) illnesses and medicines; and (d) nations.

The title "dictionary in action" which Jourdanet and Siméon gave to the tenth and eleventh books of this work (Sahagún 1880: 593-94, 597) is readily applicable to the first part. Already in the "Primeros Memorales" one sees the clear intention of simply making a vocabulary on these subjects, except for a relatively full treatment of the procedures of magicians and curers. The headings of the Mexican data were previously provided by the Tlaltelolcans themselves, a fact which can be noted mainly in the degrees of kinship established by the Nahuatl and not the European system, and in the lists of noble persons, which include many metaphorical names of the sons of the *pipiltin* and hence leave no reason for independent expansion. The questions are simple:

1. What is the . . . ?
2. What is a good one like?
3. What is a bad one like?

(This antithesis is believed to have derived from Theophrastus [Garibay in Sahagún 1956:2:88-89] or from Bartholomew de Glanville [Robertson 1966:624-25].) The second question disappears for obvious reasons when the subject is the owl man, the libertine, the homosexual, the madman, or the prostitute. The two last questions are often swamped by the interest in information, as in the case of the vendors of colors, rabbit fur, jars, paper, and saltpeter. For in spite of Sahagún's almost completely linguistic intention in this part, the answers, at first brief, become more extensive, employing adverbs and adjectives and presenting more valuable material, perhaps at the instigation of Sahagún himself. The texts thus come to constitute a reflection both of pre-Hispanic life and of life in Sahagún's time, in which vendors of European paper, Old

World animals, candles, or shoes appear. The interest in forming a vocabulary is not in recording a language that is about to disappear, but in recording one destined to be revived and augmented with new material.

The second section, concerning the parts of the human body, is meant only to provide vocabulary. In the "Primeros Memoriales" the list of parts (in the first person plural possessive, the usual form in Nahuatl in referring to the human body) carries on its right from one to four verbs related to the name. In Tlaltelolco the list of organs is notably extended; it includes synonyms and orders the parts of the body by regions or by nature, and the list of adjectives and verbs that can be applied to the parts in question grows inordinately. This explains why Sahagún would not have judged it prudent to make a Spanish translation of that veritable arsenal of words. A good opportunity was lost for learning the Nahuas' conception of the different parts of the human body (see Dibble 1959; Rogers & Anderson 1965).

The chapter dedicated to medicines and illnesses is completely different. A great interest in native medicine was shared among Sahagún, the College of Santa Cruz de Tlaltelolco, to which he dedicated so many years, and the Spaniards in general. Sahagún began collecting information on the subject in Tepepulco, and two different lists exist in the "Primeros Memoriales" (one in good handwriting and the other in bad) in which the names of illnesses are recorded to the left and then in a few words to the right either the medicine or a notation that the illness is incurable.

In Tlaltelolco the names of the informants are occasionally noted. They are all native doctors, and they are distributed among the headings by specialty, including diseases of the head, eyes, nose, and teeth; of the neck and throat; of the chest and back; of the stomach and bladder; and diseases of the skin, diarrhea, foot diseases, obstruction of the urinary ducts, fever, and finally wounds and fractures.

The process of elaboration can be followed through comparison of the Madrid Codex of the Royal Academy of History and the Florentine Codex. (A) One or several Nahua doctors edited the first five paragraphs of the chapter. This version is in the Madrid Codex with corrections and additions made when the text was written. (B) Later the doctors mentioned as informants revised and corrected the first five paragraphs and added another at the end, declaring their names. (C) Sahagún ordered

that this revision, corrected and amended, should pass on into the Florentine Codex, considering it definitive with one more addition, placed at the end of the fifth paragraph. (D) Later one or several doctors—presumably different from those previously mentioned—corrected and eliminated important parts and added the text of the Madrid Codex—all possibly without Sahagún's authorization, since one of the additions can be considered suspiciously idolatrous.

