

REVIEW ARTICLES

The *General History of the Things of New Spain*, by Bernardino de Sahagún

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MOST RECENT of numerous editions of the work of the "first ethnographer," this English version\*\* of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's "Historia de las Cosas de la Nueva España," a full treatise on the life and times of the Aztecs of Mexico, differs from all previous editions in two respects: it is a direct translation from the original Aztec texts of the Florentine Codex of the Laurentian Library in Florence in Italy and it is (or will be) a complete version of the entire Florentine Codex.

The text of the Florentine Codex, the only extant complete Aztec text of Sahagún's great work, was put together under Sahagún's direction and on the basis of earlier manuscripts, in the Convento de San Francisco el Grande, in Tenochtitlan, former capital of the Aztec empire and then seat of Spanish power in the new world, by Tenochca scribes and amanuenses, in their speech and in their style, during the years 1568-1569. A copy of this Aztec text of 1569, prepared during the years from 1575-1577, was provided with illustrations considerably influenced by European styles, presumably by Agustín de la Fuente, a native of Tlaltelolco, and with a rough Spanish paraphrase, presumably by Sahagún, and constitutes the manuscript, now known as the Florentine Codex, taken to Spain in 1580 by Fray Rodrigo de Sequera for delivery to the King. How it got from Spain to Italy and into the Laurentian Library in Florence we can only conjecture.

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\*\* *Florentine Codex, General History of the Things of New Spain*. By FRAY BERNARDINO DE SAHAGÚN. Translated by ARTHUR J. O. ANDERSON and CHARLES E. DIBBLE. 8 Books. Salt Lake City. University of Utah Press and School of American Research. Book I. The Gods. 1950. Illustrations; Book II. The Ceremonies. 1951. Notes. Illustrations. Appendix; Book III. The Origin of the Gods. 1952. Illustrations. Appendix; Book VII. The Sun, Moon, and Stars, and the Binding of the Years. 1953. Appendix; Book VIII. Kings and Lords. 1954. Illustrations. Appendices; Book XII. The Conquest of Mexico. 1955. Illustrations. Book IV. The Soothsayers and Book V. The Omens. 1957. Pp. Book I, 54; Book II, 216; Book III, 68; Book VII, 81; Book VIII, 89; Book XII, 122; Books IV and V, 196; Price Bk. I, \$4.00; II, \$8.00; III, \$4.00; VII, \$4.00; VIII, \$4.50; XII, \$6.50; IV and V, \$8.00.

The first materials for this work were assembled in Tepepulco (1558-1561), they were revised and enlarged in Tlaltelolco (1561-2, 1563-5), and the final touches and final additions were effected in Tenochtitlan (1565-9). Linguistically speaking, then, at least three dialects of the Nahuatl of the time, that of Tezcoco, that of Tlaltelolco, and that of Tenochtitlan, are involved. From the list of editors whom Sahagún mentions, it would seem possible that still other linguistic influences might also be at work: Antonio Valeriano, of Atzacapozalco, Alonso Vejerano, of Quauhtitlan, Martin Jacobita, of Tlaltelolco of the Barrio of Santa Ana, and Pedro de San Buenaventura, of Quauhtitlan, were among his principal linguistic advisers. Two of his scribes were also of Tlaltelolco, Diego de Grado, of the Barrio de la Concepción, and Bonifacio Maximiliano, of the Barrio de San Martín. Mateo Severiano, however, a third scribe, was from Xochimileo, from the section of Utlac.