The part concerning the nations that inhabited this land is not easy to analyze. The text is inconsistent within each paragraph; in no case are all the questions formulated; their order is not fixed; there does not exist as in other parts a regular ascent or descent to the questionnaire; the narration touches several points which could well constitute another answer later on; the informants take the liberty of adding what they think is important; the questions are many and cannot all be answered under each heading. Nevertheless, from the analysis of each individual chapter, one discovers that a questionnaire exists (see León-Portilla 1965:17-18). From it the following questions can be cited:

1. What is the origin of these people?
2. What places do they inhabit, and what are their characteristics and products?
3. What are the names given to this group, and what is their etymological origin?
4. What is their degree of culture?
5. What are their most important occupations?
6. In what arts do they excel?
7. What were their cultural contributions?
8. What were their gods, and how were they worshiped?
9. What are their moral virtues?
10. What are their defects?
11. What is their physical appearance?
12. What are their foods, and how do they prepare them?
13. How do they dress?
14. How do they wear their hair?
15. What type of government do they have?
16. What language do they speak?
17. Into how many groups are they divided or to what group do they belong?

18. How is the family organized?

19. What education do their children receive?

In addition to the frequency with which these themes are treated, the existence of the questions is revealed by the informants when they refer to an interruption by the Franciscan. The following phrases are examples: "*izcatqui in imitlacauhca, in imacuaultiliz in otomi*," "behold the vices, the defects of the Otomis"; "*izca in quichihua*," "behold what they did"; "*oc izca centlamantli iniyeliz, in innemiliz otomi*," "behold the form of conduct, another fact of the life of the Otomis." On other occasions the informants themselves take the initiative: "*oc izca achiton, in no monequiz mitoz in intechcopa toltecah*," "behold here even a little more that it is necessary to say about the Toltecs."

The answers are free, derived from common knowledge, but they are of great importance, fluid, and do not pretend to be spoken in elegant language.

### ELEVENTH BOOK

*On the Properties of the Animals, Birds, Fish, Trees, Grass,  
Flowers, Metals and Stones, and on Colors*

Even the initial description of the eleventh book in the Florentine Codex calls it a "forest, garden, orchard of the Mexican language." In fact, Book 11 does contain a great deal that is of purely linguistic interest, but its importance as natural history is also great. The informants who contributed descriptions of plants and animals known only in distant regions must have been expeditionary merchants or workers in the palace gardens that sheltered exotic plants (or had drawings of them on its walls), and in the animal house (Garibay in Sahagún 1956:3:216-17) that so intimidated the Spanish.

The plants and animals are classified according both to biological kinship and to means of utilization. Even though the big chapter headings are hierarchically established by Sahagún, the classification into paragraphs and the lists of species appear to have been made by the Nahuas. This can be seen in the double classification, which may refer the description of aquatic animals to previous passages on birds or mammals, or may cause the serpent that lives in anthills, *tzicanantli*, to be mentioned not among those of its order but next to the ants. As rudimentary as Euro-

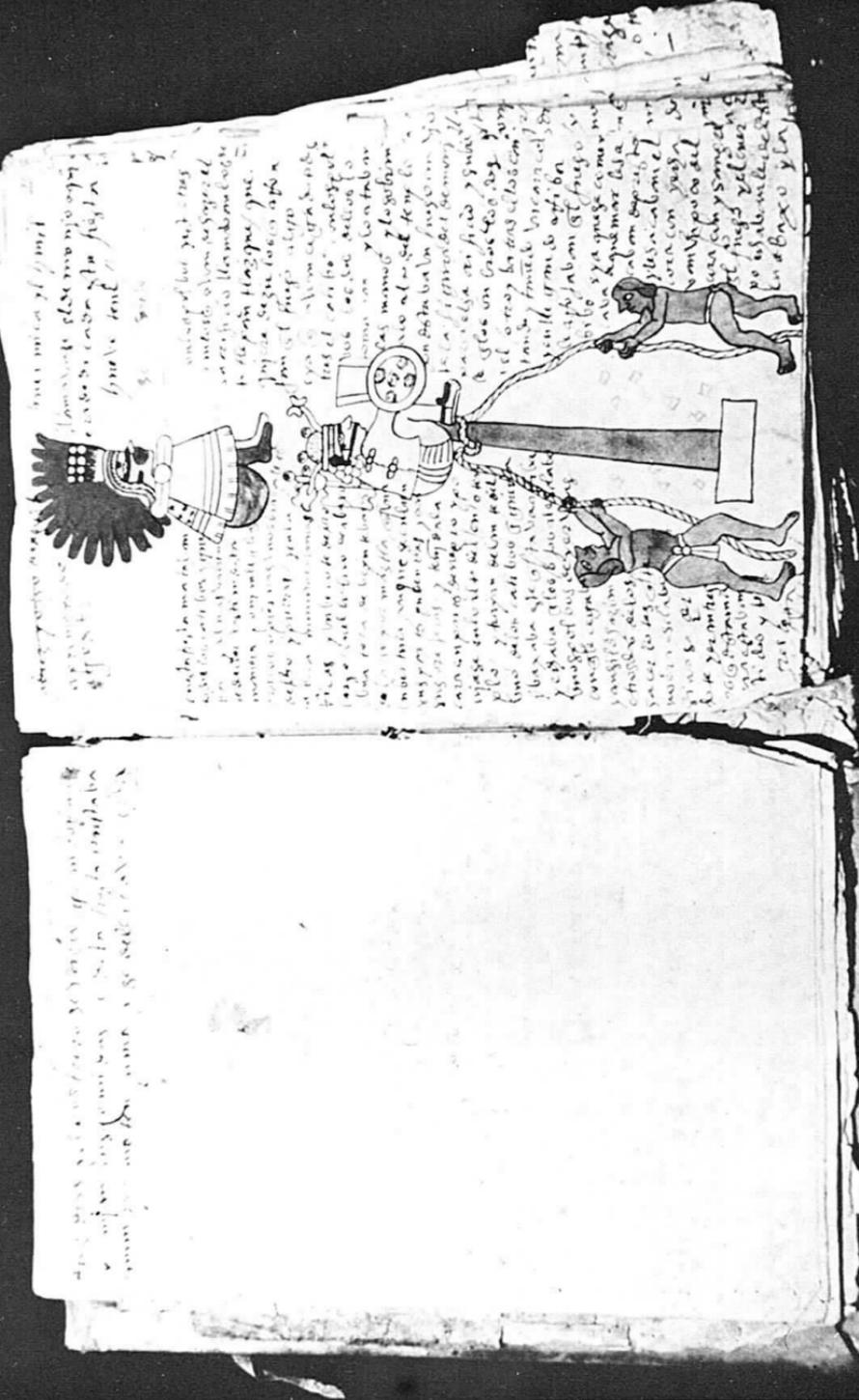


PLATE 1. Section on Xochipilli, Codex Tudela, folio 29r. From copy in Latin American Library, Tulane University.

antes q̄tu, e haze eesta ma? -  
 C On p̄iuh t̄ia. t̄ineu ualiḡm.  
 C Este Romance. N̄ dia. de p̄ues  
 qūyo e esse. se haze eesta ma?  
 C Q̄ qū m̄z̄ta a ualla q̄ y m̄a  
 Un.  
 C Este Romance v̄ndia venisse  
 de p̄ues que yo. se haze tambie  
 eesta ma n̄a.  
 C Muy t̄atica t̄ineu d̄ liḡta.  
 C Este Romance. des d̄ia ~~v̄ndia~~  
 v̄ndia veni m̄te q̄tu sa haze t̄i  
 hier e eesta ma n̄a.  
 C Q̄ qū m̄z̄ta. m̄ualla m̄ualla.  
 C Este Romance. Un n̄a v̄ndia  
 m̄tes que yo. sa haze e eesta ma  
 n̄a.  
 C Q̄ qū m̄z̄ta. a ualla que  
 m̄ualla.

210.