The translators and editors of the present edition of the Florentine Codex have wisely limited themselves, in general, to the materials to be found in this Codex (although they do include, to Book VII, an appendix—consisting of the first five chapters of Book VII from the *Memoriales con escolios*, taken from the Del Paso y Troncoso edition of the *Códices Matritenses*—this portion from the manuscript in the Biblioteca del Real Palacio in Madrid). They have translated and published to date the following:

(1950)	Book I	(Part II)	The Gods
(1951)	Book II	(Part III)	The Ceremonies
(1952)	Book III	(Part IV)	The Origin of the Gods
(1953)	Book VII	(Part VIII)	The Sun, Moon, and Stars, and the Binding of the Years (With an Appendix consisting of the first five chapters of Book VII from the <i>Memoriales con escolios</i> )
(1954)	Book VIII	(Part IX)	Kings and Lords
(1955)	Book XII	(Part XIII)	The Conquest of Mexico
(1957)	Books IV and V	Parts V and VI	The Soothsayers; The Omens

To follow in the next few years are the remaining volumes: Books VI, IX, X, and XI (Parts VII, X, XI, and XII respectively). Part I, to be done only after the translation has been completed, will include a preface and other introductory material, a table of contents, a bibliography and a general index. Almost fifteen years will have

elapsed between beginning and end of this formidable enterprise. The editors have, I repeat, wisely limited themselves to the Florentine Codex (with the one exception noted above). This codex is one of a large number of Sahaguntian source materials known by report and by inference, and one of a fair number whose whereabouts are now known. Descriptions of these other materials are to be found, most succinctly in Wigberto Jiménez Moreno's "Fray Bernardino de Sahagún y su Obra," published in 1938 as the introduction to the first volume of the fourth Spanish edition of the General History of the Things of New Spain, by Robredo in Mexico, and, with more detailed commentary and rationale, in Luis Nicolau D'Olwer's "Fray Bernardino de Sahagún" (1499-1590), published in 1952 by the Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia.

Although this edition of Sahagún's work makes no claim to be anything more than a faithful transliteration and translation of the Nahuatl text of the Florentine Codex, it is, in fact, considerably more. Anderson and Dibble have been most careful to acknowledge any departures from the original in their paleography and, in their comparison of other existing transliterations and translations, to credit other editors and translators for solutions to difficult problems which are theirs. Their botanical and geographical notes, and notes on Aztec mythology, always brief and to the point, are extremely useful. Their identification of places in Book XII (The Conquest of Mexico) and elsewhere lend contemporary relevance to the accounts of sixteenth century events. The placing of the illustrations taken from the Florentine Codex lends force to the detailed descriptions which pack some of the pages of Sahagún's ethnography.

A spot check of certain portions of the English version gives strong evidence for careful and conscientious literality in the translation. This alone constitutes a tremendous step forward. Sahagún's own Spanish versions were synoptic at best, inaccurate at worst. Spanish editions based on these earlier versions improved them by the exercise of imagination and literary talent, not by careful consultation of the Nahuatl originals on which they were based. The French version and the English were straight translations of the full Spanish text. Only the German translations, though fragmentary, were conscientious and careful versions of the Nahuatl originals. Anderson and Dibble have now extended this tradition to Sahagún's work as embodied in the Florentine Codex.

If my praise for their work seems restrained, it is only because an ideal outline of an edition of Sahagún's works lies before me. It is that of Del Paso y Troncoso, retouched and repolished by Jiménez

Moreno, by Nicolau D'Olwer, by Garibay Kintana, and by Anderson and Dibble, themselves. A critical edition of the works of Sahagún is still lacking. Such an edition would contain:

- (1) facsimiles of *all* the original manuscripts, both those of the *Historia* and those of Sahagún's other works:
  - a. the Florentine Codex
  - b. the *Códices Matritenses* of the *Real Academia de la Historia* and the *Biblioteca del Real Palacio*
  - c. other works in Nahuatl such as the *Psalmodia*
- (2) transliterations and translations of these works
- (3) full glossary of all the linguistic items
- (4) critical history of the manuscripts with a complete family tree
- (5) identification of all informants and scribes with respect both to provenience and to education
- (6) identification of the varieties of Nahuatl and of their present-day offshoots
- (7) identification of the orthographic correspondences of the sounds of the Nahuatl of the period
- (8) grammar of the language
- (9) full content index of Sahagún's works
- (10) critical evaluation of the content

Such a critical edition would constitute a gold-mine of freely accessible information both on the language and on the culture of the times and could serve as the axis around which to build a thorough-going exploration of all the other documentation in the language of the Aztecs.

The work of Anderson and Dibble has already carried us a long way.