C Este Romance. Un n̄a v̄ndia  
 p̄ues que yo. se haze e eesta ma  
 n̄a.  
 C Este Romance. m̄m̄ qū liḡta.  
 C Este Romance. Un dia v̄ndia  
 m̄tes que yo. se haze e eesta  
 ma n̄a.  
 C Q̄ qū m̄z̄ta. m̄ualla m̄ualla.  
 C Este Romance. Un mes v̄ndia  
 m̄tes que yo. se haze e eesta  
 ma n̄a.  
 C Q̄ qū m̄z̄ta. a ualla que  
 m̄ualla.

ff. mis.

C Capitulo. 8.  
 C Delos maneres de q̄

PLATE 2. Beginning of Chapter 8, "On the Manner in Which the Elders Relate History, Particularly Mythical Orations," Fray Andrés de Olmos, "Arte de la Lengua Mexicana" (1547), folios 209v-11r. From copy in Latin American Library, Tulane University.

antes q̄tu, e haze eesta ma? -  
 C On p̄iuh t̄ia. t̄ineu ualiḡm.  
 C Este Romance. N̄ dia. de p̄ues  
 qūyo e esse. se haze eesta ma?  
 C Q̄ qū m̄z̄ta a ualla q̄ y m̄a  
 Un.  
 C Este Romance v̄ndia venisse  
 de p̄ues que yo. se haze tambie  
 eesta ma n̄a.  
 C Muy t̄atica t̄ineu d̄ liḡta.  
 C Este Romance. des d̄ia ~~v̄ndia~~  
 v̄ndia veni m̄te q̄tu sa haze t̄i  
 hier e eesta ma n̄a.  
 C Q̄ qū m̄z̄ta. m̄ualla m̄ualla.  
 C Este Romance. Un n̄a v̄ndia  
 m̄tes que yo. sa haze e eesta ma  
 n̄a.  
 C Q̄ qū m̄z̄ta. a ualla que  
 m̄ualla.

211.

C Este Romance. Un n̄a v̄ndia  
 p̄ues que yo. se haze e eesta ma  
 n̄a.  
 C Este Romance. m̄m̄ qū liḡta.  
 C Este Romance. Un dia v̄ndia  
 m̄tes que yo. se haze e eesta  
 ma n̄a.  
 C Q̄ qū m̄z̄ta. m̄ualla m̄ualla.  
 C Este Romance. Un mes v̄ndia  
 m̄tes que yo. se haze e eesta  
 ma n̄a.  
 C Q̄ qū m̄z̄ta. a ualla que  
 m̄ualla.

ff. mis.

C Capitulo. 8.  
 C Delos maneres de q̄



PLATE 3. St. Jerome, from *Vitae Patrum* (Toledo, Juan de Ayala, 1553). Reproduced from James Patrick Ronaldson, *Early Book Illustration in Spain*, Introduction by Konrad Haebler (London, 1926).



PLATE 4. Scenes from Gold Working. Florentine Codex, Book 9. Laurentian Library, Florence.





PLATE 5. Scene from Gold Working showing tile floor, plateresque column and base, and landscape. Florentine Codex, Book 9. Laurentian Library, Florence.

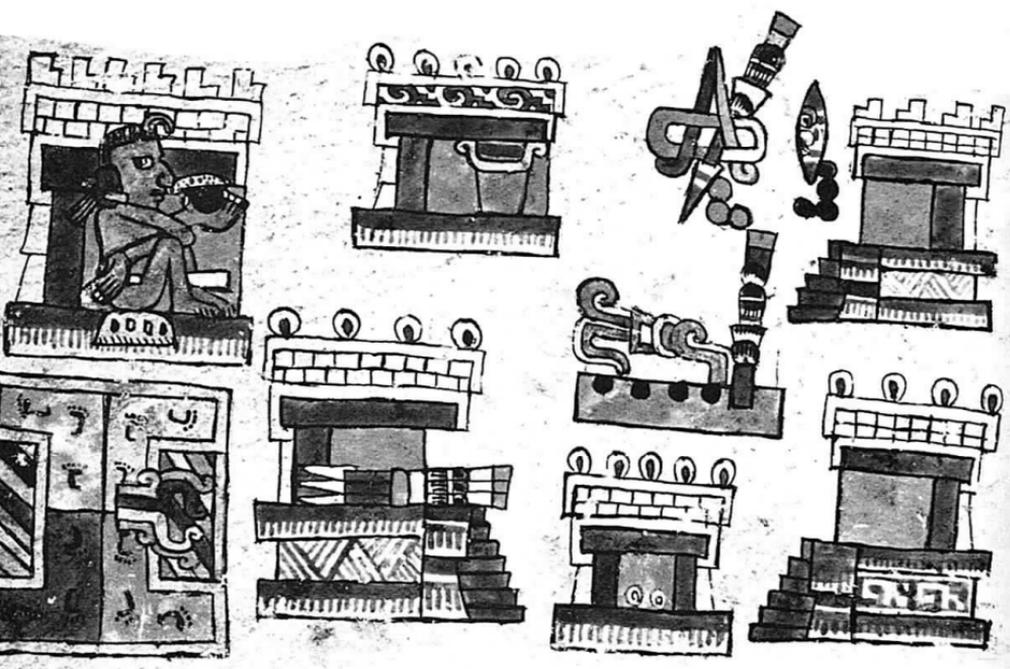


PLATE 6. Temples and Ball Court. Codex Nuttall, p. 2. British Museum, London.

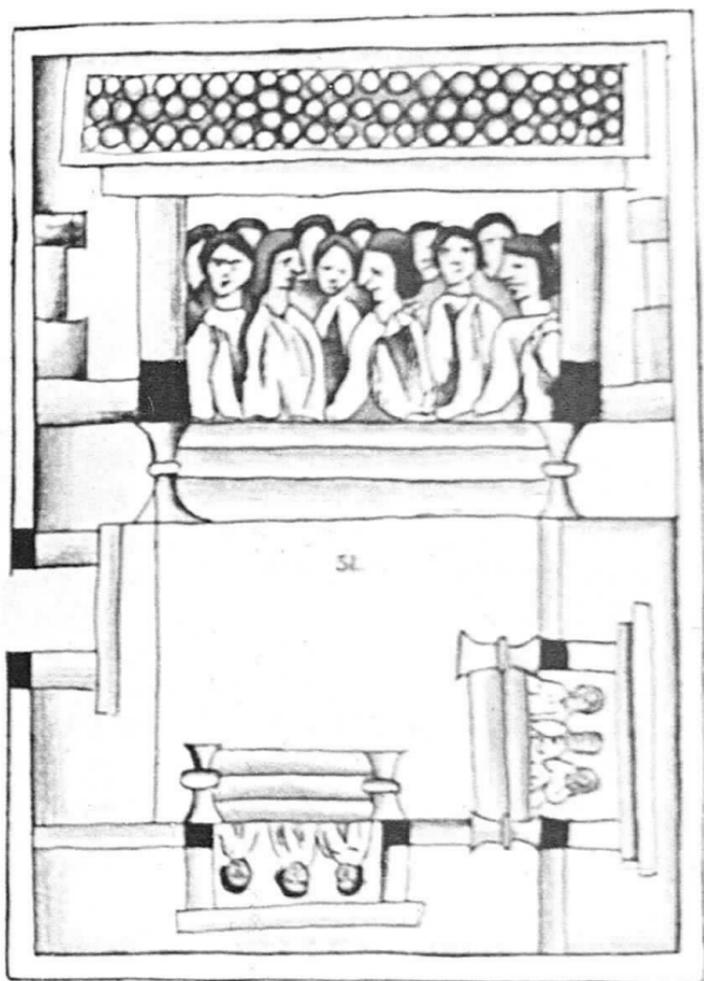


PLATE 7. Buildings in elevation generated from the plan. Florentine Codex, Book 2. Laurentian Library, Florence. (From Paso y Troncoso, Lam. XV, fig. 51.)



PLATE 8. Temple in elevation, pyramid in perspective, staircase lacking. Florentine Codex, Book 9. Laurentian Library, Florence.

PLATE 9. Scene of singing, on a tile floor. Florentine Codex, Book 9. Laurentian Library, Florence.



pean biological classification was in those days, these liberties would have been unpardonable in a European work.

The variety of questionnaires utilized and the scope of the subject make it necessary that I present here only the most outstanding examples. Furthermore, many of the problems mentioned in connection with the questionnaire on the nations also apply to this book.

The following is the approximate order of the questions posed with reference to quadrupeds, which I obtained by numerical majority of sequences:

1. What is the name (or names) of the animal?
2. What animals does it resemble?
3. Where does it live?
4. Why does it receive this name?
5. What does it look like?
6. What habits does it have?
7. What does it feed on?
8. How does it hunt?
9. What sounds does it make?

On rare occasions a question aimed simply at vocabulary is added even though it has no relation to the subject. The question alluding to appearance is the most frequent and best elaborated; the one on habits also becomes extensive and of considerable importance. Several phrases which imply answering can be discovered: "*inic tlama*," "it hunts like this"; "*inic itlacual*," "this is their food"; "*inic maci*," "this is how it is hunted"; "*auh in ieliz*," "and its way of life."

The texts referring to birds are collected with the same questionnaire in a more variable order, and answers about habitat and appearance predominate. Special questions begin to emerge: whether they migrate and when, how many eggs they lay, what the eggs are like, whether they are edible birds and what their meat is like (of lake birds), how they hunt (of predators), how they sing (of songbirds). The question on the origin of the name is asked more frequently (unless it is spontaneously volunteered because the name is onomatopoeic). Instead of saying what animal the bird in question is similar to, the informants cite its classification. Thus the answers are, "It is a duck," or, "It is an eagle." The digressions gain importance because of the liberty Sahagún allows the informants in the interest of more information. The answers are of average length when

they refer to the appearance, and brief for the rest, with important exceptions. At the end we find an extensive vocabulary on the anatomy of birds, included perhaps because so many different kinds of feathers are mentioned in the chapter on predators.

In sections on snakes and insects, the questionnaire is enlarged with the obvious questions on whether or not they are poisonous and how they attack.

In the paragraph on fruit trees the questioning is on the appearance of the tree and characteristics of its fruit; the need for words for the vocabulary is stressed, and the reply is often a verb in the first person singular. For example, "*nictzetzeloa*, *nictequi*, *nixococihui*," "I shake [the tree] so the fruit will fall," "I cut [the fruit]," "my teeth ache [when I eat the fruit]." Despite this emphasis on vocabulary, it is obvious that Sahagún insisted that the first two questions be answered also with syntactically uninvolved words—words that could be used in the dictionary. One sees the corresponding tendency of the informants to free themselves from this kind of expression, which they manage to do by clarifications about the environment, medicines, and the like. In referring to flowering trees, the second question (What does it resemble?) is replaced by one on the trees' characteristics.

In the paragraph on edible plants the questions are (without the rigorous order of a questionnaire): Where do they grow? What is the origin of their name? What is their appearance? What do they taste like? How are they eaten? A demand for vocabulary follows. The one on grasses asks what they look like, what they are used for, and where they are produced, and vocabulary is demanded. In the one on mushrooms, questions are added on whether they are medicinal, whether they are edible, and how they are prepared. In the one on hallucinogens, the effects they produce on the organism and the mind are requested.

Those referring to trees in general, to the parts of the tree, to the wood, the forest, the garden, and flowers in general are exclusively linguistic. The answers are single words; verbs in the first person singular; similarly applicable adjectives; terms of location and quantity; names for the processes of germination, maturation, and withering; and phrases and sayings.

In the section relating to precious stones and minerals, the questions are in no strict order: Where does the name come from? What is their ap-

pearance? Who can use them? (Of precious stones.) How are they polished or used? What value do they have? A demand for vocabulary is answered with verbs in the first person singular. The first question must have been asked overinsistently, for "*acampa quiza in itoca*," "the name comes from nowhere," or something similar, is a frequent response.

When colors are treated, if the subject is a raw material, the Franciscan asks for the origin of the name; whether it is animal, vegetable, or mineral; where it is produced; how the product is made; the color derived from it; and finally vocabulary. When talking of already manufactured dyestuffs he asks for the origin of the name, the chromatic tones, and the mode of production, and demands vocabulary.

I have saved for last the section about medicines in the seventh chapter of the book. I do so because the evidence of the authors (Sahagún 1956: 3:326), as in the case of illness and medicine, indicates that it was entrusted to specialists; the answers are quite free and extensive in comparison with the rest of the book, there is no demand for vocabulary, and there is no relation between the medicinal plants, animals, and minerals described here and the mention of the same ones in the rest of the treatise on natural history. Everything indicates that it is not only an independent work but also a very different one, inserted into the eleventh book (see chapter 9 of the present volume).

The questionnaire, with little variation in order and a high degree of completeness in the answers, is as follows:

1. What is it? (In the case of plants: What part of the plant is it?)
2. What does it look like?
3. What does it cure?
4. How is the medicine prepared?
5. How is it administered?
6. Where is it found?

## TWELFTH BOOK

### *Which Treats the Conquest of Mexico*

The problems posed by this history of the conquest are many, and the solutions scholars have proposed on the matter very contradictory (Ramírez 1903a; Chavero n.d.; Boban 1891; García Icazbalceta 1954; Garibay

in Sahagún 1956; Jiménez Moreno in Sahagún 1938; León-Portilla 1961; Nicolau D'Olwer 1952). Nevertheless, the method used was simple: Sahagún collected from the native informants of Tlaltelolco their narration of the fall of Mexico. The Nahuatl style is unmistakable: the characteristic connectives of uninterrupted narrative abound, particularly those formed with the word *auh* and a verb in the preterit perfect which refers to the last thing mentioned in the previous paragraph. The description contains long lists of functionaries and the typically native kinds of speeches that often give body to history. There is no doubt that the history originated in Tlaltelolco, since the role played by the Mexicans of the northern city is judged to be greater than that of its sister city of Tenochtitlan, and there are phrases exalting Tlaltelolco's value: ". . . *ayatle huel quichiuque; yuhquin tetitech onehuaco; yehica ca in tlatlulque cenca mochicauque*," "[Alvarado's men] could do nothing; it was as if they had come up against a rock, for the Tlaltelolcans made themselves very strong." We may be sure that this was not dictated by Tenochcas.

Sahagún only divided the book into chapters, and not even always in the right places, for between chapters 21 and 22 and between 33 and 34 he chopped off the informants' sentences.

## CONCLUSION

New questions arise upon ending this first approximation of Sahagún's method. Three important ones may be mentioned: What is the degree of veracity in the informants' answers? To what degree can the answers be considered reflections of the ancient culture rather than merely the personal or class attitudes of the elderly informants, since they all belonged to the upper stratum of Nahuatl society? How reliably did Sahagún employ the data he was given? Some questions can already be answered with the material presented here, but the necessary comparisons of these data with those from other sources and of all the Nahuatl manuscripts with one another and with the *General History* have not yet been made. We have taken only the first step.

## *The Research Method of Sahagún*

The analysis of the method of this work shows that the method cannot be regarded as the transplantation of a Christian Occidental mode of inquiry—it is not one man's reanimation of the medieval encyclopedia through humanism. Nor is it the last fruit of the millennial tradition of the corn growers nor the perfection of the old colored glyph. It arose as a new reality which is neither sum nor average of an old one, and it is still charged with understanding and misunderstanding. It bore the mark of an unrealized dream, and it persists as a reality that was never dreamed of, a source of knowledge about Nahuatl man, and, in the last analysis, about all men.

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Synonymous Titles:

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